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HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH ON TEACHING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

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Harvey Graff’s (1979) history of the “literacy myth” and Brian Street’s (1984) ethnographic case for an “ideological model” of literacy set the grounds for a three decade revision of the core premises of literacy education. The shapes and consequences of literacy are not universal. They depend on historical and cultural context: on political ideologies and disciplinary discourses, systems of governance, ownership and control of texts and information, and local functions and uses of literacy. Institutions like schools, religions, and media/Internet corporations provide selective sociohistorical scripts for its acquisition and use. These institutions stand in complex and contested relationships with the traditions and practices of vernacular and indigenous cultures and languages (Hornberger, 2002).

Economic and cultural globalisation has, in effect, put these relationships on steroids, with accelerated patterns of contact, change and disruption. New cultural, technological and economic conditions have generated what are referred to in this volume as “new literacies” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Digital culture and economic globalisation are grounded in shifts in dominant modes of communication, spatial relocations of industrial means of production, and transnational economies of ownership and control, censorship and access to information (Graham, 2002). The print publishing and media industries (e.g., NewsCorp) are rapidly moving towards hybrid print/digital markets; the next wave of cross-marketing structures and alliances for the consolidation and expansion of media is underway (e.g., Apple, Sony, Google). Autocratic governments and authors alike face issues of the control and censorship of information and intellectual property, free and paid access, and the ownership of texts.

While book sales remain robust and newspapers shift to digital delivery, there are significant changes in the everyday modes and genres of reading and writing: from e-reading to social networking and videogaming. While much of this is via expanded corporate markets, the Internet has also created openings for non-profit, activist, local and regional social, cultural, and political work and for new, rogue forms of criminal action and black economies.

Researchers are theorising and examining emergent identities and textual practices in a multiplicity of spaces and temporalities beyond the print “classroom-as-container” (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010). A wave of research on youth and digital culture has documented new patterns of agency, identity, and exchange, remixing and reappropriation of texts, often in ways that escape corporate and government control (e.g., Lam, 2006; Pinkard, Barron, & Martin, 2008).

Yet debates over the policy and practices of schools continue to work from 20th-century hierarchical and linear models that assume a universal individual development from alphabetic “basics” to “higher order” reading skills. School curriculum maintains a focus on canonical print genres. Current curriculum debates in Australia, Japan, the United States, and UK feature a resurgence of traditional literature study. In the United States, UK, and Australia, national education policies focus on high stakes pencil-and-paper testing of basic print skills. Simply, schools do not know what to do with digital culture or transnational identities, relations and practices.

Cultural and economic globalisation requires a dual optics: (a) a focus on new textual and linguistic practices and “semiotic social spaces” (Gee, 2005), and affiliated issues of ownership, access and control, surveillance, and censorship; and (b) a focus on persistent inequitable access to traditional reading and writing. Teachers and researchers work in non-synchronous educational contexts where print and digital cultures sit side-by-side and exist simultaneously, where new literacies and print literacy sit in close social, geographical, and cultural proximity. These conditions require cogent analysis of the effects of the global on educational media, youth identities and cultures, and literate practices and epistemologies and a deliberate, reflexive making of global flows, forces and exchange the objects of literate practices, as the very substantive curriculum
content of literacy. Our case is that researchers, teachers, and students require a critical analysis of this new global information order, its possibilities and problems, its local, regional, and transnational effects and synergies, and its contradictions and inequities. These are the new fields for literate power and exchange.

The global exchange of information, discourse, economic, and symbolic capital, material resources, cultural artefacts, manufactured goods, and people has been enabled, enhanced, and accelerated by communications technologies (Innis, 1950). Literacy and globalisation thus stand in a complex and dynamic relationship. Globalisation depends upon the compression of time and space via transportation and communications technologies (Harvey, 1989). Increased literacy in dominant lingua francæ (e.g., English, Mandarin) is viewed by nations as prerequisite for economic growth and late modernity, its collateral effects on Indigenous cultures and languages notwithstanding (Phillipson, 2004). Print and digital literacies, then, are both means and ends, subjects and objects of transnational economic, cultural, and semiotic exchange. The effects of literacy remain, pace Graff (1979) and Street (1984), mixed, local, and contingent on the “push/pull” effects (Burbules & Torres, 2000) of global exchange. Literacy enables economic participation and political enfranchisement, and, often in the same contexts, sets the conditions for new forms of hegemony and social stratification.

This chapter examines the implications of technologically driven globalisation for the teaching of English language arts. Our aim is to provide an overview of: (a) challenges and issues for those literacy educators and researchers who work in North America, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand; (b) challenges and issues for educational systems in selected “Other” postcolonial countries and regions where English holds a powerful and contested space. We propose three contemporaneous frames for considering literacy in transnational and global contexts:

The Development Paradigm: focusing on the spread of basic literacy, its economic and social effects;
• The Hegemony Paradigm: focusing on the ideological and cultural effects of “official” literacy formalised by schools, media and the state;
The New Literacies Paradigm: focusing on the emergent cultures, identities and practices of multimodal and digital literacies.

Throughout we refer to developments in China and India as key reference points, due in part to their acknowledged geopolitical and economic significance. With complex histories of colonisation, nationalism, socialism and capitalism, China and India were technically classified as ‘third-world’ and ‘developing’ countries in postwar development models. Both countries have complex multilingual and multi-ethnic histories. Both have emerged as nexuses of capital exchange, cultural and linguistic influence, intellectual and technological innovation—albeit with very different political and economic structures. They also illustrate the non-synchronous character of literacies in current conditions: where problems of universal access to basic literacy coexist, often uncomfortably, with new digital exchange.

The Development Paradigm

International comparisons on standardised achievement testing systems like PISA (OECD, 2000) indicate the overall achievement bands tend to locate the same cluster of wealthy countries (e.g., UK, EU, United States, Canada, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand) in achievement levels above those still developing compulsory educational provision. China and India have expanded educational provision and increased levels of literacy in the context of expanding economic and geopolitical power, and domestic poverty amelioration. Yet, there are over 25 million adults and youth unable to read in these same countries (UNESCO, 2008). While there has been an increase in literacy rates with over 9% reported in East Asia, there is “below-global-average increase of over 5%” in Sub-Saharan Africa (p. 34). UNESCO concludes that policies of “the last half century have not reduced inequalities” (p. 48). This pattern has been exacerbated during the ‘boom’ period of globalisation: with increased stratification of wealth within even ‘successful’ economies (Stiglitz, 2002), and deteriorating conditions for the poor globally (Cohen, 2006).

Since World War II, work in the field of language planning set thresholds for literacy in terms of a number of years of primary/elementary schooling achieved (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003). These thresholds exclude recognition of informal education in community, rural and village settings (Farrell, 2008). Given wide variability in curriculum and school infrastructure, national comparisons offer at best a notional sense of the spread of literacy. They also reflect ideological, religious and political economic divisions, especially in those countries where the universal educational provision for girls and women has lagged (UN Millennium Project, 2005) where religious and traditional practice has enabled or constrained access to particular sub-groups (Rosowsky, 2008), where state censorship of print and digital texts continues, and where cultural and linguistic minorities have been educationally marginalised (Hornberger, 2009).

The general assumption of postwar language planning experts and of non-government organisations (e.g., the World Bank), then, has been that levels of literacy are robust predictors of economic and social development. Debates around the spread and distribution of literacy are based upon human capital models of education and social development. There are several key issues here. First, as noted, levels of formal schooling have been taken as proxies for actual facility with print. Second, the model was premised on a ‘thermometer’ model, with a focus on more or less literacy per se, as a singular entity, rather than as on the diverse and stratified spread of specialised practices with print and other media (Freebody, 2007). While the United States, UK,
Canada, and Australia have over 95+% levels of functional literacy, by the school-attainment proxy, young adults leave school with stratified levels of textual capacity, and differential histories of engagement and access to canonical, specialised and ‘high stakes’ texts and discourses. Despite legislated school reform, persistent gaps between upper and lower socioeconomic groups, between dominant and minority linguistic and cultural communities persist—with a persistent Indigenous achievement gap (OECD, 2000). Recent reviews of U.S. data have indicated that high stakes testing and accountability systems have failed to close and, in some states, increased gaps in achievement (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005). In the United States and the UK, these gaps increased during periods of increased income disparity and declining social mobility (Jantti et al., 2006).

Since the 1960s universal literacy has been a key Indian national goal (Bordia & Kaul, 1992). Yet legislation for universal, compulsory, and free elementary education is still under consideration as this volume goes to press. Literacy levels vary from as high as 90% in Kerala, 70% in Tamil Nadu at one end of the continuum to a low 45% in states such as Bihar and Rajasthan—and reflect differences in regional economic development and political stability. In many poor communities, children are carers for siblings and do domestic and paid labor; in other communities, girls’ education has low community and family priority (Rampal, 2007). In remote areas, health, sanitation, and basic services have taken precedence over schooling. At the same time, a burgeoning market economy, corporate services, manufacturing and technology, industrial and digital sectors have set the conditions for a “commercialisation of education” (NCERT, 2005, p. 9) and an expansion of the tertiary sector for urban middle and upper classes.

Using school proxy measures, literacy amongst youth aged 15–24 in India overall is 79.8% (UNESCO, 2007) with 84.4% males and 74.8% females reported as literate. Literacy instruction is influenced by century-old politicised debates of mother tongue versus official languages. Combined with caste, religion, class, geographic, and political issues, this complicates any coordinated national or regional literacy policy. In parts of the country, regional languages are the medium of instruction at the elementary level (e.g., Hindi, Marathi, Tamil) (Petrovic & Majumdar, 2010). These are second languages for those who speak a variety of dialects, and for many students English is a third language (Kamal, 1991). Yet, in India, as throughout Asia, English literacy is viewed by government, the corporate sector, and educated elites as necessary for economic success, class mobility, and, increasingly, regional and transnational educational and occupational mobility.

In China, the proxy measure of literacy among youth aged 15–24 is 99%, with, notably, little significant differences between genders (UNESCO, 2007). Since 1949, the Chinese government has successfully expanded the provision of universal, compulsory schooling with the target of universal literacy. In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, education and literacy became a central focus of the school reform movement in the 1970s and 1980s (Peterson, 1997). These targets have been achieved with an official policy of “digraphic” (Liu, 2005) and “bi-scriptural literacy” (Wang, Perfetti, & Liu, 2005), with school children receiving instruction in Putonghua alphabetic and character systems. The result is the largest extant population cohort with mastery of two writing systems. As in other historical cases, the press for a national, compulsory literacy in an official language—in this case, Mandarin—has had collateral effects on the intergenerational transmission and use of regional dialects and Indigenous languages (Lin & Man, 2009).

The 1979 Open Door Policy set English as a compulsory college entry subject, affiliating English with ideologies of modernity and progress. Since that period, China has grown into the world’s largest market for private and government, formal and informal, face-to-face, and online English as a ‘foreign’ language teaching. In this millennium the number of English speakers in countries like China and India is likely to exceed that of the total populations of the United States and the UK (Crystal, 2003). Yet at the same time, the enthusiasm of educated youth for English has been described in the state-run China Daily (Zuo, 2010) as “English idolatry”, with youth caught up in a “mimicry” of Hollywood culture, fashion, and identity.

The spread of literacy to the rural and urban poor in developing countries is a pressing matter of human rights and redistributive social justice. Many governments in Africa, Asia, and the Americas are struggling to provide basic educational infrastructure that would enhance economic, social and political participation. However, as the cases of India and China suggest, the development paradigm offers at best a partial explanation of literacy in the context of globalisation. Since their inception in the 15th century, national literacy campaigns have stressed standardisation and monolingualism (Arnove & Graff, 1987), with direct impacts on regional dialectal and linguistic variation, and Indigenous language loss. In both countries, governments have supported the expansion of World Language English as a medium of multinational capital and transnational cultural exchange (Lin & Martin, 2005).

The Hegemony Paradigm

A primary assumption of the hegemony paradigm is that mass literacy enables transmission and reproduction of ideological systems that serve dominant social classes. From a postcolonial perspective, Western literacy has been a vehicle for ideological indoctrination, linguistic imperialism and the eradication of Indigenous cultures (Pennycook, 1998). Yet literacy also is a means of power: as a critical, counter-hegemonic tool with the potential to analyse, critique and contest neo-colonialism and global economic and cultural forces.

European colonisation of Africa, the Americas and Asia entailed the symbolic, physical, and bodily imposition of colonial religion, governance, and education. The
transplantation of colonial literacy education was a central strategy, eradicating or overwriting indigenous languages and cultures, and yielding, however intentionally, hybrid languages, cultural styles, identities, and practices (e.g., Stroud & Wee, 2005). Schooled literacy in a colonial language and knowledge of Western scientific and literary canons became the Eurocentric benchmarks and measures of ‘civilisation’ and elite culture in many countries in the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Colonial textbooks, pedagogies, and examination systems were the educational means for the spread of imperial ideologies, for linguistic and cultural imposition, and for the subordination and eradication of Indigenous languages and knowledges (Nozaki, Openshaw, & Luke, 2005). With decolonisation, new nationalist curriculum settlements were forged, entail- ing new languages of instruction and postcolonial textbook ideologies (e.g., Wong, 2007). In East Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, literacy instruction was seen as a primary means for the building of a new social imaginary in languages suppressed by colonial powers.

Yet in many of these same postcolonial countries, English language literacy is now viewed as a material prerequisite for participation in global flows of capital and discourse, bodies and workers across borders (Wiley & Artiles, 2007). In these contexts, the extension of mass literacy, the spread of English, the loss of vernacular language and culture, and the engagement with economic globalisation is a site for cultural conflict and political dispute. The case for a direct ‘hypodermic’ relationship between literacy and economic development is vexed by questions of literacy in which language, for whom, in whose interests, and to what ends.

In India, the politics of English language education has become a de facto struggle over the push-pull relationships between transnational and vernacular cultural politics (Sonntag, 1996). In the 2005 National Curricular Framework (NCERT, 2005) of India, English is promoted as “a global language” and “a political response to people’s aspirations” (p. 380). An educational focus on English language literacy has set the conditions for the emergence of a domestic and transnational middle class that services multinational export industries (e.g., call centres, software development). This has enhanced economic growth and the expansion of the middle class, increased the number of Indian students and scientists engaged in transnational work and study, and expanded the scope and power of the Indian diaspora. However, within India the attainment of English literacy has become a fault line between rich and poor in the country (Ramanathan, 2005).

Paulo Freire (1970) and other educators working in colonial and postcolonial contexts argued for a reinvention of literacy instruction to encourage political critique, cultural and economic analysis and social action. Critical models of literacy education build literacy from vernacular knowledge and local problems, interrogating background knowledge and issues, and encouraging the critical analysis of material conditions and social relations (Freire & Macedo, 1987). This requires a “micro-social analysis” sensitive to the “everyday strategies of linguistic negotiation of the local people” (Canagarajah, 2000, p. 123), as well as pedagogic dialogue about the social fields and relations where texts are used (Fairclough, 1990). Principles of critical education have shaped literacy education in postcolonial contexts (e.g., Mozambique, Venezuela, South Africa, Peru) (e.g., Janks, 2010), the education of migrant and second language learners (e.g., Norton & Toohey, 2004), and the teaching of English, reading and language arts (e.g., Comber & Simpson, 2001; Luke & Carrington, 2002).

American critical education has focused on setting the grounds for a critique of popular culture and media, curricular representations of history and culture, and dominant state ideologies. Current work has moved towards an examination of how critical educational approaches can entail a critique of the dominant technocratic discourses and taken-for-granted assumptions about current material and cultural conditions. This would entail both an engagement with local effects of globalisation—on language uses, cultural practices, work, identity and everyday social relations—and with the texts and master discourses that explain, rationalise, and justify the expansion of multinational corporations across borders. It would also entail students working with digital technology to access information and generate an analysis of transnational relations and effects of cultural and economic flows, a focus on global and local power on students’ communities, and the possibilities of indigenous knowledges and alternative epistemological stances.

The New Literacies Paradigm

The 2010 decision by Google to suspend operations in China highlighted the contentious issues raised by digital access to texts, discourses and information. China has become a global “superpower … in information acquisition and dissemination” (Srikantaiah & Xiaoying, 1998). Spires, Morris, and Zhang (2008) report that while Chinese students (2.4 hours per week) tended to spend less time than their American counterparts (4.3 hours per week) on the Internet, their preferred practices were similar. Estimates of the number of Internet users in China range from 250 to 400 million. Their practices include: business and commercial exchanges, social networking and blogging, videogaming, music and media downloads, accessing of news outside of officially controlled print media, online English learning and university study, and participation in the flourishing artistic and political underground. Chinese and English search engines are under close government monitoring and censorship, with corporations like Newscorp and Google negotiating filters and firewalls, with government authorities. Internet use accelerates the shift towards dominant languages—English and Chinese. Many language communities with smaller transnational populations (e.g., Tamil speakers in India, Sri Lanka, and Singapore) have made Web resources available, and Internet resources have served Indigenous language revitalisation programs (see,

Chinese users are concentrated amongst emergent middle class in urban centres (e.g., Beijing, the Pearl River Delta), while rural communities in Western and Northern China and an older generation of Chinese continue to have limited patterns of access and use. Increasing numbers of Chinese Internet users, like their Japanese and Korean counterparts, have urban access and sufficient income to participate in the consumption of cross-marketed goods and ‘styles’ of hybridised media cultures. These cultures are not unidirectional impositions from America. Bollywood, Japanese Manga cultures, Cantopop, Korean soap operas, and other non-American influences are at work across Asia (Lin & Tong, 2008). Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Indian brands and media images feature in print and online marketing in Asia and in the West. Unlike print and broadcast media, new media practices have generated hybrid, transcultural social and cultural practices and affiliated youth identities (Kraidy, 2005). Digital technologies have resulted in cultural convergence (Jenkins, 2006) and remixing “combining elements of R/O [read/only] culture; it succeeds by leveraging the meaning created by reference to build something new” (Lessig, 2008, p. 76).

The shift from “R/O” [read/only] culture to a widely accessible remix digital production culture marks out a major conceptual shift in literacy practices. ‘Users’ do not simply encode messages broadcast by central sources and authorities, but engage in potentially less regulable and recombinatory coding of new and blended messages. In effect, Youtube, blogs, and online e-publishing have disrupted publishers’ and media corporations’ late 20th century monopolies on production. New media forms have created new discourses, hybrid languages, and conventions of exchange based on peer networks and affinity groups (Gee, 2004). This has altered longstanding relationships of power in communications models of ‘dominant’ and interpellating ideology (Hammer & Kellner, 2009), between encoders and decoders, writers and readers, commercial/state messages and text consumers—a matter well understood by government authorities attempting to surveil and control Internet access and use.

These shifts have implications for schooling and print literacy teaching and learning, the institutions at the core of the development paradigm. How adequate is traditional print literacy curricula for preparing students to deal with the borderless flow of texts, practices, and discourses? Currently, national and state standards and curricula refer to digital or Internet competence as cross-curricular competencies for integration into traditional school subjects. The policy focus on traditional print literacy is premised on the assumption that basic reading and writing developmentally precede digital cultural engagement, despite evidence that children’s use of digital technology may precede initial print education (e.g., Marsh, 2005). There is, further, a liberal humanist position that print literacy and literature can act as a moral and ideological defence against the messages of new media (e.g., Postman, 1993). This complements a growing atmosphere of moral panic around the Internet as a means for terrorism, bullying, pedophilia, fraud, and a limitless list of potential criminal acts (Luke & Luke, 2000).

Approaches to critical literacy based on critical linguistics have focused on ideology critique and the analysis of dominant discourses and texts (Muspratt, Luke, & Freebody, 1997), with an increasing focus on visual and multimodal texts (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Other work has focused on assisting students to navigate complex and multiple sources of information, taking account of the “uncertainty and theoretical disarray” (Sefte, 1999, p. xvi), non-traditional concepts of knowledge (Rantala & Korhonen, 2008), and incorporating multiple view points (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). As the 2008 U.S. election campaigns and the current issues around state censorship in China illustrate, the new media has the potential to mark out a shift towards media production and networking as forms of social agency and political action, locally based but taking up the themes and issues raised by transnational relations. The shift from decoding to encoding, from critical analysis of texts to the production of new textual forms has the potential to reconfigure Freire’s (1970) original conceptions of education for cultural and political action.

**Making Globalisation an Object of Study**

We began from the premise that the conditions of cultural and economic globalisation have created non-synchronous conditions for print and digital literacies. Our intent here has been to ‘make the familiar strange’ for North American readers by showing a contrasting but converging picture of literacy. In Delhi and Shanghai, Los Angeles and Phoenix, we find parallel worlds of literacy and education in close geographic and cultural proximity and contact. Urban poor, migrants, agricultural workers and indigenous families and their children continue to struggle for equitable access to basic print literacy, within kilometres of office buildings where educated workers busy themselves with the transnational exchange of capital, information and discourse. Where they have access, youth of diverse cultural and economic backgrounds communicate with others globally and locally in new textual forms—creating local and transnational new identities, communities and textual forms (Warriner, 2007; Hull, Zacher, & Hibbert, 2009; McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg, & Costa Saliani, 2007).

This is nothing less than a new global “eduscape” (C. Luke, 2006), however uneven and inequitable its spread, depth, and breath may be. It is characterised by population movement and cultural contact, ubiquitous everyday engagement with new modes of sound and image, an unprecedented proliferation of the archive of available texts and discourses, and the global spread of a text-saturated, mediated culture. This educational ‘reality’ is set in complex and, at times, incomprehensible corporate and state
political economies which, ironically, are not the objects of study in school (Luke, Luke, & Graham, 2007).

English language arts educators face a complex array of new challenges for the everyday work of curriculum, instruction and assessment in classrooms. Globalised economies and cultures have destabilised the core assumptions of 20th-century education: about the cultural and linguistic homogeneity of student bodies; about the stability of curriculum knowledge; about the centrality of face-to-face classroom interaction, and about the pre-eminence of print. This is a new space for conflict and struggle over whose languages, texts, and discourses will count, over who will produce, use, and own them, over whose voices will count and be heard, and over who will be excluded and marginalised.

Many education systems have responded with “back to the basics” policies, a curriculum fundamentalism based on a restoration of educational conditions, student identities, and cultural conditions past (Luke & Luke, 2000). For literacy researchers and educators, however, there are immediate practical ways forward. Historically, literate societies have inducted youth to selective cultural scripts about how the technologies of writing work, where they can be used, with what social and cultural effects, and in whose human interests. This is what the traditional study of literature sets out to achieve on behalf of print. We can begin by making these new conditions—of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalism—focal objects of study for literacy education. This would not amount to a simple inclusion of print and digital literacies qua skills—but a full consideration of their possibilities and limits, an analysis of their communities, and a considered examination of how they can be used for development and hegemony alike. It would entail the generation of new texts, designs, and worlds by students and teachers, youth and elders, masters and apprentices. Given the rapidity, volatility, and uncertainty of these new worlds, this will require nothing but a full consideration of their possibilities and limits, an analysis of their communities, and a considered examination of how they can be used for development and hegemony alike. It would entail the generation of new texts, designs, and worlds by students and teachers, youth and elders, masters and apprentices. Given the rapidity, volatility, and uncertainty of these new worlds, this will require nothing less than a critical literacy of the ‘global.’

References


