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Literacy and the Other: A sociological approach to literacy research and policy in multilingual societies

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An Australian standpoint on literacy policy

In multicultural nations the issues of language rights and loss and the equitable redistribution of textual and discourse resources through literacy education are test cases for democratic education. The *RRQ* invitation to write about the future of literacy research in multilingual societies was timely. As I write this piece, a team of us are undertaking policy research on the teaching of language and literacy education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the Queensland state system, working with Aboriginal teachers, principals, elders, and senior state bureaucrats. We are reviewing data on these communities' language and literacy achievement, current system and school-level interventions, and the adequacy and cultural bases of existing performance measures and reporting systems (Luke, Land, Christie, & Kolatsis, in press). We are drawing upon a wide range of disciplinary, empirical, and interpretive evidence.

Whatever pretences we may have about the scientific formation of government policy, it is inevitably both socially and culturally normative and regulative. In this case, we are developing an overarching "language-in-education" policy (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1999) and literacy strategy for indigenous schools and communities. Policymaking is not simply subjective, and it need not be at the whims of partisan politics, constituency expediency, and so forth. It can indeed be based on powerful, rigorously theorised, grounded, and documented observations and analysis of the contexts for language, literacy, and education. But exactly how and with what intellectual, discursive, disciplinary, and governmental resources we do such analyses are the hard questions.

One of the binary divides that has emerged in the ongoing U.S. debate over "evidence-based" poli-

cy is between a narrowly circumscribed version of "pure," objective science and a Hobbesian universe of arbitrary, subjective, and politically contaminated decision making (see commentary by Cunningham, 2001). Yet the making of literacy policy is—in actual practice and social fact—hermeneutic, interpretive, discourse constructive, case based, and highly contextual. Because it is tied up with the normative allocation of resources, policy is by definition and necessarily political. Hence, it is not simply a matter of whether we use contextual, sociocultural research to make policy—we should, and I will argue that case momentarily. My starting point is the view that policymaking itself is discourse constructive, interpretive, and contextual, made in those strange textual monocultures that we call bureaucracies (Luke, 1997).

Educational policies are bids to centrally regulate and govern flows of discourse, fiscal capital, and physical and human resources across the time and space boundaries of educational systems. Policies and policymakers set out to achieve estimable educational, cultural, social, and economic goals and outcomes. In outlining a scenario for literacy research in multilingual societies and communities, my case is that, if indeed there is to be a critical science of literacy policy development and intervention, it must be multidisciplinary. It must also draw from a range of sources and kinds of data (sociological, demographic, social geographic, economic, and, of course, linguistic as well as data on individual or institutional performativity). It needs to be reliant on interpretive debate and analysis at the most sophisticated levels and be socially and culturally contextual in the most fine-grained ways. Such a policy challenges governments—politicians and civil servants alike—senior educational administrators, and researchers to actually engage in new coalitions and to create new critical

fora, new zones of proximal development for the articulation and implementation of educational policy.

So my particular standpoint and interest in writing this piece is as a researcher and bureaucrat trying to come to grips with the unreconciled issue of redistributive social justice in Australian education: the educational achievement and life pathways of Aborigine and Torres Strait Islander children and youth. I'll take this as an illustrative case for the kinds of research we would need for proper evidence-based policy formation and as a lead to current and possible directions of literacy research in multilingual societies.

A more formal introduction

The perennial questions of literacy education are only subordinately about method. First, the *lingua franca* question: Whose languages should be the media of instruction in schools, and also civic domains, workplaces, mass media, and other institutions? Second, the curriculum questions: Which selective traditions should shape what will count as literacy; which texts and discourses, literacy practices, and events will be codified and transmitted in schools; in whose interests and with what material and discourse consequences will it be done?

Over the second half of the 20th century, state school systems struggled to address the challenges of cultural and linguistic diversity—tenacious and ongoing problems in the educational participation and achievement of students from cultural and religious minority and second-language-speaking communities. More specifically, the educational systems in what are termed “advanced” and “postindustrial” countries of the North and West confront the educational needs of not only longstanding diasporic communities and their indigenous peoples but also the recent waves of migrants, refugees, guest workers, and postcolonial subjects of their own making. The legacies of these efforts are ongoing debates about the extent to which mainstream schooling systems are and should be agents of cultural assimilation or pluralism, how these same systems serve to enhance or deny minority language rights (May, 2001), and, centrally, the redress of differential and unequal access to educationally acquired cultural and linguistic capital. These debates sit within the contexts of geopolitical conflict and warfare, resurgent nationalism, emergent issues around economic globalisation and the “spatial redistribution” of wealth and privilege (Harvey, 2000), and the politics of racism and religious intolerance.

These new economic and cultural conditions, complicated by the emergence of digital technologies, have made educational policy and practice more complex and more contingent, rather than less. It is worth noting sociologist Manuel Castells's (1996) observation that one of the emergent responses to globalisation is fundamentalism of all orders: the harkening for a simplicity, reductionism, and literalism. In literacy debates, back to the “basics” movements are modes of educational fundamentalism. What counts as literacy itself is in historical transition: How will literacy practices be redefined in relation not only to the emergence of digital technologies but also to the emergent, blended forms of social identity, work, civic and institutional life, and the redistributions of wealth and power that accompany economic and cultural globalisation?

Further, the “Others” of mainstream literacy education are not the self-same populations that we identified as “disadvantaged” or “at risk” or “underserved” or “underperforming” in the postwar period. What counts as a “minority,” “diasporic,” “linguistically marginal,” or disadvantaged group in postindustrial economies is, of course, a matter for debate and definition beyond the scope of this piece. For my purposes here, I provisionally note three defining characteristics, all of which define historically marginalised communities in relation to dominant fields of power: (a) minorities are communities whose characteristic forms of cultural capital—embodied discourse practices and skills—are of lesser immediate exchange value in dominant social fields and linguistic markets; (b) they develop “minority discourses” (JanMohamad & Lloyd, 1990), ways of talking back against power, modes of critique, voice, and speaking positions that may or may not “entitle” them to access or break the strangleholds that mainstream markets hold over that access; while (c) they remain pressed to master dominant forms of cultural practice in order to achieve degrees and kinds of access to and mobility across mainstream political and economic institutions—some of these dominant forms of practice are arbitrary forms of symbolic power; others are requisite for technical and epistemological mastery of particular forms of life in capitalist economies.

One of the consequences of economic globalisation is the relative permeability of borders and accelerated, though uneven, flows of bodies across geographical and political boundaries. New population demographics threaten the stability of large-scale educational systems as linguistic and ethnic monocultures, and they have destabilised longstanding curriculum settlements. Schools now include

those groups that have historically struggled with access and participation in mainstream economies—new and recent migrants, as well as emergent “underclasses” of new poor and geographically marginalised communities.

In light of these conditions, it is not surprising that how best to educate ethnic and linguistic minorities in current contexts is straining the boundaries and the credibility of discourses of multiculturalism and compensatory education—the terms of which were set over 30 years ago by U.S. civil rights and school desegregation legislation, framed by the Bernstein/Labov debate and Cazden, Johns, and Hymes’s (1972) prototypical work on the ethnography of speaking. We are now dealing with the social and demographic impacts of postcolonialism and economic globalisation, with culturally and linguistically diverse student bodies having become the norm in many educational jurisdictions. At the same time, the actual practices and demands of literacy are in historical transition (Alvermann, 2002).

How adequate are our disciplinary, policy, and pedagogy toolkits for addressing new times? All of the discussion pieces in this edition of *RRQ* are, to some extent, normative and ameliorative. Whatever our epistemological standpoint or “scientific” basis, all of these pieces speak to longstanding patterns of inequality. Yet the educational solutions on offer are very much those of the last three decades. These run across a broad theoretical, scientific, and political landscape to include mainstream compensatory programs that attempt to identify and remediate ostensive early literacy or language problems experienced by minority students; transitional bilingual, English as a Second Language and English as a Second Dialect programs; programs that focus on multicultural content and culturally appropriate pedagogy to address cultural and linguistic mismatch; and critical and postcolonial pedagogies that focus on the need for student and community voice and identity politics.

There is emergent social science research that documents new configurations of “difference” and “diversity” in literate identities, practices, and pathways. This work includes studies using hermeneutic, sociocultural, and critical or interpretivist approaches to redefine second-language acquisition (e.g., Miller, in press; Norton, 1999; Norton & Toohey, in press; Pavlenko, Blackledge, Piller, & Teutsch-Dwyer, 2001; Toohey, 2000) and to set the grounds for a “critical applied linguistics” (Pennycook, 2001).

Extending Hymesian traditions, such approaches have refocused second-language teaching and learning towards issues of identity and subjectiv-

ity and turned attention to the embedded relationships of schools and learning in community and home contexts (e.g., Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, & Riazi, in press). At the same time, other approaches to literacy research have moved from traditional anthropological definitions of culture to plural redefinitions of cultures that draw from poststructuralist feminist and postcolonial theory (for a recent, more general review, see Foley, Levinson, & Hurtig, 2001). They have moved in ways that have begun to blur the once clear paradigmatic distinctions between traditional reading research, literacy research, and, indeed the aforementioned second-language and multicultural research. This corpus of work includes the following: Studies of the new patterns of development and use of spoken language, print literacy, and digital multiliteracies in the formation of social and cultural identities, as children begin to blend languages and cultures—ethnic and popular and gendered—in new and novel ways. Researchers draw upon a broad range of disciplinary and theoretical resources, including sociocultural psychology, cultural studies, postcolonial and feminist studies, the ethnography of literacy, and critical discourse analysis (e.g., Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Comber & Thompson, 2001; Dyson, 1997; Moje, 2000).

This work documents and describes how language, discourse, and literacy are media for the construction and negotiation of identity and power in all of their dynamic forms (e.g., sociocultural, economic, libidinal) and in relation to local collocations of social class, race, and gender. It also has begun to broaden its focus beyond schools and other educational institutions to examine the new and volatile life pathways to and through social fields (both informal and formal, community and corporate, traditional and modern) in relation to economic globalisation and its new, oscillating formations of capital, discourse, and power. Such studies work both at the microethnographic level, examining institutional sites and relations, and via a macrosociological analysis, tracing globalised flows of language, discourse, texts, and power. These include (a) studies of diversity and multilingualism in workplaces and other social institutions, which have begun to document new patterns of textual and identity work, the impacts of new technologies, and emergent power relations (e.g., Goldstein, 1997; Hull, 1997) and (b) studies of national and regional, local and “glocal” cultural and linguistic, social, and economic responses to the hegemony of world-language English (e.g., Pennycook, 1996, 1998).

A research agenda around multilingualism so conceived marks an epistemological shift that is far more intricate than a simple expansion from psychological to social foundations or from reading research to new literacy studies (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 1999). It moves first from postwar, modern “culturalisations” of language pedagogy, psychology, and learning heralded near mid-century by Hymes (1996) and sustained by current U.S. neo-Vygotskian work, to an explicit engagement with new ways of theorising and studying culture, identity, and discourse. Encouraged by new social theory on globalisation and social movements of the past five years, this agenda has begun to move from a focus on identity and subjectivity motivated strongly by feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theory towards a regrounded socioeconomic analysis of globalised patterns and configurations of language, literacy, power, and capital (e.g., Burbules & Torres, 2000).

It is not particularly surprising that this work has not factored into U.S. policy debates on pedagogical method, given the continued sublimation of social class analysis in literacy research, despite the extensive and continued sociological research on the impact of class on school achievement since Coleman. Likewise, much of the literature on multiculturalism tends to treat all multilingual “ethnicities” of a piece, without due attention to social class, location, and history. It is impossible to understand relative socioeconomic power and networks of, for example, diasporic Chinese communities without an analysis of class and economic globalisation that, for many of these communities, began over 100 years ago (Luke & Luke, 1999). In the face of the new social facts of diversity and difference, I here want to ask how it is that, in countries like the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia (each with over a quarter of their population non-English-speaking in background), literacy and language education continues to routinely categorise the multilingual subject as “Other,” as afterthought, exception, anomaly, and “lack.” Because of the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand is a remarkable exception, where all educational and language policy and intervention is responsible for addressing indigenous language and cultural rights (McNaughton, 2002).

On a related subject, I want to ask what is missing from the current debates over scientific approaches to reading, especially to the degree to which their affiliated funding and policy agendas have direct impact on these same marginal communities. Do the current debates around method, alphabets, and phonics become a de facto strategy, regardless of

researcher good faith and scientific intent, for further deferring the *lingua franca* and the curriculum questions above? If they do not, then we must ask how they address and frame the multilingual subject.

What is needed is an historical and sociological perspective on literacy and educational policy in multilingual societies. Here I want to build a case for a broader language and literacy in education approach to policy that draws upon rich sociological, ethnographic, and economic evidence about emergent literacies, economies, and cultural practices across increasingly multilingual communities and stratified educational systems. In so doing, I draw from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1991, 1998) to argue that we need a rigorous sociological, demographic, and economic analysis of how literacy makes a difference in communities and institutions in relation to other forms of available economic and social capital.

Literacy, nation, globalisation

The linguistic, cultural, and educational calculus of European and Asian colonialism was inescapably simple: One nation = one race = one language (Hall, 1992; Willinsky, 1998; Young, 1995). To this, Benedict Anderson’s (1991) *Imagined Communities* adds one further element to the equation: “print capitalism” as a core component of the modern nation state. A common stock of literate practices has been crucial for the building of national culture and identity. Universal print literacy has been a widely documented precursor for the expansion, distribution, and consolidation of capital, though obviously not in equitable ways.

Since its initiation in Reformation Germany, the official governmental support for universal literacy via mass public schooling has been, as well, a push towards linguistic and cultural homogeneity, and via the selective traditions of schooling, towards political and social hegemony. In instances, literacy education has been remoulded by governments to accommodate and facilitate linguistic and cultural diversity and, indeed, to enable the progressive or revolutionary redistribution of power and capital. Numerous postcolonial literacy campaigns have shaped literacy education in ways that run counter to the simple assertion of colonial or imperial power, knowledge, and language relations (e.g., Arnove & Graff, 1987). In several postcolonial contexts in the Americas and Asia, literacy education has been redesigned for the economic enfranchisement of rural classes and for the extension of franchise and social participation to

women and diasporic ethnic communities. Further, throughout Asia and the Pacific literacy education has been used as a postcolonial vehicle for language policies that promote cultural nationalism and solidarity and ethnic identity and essentialism. These policies tend to be based on the choice and, in instances, construction of an indigenous *lingua franca* such as Maori, Bahasa Indonesian, Bahasa Malay, or Putonghua (e.g., Kaplan & Baldauf, 1999).

Contrast this situation with current approaches and debates in economically and geopolitically focal countries like the United States and United Kingdom, where questions about literacy remain focused principally on pedagogic method and systems reform, seemingly divorced from larger issues of blended cultural identity, linguistic diversity, and economic enfranchisement. Government literacy policy, where it exists, has been deployed as an adjunct to the neoliberal rationalisation of schooling systems through the development and deployment of discourses of school-based management, “quality assurance,” and accountability via standardised testing—often without any powerful normative positions on the social and cultural consequences of literacy.

Policy interventions are, by definition, synergistic and potentially countersynergistic in local effects, both across government silos (e.g., education, health, social welfare, urban planning, policing) and within a particular department or ministry such as education. That is, educational policies are never stand-alone phenomena. In order to be effective they must orchestrate a series of intertextual “embeddings” in relation to other extant educational and social policies.

How often, any policy analytic perspective on literacy must ask, do those who pursue “pure” and scientific literacy policy query the larger suite of systemic and strategic policy interventions and reforms incorporating any policy on literacy? State and national policies are divorced from the explicit development of larger language policies, which in turn (the extensive work in the field of language planning tells us) must be articulated in relation to other social policies (e.g., health, child care, employment, immigration). My point is that most advanced or “late” capitalist countries have proceeded to make literacy policy as if existing social contracts around literacy, cultural identity, and language rights have been reconciled and solved—even in the face of new waves of migrants, the facts of *majority* second-language populations in many educational jurisdictions, or the absence of treaty with indigenous peoples. At the same time, a further operational assumption is that literacy itself—its functions and uses—is a relatively sta-

ble phenomenon that can be assessed, transmitted, acquired, and used accordingly—even in the face of new digital multiliteracies and hybrid textual practices. Another assumption is that its initial acquisition has field-universal effects, regardless of the rules of exchange in particular linguistic markets and the relative availability and nonavailability of other forms of capital (e.g., social infrastructure, nondiscriminatory social institutions, meaningful and gainful labour)—even in the face of rapidly shifting “linguistic markets” driven by rapid economic change and restratification of material and discourse resources. All are broad assumptions about the contexts where language and literacy are acquired and used. To understand them and factor them into the planning of curriculum and instruction would require rigorous documentation of changing domains of use (e.g., “status planning”; Fishman, 1989), within which educationally acquired competence is actually negotiated, used, and, indeed, often lost.

To proceed without such planning is to assume, as many post-National Reading Panel federal and state policies in the United States have done, that there can indeed be free-standing pedagogical and psychological decisions around the official classification and framing of literacy as school knowledge independent of broader sociological, linguistic, and ethnographic analyses of the functions and uses of literacy in multilingual and, indeed, multiliterate societies increasingly characterised by cultural and linguistic diversity and dynamic, hybrid textual and semiotic systems, and volatile flows of capital and discourse. Such a position is sociologically and historically, indeed social scientifically, naïve. It is destined as well, from the public policy perspective I have described here, to have limited, accidental, and contradictory effects.

Of course, in some ways, we look to print literacy, face-to-face literacy education, and canonical cultural texts and genres as moral, epistemological, and political anchors in the face of socioeconomic change. The 20th-century shaping of literacy in industrial countries has entailed the institutional construction of literate workers, citizens, and consumers with a powerful desire and will towards capital via textual work (e.g., Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1997) and the establishment through education of a homogeneous linguistic and cultural nationalism (Luke, 1988; Shannon, 1987). Current conditions of economic and cultural globalisation, of transnational flows of capital, information, and bodies, make it extremely tempting to simply reframe these industrial discourses for the production of literate workers into “new narratives of human capital”

(Luke, 2000). But these new conditions also raise two new defining challenges to literacy education.

First, postindustrial nation states of the North and West are increasingly built on what we could term semiotic economies. For many, labour in these societies has become increasingly service- and information-based, with an increasing proportion of the overall employment (and consumption) via text work. This type of work requires cognitive engagement and social interaction around spoken language, traditional print texts and records, and digital and online communications. Whether workers are involved in knowledge constituent, symbolic analyst roles or as new proletarian end users, automaticity and innovative capacity with a range of linguistic, semiotic, digital, and analogue codes make gainful and willful participation in economic fields tighter, more complex, and, across one's life trajectory, more volatile than in industrial economies of the last two centuries. In the emergent industrial and transitional peasant economies in postcolonial countries, the principal laboring classes did not engage in such wholly language-dependent or text-saturated labour. If class stratification is contingent on access to material and discourse resources and if access to different kinds and levels of print literacy (*qua* cultural capital) is a major regulatory gatekeeper in "print capitalist" societies, that mix becomes complicated, more volatile, and leveled by the emergence of digital literacies. How these new blends of knowledge, skill, and identity count in economies in transition is a pressing empirical question with which governments and educational planners are struggling.

Second, these same societies have become increasingly multilingual and multicultural in population demographics and in the cultural and textual practices of everyday life. The social and demographic facts of cultural and linguistic diversity are inescapable both in English-dominant, postindustrial countries like the United States and United Kingdom, in the European Union countries described by Charles Berg earlier in this issue of *RRQ*, and in postcolonial countries in East and West Asia, Africa, and the Middle East as well. Social structure in the North and West remains characterised by class stratification linked strongly to ethnic and religious and linguistic background, with indigenous and vernacular speakers, guest workers and refugees, and longstanding diasporic cultural minorities still struggling to gain access and power in mainstream economies and their text-based institutions. Any serious policy effort to alter or ameliorate these patterns may require something more than tinkering with industrial-era, monocultural school systems; to-

ken inclusion of ethnic content in mainstream curriculum; teacher consciousness raising; or the adjustment of classroom methods.

The problem, then, is this. The selection, codification, and differential transmission of a dominant set of literate and linguistic practices via institutions like schooling must contend with unprecedented and increasing diversity of background knowledge and competence, linguistic and cultural resources, available discourses and textual practices brought to and through classrooms and schools. (For a recent review of U.S. work, argued from a multiculturalist perspective, see Meecham, 2001; for a series of insightful U.K. studies on multilingualism and cultural diversity in U.K. contexts, see Gregory, 1997; for a very useful New Zealand-based introductory synthesis of sociocultural work, see McNaughton, 2002.) This situation is at least in part a challenge for the adjustment of curriculum and pedagogy; to a significant but not exclusive extent, questions of minority achievement fall within the ambit of educational policy and practices. At the same time, any educational system with democratic and egalitarian aspirations that go beyond the language/culture stratified production of literate workers must visibly enable multiple pathways and equitable access to the languages, texts, and discourses of power in these emergent semiotic economies and globalised cultures, where biographical lifelines through communities, workplaces, and civic institutions are taking risky, different patterns that governments and social scientists are struggling to document and understand. This is only partly within the capture of educational policies, systems, and practices, for the alteration and improvement of life pathways to and from educational institutions into other social and economic fields depend only in part on the contingent educational provision of literacy, whether conceived as print or digital, behaviour or practice. The use and value of literacy for learners—the available discourses, background knowledges, repertoires of practices and motivation structures for learning and using literacy—are as contingent on those extra-educational social relations and linguistic markets that they inhabit before, during, and after schooling.

Traditionally, reading researchers have framed this issue as one of transfer of training, a perennial empirical problem since Thorndike's time. But it is also a more complex sociological problem: how social subjects embody educationally acquired skill and competence and put them to work in variable social fields, in complex combinations of other kinds of available social, economic, and cultural resources, with differential payoffs in their life trajectories

(Luke, 1996; Olneck, 2000). It is axiomatic in the literature on migrant language retention and language planning that, unless powerful functional domains for everyday practical language use in the target language exist, pedagogical efforts to maintain, preserve, or retain language will be less than effective. It has been a salutary lesson since the United Nations World Experimental Literacy Program that the effectiveness of pedagogical delivery is contingent on its ready deployment in functional, powerful, and necessary everyday domains of use (Arnové & Graff, 1987). In order to build effective literacy programs to respond to the *lingua franca* and the curriculum questions, we cannot simply focus narrowly on what experimental research on variable pedagogic method tells us. The achievement of automaticity of skill cannot be the sole or driving focus of a language and literacy-in-education policy. We need a rigorous understanding of the places and spaces; the “social fields” and “linguistic markets” (Bourdieu, 1991); the zones of sociocultural and political power where language and literacy are acquired and used, gained and lost outside of schools.

Towards a sociological analysis of literacy as capital

In multilingual societies, specific modes and genres of linguistic and literate practice constitute forms of cultural capital with variable and field-specific exchange value. But they never have freestanding effects independent of the availability and use of other forms of economic, social, and cultural capital. The work of the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1989, 1991, 1998) provides a template for the analysis of class-based available resources in communities and institutions. He argued that human subjects’ trajectories take them through a range of institutional fields that shape their discourse and linguistic resources. Each of these fields forms a distinctive linguistic market. Students bear acquired, embodied, and structured “dispositions”—the sum total of their skills, competences, and knowledges—into these fields, where they are valued and exchanged. By this account, community culture, ethnicity, race, gender, and identity are embodied in a social class-based “habitus.” Forces and relations within the field position each habitus in particular relations of power and status, and individuals can actively “position take” in such fields (Bourdieu, 1998), attempting to alter their positions, relative power, and the rules of exchange within them.

To illustrate, a Torres Strait Islander girl might enter Thursday Island Primary School (in a remote indigenous Islander community off Australia’s northern coast) with trilingual linguistic competence (typically one of three vernaculars, plus Torres Strait Creole and English) but limited early print knowledge (embodied capital), access to family networks and community infrastructure (social capital), and limited family material wealth (economic capital). The state school, operating as a mainstream Australian institution, endeavours to exchange and transform her capital into other forms of cultural capital. This would set up optimal zones and environments for the conversion through social relations and linguistic interaction for the student to further develop English-language reading and speech. She would then transform this into a visible portfolio of artefacts of writing and other literate practice as demonstration of competence (objectified capital) and degrees/diplomas/grades (institutional capital) that might enhance her traverse through both Islander community life and mainstream Australian and Queensland institutions and economies. These in turn are re/mediated and exchanged in other institutional settings (other educational organisations, communities local and “glocal,” face-to-face and virtual, workplaces) with differential field-specific cachet (Luke & Carrington, 2002). Some of these institutions will be more friendly and welcoming than others in terms of the ways they structurally position and enable Islander women.

To make inclusive and enabling educational policies for multilingual societies, we must see and know and understand as much as possible about the totality and interrelationships of social fields and linguistic markets and of people’s lateral traverse of them. I have here tabled a somewhat different perspective on the various pedagogical and technical solutions on offer in the current version of the “great debate” on reading, literacy, and education. The game has changed. Even the baseline discourses and tenets of multiculturalism, as it struggles to become policy in the face of backlash, have been destabilised by cultural and economic globalisation. The research and policy questions about language and literacy in multilingual societies are now about language and literacy in globalised economies. At the same time, the persistent questions of local language maintenance and the hegemony of English and other dominant languages are no longer, if they ever were, solely juridical matters of nation states, regions, or regional educational authorities. They too are embedded in the complex fields of multinational economies, flows of human subjects, globalising media, and their at-

tendant world cultures. Finally, the actual populations and communities have shifted in ways that make minority-majority distinctions at the least locally variable and unstable.

The continuing parochialism of literacy research debates may be in their viewing of the problem in now traditional dichotomies that oscillate between neodeficit, neoliberal models of minority failure and liberal, romantic models of minority voice and linguistic rights and between narrow technocratic skills approaches and child-centred, progressivist pedagogies. There must be a more sociologically trenchant way of theorising and studying linguistic minorities and literacy in multilingual societies. If we are serious about building the kinds of literacy that will have visible and transformative impacts on communities' futures and life pathways, this must involve a more complex analysis of the availability and flows of capital in globalised and globalising economic contexts of localities, regions, and states.

In these contexts of global flows, it should not be surprising that language and literacy education are explicitly political matters. In the current U.S. context, this is usually meant in the pejorative sense that somehow literacy education is political because of unwarranted and conspiratorial interference of elected officials or state governments. But it was Freire's (1970) initial point that literacy is political, inasmuch as its use and deployment are acts of power in complex political economies where language, literacy, and affiliated systems of representation are used for purposes of economic and social power. If we take literacy and literacy education to be political in this sense, the imperative would be to develop strategies—whole-school, classroom-based pedagogic strategies—curriculum selective traditions, and literacy and language education policies that sit well and dovetail with other kinds of overarching state strategies, interventions, and schooling policies to concentrate and coordinate discourse, material, and human resources. The lesson of the Bourdieu model is that just fixing pedagogy one way or another might be necessary but is never sufficient for such a difference to be made. The consequences of literacy—and its ever present radical potential for altering life pathways and inequitable access to discourse, knowledge, and power—depend at least in part on the availability of other kinds of capital—social, economic, and symbolic—both within the school and across other social fields.

By accepting as scientific fact that the pedagogic delivery of basic skill with automaticity is the bare and baseline solution, we leave educational research,

school systems, and teaching professionals vulnerable to the most sophisticated form of victim blaming in social policy: where governments and systems and public and private sectors make available to community ineffective or dysfunctional combinations of capital. It is all too easy for systems to deliver, for example, economic capital in the form of social welfare or charity but not jobs or education, education but not health or jobs, jobs but no welfare and health infrastructure. In the case of Australian indigenous communities, it is easy to deliver education and, indeed, alphabets on the one hand while running policies that actually accelerate the deterioration of the communities' kinship structure, traditional values, and forms of work, private sector investment, and community social infrastructure on the other. In such scenarios, indigenous communities, linguistic minorities, diasporic communities, and others are often blamed for having squandered or abused government "handouts" and other resources made available.

A research agenda that focuses on the relationships between language and other forms of capital in social fields opens the fields of research and policy-making. We can focus on how schools shape variable repertoires of practices with specific texts and discourses that have potential combinatory power with other kinds of capital available in students' lived communities. This means that shaping a selective tradition is done optimally with an eye on the changing social fields where students live and work. It also means that the redefined function of governments (and other nongovernment organisations, as well as private sector, traditional, and community bodies) is to provide access to combinatory forms of enabling capital that enhance students' possibilities of putting the kinds of practices, texts, and discourses acquired in schools to work in consequential ways that enable active position taking in social fields. These ways should enable some control on the part of these people over the shapes of their life pathways and, ultimately, over the shapes and rules of exchange of the places where they will put their cultural capital to work.

Hence, a new set of questions for literacy research in multilingual communities might underpin language and literacy-in-education policy:

Which linguistic competences, discourses and textual resources, and multiliteracies are accessible? How, in what blended and separate domains and to what ends, are different languages used? How do people use languages, texts, discourses, and literacies as convertible and transformative resources in homes, communities, and schools?

How are these resources recognised and misrecognised, re-mediated and converted in school-based literacy instruction?

How are these resources taken into communities and re-combined with other kinds of social, economic, and ecological capital in consequential ways in which social fields and linguistic markets? Which children's and adolescents' pathways through and across social fields will be affected?

How can government policies, including (but not exclusively) language, literacy, and educational policy, be coordinated to enable the "just in time" access and delivery of the requisite kinds of educationally acquired capital, health and social resources, jobs, and work to enhance communities and individuals' lives?

Such an agenda need not be restricted to ethnographic, discourse analytic, observational, and other forms of case-based research—a great deal of which is in hand. Powerful forms of social statistical analysis, and a rigorous modelling of how multiple sociodemographic factors and available capital optimise literate cultural capital as a convertible resource, are crucial. These would be needed for cross-government and locally effective social policy development.

For a simpler universe and science of literacy it would, indeed, be easier if we had verifiable evidence of decontextualised skills that could be inculcated (with precision and alacrity and at reasonable economies of scale); acquired with automaticity by all; and then predictably redeployed regardless of the demands, rules of exchange, linguistic norms, and symbolic power available in any and every social field. This has been the object of 100 years of reading research. The caveat here is that such a science provides a very small and highly contingent part of a larger evidence base about language, about literacy, and about the life worlds where they are won and lost.

While the Bourdieu model underlines the sociological contingency of literacy practice, it also provides new grounds for analysing the intrapsychological contingency and locality of practice. Literate practice is situated, constructed, and intrapsychologically negotiated through an (artificial) social field called the school, with rules of exchange denoted in scaffolded social activities around particular selected texts. But any acquired skills, whether basic or higher order, are reconstituted and re-mediated in relation to variable fields of power and practice in the larger community. These, indeed, constitute political economies (see work by Engeström and colleagues at the Centre for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research: <http://www.edu.Helsinki.fi/activity/>).

A science of literacy education that restricts itself to the efficacy of classroom method and that attempts to control against the variance of these

economies and cultures is, indeed, a naïve science—at best decontextualised, at worst part of a long ideological effort to remove reading and literacy forcefully from its complex social, cultural, and economic contexts. To move forward both in research and policy towards a more inclusive literacy in multilingual societies is a task that will require broader, more complex forms of social science, not reductionist ones.

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