

The Implications of the New Literacy Studies for the New South Africa *

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Summary

This paper relates some of the developments, in what has come to be called the "New Literacy Studies" in recent years, to some of the debates currently taking place regarding the role of literacy and education in the new South Africa. The conceptual apparatus that is becoming familiar in the New Literacy Studies, and some of the problems it has raised, will be outlined. The paper will then consider the implications of viewing literacy in this way for some current issues in South Africa, notably the debate over mother tongue literacy, the role of literacy in Education courses and the issue of access to dominant literacy.

Opsomming

In hierdie referaat word sommige van die ontwikkelinge op die terrein van wat in die laaste tyd die sogenaamde "Nuwe studie van geletterdheid" genoem word, gekontekstualiseer binne huidige diskussiepunte rondom die rol van geletterdheid en opvoeding in die nuwe Suid-Afrika. Benewens 'n uiteensetting van die toenemend gebruiklike konseptuele raamwerk vir die nuwe studie van geletterdheid, sal daar ook gelet word op sommige van die probleme wat deur 'n dergelike konseptuele raamwerk opgewerp word. Vervolgens sal die implikasies van 'n dergelike beskouing van geletterdheid vir sommige aktuele kwessies in Suid-Afrika bekyk word: die debat oor moedertaalgeletterdheid, die rol van geletterdheid in onderwyskursusse en die kwessie van toegang tot die heersende of dominante geletterdheid.

A great deal of the thinking about literacy in a previous generation has assumed that literacy with a big "L" and a single "y" was a single autonomous thing that had consequences. This "autonomous" model of literacy has been a dominant feature of development theory, in relation to education and social progress generally. The underlying assumption of modernisation in the post-war era, has been that if some societies appear to be less advanced than others the way to get them advanced was to give them the things the so-called advanced ones had. The notion was also carried over to education as well as to literacy. So if "we" in the west had literacy, we should be able to give "them" in the developing world, the literacy that we had, and they would then catch up. That was the organising frame of much of the literacy

programmes sponsored by development agencies. Some of these ideas around the autonomous characteristics of literacy, I would argue, persist across the development spectrum wherever modernisation theory has not been challenged. One form the argument has taken is in terms of what has been called the great divide between orality and literacy. I will briefly summarise that particular debate.

The argument turns on the assumption that the shift in society from oral to written, the shift in individuals from oral to written, the shift in history from oral to written, was the grand shift of history. This shift from oral to written had consequences for cognition, for mental processing of various kinds, for the kinds of social organisations, for democracy and development. One of the major exponents of this theory in America is Walter Ong whose notions of orality and literacy are still influential in parts of southern Africa.

Ong (1982) distinguishes between the oral world and the written world. The characteristics of the oral world, according to him, are that it is formulaic, conservative, close to the human life world, agonistically toned - empathetic, homeostatic, situational, and involves memorisation by formula rather than verbatim. The literate world is the opposite: it is abstract, analytic, distancing, objective and separative. The consequence of these differences between orality and literacy is that it becomes possible to distinguish between two major cultural forms in the history of human development. One, the verbo-motor culture, the other, high technology cultures; the former is word-oriented, the latter are object-oriented. The oral world is communal, externalised, less introspective. The explanation for these differences lies in a basic principle that distinguishes orality as such from literacy as such. That is, the fact that sound only exists in its departing; it cannot be held or captured, it is always in process. It is also an interior process. Marks on visual external surfaces - that is writing - are isolating, dissecting, analytic, associated with other senses in a way that sound is not, and crucially they appear able to fix impressions in a way that sound does not.

This conceptualisation of orality/literacy has not gone unchallenged though. Ruth Finnegan (1973, 1988) and Street (1988a) for instance, have called a number of Ong's tenets into question. The first problem is methodological. According to Ong our problem with understanding the oral world is that we do not live in one. We live in a literate environment, so it is very difficult for us to imagine ourselves back into an oral world. He then proceeds to do exactly that. There is, then, a methodological problem here: given the world that he is living in, how could he know what it is like to be in an oral world? There is also an empirical problem with attempting

to find this oral world in contemporary societies. As Ruth Finnegan (1988) points out, working with oral tradition in Africa, there are very few societies these days in which there is not some involvement of written material. So the distinction between oral and written is not viable empirically, because purely oral societies in that sense do not exist. A theoretical problem arises from wanting to separate orality and writing in the face of much evidence to the contrary - namely that we actually operate with a combination of the two modes. Even if we were to concede that there are so-called oral-dominant cultures, Finnegan (1988) has demonstrated quite clearly that they have all of the characteristics that are attributed to written culture, particularly things like meta-linguistic awareness, deductive logic and all those cognitive skills that are supposed to be attributable only to writing. So why bother with Ong and the "great divide"? Because it keeps recurring, especially in educational circles; so it is important to analyse its problems at base.

This view of the "great divide" presents itself as "common sense". The view frequently put forward in educational institutions and development - that there is a distinction, there is a great divide; that there are characteristics on each side of the oral-written divide; that if you give people literacy, all kinds of things follow - appears fairly natural, and very often it is not even represented as a position. One of the reasons for referring to this position as an autonomous model of literacy is precisely because it represents itself as though it is not a position located ideologically at all, as though it is just natural. One of the reasons why I want to call the counter-position ideological, is precisely in order to signal that we are not simply talking here about technical features of the written or the oral process. What we are talking about are contesting models and assumptions about the writing process, which are always embedded in power relations. The agenda, then, is contested already. There is variation in literacy across a whole range of different practices, contexts and domains, and in each case there are competing discourses (Lee 1992).

I will cite briefly some of the concepts surrounding the issue of literacy from within an ideological model. Firstly, the concept of "Literacy events" was coined by Shirley Brice Heath (1982a) on analogy with speech event, in the socio-linguistic literature. A literacy event, then, is any event in which reading and/or writing has a role. Heath's notion of literacy events points to concrete practice. Lectures, for instance, represent a classic literacy event: The lecturer reads the odd note here and there; an overhead slide projects different types of notes; occasionally people take a note down; some of them might file it away somewhere in a bureaucracy; some of them might throw it in the waste-paper basket, might look up at the overhead,

and look down and write, read their own notes and listen again to the speaker. The whole is, in a sense, greater than the sum of its parts, and is underpinned by systems of ideas and organisation that are not necessarily made explicit in the immediate discourse.

I am not, however, entirely satisfied with the notion of a literacy event because event seems to signal mainly behaviour. There are, however, all kinds of conventions which people internalise - we all know in everyday literacy events such as encounters with bureaucracy, or in seminars or meetings how tightly controlled the conventions are. They are often more apparent at times of political resistance. Feminist and other movements, for instance, tend to resist dominant speech/writing conventions, to make them explicit and then find ways of changing and resisting them.

Thus we have culturally constructed models of the literacy event in our minds. I want to use the concept of literacy practices to indicate this level of the cultural uses and meanings of reading and writing. Literacy practices I would take as referring not only to the event itself, but to the conceptions of the reading and writing process that people hold when they are engaged in the event. The distinction between literacy practices and Literacy events has been well summarised and further elaborated in a recent book entitled *Writing in the Community* (Barton & Ivanic 1991). So, armed with those two concepts - literacy events and literacy practices - within the framework of an ideological model, it seems to me possible to go out and start doing comparative research as well as to organise programmes and develop curricula in a more socially-conscious and explicit way.

What I want to avoid, in looking at the cultural aspect of literacy, is recreating the reified list - here is a culture, here is its literacy; here is another culture, here is its literacy (Thornton 1988). That is unfortunately one of the problems that have arisen with the notion of multiple literacies. The notion of multiple literacies is crucial in challenging the autonomous model. We have to be able to indicate that the notion of a single literacy with a big "L" and a single "y" is only one subculture's view, and there are varieties of literacy practices. But once you slip into the notion of multiple literacies, you then begin to move towards culture as a listed inventory. I will indicate just a few of the different ways in which the notion of multiple literacy has been defined recently to indicate the conceptual as well as ideological difficulties entailed.

The work by Kirsch and Jungeblut (1986) in America, *Literacy: Profiles of America's Young Adults*, talks of three literacies: reading, writing and numeracy with possibly a fourth, document processing. In Australia, frameworks and competency scales for assessing literacy levels are presently being researched; Griffin (1990), for instance, claims explicitly that there are

four literacies: literacy for knowledge, literacy for self-expression, literacy for practical purposes, literacy for public debate. Heath (1983a), working in the Piedmont Carolinas, talks about three communities, each having a literacy. In a sense, the work I was doing in Iran (Street 1984), talking about three different literacies - maktab literacy, school literacy, commercial literacy - could take on that same characteristic if we assume that each literacy is associated with a different community. A similar view is to be found amongst some researchers in the New Literacy Studies in America. Miriam Camitta (1993) for instance, researching adolescent literacies in and out of school, talks about vernacular literacy and schools literacy, where the vernacular literacy represents a resistance to the dominant mode by adolescents who develop separately their own literacy practices. Barton and Ivanic (1991), in the book *Writing in the Community*, talk about "domains" of literacy; "community" literacy has become quite a key concept in their Lancaster research programme. To avoid the pitfalls of a culturalist view of literacy, I have tried to develop the notion of dominant literacies, in opposition to "marginalised" literacies, on the analogy with some of the work in socio-linguistics around the notion of dominant language (Grillo 1989). If you talk about "standard", it looks as though that would naturally be the one that we should all be acquiring. If you talk about dominant language, you are asking the question, how did it become dominant, how does it reproduce itself, how does it contest with other marginalised languages? A great deal of current research in ethnography of literacy practices is beginning to explore the associations between cultural conventions, literacy practices, notions of self, person and identity and struggles over power. We need, then, not just "cultural" models of literacy but "ideological" ones, in the sense that in all of these cases, the uses and meanings of literacy entail struggles over particular identities up against other identities, often imposed ones.

Implications for Pedagogy and Educational Policy

All of this has huge implications for pedagogy, and I will suggest some of the ways in which this might be explored. This account is based on the argument developed elsewhere (Gee, Luke, Freebody & Street, forthcoming), that we are not providing a fixed "proper" way to view literacy, but a heuristic framework within which teachers, practitioners, teacher educators and programme planners can re-theorise their practice in the contexts of the specific difference, locality and politics they are faced with. Many of the arguments with regard to formal schooling have been dealt with by Luke

and others (Luke 1988; De Castell, Luke & Luke 1989), in showing that the history of "schooled literacy" (cf. Cook-Gumperz 1986) has a specific ideological history, related to the gendered construction of appropriate selves for particular political cultures. We argue that a reframing of literacy as a critical social practice requires us to take account of these historical as well as cross-cultural perspectives in classroom practice and to help students to locate their literacy practices, somewhat in the way that the Critical Language Awareness approach (Fairclough 1992) helps locate language practices more generally.

It seems to follow from all of this that the teacher, the curriculum designer and the programme developer, whether in industrialised societies facing "new times" or in "development" programmes, need to have an understanding not only of educational theory, but also of linguistic theory, of literacy theory and of social theory. In these contexts there inevitably will be implicit assumptions about cultural relations, identity, etcetera, but to maintain any kind of control of what we are doing, we need to make them explicit: and to work through their implications for pedagogy, school literacy, and for the social relations teachers have with their students. I will briefly touch on a number of different approaches to teaching literacy in the light of these perspectives: schooled literacy, the Freireian approach, the language experience approach, and the genre approach. Much of what I am saying here about literacy practices also applies to numeracy practices, although there is not space here to explore this (Baker & Street 1993).

With regard to schooled literacy, it is clear that in general the autonomous model of literacy has dominated curriculum and pedagogy. As Freebody (Freebody & Welch 1993) and others have shown, apparently innocent texts for infants, questions by teachers and the emphasis on "correct" spelling and on linguistic detail, are ways of maintaining discipline. Learning precise phonemic distinctions is not just a technical prerequisite of reading and writing, but a key way of training new members of the polity *how* to learn and how to discern other distinctions, to make appropriate cultural discriminations in societies that are increasingly heterogeneous. These secondary discourses, as Gee calls the literacies delivered by state institutions, enable a centralising state to assert homogeneity against the heterogeneity evident in the variety of primary discourses into which communities socialise their members (Gee 1990). Teaching awareness of these conflicts and of the ways in which Literacy practices are sites of ideological contest, is itself already a challenge to the dominant autonomous model that disguises such processes.

Paulo Freire's approach to learning in Third World literacy campaigns has attempted to challenge this model. Criticising the "banking" approach to

learning, that assumed knowledge was a fixed set of facts to be deposited in the learner, he has advocated an approach that starts from consciousness raising, enabling the poor and oppressed to explore and analyse the sources of their oppression. Literacy classes would begin with discussion of key concepts in the local context, such as *favela* (slum) in shanty towns. The animator would discuss with class members what such concepts mean in their context, how it is that they come to live in such conditions, where the responsibility lies for the gross poverty experienced by so many. Once the words themselves had become familiar in this critical sense, the animator would then begin to write them on a board. In Portuguese, the language in which Freire began his work, and also in Spanish, in which it has been particularly influential, words are built up out of syllables so that a word such as *favela* can be broken down into parts and then each part - fav el-a - rebuilt with other syllables - fav + el + o - to make new words. Students can quickly learn to copy the letters of such key words and then make their own new words, moving on to sentence building. This approach, a combination of general political socialisation with specific language techniques, has been highly influential in a number of Literacy Campaigns in the past twenty years, and is also being employed in many adult literacy classes in industrialised societies (Barton & Hamilton 1990). From the perspective I am developing here, however, there are a number of problems that need to be addressed. One critique by Mastin Prinsloo, a South African educator, brings out the problems he has found using Freire in that context:

In Xhosa literacy classes, there is a somewhat problematic following of the basic Learn and Teach/Freireian methods of word building using syllable charts drawn from generative words (the ma-me-mi approach).

The problem with using this phonetic approach almost exclusively, is that lessons on word building tend to go on indefinitely without learners developing reading and writing habits that are embedded in real use contexts. The move to reading and writing seriously for meaning gets delayed for so long that learners sometimes despair ... [there is an] urgent need for development of method to include aspects of language experience approach to literacy teaching together with the phonetical drills of the Freireian approach.

(Barton & Hamilton 1990: 14)

Similar criticisms can be found from other parts of the world. Bourgois (1986), writing about the Nicaraguan Literacy crusade which was one of the more spectacular successes of a modified Freireian approach, points out as an anthropologist how culturally specific the chosen key words can be and how difficult it is for programme organisers and teachers to really know what the key words in a culture are and what they mean. The Sandinistas

organised their campaign after the revolution (Lankshear 1987) in the midst of revolutionary fervour seen by many commentators as the key ingredient for success of the "mass" campaign (Bhola 1984). But they failed at first to recognise that those who lived on the Atlantic Coast belonged to quite different cultural and language groupings than the dominant Spanish speaking peoples who had been involved in the revolution. For them the key phrase "Sandino is the Hero of the Revolution" was as meaningless and as much part of Managuan hegemony as had been the grosser propaganda of the previous Samosa regime (Freeland 1990). The Freireian approach is vulnerable to such culturally-blind manipulation by activists imbued with ideological fervour and believing so strongly that they are "empowering" "ignorant" peasants that they fail to see their own cultural and political domination. Rogers (1991), reviewing a recent book by Archer and Costello (*Literacy and Power* 1990) on literacy and power in South American literacy campaigns, makes a similar point. Against the apparent belief of the authors and of many of the practitioners whose work they describe, that literacy is inevitably empowering, Rogers argues:

Until we know the nature of the power used by the oppressor, we cannot know whether literacy can or cannot do anything to relieve that oppression. By a close study of the nature and causes of poverty, it seems to be increasingly accepted that literacy can do little to relieve the first stages of extreme poverty (though it contributes mightily to the second and higher levels of increasing prosperity). Similarly, what we need now is to study power first, not literacy. If literacy in itself does possess the power to empower, as is so often claimed, then more is needed than the case studies in this book to demonstrate it. But I am beginning to doubt it; for the elites who hold power do not do so on the basis of literacy. They often use literacy to buttress their power; but they have many other weapons. If one hundred percent literacy was achieved in a country like Cuba, for example, would democracy be advanced one bit? I doubt it.

(Rogers 1991: 34)

A similar argument might be used to qualify some of the faith in teaching children the dominant literacies or the "genres of power" put forward by some advocates of the genre approach to schooling and literacy in Australia. Some would argue that children cannot learn to question the power structures of the society they inhabit until *after* they have learned these genres. The teacher's task, then, is to impart knowledge of the traditional forms of reading and writing - the dominant literary forms, the genres of expository prose and essay-text writing, the ways of composing letters to business organisations - in order to empower their students. Only then can those students be in a position to question whether these forms are biased against their particular backgrounds - in gender or ethnic terms for instance - and

work to change them. There are a number of problems with this "wait for critique" approach. Gee (1990: 149) points out that much of the linguistic triviality that goes to make up such genres and to mark social groups as separate (phonology, spelling, surface grammar, etcetera) is learnt in "socially situated practices", not in the classroom: hence "they cannot be 'picked up' later, outside the full context of an early apprenticeship (at home and at school)". This is the problem with J.D. Hirsch's much-publicised notion of "cultural literacy", which is strikingly similar to that proposed by those on the other end of the political spectrum as the "genres of power": "He is right", says Gee,

that without having mastered an extensive list of trivialities people can be (and often are) excluded from "goods" controlled by dominant groups in the society; he is wrong that this can be taught (in a classroom of all places!) apart from the socially situated practices that these groups have incorporated into their homes and daily lives.

(Gee 1990: 149)

A further problem with the "wait for critique" approach is highlighted by Rogers's arguments above: even when children have acquired the powerful genres, there is no guarantee that they will become empowered: the goalposts may shift, as many women and those from ethnic minorities and working class backgrounds have discovered in the United States and United Kingdom, where statistics show that women and people of colour who have university degrees cannot obtain the kinds of jobs achieved by white men with comparable qualifications. In Gee's terms, if the markers of separation are indeed often trivial, then it is not very difficult for those in power to change them as new cohorts of "outsiders" learn the spelling, grammar and phonology of the dominant groups. A further problem with the dominant literacy position that is highlighted by the approach being put forward here, is the fact that assumptions are being made about the nature and uses of reading and writing without actual ethnographic knowledge. There are a number of powerful genres, not just a single autonomous literacy, and we know very little about how they operate - in the Stock Exchange for instance, or in higher reaches of Commerce and Government. One might speculate that these in-house, abbreviated literacies, through which those already confident of power communicate, are not the same as those laborious and explicit genres being taught in schools. After all, as many pupils know, the teachers who impart these genres have evidently themselves failed to achieve positions of power in their society. There is much research to be done yet on the actual relations between specific genres and the holding of power, financial and political. To lead students to believe that there is a

one-way relationship between particular genres taught in school and the positions of power is to set them up for disappointment and disillusion.

There is a further argument, brought out in the work of Luke and Freebody and central to the ideological model of literacy (Street 1984), that learning literacy is not just about acquiring content but about learning a process. Every literacy is learnt in a specific context in a particular way and the modes of learning, the social relationships of student to teacher, are modes of socialisation and acculturation. The student is learning cultural models of identity and personhood, not just how to decode script or to write a particular hand. If that is the case, then leaving the critical process until after they have learnt many of the genres of literacy used in that society, is putting off, possibly for ever, the socialisation into critical perspective. When exactly will most students revise and criticise their school learning if not during the process of experiencing it? Griffin, in describing stages or levels of literacy for purposes of developing assessment instruments, argues that

empowerment may not occur until individuals proceed past the access and required levels to a level where they are able to set the parameters on what literacy skills are required.

(Griffin 1990: 22)

This approach, in which liberal technicians line up with radical genre theorists, is, I believe, fundamentally flawed and deeply conservative. There are problems with the concepts of "stages" and "levels" that are coming to dominate discourses on literacy, and with the theories of power, of literacy and of socialisation that underpin these approaches. This is well articulated by Sue Newman:

Because stage-level models are generally based on middle class or mainstream definitions of standard or normative behaviour, they also ignore the political aspects of literacy development by failure to acknowledge that people are often denied comparable access to a particular literacy because of race, class or gender. Benefits of higher levels of literacy are cited without acknowledging that such benefits may not be identical for those who attain them, again because of differential status within a society.

(Newman 1992: 13)

An approach that sees literacy as critical social practice would make explicit from the outset both the assumptions and the power relations on which these models of literacy are based. In contrast to the argument that learners are not "ready" for such critical interpretation until they reach higher stages or levels, I would argue that teachers have a social obligation to engage in

critical interpretation. This is only possible on the assumption that skilled teachers can facilitate critical perspectives in appropriate language and communicative forms as readily as traditionalists can impart genres, levels, contents and skills within a conservative view of literacy. The introduction of Critical Language Awareness and of Literacy as Critical Social Practice can, I believe, facilitate this process. Introducing this into the South African context at a time of rapid and fundamental social change is not a luxury but a necessity.

I will conclude with some discussion of the policy implications of the critical findings outlined above, with respect to the new situation in South Africa, based on observations made during study visits I made to the country during 1991 and 1992.

The Mother Tongue Debate

The new theories of literacy seem to me to have new and radical implications for the debate about mother tongue literacy. If you start from the assumption that learning literacies is in fact a process of cultural learning - that it is about epistemology, knowledge and identity - then learning one literacy will not necessarily help in learning another. If, on the other hand, you believe that learning literacy is a technical process in which you learn the relationship between sign and sound, then it does seem to follow that what you learn in the first Literacy can carry over to learning the second. In that case it does appear sensible to provide mother tongue literacy first: people know their own language best, they can crack the literacy code in this familiar setting more easily and then move on to a second language with those technical skills under their belt. That has been the theory and it has driven a lot of policy. But if you shift to an assumption that literacies are social practices, then this policy does not necessarily follow so straightforwardly. In fact, it may be that learning literacy in the mother tongue as a bridge to learning in a second language - such as Spanish or English - may actually interfere with learning it in the second language.

Language and literacy policy in South Africa, like in many African and third world countries, appear to have been based on the autonomous model. Children spend the first three years in primary school learning their mother tongue literacy and then, at Standard Four, they switch to English as the medium of instruction. The mother tongues have mostly been written down by missionaries in English script, so a child learns Xhosa or various Nguni languages, which are non-cognate with English, in English writing. In the light of recent theories and research in literacy this process is likely to have

numerous disadvantages (Bell 1990). The relationship of sign to sound in English writing is different from that in Nguni, even though most of the "letters" appear to be the same: they obviously represent different sounds in each language and there are indeed different sound ranges that have to be covered by the same limited number of signs. In fact, a few signs are added for each local language, or diacritical marks are used. English, for instance, has about fifteen vowel sounds, represented by five vowel signs or letters. Xhosa has about six. Children learning literacy first in Xhosa are going to need some explanation of this when they switch to English language literacy. Even at the technical level, the decoding skills of mother tongue literacy are not straightforwardly transferred to second language literacy. But the situation becomes even more complex when we consider the social meanings and uses of literacy in each language. What the child has learnt about the meanings and uses of literacy will also be different from the mother tongue to English literacy. In the mother tongue, literacy is associated with various local meanings, perhaps stories and immediate practical issues; in English the uses of literacy are associated with central administration, schooling, urbanisation, etcetera. This, then, casts some doubt on the notion that mother tongue literacy will provide a helpful "bridge" to learning the language and literacy of "power". Moreover, the notion that the local literacy is only good as a bridge is rather demeaning of that literacy.

So the new theories of literacy are forcing us to question this policy. The policy of mother tongue maintenance may well be important - for political and cultural reasons - and I personally support this. But this should involve using mother tongue literacy in its own right as a significant form of literacy rather than simply as a channel to something else - another language and literacy. The issue of second language literacy can then be treated separately. The relationship between the two languages and the two literacies should be treated as problematic - leading to some disadvantages and to some advantages, rather than assumed to be inevitably good for the learner in all cases.

Putting Literacy into Education

I would like to conclude with some proposals for the inclusion of literacy training in university education courses and programmes, arising out of a study visit I paid to South-Africa in the summer of 1992. The proposals follow directly from the nature of the New Literacy Studies outlined above and, along with the arguments about mother tongue teaching, address the

implications of the debate about access to dominant literacies outlined more abstractly in the earlier part of the paper.

The need for professional training for Leadership in the field of Adult Education and the categories of persons to whom it should be directed, has been spelt out clearly in a number of Policy Documents circulating and being widely discussed in South-Africa (see Appendix). For instance, the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) summary document on Adult Basic Education (ABE) states:

... there is a tremendous shortage of adult basic educators at higher levels i.e. as planners and policy makers. Apart from trained teachers various other officials and educators are needed, such as adult education officers, based in central and local administration, with responsibility for planning, organisation, financial management, training, research and evaluation. Their training will include detailed university training as well as in-service training.

(NEPI 1992)

A major category or personnel that will be needed in post-apartheid South-Africa, some of whom are in place but need upgrading through courses of the kind envisaged here, are:

Regional supervisors, inspectors and organisers [who] provide key administrative, training and support functions. They form the bulk of professionally trained personnel in adult basic education and most training is directed to them. They are full time and professionally most committed. Their job is to identify and train part-time supervisors, oversee the organisation, composition and supervision of classes and the distribution of infrastructural and instructional equipment. Their most important function is that they provide the liaison between grassroots local government units and central administrative level. Their training is normally at certificate level at universities or other tertiary institutions. Their training will include understanding the adult learner, nature, purpose and scope of adult education, skills for initiating, designing, planning and administering programmes and group leadership. Their training is a mixture of theory and practice with a great emphasis on field work.

(NEPI 1992: 31)

At a general level, much of the training for such personnel is provided by Diplomas and Certificates available in the Adult Education departments at the "traditionally white" universities. Provision for the *literacy* aspect of ABE is, however, less substantial: whilst the Diplomas and MA's available in Adult Education Departments usually include some attention to literacy, and there is generally a percentage of students from the literacy field in each cohort accepted onto such courses, the Theory and Practice of Literacy does not have a high profile in the course structure or content. The need for

specific focus on Literacy derives from a number of considerations (spelt out in detail in the various policy documents cited in the Appendix). A large proportion of the adult population of South Africa currently has minimal literacy skills, as a result of the breakdown of formal education and of the continuing violence and instability that has made literacy projects and courses difficult to attend. Those who have been involved in addressing their needs are themselves also underqualified; and upgrading their educational level is a prior step to providing for the needs of the mass of under-educated adults. There has been a great deal of literacy work on the ground, mainly in the form of NGO's working closely with local communities and of University Adult Education and Continuing Education Department Outreach programmes. There is some tension between these sectors which any programme proposals would need to address. Nevertheless, considerable experience has been built up both of literacy teaching practices in these conditions and of programme planning and management and there is a pool of able and experienced practitioners. However, they are mostly underqualified in the formal sense as well as in need of broader perspectives and higher level skills, and upgrading and professionalisation are now necessary. Whether that training is conducted by Adult Education Departments or by NGO's themselves, perhaps accredited by the Universities, is a source of dispute, but it is generally agreed that the extension of literacy provision for adults will be essential in post-apartheid South Africa.

A major rationale for the specific focus on literacy derives from recent developments in theory and in cross-cultural comparison of literacy work outlined above as the New Literacy Studies. Prior to these developments, a number of ABE educationalists had argued plausibly that literacy should be subsumed within Adult Basic Education. Amongst other things, this would avoid the stigma attached to the concept of "illiteracy" that is a deterrent to many adults with literacy needs coming forward to programmes. The New Literacy Studies, however, have both challenged the "illiteracy/literacy" divide and demonstrated that literacy skills and needs are specific to context. This, then, requires educationalists, teachers, programme managers and policy makers to be sensitive to specific literacy needs and cultural perspectives for which ABE alone is not sufficient. Courses developed to meet these needs, then, would have to include attention to a range of literacy-specific issues: knowledge of recent developments in theory of Literacy; expertise in materials development and curriculum planning; management of literacy programmes; and awareness of a range of policy perspectives and their implications. Whatever short term arguments and immediate political and institutional pressures inform decision making for the new South Africa, some attention to these broader issues and to

international and cross-cultural developments in our understanding of literacy practices - to which South African educators have made a significant contribution (cf. Chick 1990; Miller et al. 1991; Hutton 1992) - will be crucial for the achievement of longer term goals. This is particularly relevant for those goals that involve not only gaining access to the genres of power, but also of changing them in ways many of us consider necessary for a more democratic and open society.

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Note

1. A version of this paper is due to appear in Luke, A., Freebody, P., Gee, J. & Street, B. *Literacy as Critical Social Practice*, Falmer Press, forthcoming.

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