

GUEST EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Social Studies of Literacy and Comparative Education: Intersections

Lesley Bartlett
Teachers College, Columbia University

This issue of *CICE* emphasizes the crucial role of language and literacy in educational processes while it extends contemporary social analyses of literacy. Too often, the comparative education literature has ignored critical issues relating to language, such as language policy and planning, literacy instruction in theory and practice, and the role of language ideologies in educational politics, to name only three. And yet these issues are central to contemporary debates in the field, such as the globalization of educational policy and the convergence and divergence of educational practices, the attempted use of schools to create more democratic, egalitarian relations among linguistically and culturally diverse populations, and the relationship between schooling and economic development. In what follows, I give a brief overview of social studies of literacy, including some of the main conceptual developments. In that review, I indicate the contributions made by authors in this volume to current debates in the field of literacy studies. Finally, I suggest that debates in literacy studies have much to offer the field of comparative education.

Theoretical Development in Social Studies of Literacy

In this section, I briefly outline some of the major conceptual advances in the field of literacy studies in order to contextualize the directions for research suggested by the articles in this issue. I organize these in four sections: literacy and power, literacy and development, multiplicity, and identities.

Literacy and power

Early research on literacy ignored the social context of the acquisition and use of literacy, treating it instead as a neutral technology; much of the contemporary reading research working in the quantitative paradigm repeats this mistake. However, social studies of literacy have revealed the coupling of literacy and power. Renowned Brazilian literacy theorist Paulo Freire charged that literate people held a decided advantage over illiterate people. Further, he criticized the normal pedagogical 'banking education' model, in which teachers 'own' knowledge and 'deposit' it in the minds of students; he called instead for a 'consciousness-raising' form of education which valued students' prior knowledge and encouraged them to learn to "read the word and the world," or simultaneously learn to read and to critique social relations of inequality (Freire, 1970, 1975, 1976; Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Analyses of literacy and power tend to be skewed toward the extremes of optimism or pessimism. Adherents of critical literacy maintain that literacy can empower learners (Giroux, 1988; Mackie, 1981; Purcell-Gates & Waterman, 2000). Indeed, Freire himself proposed that 'hope' is a crucial resource for educators (Freire, 1994). Others take a less sanguine view (Freebody & Welch, 1993). Some, recognizing that access to literacy and other levels of education falls broadly along the familiar contours of social inequality,

despair of ever using a form of education to interrupt social reproduction. For example, Youngman's political economic analysis of literacy policies and programs demonstrated how easily literacy levels could become yet another symptom of class privilege (Youngman, 1986, 2000).

The role of language in social reproduction, or rather in the cultural production of social structures, was greatly illuminated by the conceptual contributions of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, especially his notions of linguistic capital, linguistic markets, and linguistic habitus. In his landmark 1977 article "The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges," Bourdieu argued that linguistic exchanges invoke a complex network of power relations in which the producer, by producing an utterance or text, makes a bid for social authority, and the recipient or audience decides to what degree to recognize that claim to authority (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu introduced the concept of linguistic capital to describe the respect or authority enjoyed by a speaker. Those with high linguistic capital speak with "command," i.e., the power to influence a listener toward the desired interpretation. Further, utterances are always ventured in a particular field or market, in which certain social expectations for speech and interaction obtain. A linguistic market is a "system of relations of force which impose themselves as a system of specific sanctions and specific censorship, and thereby help fashion linguistic production by determining the 'price' [or value] of linguistic products" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 145). In a linguistic market, people undertake speech production with a certain "anticipation of profit," or anticipation of the expected reception of one's words. Thus, according to Bourdieu, linguistic capital is created, adapted, asserted, and re-evaluated through linguistic encounters. Furthermore, linguistic production is governed by linguistic habitus, or a historically and socially constituted sedimentation of experiences in linguistic markets (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 145). Linguistic habitus signifies the internalized inclination toward certain types or styles of linguistic production, which is considerably shaped by one's personal history of social interaction and one's sense of the value of one's language. With the concepts of habitus, markets, and capital, Bourdieu detailed the micropolitics that blunt the possible impact of education upon social change. And though Bourdieu primarily discussed speech, his concepts apply equally to literacy.

In the vein of power and literacy, social studies of literacy could greatly benefit from incorporating an awareness of the power-knowledge connection as elucidated by Foucault. Foucault emphasized the role of the human sciences in the normalization of social principles, institutions, and discourses, including conceptualizations of the knowable and the ineffable, and the concomitant subjugation of local knowledges (Foucault, 1980). His critical interrogations apply equally to educational sciences and pedagogies (Ball, 1990; Usher & Edwards, 1994).

Though she doesn't work within the paradigms discussed here (critical literacy, political economy, Bourdieu's practice theory, and Foucauldian post-structuralism), linguistic anthropologist Aurolyn Luykx addresses issues of literacy and power. In her article in this issue, Luykx warns about the dangers of standardizing and codifying a language based not on local linguistic practices but rather on the imported, educated expertise of language and development professionals. Her ethnographic study of the codification and institutionalization of indigenous languages in Bolivia cautions us to question the

assumption that literacy (and/or schooling) leads, necessarily, to empowerment, even as it provides a fascinating glimpse of the potential subjugation of local languages by well-meaning educators.

Literacy and development

Consonant with their ignorance of power, early studies of the relationship between literacy and development treated literacy as a neutral technology with a singular, predictable impact on the individual and society (Goody, 1977, 1968; Ong, 1982); many orthodox conceptualizations of literacy still maintain this idea. 'Development' is a notoriously vague concept, which scholars applied to cognitive, social, political, or economic development (sometimes simultaneously). Further, earlier literacy scholars often floated (as though interchangeably) between claims about individual and society-wide development. However, social studies of literacy gradually and effectively challenged the multi-faceted claim of a causal relationship between literacy and development.

The conceptual revolution for this strand of literacy studies came with the publication of social anthropologist Brian Street's ethnography of multiple forms of literacy in Iran (Street, 1984). Street cogently argued against what he dubbed the autonomous model of literacy and for an ideological model of literacy. The autonomous model, he argued, presents literacy "in technical terms, treating it as independent of social context, an autonomous variable whose consequences for society and cognition can be derived from its intrinsic character" (Street 1993: 5). The autonomous model portrays education as a transparent skill learned gradually as the individual moves through universal stages of cognitive and physical development. This skill, the model holds, results in individual rational thought, intellectual development, social development, and economic mobility. The model also assumes a homology between the individual and the society; it predicts that literacy will result in national economic growth and social and political development.

In contrast to the dominant autonomous model, Street proposed the ideological model of literacy. Ideological analyses of literacy "view literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society, and recognize the variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing in different contexts" (Street 1993: 7). Literacy, Street argued, "is a social process, in which particular socially constructed technologies are used within particular institutional frameworks for specific social purposes" (Street 1984: 97). Literacy is subject to cultural construction and social practice. Its significance varies across time and across as well as within cultures; literacy takes meaning from the situations in which it is embedded. Further, literacy events, or activities that include literacy, are social acts produced by people in specific situations with varying degrees of power and authority, and thus varying abilities to influence the conduct of such events.

Thus, Street's conceptualization joined a social analysis of power relations as well as language and literacy ideologies to a cultural awareness of the (bottom-up) invention of meaning. Further, his vast literature review and his ethnographic research demonstrated that there is no empirical basis to assume an automatic, causal, and/or universal relationship between literacy and development. Literacy has no autonomous 'effect' on

development in any form (cognitive, social, political, or economic); instead, in each case literacy's influence is filtered through its interaction with complex, contextual particularities.

Street's publication also marked a significant methodological shift. Prior ethnographies of literacy primarily relied on the concept of literacy events, a notion adapted by Heath (Heath, 1983) from Hymes's work in the ethnography of communication (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972). Literacy events are, quite simply, events that involve reading and/or writing. However, Street introduced the idea of literacy practices, a concept further developed by scholars working in what has come to be called New Literacy Studies (Barton, 1991; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Baynham, 1995; Street, 1995). The concept of literacy practices places literacy events and individual actions in a solidly social frame, contextualizing the event in the power structures and cultural meanings at play (Street 1993: 7). Like Bourdieu's practice theory, the concept of literacy practices clearly situates individual acts and interpersonal relations in a social structural framework.

Multiplicity

The fragmentation of a unitary, universalist conception of literacy into a multitude of literacy practices had numerous effects within the field of social studies of literacy. The notion of pluralities materialized throughout the literature. Employing a Gramscian conception of power and hegemony, some scholars investigated the difference between dominant literacy genres, attached to authoritative institutions and commanding segments of the population, and vernacular literacy genres, local literacies developed and employed by those with relatively less authority (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Luke, 1996). Furthermore, new literacy scholars emphasized the domains in which literacy practices occurred. Domains are "structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). They might be institutional spaces (church, school, home, prison, etc.) or, more abstractly, they might discourse communities transubstantiated in unrelated physical settings (e.g., reading a legal document on the bus or contesting a charge on a credit card bill in the home) (Hamilton, 2000).

The pluralization continues. Recently, a group of British, Australian, and U.S.-based scholars known as the New London Group proffered the concept of multiliteracies to signify two facets of contemporary social studies of literacy: "the multiplicity of communication channels" related to literacy; and the "increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Multimodality is a burgeoning topic (Kress, 2000), while numerous ethnographies of literacy have documented the continuing importance of local diversity (Aikman, 1999; Bartlett, 2001; Prinsloo & Breier, 1997; Robinson-Pant, 2001; Street, 1993, 2001).

In much of this literature, the term "literacy" itself has been made plural in order to emphatically reject a unitary notion of literacy. Literacies, according to one definition, "are coherent configurations of literacy practices" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). I have several concerns with this trend. First, even in plural form, the notion of "literacies" is too static for my taste. As "configurations," literacies become nominalized and reified, not unlike problems noted with the culture concept. This nominalization sets up searches for boundedness or, alternately, declarations of hybridity (which, ultimately,

assert the distinctiveness and discernibleness of the things that are 'mixed') that may have very little to do with institutional and/or structural histories or with subjective experiences of literacy.

My second concern seems, ironically, the reverse of the first. The literature on multiplicity-vernacular and dominant literacy genres, multiple domains, multimodality, local literacies-emphasizes differences between literacies. However, much of the quantitative work on literacy, especially on literacy and pedagogy, stresses what transfers from one literacy task to another. Our insistence on differences, it seems to me, leads us to ignore similarities. While I am not arguing for an autonomous model, I am suggesting that it may be time for us to give equal weight to strategies or practices that remain stable across contexts.

I argue that the concept of literacy practices allows us to overcome the limitations of reification and (overgeneralized) differentiation. As a person-centered concept, it allows us to follow individuals or groups through diverse physical settings and discourse communities, documenting both similarities and differences across literacy events. Further, in the spirit of Bourdieu's practice theory, it permits analysts to examine the cultural production in the face of historical and structural constraints, rather than policing the boundary/ies of literacy/ies.

Identities

Likewise, the concept of identities encourages a person-centered examination of literacy practices. Further, it begins to answer some of the questions I posed about transfer, while allowing for the examination of social change.

Social studies of literacy have made it clear that becoming and being literate is as much about social work as it is about any cognitive shift. As Bourdieu suggested, in asserting linguistic capital through a literacy practice, a person makes a social claim to authority that must then be evaluated by the audience; or, as McDermott explained, 'becoming literate' is as much about "passing" for literate as it is about learning to read. However, some have suggested that, precisely because they are so absolutely socially embedded, it is very difficult for learners to acquire other literacies and perform them naturally. For example, Jim Gee emphasized the social identities attached to ways of communicating. He questioned whether one could learn a secondary Discourse through direct instruction rather than indirect socialization, and he suggested that secondary Discourses rarely commanded as much respect or approbation as primary Discourses (Gee, 1990). Gee's formulation insinuated that literacies were much more durable and less amenable to acquisition than previously thought.

Yet many have contested this static notion of literacy and pessimistic view of learning. In particular, recent work by Bartlett and Holland clarifies how identity work invokes personal social change (Bartlett & Holland, 2001). Drawing on innovations in the cultural historical school of psychology, sociohistorical theory, and social practice theory, Bartlett and Holland suggest that literacy learners can employ cultural symbols that are meaningful to the figured world of literacy (e.g., books, letters, teacher dictums) to manage their own feelings, thoughts, behavior and actions on a broad scale. These symbolic elements of identity can then be used to challenge and overcome ascribed,

positional identities firmly rooted in social structures, such as class and race.

The article in this issue by Ingulsrud and Allen addresses one aspect of literacy and identity-the attempted inculcation, in China, of a national identity through literacy instruction. In this case, they hypothesize that the provision of standardized cultural symbols-Roman script Putonghua-helps to instill a shared national identity. Of course, while the government's intent is clear, only ethnographic research can reveal how individual students did (or did not) 'take up' and use those cultural symbols.

Literacy studies and comparative education

The fields of literacy studies and comparative education have some things in common. They share some scholars. As demonstrated in this review, social studies of literacy are addressing many issues of interest to comparative educators: the contribution of literacy and schooling to economic, political, and social change; global standardization and local diversification; the tension between generalizability and contextually-rich specificity, as well as between causally-based predictability and descriptive accuracy; and the role of schooling in establishing limits and opening possibilities for social structures and cultural production. Like comparative education, literacy studies is striving to examine educational policy and practice simultaneously, in order to capture a more complete picture of educational processes.

However, there is much they don't but could share that would redound to their mutual benefit. For example, to get beyond charges of localism, literacy studies could adopt qualitative comparative methods (Schriewer & Kälble, forthcoming). Likewise, concepts developed in literacy studies-specifically educational practices and identities-promise much to the field of comparative education. The essays in this issue demonstrate the potential of careful studies of language and literacy for the field of comparative education.

Bibliography

Aikman, S. (1999). *Intercultural education and literacy : an ethnographic study of indigenous knowledge and learning in the Peruvian Amazon*. Amsterdam ; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub.

Arnové, R. (1986). *Education and Revolution in Nicaragua*. New York: Praeger.

Arnové, R., & Torres, C. A. (1995). Adult education and state policy in Latin America: The contrasting cases of Mexico and Nicaragua. *Comparative Education*, 31(3).

Ball, S. (Ed.). (1990). *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge*. New York: Routledge.

Bartlett, L. (2001). *Literacy Shame and Competing Educational Projects in Contemporary Brazil*. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Bartlett, L., & Holland, D. (2001). Theorizing the Space of Literacy Practice. *Ways of Knowing*.

Barton, D. (1991). The social nature of writing. In D. Barton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Writing in the community*. London: Sage.

Barton, D. (1994). *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of the Written Language*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*. New York: Routledge.

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (2000). Literacy practices. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: reading and writing in context*. New York: Routledge

Barton, D., Hamilton, M., & Ivanic, R. (Eds.). (1999). *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. London: Routledge.

Baynham, M. (1995). *Literacy Practices: Investigating Literacy in Social Contexts*. London: Longman.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). The economy of linguistic exchanges. *Social Science Information*.

Bourdieu, P., & Thompson, J. B. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in Capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books.

Carnoy, M., & Levin, H. M. (1985). *Schooling and work in the democratic state*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Multiliteracies : Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. New York: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon.

Fox, R., & King, B. (Eds.). (2002). *Anthropology beyond culture*. New York: Berg.

Freebody, P., & Welch, A. (1993). *Knowledge, Culture and Power: International Perspectives on Literacy as Policy and Practice*. London: Falmer Press.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Freire, P. (1975). *Cultural Action for Freedom*. Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review Monography.

Freire, P. (1976). *Education: The Practice of Freedom* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). London: Writers and Readers.

Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"*. New York: Continuum.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. Westport, CN: Bergin & Garvey.

Gee, J. P. (1990). *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. New York: Falmer Press.

Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis : Theory and method*. London: Routledge.

Giroux, H. A. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals : toward a critical pedagogy of learning*. Granby, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey.

Giroux, H. A., & McLaren, P. (1989). *Critical pedagogy, the state, and cultural struggle*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Goody, J. (1977). *The domestication of the savage mind*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Goody, J. (Ed.). (1968). *Literacy in Traditional Societies*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Gumperz, J., & Hymes, D. (Eds.). (1972). *Directions in sociolinguistics : the ethnography of communication*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Hamilton, M. (2000). Expanding the new literacy studies: Using photographs to explore literacy as social practice. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: reading and writing in context*. New York: Routledge.

Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hymes, D. (1972). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (Eds.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication* (pp. 35-71). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Kress, G. (2000). Multimodality. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. New York: Routledge.

Lankshear, C., & McLaren, P. (1993). *Critical literacy : politics, praxis, and the postmodern*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Luke, A. (1996). Genres of power? Literacy education and the production of capital. In R.

- Hasan & G. Williams (Eds.), *Literacy in society*. London: Longman.
- Mackie, R. (1981). *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*. New York: Continuum.
- McLaren, P. (1989). *Life in schools : introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. New York: Longman.
- Moll, L. C. (1990). *Vygotsky and education : instructional implications and applications of socio-historical psychology*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Cadiz, M. P., Wong, P., & Torres, C. A. (1998). *Education and democracy : Paulo Freire, social movements, and educational reform in São Paulo*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Ong, W. (1982). *Orality and Literacy*. London: Methuen.
- Prinsloo, M., & Breier, M. (1997). *The Social Uses of Literacy: Theory and Practice in Contemporary South Africa*. Bertsham, South Africa: Sached Books and John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Purcell-Gates, V., & Waterman, R. (2000). *Now We Read, We See, We Speak: Portrait of Literacy Development in an Adult Freirean-Based Class*. Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Robinson-Pant, A. (2001). *Why Eat Green Cucumber at the Time of Dying?: Exploring the Link between Women's Literacy and Development - a Nepal Perspective*. Paris: Unesco.
- Schriewer, J., & Kälble, H. (Eds.). (forthcoming). *Comparing Comparison: Reflections on the Comparative Method in the Humanities and the Social Sciences*: Campus Publishers.
- Shor, I. (1980). *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*. Boston: South End Press.
- Shor, I., & Pari, C. (1999). *Critical Literacy in Action: Writing Words, Changing Worlds*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2000). Transferring Education, Displacing Reforms. In J. Schriewer (Ed.), *Discourse Formations in Comparative Education* (pp. 153-187). Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Quist, H. (2000). The Politics of Educational Borrowing: Reopening the Case of Achimota in British Ghana. (Achimota College). *Comparative Education Review*, 44(3), 272.
- Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B. (1995). *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy Development, Ethnography, and Education*: Longman.
- Street, B. (Ed.). (1993). *Cross-cultural Approaches to Literacy*. New York: Cambridge

University Press.

Street, B. (Ed.). (2001). *Literacy and Development: Ethnographic Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Stromquist, N. P. (1997). *Literacy for citizenship : gender and grassroots dynamics in Brazil*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Torres, C. A. (1990). *The Politics of Nonformal Education in Latin America*. New York: Praeger.

Usher, R., & Edwards, R. (Eds.). (1994). *Postmodernism and Education*. New York: Routledge.

Varenne, H., & McDermott, R. (1999). *Successful Failure: The Schools America Builds*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Youngman, F. (1986). *Adult education and socialist pedagogy*. Beckenham: Croom Helm.

Youngman, F. (2000). *The Political Economy of Adult Education and Development*. New York: Zed Books.