The politics of literacy:
Classrooms, curriculums, and assessments.

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Preface

This is a paper about literacy research rather than a report of research.
Its general purpose is to provide a broad backdrop against which the other
papers in this strand may be viewed, and to give some flavour of the

activity, diversity, and excitement currently in evidence in literacy
research. To address such a broad purpose, the paper presents an argument
about literacy research that runs, in very general terms, like this:

Many contemporary theories of literacy stress the site-specificity of
literacy practices, and seriously question the idea that literacy is a
single attribute or a single, specifiable set of criterial skills.
Literacy practices that are developed in schooling contexts, therefore,
constitute selections of practices. Furthermore, these selections are not
accidental, random, or idiosyncratic but rather supportive of the
organisational needs of the institution of schooling; thus effort needs to
be put into making them appear natural and reflective of essential
definitions of literacy. In that sense at least, literacy education and
research about it can be viewed as 'political', in that each entails
choices among theories and methodologies that afford or reinforce radically
differing competencies and ways of engaging in social experience. The paper
pursues this argument from the classroom to the curriculum document and to
assessment, and finally to the framing of policies and the choices that
face educational researchers.

The levels of activity, diversity, and excitement currently evident in
Australian literacy education are products of a set of converging
interests:

    SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h the Commonwealth Department of
Employment Education and Training's comparatively recent discovery of
literacy education, as manifest in the Australian Language and Literacy
Policy ("White") Paper (Dawkins, 1990);

    SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h a growing awareness that the old
chestnut about literacy being an 'across-the-curriculum' issue may indeed
be a serious matter for educators - teachers, curriculum producers,
administrators, and researchers;

    SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h an intellectual and theoretical
liveliness arising from the critiques of the various progressivist/process,
cultural heritage, and skills / competencies approaches to literacy
education.

On this latter point, the most engaging debates have been waged mainly by
researchers and educators working in personal growth models of literacy
learning (e.g., Cambourne, Turbill), in alphabetic acquisition (e.g.,
Byrne, Andrews), in cognitive studies of language processing, especially in
studies of "situated cognition" (e.g., Moore, van Kraayenoord, Chan), by
functional text-linguists (e.g., Christie, Martin, Rothery), and by
critical social theorists (e.g., Gilbert, Luke, and Green). The
consequence of some of these debates has been the renewed need to theorise
"instruction" - to put to the test, theoretically and empirically, ideas
about the need for direct, explicit teaching as a crucial element in the
teaching cycle. This has implications for changes in teachers' knowledge

about literacy and ideology as they relate to the everyday work of the curriculum.

There are many facets that recur in different guises through these debates, and many notable features of current Australian and New Zealand literacy research (some of which are reviewed comprehensively in Christie et al., 1991). But this paper is by way of a sketch of a "backdrop", not an exhaustive review of this body of literature. It is also a selection of issues that I know something about, that I think have some serious things

to alert us to with respect to our research over the coming years, and that I believe have some relevance to educational researchers generally 1.

Introduction: Why the politics of literacy research?

Among previous generations of researchers, literacy education has been accorded a kind of "theoretical innocence" not traditionally enjoyed by such areas as, minority education, the economics of education, or comparative education. The opening statements from two recent volumes on international views of literacy policy and practice give some flavour of the recent loss of this innocence that has been experienced by literacy researchers and educators: The first from Freebody & Welch (1993):

The almost archetypal innocence of a scene in which one person helps another learn to read or write is matched by the ideological innocence claimed by the disciplines that once exclusively informed that scene - Psychology, Human Development, and Educational Measurement. But the study of reading and writing has become a political pursuit. The most significant events in recent theorising about reading and writing have been the applications of political perspectives from Sociology, Anthropology, History, Politics, Linguistics, and Economics to the study of literacy and literacy education. These perspectives ... have not only contextualised but have often countered the three traditionally dominant accounts of literacy: the growth-through-cultural-heritage account, the cognitive-psychological account, and the skills-and-measurement account. (Welch & Freebody, in press/1992: 6)

The second, from Street (in press/1993):

(..A)n important shift has been the rejection by many writers of the dominant view of literacy as a "neutral", technical skill, and the conceptualisation of literacy instead as an ideological practice, implicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices. (Street, in press/1993: 1)

But, of course, politics and the exercise of power have always been implicated in literacy education just as surely as in minority education,

the economics of education, or comparative education, even if that
implication has traditionally been largely lost on researchers who study
how, why, and what people read and write. If for no other reason, it is
worth fostering a consciousness of the politics of literacy education at
this point because 1993 is the International Year of Indigenous People. In
an era of post-colonialism, indigenous communities have a desperate stake
in the nature and efficacy of their literacy education efforts, and,
importantly, in the dominant theories and methodologies used to legitimate
those efforts.

According to some accounts (e.g., Sachs, 1992), there are about 5100
distinctive languages spoken in the world at this point, over 90% of them
in countries of the South (the so-called 'third world'). At current rates
of "absorption", it is estimated that less than 300 will survive the next
50 years. One of the key instruments of "absorption" is, of course,
literacy education, in the Australasian and Pacific Rim regions as much as
anywhere (see Ahai & Faraclas, 1993, for a discussion of this phenomenon in
Papua New Guinea). The access to public policy afforded by control of
literacy practices means that decisions about the production, distribution,
exchange, and maintenance of these practices are matters of power and thus
politics.

More particularly, for the case to be tenable that literacy education and
research can be usefully defined as 'political', some explication is needed
of how power relations are implicated in everyday reading and writing. As
a starting point, we may turn to a simple-minded combination of the views
of Connell and Foucault on power: Connell described power as the

ability to impose a definition of the situation, to see the terms in which
events are understood and issues dismissed (Connell, 1987: 101)

Further, Foucault (1980) has suggested that power is best seen in the
patterns of support that various definitions find in one another such that
they can form chains of compatibilities and contradictions across
apparently disparate sites and activities. Thus, one approach to the
operation of power is to consider who is afforded the warrant to determine
or at least put forward a definition of 'what is going on here', how the
contents of those definitions draw upon and intersect with comparable
definitional options exercised in varying contexts, and how the strategies
for installing those definitions are naturalised in and by day-to-day
social experience.

For the purposes of considering literacy education, we might think of this
approach to power as implicating the imposition of definitions of:

    SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h what counts as 'reading' and
'writing' here and now?

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h what is going on here and what is its significance? and

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h what counts as 'a more or a less literate individual'?

These questions apply not only to the most obvious site for the 'production' of the literate person - the classroom - but also to all of the other sites in which options are exercised about what will publicly come to count as a literate event, or a literate curriculum, or a literate competency, or, finally, a literate schooling.

This paper has a number of argumentative themes that can count as its aims. These may be expressed as goals on my part to convince you that:

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h literacy practices are site-specific, diverse, and part of (not added to) everyday social experiences of a literate community;

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h 'rational' literacy practices are local products, and are socially maintained and accounted for;

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h literacy practices in institutions are purpose-built: primarily for the order of the institution; and

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h therefore: institutions, through the production, distribution, exchange, and maintenance of certain literacy practices, have as much potential to maintain and entrench patterns of inequality as they do to resist and challenge them.

Overall, these goals amount to the following conclusion: An appreciation of the extent to which the definitions held by us as literacy researchers of 'what is going on' in the various levels of delivery of literacy education are institutionalised definitions has consequences for what we choose to study and how we choose to theorise reading and writing.

As with other educational practices, we can see literacy education as naturalising particular accounts of the relationship between the individual and society: The literate individual is a product - built through the interpretive categories of folk-wisdom and formal social-science accounts of reading and writing. What counts as a literacy event or practice or a literate person is a social construction, comparable to the observation made by Jenks (1982) about the apparently equally natural category of the child:

The idea of childhood is not a natural but a social construct; as such its status is constituted in particular socially located forms of discourse ... the child is assembled intentionally to serve the purposes of supporting

and perpetuating the fundamental grounds of and versions of man (sic),
action, order, language, and rationality within particular theories (Jenks,
1982: 23)

But further, literacy practices are also entailed in the students'
encounters with the world-views that each of the formal school subject
areas afford and with the assumptions - the emphases and the blind spots -
that underlie those world-views. So any account of literacy education
needs to accommodate the workings of the discourses and ideologies that
give those world-views coherence and legitimacy.

So the naturalised term 'literate individual' is a moral idea (Jayyusi,
1982): a set of important and often presupposed interpretive categories,
connections, and explanations to do with the regulation of public and
domestic life. Following Jenks on 'the child', literacy is enacted
variously in different institutional settings, particular reading- and
writing-related practices, suited to the local rationality of the
institution, come to be valued and transmitted (e.g., in schools, churches,
workplaces). In the case of schools, for instance, these practices may be
predicted to be about individuality, displays of memory, feeling, and
morality, and the "countability" of competence.

The argument here, then, is that literacy practices, in chains of
compatibilities and contradictions, are produced, distributed, exchanged,
and maintained at and across all of the sites within the various
institutional facets of education - the classroom, the staffroom, in
curriculum materials and guides, in regional and head offices of
educational authorities, in teacher-education lectures and textbooks, in
the education ministries, and in international aid programs in literacy.

Two further points need to be emphasised: First, these particular
institutionalised practices are projected as natural and essential accounts
of literacy onto those sites that may be thought of as 'in loco pedagogis'
such as the home, the workplace training session, and some educational
sectors of the media.

Secondly, this description of literacy, while assaulting its interpersonal
and ideological 'innocence', should not be heard as villainising current
literacy education or research practices by postulating that there is some
neutral space in which essential literacy awaits or some more spacious time
in which we were free of the rhetoric of literacy crisis (see Welch &
Freebody, 1993). That is, in a sense, this account is not to be heard as a
complaint in and of itself - the point is that, given the ways language and
interpretive categories work, things could not be otherwise. Rather this
paper tries to sketch a brief context in which to examine the options that
have been exercised by generations of literacy educators and researchers
and the choices that continue to be afforded, and further t be afforded as

a natural and comprehensive set of options.

The task for the rest of the paper is to examine and illustrate how the contents of literacy activities in classrooms, curriculum documents, assessment procedures, and policies serve to cast literacy practices into forms compatible with institutional imperatives and preferences 2. The paper concludes with a set of questions about research, and with a revisiting of the challenge to bracket our institutionalised categories of practice and work away at resisting the equation of those categories with essential notions of reading and writing.

How is the literacy classroom political?

The force of much of the substantial body of research conducted over the last decade on classroom talk has been to demonstrate the ways in which teachers model and shape a running 'monologue' that comes to count as the text of the lesson (Baker & Freebody, 1989a; Heap, 1991). It is knowledge of this confirmed linear text for which students can be held publicly accountable. Further, this construction of the canonical text through classroom talk is at work even when the work of the teacher seems to be

largely interrogative and, in the teacher's definition, 'student-centred' (Michaels, 1981, 1987; and as reviewed in Edwards & Westgate, 1987), such that it is now something of a commonplace to assert that teachers generally direct learning fairly closely just as much when they are apparently asking open questions as when engaging in more visibly directive strategies.

More directly for our purposes, the literacy classroom can be seen as directing its interests at producing an individual reader and writer who presents a "literate-assessable" self -- a self presented as functioning in a closed system, with one "set text" that has "one reading" (Baker & Freebody, 1989b). There are a small number of studies that have examined how teachers accomplish these interactive particularities in the first few months of schooling (e.g., Willes, 1983). It is important to point out that the distinction of interest here is not that between 'factual' versus 'inferential' reading and writing practices. The claim here is, rather, that there is evidence in the transcripts of literacy classrooms (often most visibly with students in their early formal schooling) that students are interactively positioned to present themselves as engaged in "virtual" tasks - in tasks that, for instance, are presented to have certain resources available, or certain criteria for success that may reflect in very indirect ways the "open" systems of accomplishment obtaining in out-of-school contexts.

Example 1 shows a transcript taken from a reading lesson about eight weeks into the first year of the students' formal schooling, with their average age about five years. In the class there is one student, Zak, who is fully literate, thanks to systematic teaching by his parents. In literacy

lessons, Zak has taken to cruising, helping the other students, and
responding to the teacher's complaints or queries about the other students'
efforts. It is clear that part of the teacher's work, as documented by
Willes (1983), is to model and establish what counts as successful task
completion in the classroom. as opposed to what might count if the task
"really" needed to be done by this group of people. It is also clear that
the students display differing degrees of clarity about the force of a
question and the minimal conditions for producing an answer in the
classroom.

Example 1

241 t   Well, how would you find out where it says slobby?
242 J   You'd look at slobby
243 t   Well how would you do that?
244 s   Oh
245 s   It's easy
246 J   Find .. find the .. find the person, like Zak
247 t   Yes, that's one way, you could go and ask Zak, because he knows
how to write slobby. But if Zak is busy, what else could you do?
248 J   Look on the board
249 t   Hmm, where would we look .. Christine ? No, just stay there and
tell me darling. Hmm? There? Where ?
250 C   Next to the monster
***

254 t   But how do you know that says slobby?
255 C   Because it has /s/
256 t   So does this one
257 C   I know that//
258 t   //so does this one
259 s .   'Cause, .'cause they know 'cause it's got a 'b', two b's over
there
260 Z   And a 'o'
261 t   Oh, that's a good idea, Zak, yes you can look for some other
sounds that you can hear. Slo::obby Good boy.

(from Freebody & Dwyer, 1992)

There are a number of commentary points we could make about this excerpt,
even from a brief examination. First, the student Jane hears the first
question in the excerpt as a request to locate a word as if she were a
reader ("how would one locate the word slobby?"), rather than to describe
how she would seek help for the task or describe some version of her
searching process. Second, she next hears "how" as "how actually to
accomplish the task", to which she indicates that she would recruit Zak.
Zak's hypothetical unavailability leads Jane to revert to "looking" (248),

and the teacher selects another student to rebuild the exchange as a sequence involving first the more simple task of finding the word and then describing "how you know". Third, the teacher responds within the frame of the answer only when she receives an answer based on the alphabetic features of the word (255-6). Zak, out troubleshooting, has by this time entered the fray and clinches the exchange by mentioning a distinctive letter in the target word, for which he is rewarded.

There are two inferences worth drawing by way of further commentary: First, this is not like an out-of-school reading event in many ways. Rather it is a simulation, a for-school 'reading event'. A reader, out of school, would likely accomplish the task by simply looking at the word; a non-reader, out of school, would likely enlist the aid of a reader, if the completion of the task mattered enough. The task enacted by this group is in a "virtual" ecology. This leads to the second inference: The self presented by the student is not one that simply can or cannot read. Rather what is called for is the presentation of a simulated self as learning-to-read.   The students come to articulate themselves according to the teacher's theory of what constitutes a learner looking, with partial knowledge, for a word. They present, effectively, a version of their practical consciousness and reasoning for the assessment of the teacher 3. We hear echoes of this presentation in the 'genuine responses' to literature called for in the secondary school years. This is a point developed in the later section on assessment.

The point here, again, is not that one of the versions presented for accomplishing this task is better or more real than the others, or that there is available a "real" version to begin with, or even that there is some non-simulated way of performing the task posed by the teacher. For instance and for you, right here and now as you read, locate the word than in the previous sentence and describe in some non-theorised and real way how you "found out where it said than". The point is rather that, of all of the possible public social enactments and accounts of a task such as that, the selected tradition evident in transcripts such as in Example 1 represents an interactive tradition that is not unrelated to, and indeed is supportive of the versions of studenthood and literacy that support the logic of contemporary western-style schooling. To comment upon or assess them as approximations to "real" literacy is to misrepresent the always-already social-contextual nature of literate practices.

Example 2 below is taken from a session following the chorus reading, with the teacher, of a book by a class about half way through their second year of schooling, with an average age of about six and a half years.

Example 2

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291 t     If you had a chance to be one of the things in our story which
292 s     hh!
293 t     Carl ?
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294 C     The cricket. I mean the big weta.
295 t     [The big weta.
296 s     [Oh so would I.
297 t     Why would you like to be the big weta?



298 C     'Cause he comes last.
299 t     He comes last, but what's what happens to him that's so uh so
good do you think?
300 C     'Cause he, he gets to stay in the bed.
301 t     He gets to stay in the bed. Yes.
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(from Baker & Freebody, 1989b)

This exchange illustrates, among other things, the distinction between so-called open questions and open exchanges. Effectively, few other question types would indicate openness more than preference questions. But here again, there are some forms of answers that count as complete answers and some that do not. The answer called for by 297 appears to be a description of the student's own self-reported consciousness. However, it is characterised as unacceptable in its current form by the reformulation in 299. That is, the student's own report to an apparently open question about his own subjectivity does not comply with the teacher's apparently pre-determined form of answer. The teacher calls for a more plot-specific substantiation.

The point again is that exchanges such as these can be interrogated for the ways in which tasks, selves, and subjectivities need to be recast into institutionally 'rational' forms in order for the accomplishment of the institutional ceremony of, in our case, a reading lesson, and, more precisely in Example 2, a preference question within a reading comprehension lesson. Heap (1991), drawing on Vygotsky (1978), made the following observation about 'local rationalities' in reading lessons:

What counts as reading, procedurally, is whatever parties to a setting are apparently justified in believing to be the case about what reading is, what the skills of reading are, and how well any of the interactants performed. An interactant learns what reading is, how it is done, and what counts as reading, criterially, by paying attention to what counts as reading, procedurally, in particular situations ... whatever the teacher permits to pass, uninterrupted and apparently unchallenged, as an adequate display of reading skill, counts, procedurally as adequate, until further notice (1991: 128-9; emphases in original).

From Examples 1 and 2 we might add that it is not only the display of reading "skill" that is produced procedurally in reading lessons, but particular versions of the consciousness of a person who is aware of being

in the process of (according to one theory) learning to read, or, for
instance, who knows how to prefer certain fictional characters. The issue
for the student in the presentation of for-school subjectivity is whether
or not the interpretive partnership between teacher and text that is
displayed by the teacher can be simulated, with interactive assistance, by
and in an answer to a question.

The processes of institutionalising what counts as literacy practices are
most evident in the early years of schooling, mainly because some of the
deep pre-suppositions of school-literacy, such as individual performance
and textual substantiations for subjective 'responses', are not yet pre-
supposed by some students and the local rationalities are occasionally made
visible, as in Examples 1 and 2 (and see Baker & Freebody 1989a and b).
But Gerot's research (1990) shows clearly and in considerable detail that
what counts as a 'right' answer, and as a legitimate question, vary not
only from out-of-school to in-school, but within the various subject areas
of junior secondary school.

So at this prime site of the production, distribution, exchange, and
maintenance of literacy practices, close attention to talk around reading
and writing activities allows us see some ways in which 'reading and
writing' are enacted in ways particular to the institutional rationalities

in which they are embedded.

IV. THE LITERACY CURRICULUM

The processes by which institutions cast literacy practices and recast
particular interactant subjectivities are not restricted to the patterns of
classroom talk. The material curriculum reinforces and extends versions of
institutional practice by introducing trajectories from the apparent out-
of-school world. The curriculum guideline documents, textbooks,
worksheets, and media resources used in school serve also to naturalise
particular versions of domestic and public experience (deCastell, Luke &
Luke, 1989 described several examples of these processes). Initially, in
the first year or so of schooling, classroom reading materials recast the
apparently everyday domestic experience of children. Freebody & Baker
(1987), for instance, documented how 'boyness' and 'girlness' are portrayed
in the first reading books students receive in school, an example of which
is shown in Example 3:

Example 3

"We have to jump this," says Peter.
"Come after me. I know how to do it. Come after me, but keep out of the
water."
Jane says, "Mummy said that we must keep out of the water.

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"I know she said so," says Peter, "but we are not going in the water. I know how to do this."
Peter jumps again. "You can do it, Jane," he says.
Then Jane jumps. She says, "Yes, I can do it. Look at me, Peter. I can do it."

A particular division of the social, emotional, and conversational labour is presented, as well as distinct roles in the moral surveillance of the fictive scene, with Jane acting in loco parentis. Moreover, certain reading practices are called for, for both boy and girl readers in interpreting scenes such as this. These practices involve, among other things, a rarifying of the cultural order (Allan Luke, 1988, called this "mythologising"), an interest in a virtual form of boyness, girlness, and the cultural order that produces and is partly produced by them.

Further, particular states of subjectivity - feelings, reactions, judgements - are placed on display by these "mythological" characters in early school-reading materials (Luke, 1988). For instance, Freebody & Baker (1987) reported patterns in the uses of expressive words in a large corpus of beginning school books. Some examples can be summarised as follows:

Example 4

i) The term like is applied to the case of one person liking another only six percent of the time, it is used by and about parents almost never, and the boy/s-characters are statistically more likely to like objects and events, and the girl/s-characters animals.

ii) The term good is statistically much more likely to be used by persons to or about one another than is like. Further, the statistical patterns of association of use among characters are: mother/s to and about girl/s; father/s to and about boy/s; boy/s to and about events.

iii) The term laugh has the following associations: boy/s laugh more than girl/s; adult/s laugh at boy/s and animals, while girl/s laugh at boys and adults. Girl/s rarely laugh and are never laughed at.

iv) The term cry is never applied to adults; girl/s cry at being lost,

hurt, or losing objects; boy/s almost never.

The adult-characters in these reading materials produce almost no expressive talk or activity and appear to act as surveillance, even, as is the case in Example 3, when they are not present in the fictive scene. More obviously, the expression of subjective feelings and judgements in domestic settings is firmly cast along gender and generational lines.

These patterns of association constitute the unseen texture of, in this case, institutionalised gender and generation relations, and their availability in the very first school-reading materials reinforces the need for a critical literacy pedagogy from the start of schooling (Threadgold, 1992). They can be seen as a pattern of presentations that constructs a "virtual", naturalised domestic world for consumption in the classroom.

But the public world is constituted in terms of institutional imperatives as well, most clearly at the other end of the schooling process. Example 6 shows a selection from a senior economics text of the standard features of a less-developed country. All of the characteristics listed are quoted below in Example 6. The reading, as with Peter and Jane, a reading of a virtual world: Note the presentation of circumstances without history, peopled by autonomous individuals, forming autonomous collectivities, with agency over such matters as access to birth control procedures and primary produce prices:

Example 5

Less-developed countries (LDCs) tend to be characterised by the following features:

1 [..] most individuals in less-developed countries use their output for their own family [..] and exchange little of their production [..]

2 A high proportion of the workforce in less-developed countries is engaged in agriculture and in other primary industries. [..]

3 Technical change in less-developed countries is normally slow and producers often cling to traditional methods [..]

4 [..] those on high incomes in the LDC's are reputed to spend most of their income on ostentatious consumption rather than to invest in productive work. [..]

5 Business motivation or entrepreneurship of a productive nature may be lacking. [..] Capitalistic entrepreneurship may be lacking.

6 Unemployment, labourintensive methods, underemployment.

7 Life expectancy is low, nutrition and health poor.

8 High growth rates of the population and a distorted age distribution of the population add to poverty. The higher rate of (population) increase in the LDCs may suggest the less frequent use of birth control techniques

9 Urbanisation problems, but a proportionately low urban population.

10 [..] The supply of roads, ports, hospitals, schools, telephone services,
water and sewerage facilities is limited. This is a refection of overall
poverty.

11 Illiteracy is widespread and the technical skills required in modern
industry are in short supply.

12 The distribution of income in LDCs is very uneven

13 Dualism. [..] an urban monetary economy consisting of individuals
engaged in Western style industry and a rural traditional barter economy.
[..]

14 Export dependency on one or two primary products. l...] The prices of
primary products tend to be very unstable and specialisation in such a
limited range of primary products (lack of diversification) adds to risk as
a rule.

(Tisdell, 1979, pp. 173-9)

The "virtual" curricular world of mass poverty calls for versions of the
task and the assessable practical consciousness whose infancy we viewed in
Examples 1 and 2 - Zak and "you favourite character". More particularly,
we view the presentation of a world that is static but complex, with facets
that are associated with some "essential", "less-developed" status.
Accounts of why these facets apply to some countries and not to others (as
described in Freebody, 1991) are also stripped of any description of the
history of the nation and its neighbours, colonists, and political allies
and opponents. This leaves the account individualising and domesticating
the problem, the explanations, the blame, and the solutions of poverty:

Example 6

The key factor is that economic development is an increase in productivity
which means an increase in the amount of output produced per worker per
unit of time, whereas economic growth is simply an increase in the output
of goods and services. The message is therefore clear that for a country
to achieve economic development it must strive to achieve an increase in
productivity. (Gibson, Hermann, Kirkwood, & Swiericzuk, 1979: 128,
emphases added)

The argument here is an extension of the general observation that was
applied to the examination of the classroom transcript data: that,
necessarily, curriculum representations of social experience and the
intellectual and moral tasks they afford amount to a recasting of that
experience in ways that suit the local rationality of the school as

institution that constructs selective traditions. Furthermore, it is at
least arguable that the school system can be seen as a "conservative force"
(Bourdieu, 1974) not only in the selective content and narratives of
history and daily domestic and public experience - a self constrained by
possible "mis-information"; also, perhaps moreso, a version of the self as
employing particular "rarefied" cognitive and moral categories in
describing and accounting for aspects of history and daily domestic and
public experience amounts to a powerfully political activity - a self
redefined at its subjectivity. Pursuing this idea that classroom life and
curriculum call for and naturalise a presentation of one's apparent
practical consciousness leads directly to the issue that has been only
indirectly sighted so far - assessment.

V. ASSESSMENT OF LITERACY

Assessment in educational circumstances, pre-supposes some projection of 1)
what is going on here-and-now, and 2) what may be inferred to be the analog
of this activity out of the assessment context. Any assessment procedure
can be read for the particular way in which it "glosses" the projected
relevance to which it aspires in the non-test, usually non-school context.
This gloss may entail, at a simple level, formatting or content, or in more
complex ways, implied social circumstances, resources, or combinations of
these and other features of the task or the displayed and assessable
practical consciousness. For instance, we can re-read the questioning of
Jane in Example 1 as an assessment activity and recover from the talk
between the students and the teacher the ways in which the questioning and
guiding talk of the teacher adds up to a glossing of the features of an
out-of-school version of "finding out where it says slobby". But, in
contradistinction to the points made about classroom life, it is more
formal assessment procedures conducted later in the chronology of school-
style testing that are often more revealing of the institutionalising of
literate practices, precisely because they take for granted the 'natural'
status of the recastings of self and task that I have been outlining. An
example, designed for use in a test battery concerning levels of functional
literacy among adults, can show some of these recastings in action. The
following is drawn from Kirsch and Jungblut (1986) and is discussed in some
detail by Heap (1989).

Example 7

A manufacturing company provides its customers with the following
instructions for returning appliances for service:

When returning appliance for servicing, include a note telling as clearly
and as specifically as possible what is wrong with the appliance.

A repair person for the company receives four appliances with the following
notes attached. Circle the letter next to the note which best follows the
instructions supplied by the company.

A
The clock does not run correctly on this clock radio. I tried fixing it,
but I couldn't.

B
My clock radio is not working. It stopped working right after I used it for
five days.

C
The alarm on my clock radio doesn't go off at the time I set. It rings 15 -
30 minutes later.

D
This radio is broken. Please repair and return by Priority Post to the
address on my slip.

Heap mentioned some aspects of what he termed "mismatches" between the
'real' task ecology and the test item. Heap discusses these features in
terms of the "thickness" of the simulation, concluding that most test items
constitute thin simulations. This applies particularly in the case of
those posed in adult literacy tests because generally they lay claim to a
close relationship to the out-of-test context - civil, community, academic,
or vocational.

In the light of the discussion so far we might term the modifications

suggested by Heap 'back-recastings', in which some feature is suggested
that would make a task more recognisably out-of-school. We can note, as
these are itemised, how they countermand to differing degrees the local
rationalities of the classroom test to the point where in some cases the
"test" is no more, only the task. First Heap noted differences that could
be addressed to back-recast into a hypothetical workplace under a number of
headings:

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h task layout and the process of task
completion:
     Where do the instructions come from? When might a reader recognise a
note rather than, say, write one?

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h familiarity of content:
     Has anybody who is likely to be a participant ever been in the
situation of receiving notes of this kind? Moreover, has anybody , ever,

had to nominate one out of a group of notes that "best follows the instructions"? Do repairers or readers of any kind rate the relative efficacy of notes?

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h the consequences of the respondents' efforts:
    What could happen if the answer given were right or wrong?

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h relative significance of the items:
    In the battery used by Kirsch & Jungblut, circling a selection of long distance telephone charges is as significant, in terms of scoring, as reading the dosage level of a medicine for a child. Could some weightings be decided upon that reflect experiences in another context?

Heap made the point that modifications could be made to minimise the mismatch between the test and the out-of-school task along these four lines. He also described, however, differences that are necessary or intrinsic to the testing context that cannot be modified in such a way that the mismatch would be minimised. For instance:

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h Preferred order of task performance
    Some sequence of events needs to be directed, or the student can be left to complete the items in an order of their choice. In out-of-test contexts, the sequencing of the events is either determined by the structure of the task to a large extent, or is itself part of the problem of acting rationally in that task environment.

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h Time-boundedness:
    Some time restrictions need to be imposed on the task for testing purposes. In out-of-test contexts, a task may be left for days or weeks, until some other social or material supports become available. Again, trying to simulate this would do away with the direct comparability of performances across individuals, as well as redefining the task.

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h Frame pre-specification:
    In what respect does the provision of the instructions recast the nature of the task, quite apart from the actual content of the instructions?

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h Relevance of the observable field:
    In the test situation, the ideal respondent knows that everything that is visible in the task is relevant, and nothing need be relevant that is not observable in the test document. This is a crucial element in the thinning out of the simulation. In the out-of-test world, part of the competency is knowing which aspects of the resources available or possibly available might be relevant.

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h Availability of resources:
    Along with knowing what might be relevant, a feature of competency in an out-of-test task is the competency to seek out and effectively interact

with any material and social resources that could be recruited to assist in the completion of the task. These availabilities and, importantly, the manner, degree, and frequency of appropriate recruitment are central features in the local rationality of the context. In the case of assessments, these features are usually, in the case of additional material resources, and always, in the case of social resources (e.g., the Zaks of the world) irrelevant.

This last point raises the issue of the necessarily embedded nature of managing tasks, including in school. In the processes of assessment each simulation entails the presentation of a naturalised moral order that supports the institutional order of the school or the training institution, partly by presenting an institutionalised set of literacy practices as if they were the essential or basic ones, as well as by presenting the curriculum's movement through these practices as the description of a developmental progression.

One example from current debates on language and literacy education can show this necessary conflation of institutional practice and ceremony (Baker, 1992) with language competencies. This example shows clearly the moral facet of the local institutional rationality of the school system, and shows excerpts drawn from the draft National Profiles for English (1992):

Example 8

Speaking and listening

LEVEL 1:

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h "explor(es) the possibilities and routines of school"
SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h "responds appropriately to non-verbal cues
SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h "observes agreed ground rules in structured large group settings"
SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h "asks, accedes to and refuses requests in appropriate ways"

LEVEL 2

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h "seeks clarification when something is

not understood "
SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h "reads prepared material aloud with
appropriate expression"

LEVEL 3:

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h "is tolerant of and responsive to
others' contributions"
SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h "observes non-verbal conventions of
spoken interaction in situations where Standard Australian English ;s
required, e.g., by making eye contact as appropriate, and sitting or
standing in positions and at distances from others that are acceptable and
appropriate"...

LEVEL 8

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h "asserts own point of view or idea with
determination and conviction, but without aggression, condescension or
disrespect"
SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h "conveys a sense of genuine, active
communication by, for example, sounding relaxed and spontaneous during a
speech even though the speech was carefully rehearsed"

Again, institutional appropriateness and the local rationality and moral
order of the classroom are the inseparable contexts of English competence.
The institutional preferences that are maintained by this casting of the
competency 'English language use' explicitly support and reflexively
validate and naturalise the interactive order of the school classroom 4.

Later in the draft National Profiles for English, examples are given of
texts that have been graded to be at certain levels for each of the
categories of performance. It is interesting that one of these examples at
the very highest level of performance ("level 8") in "Speaking and
Listening" involves the speaking notes for a presentation about the school
subject English, offering an almost transparent opportunity to view the
ultimate product, as deemed by the authors of the draft National Profiles
for English, of the institutionalised subjectivity - the form of assessable
practical consciousness that perfectly reflects the aspirations of the
English curriculum. Example 10 shows a selection from this illustrative
text, stated to be attainable by only a small percentage of final-year high
school students.

Example 9

EXAMPLE OF LEVEL 8 SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Card 1: When I think about English. . .I think of opportunities for self expression, personal. . and REFLECTION which had made me more aware.

Card 2 Writing is important in our lives and the English classroom offers us MANY IDEAS for writing in different ways. SELF EXPRESSION is encouraged and we are urged to express ourselves, communicate. . . with other through WRITING ... DISCUSSING DIFFERENT ISSUES. THIS WAY WE DEVELOPE (sic) OUR OWN OPINIONS. .

Card 6 ANOTHER WORLD OR TO ANOTHER VIEW OF THE WORLD. . . INVITED TO VISIT. . EXPERIENCE VICARIOUSLY THROUGH LITERATURE.

Card 9 Through this experience I have learnt. . . CONTENT. . . IS AS. . . PRESENTATION. I cannot cover everything English has offered me as I'm still discovering its significance. One thing I would like to stress is that not only is English .. foundation of world wide communication but it provides the chance for growing adolescents to individually express personal feelings. It is THE subject. . . creativity of ideas. imagination is allowed to flourish. .

We can note that the final level of achievement of oral language entails the presentation of a self in which the apparent personal voice is consonant, morally, dispositionally, and stylistically, with the imperatives of the English curriculum. This process of conflation of competency with the local rationalities of the institution of schooling entails not only the claiming of particular traits for oneself ("more aware"), but also the presentation of oneself as developing within the parameters of the institution, just as did Zak and his peers when they were able to present their practical consciousness as being that of learners-to-read. This student publicly notes himself as a "growing adolescent", who is "being encouraged" and is "still discovering" the significance of English.

Bourdieu (1974) has interpreted the effort directed toward naturalising institutionally shaped definitions of competency as being class-based and at the core of the culturally and economically reproductive functions of schooling - the processes by which cultural gifts are systematically mistaken for academic or intellectual gifts. But it is perhaps more warranted at least for instances such as Example 10 to hear the strongly institutionalised version of generational discourse - the 'child of the curriculum', acknowledging him or herself as such, and giving an apparently spontaneous display of the inner, learning-by-the-curriculum self. As I have argued elsewhere (Freebody, 1992), it is this display of subjectivity that is sought in assessment, particularly but not exclusively in the school subject English, rather than a definable set of procedural competencies.

VI. THEORY AND METHOD IN POLICY AND RESEARCH

One theme has been pursued and variously inflected through this paper:
There are many practices that can and have come under the heading of
'literacy', and doing teaching, curriculum building, assessing, theorising,
and research necessarily entail choices that have consequences, conscious
or otherwise. One consequence is that some practices are centre-staged and
some are put to the margin. It has been to relate those choices to the
rhetoric of educational justice, however conceived, that has been the focus
of this paper, rather than to persuade you of a particular account of
educational justice or to describe the position of any particular marginal
group.

The International Literacy Year was a milestone for literacy education in
Australia not only in the ways envisaged by the Commonwealth Department of
Employment, Education and Training, in that it was an occasion to highlight
the significance of literacy for employment and the economy in labour
markets whose demands are becoming increasingly fluid and complex. The
Commonwealth's own initiatives in this respect also stimulated debates on
the nature and uses of literacy practices in the school, the community, and
the workplace.

The discourses that enjoy power in the political institutions of Australia
at this time assume the commoditisation of human labour, and proclaim the
need for defensibility in the allocation of educational resources. In this
light, literacy education is recast into a resource , itself a commodity or
investment that enhances the accountable value of the human resource. Thus
a version of the human-capital argument fore literacy education was
installed from the very outset of the 'White Paper' on Australian Literacy
and Language Policy. Here are the opening paragraphs of that document:

Example 10

Australia has embarked on a thorough-going appraisal of its education,
vocational training and labour market preparation systems. Schools, TAFE,
higher education, industry training and labour market programs have all
been subject to major review. Governments have joined with educators,
students, parents and business to rethink policies, programs and structures
and to work towards national goals that will benefit the nation and better
serve the needs of individuals. A heightened concern for quality has
emerged - quality in content, in delivery, and in results.

Language and literacy issues are central to the reshaping and the. improved

performance of our education and training systems [....]

There is a strong and well-demonstrated relationship between low levels of literacy or English language competence and high levels of unemployment and other forms of social disadvantage. To illustrate this, unemployment rates at the time of the 1986 Census varied from 8.6% for those who spoke English only, to 11% for those who used another language but spoke English 'well' or 'very well', to 20% and higher for those who spoke English poorly or not at all. While other factors also are involved, English language proficiency has a vital bearing on the labour market prospects and the general welfare of individual Australians

We cannot afford the inequities and inefficiencies which such a waste of human resources would entail.

The literacy difficulties encountered by so many Australians have not received sufficient public attention. Yet the demands of our society for higher levels of proficiency in English literacy are increasing all the time, especially in the workplace. Language and literacy development is a responsibility of the whole community. While governments will continue to play their role, industry and community agencies must contribute as well. Individuals must also share this responsibility and make the most of the learning opportunities available to them.

It is now time to co-ordinate our efforts and build on the National Policy on Languages and the achievements of International Literacy Year through this Australian Language and Literacy Policy.

Proficiency in our national language, Australian English, is obviously necessary for an individual to participate as fully as possible in Australian society. (Dawkins, 1990).

In order for a natural version of the human-capital argument to be put to work, two key suppositions have to be made: the first that literacy is a "mass" noun - a dimension or set of pre-specifiable dimensions that exists unproblematicly in some quantity or set of quantities ("low levels of literacy", "higher levels of proficiency in English literacy"); the second that the "Australian community" is similarly homogenised into a cohort without fundamentally different relationships to the dominant language, literacy, and economic patterns ("we", "us", "Australia", "our national language").

In the third paragraph of the example, there is an attempt to establish the key relationship: Unemployment is related to first spoken language status, and the inferences are allowed to be drawn that 1) this correlation is in fact causal, and 2) that this unsubstantiated and apparently straightforward relationship between levels of first spoken language status and employment status also applies to literacy. The topic sentence thematises the "strong and well-demonstrated relationship between low

levels of literacy or English language competence and high levels of unemployment and other forms of social disadvantage" (italics added).

With the community and literacy each unidimensionally in place the "human-capital" argument for the need for enhanced literacy can be pre-supposed. But for some groups the cost of these fixtures is high. There are 100 or so indigenous languages in Australia (and many in New Zealand); there are 100 or so migrant or "community" languages spoken in Australia, and there is a multiplicity of literacy practices in and especially out of schools. These political naturalisations recall Street's (1984) discussions of autonomous and ideological models of literacy. Street's anthropological orientation led him to present data that questions a view of literacy that is unidimensional and has pre-specifiable effects on a culture - the

"autonomous" model of literacy. Rather, Street claimed, we need to deploy an "ideological" model of literacy that draws attention to the contestation involved in literacy activities. From this perspective, reading and writing are seen to be inextricably embedded in interpersonal and institutional relations, and thus as political everyday public and domestic practices that both reflect and embody anew particular power relations.

If the outline sketched in this paper is convincing or even just plausible, then some questions for researchers arise:

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h How thick are the simulations that our theoretical positions and our research methodologies afford?

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h More specifically, do our theoretical positions and our research methodologies conflate institutional practices for natural "real" or "basic" or "underpinning" reading and writing?

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h How do literacy practices feature as elements of everyday social experience in and out of school?

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h How do different literacy practices present contrasting views of social experience in different institutional sites?

SYMBOL 110 \f "Wingdings" \s 10 \h How can pedagogical, curriculum, assessment, and policy decisions build upon these 'ethnographies' in principled ways to generate positive educational changes?

A distinctive role that researchers can play is through documenting and debating carefully what does, can, and could count as reading and writing, as the literate individual, and as the significance of literacy education practices. This can be done, it seems to me, only through the principled study of the everyday literacy practices of Australians and New Zealanders. In one sense, this is at the heart of what the self-appointed New Literacy Studies have to offer - principled studies of the work of students,

teachers, and administrators in literacy activities, such that policy documents and curriculum materials can become based upon increasingly principled descriptive accounts of social experience rather than remaining prescriptions, not just about reading and writing but about ways of domestic and public being in disguise (Gee, 1992).

The inclusion of a literacy symposium for the first time in the AARE / NZARE annual conference offers good evidence of the visibility of Australian and New Zealand researchers' efforts in literacy education. In spite of and because of the fractiousness of their field they have taken the products of their work seriously, and it is encouraging that governments and professional educational research associations are starting to as well.

Notes:

1. It is important to say here that my ideas, and more specifically many of the ideas in this paper, rely heavily on the work of James Heap (especially 1987), Brian Street (1984, in press / 1993), and Carolyn Baker (1992). Also some of the ideas presented here were developed with Tony Welch and appear in Freebody and Welch (1993).

2. Some of these examples are discussed more fully in Freebody, Gee, Luke, & Street (in press).

3. While Raymond Williams (1980) used the notion of language as "practical consciousness", I am indebted to Carolyn Baker for clarifying this point in terms of how ways of acceptably describing one's own subjectivity are the prime task of the "ceremonial" work of early schooling.

4. It is also arguable, of course, that these practices that are deemed to be competencies can be heard to reflect narrow class- and race-based notions of appropriate interactive practices, but the most parsimonious position is to present a commentary that focuses on the institutional source of these data and to search in other places (letters to parents, media accounts, and so on) for direct empirical support for those interpretations of the competencies.

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