Different angles

Thinking through the four literacies

Rob McCormack

In this background article I try to show that 'the four literacies' can be used as a tool for thinking and reflecting about ALBE, as well as a reporting framework for systems of administration.

I first define literacy as 'more than just cracking the code'; then glance at the way this extended definition of literacy as 'participating in forms of life' unsettles the relationship between Literacy and Oracy. I then take up the main task ,which is to open up a number of different angles on the four literacies.

The four literacies

To say that ALBE includes four literacies is to say that four forms or regions of answerability and accountability traverse the ALBE field, four vectors or horizons of answerability. I will sketch them quickly for you.[1]

Personal identity

One horizon foregrounds the personal identity formation of our students, their sense of themselves as agents of a sociocultural narrative, their sense of the connections between different phases of their lives and their present capacity to speak to, on behalf of, and from within their lives. It is within this context that issues of sexual, cultural, social, and class difference are picked up. We could think of this horizon of Self Expression as converging with the horizon encompassing the themes, concerns and purposes of 'subject English' in schools.[2]

Modern knowledge

A second horizon points to the production and distribution of modern forms of knowledge. Here we are concerned that ALBE begins to introduce students to the discursive forms of modern knowledge. This will include learning to read and write expository and textbook prose. Here we envisage ALBE educators developing diverse curricula that begin to apprentice students into the discursive forms and practices of such

subjects as History, Sociology, Biology, Legal Studies, Cultural Studies, and so on.

Organisations

The third horizon embraces the diverse understandings and competencies required to engage with contemporary organisation and institutions, especially those of the workplace. Here we are trying to include those competencies covered by 'functional literacy', and to acknowledge that modern life is fundamentally shaped by abstract organisations, bureaucracies and structures, institutions that depend more on written communication than face–to–face presence.

Citizenship

The fourth horizon is what we could call the horizon of the polis. This horizon tries to foreground the fact that modernity also contains a horizon or project specifiable as democracy. This horizon articulates the right and duty of contemporary individuals to contribute to the public discourse which is continually questioning, resisting, proposing and counter–proposing our communal activities, policies and ways of life.

However, in proposing four literacies there is no suggestion that they should be insulated from one another. Quite the opposite. The point is precisely that they are all implicated in one another. If there is one point that everyone associated with this project agrees on, it is that no ALBE program should frame itself in relation to only one literacy horizon.

Naming what happens in ALBE classrooms?

The four literacies in the Frameworks are not meant to impose new forms of teaching and learning on ALBE. Rather, positing four literacies is a way of trying to capture the full range of ALBE literacy practice more explicitly.

The power of names

Of course, no classification is innocent. As literacy practitioners, we are deeply sensitive to the consequences of naming: most of our students suffer from being 'called names' — names wield as much power as sticks and stones. Modern power is exercised as much through language as through physical force. Power not only comes out of the barrel of a gun, it also comes out of the discourses governing what people and things are called and count as.

Naming and accountability

Unquestionably much of the pressure for explicitness about ALBE classrooms comes from the efforts of governments to 'represent' the interests of tax–payers, business and the general public in accounting for the efficient and effective expenditure of public moneys. However, this is not the only source of pressure for more explicitness: many educators within the ALBE field itself are also concerned to develop more explicit ways of describing what transpires in their classrooms.

Competing concerns

However, an continuing issue is whether a common language can be found that captures the concerns of both governments and educators. As a rule, educators find 'the language of government' reductive and alienating, while government typically finds 'the language of educators' vague, elusive and unquantifiable.

Competence as Literacy for Practical Purposes

At present, most English–speaking governments have (im)posed the 'language of competencies' as a common framework and vocabulary for mediating between educators, bureaucrats and their 'clients'. However, it is doubtful that this vocabulary of competency can be made 'to stick' in the long term. Using the four literacies to think about these matters, we could say that the notion of 'competence' is an attempt to interpret all four literacies in terms of just one of them: Literacy for Practical Purposes.

The other literacies fight back

Already, there has been a backlash against this reductiveness: Conservatives have brought Literacy for Knowledge back into focus with their advocacy of 'cultural literacy'[3]; radicals have invoked Literacy For Public Debate with their concept of 'critical literacy'; and postmodernism has revived Literacy for Self Expression by emphasising issues of identity and the 'differences' of class, gender, race and ethnicity.

Future debates

If this is correct, the next 10 –15 years in education is going to focus around the struggles and negotiations between these four forms of literacy, these four forms of selfhood, these four forms of social engagement, these four forms of activity, these four purposes, these four forms of accountability, these four forms of judgement. By construing ALBE as a region of education answerable to *all four* literacies, ALBE becomes a

significant social site where these four versions of life can engage in a continuing conversation about how to relate to one another and to life, about how they shape different names for life and thus shape life itself; — hence the importance of 'names'; hence the importance of language and literacy.

But what is literacy anyway?

In the Curriculum Model, literacy is construed as: *the ability to engage in the contexts, texts, occasions and forms of activity associated with written language*. Learning to be literate is learning ways of reading and writing that embody the forms of interpreting, understanding, talking, thinking and feeling associated with these contexts, texts, occasions and activities. Literacy is participating in forms of life and social activity. There are ways of knowing and living associated with written texts: to learn literacy is to learn to engage with these ways of knowing and living.

More than cracking the code

Notice how this view of literacy extends the common notion of literacy. Usually literacy is taken to mean simply learning to crack the alphabetic and grammatical code, as if once you knew how to decipher individual words and sentences you would then be able to read any book published in that language. But we know that there is more to reading and writing than this.

Language in use

Although not excluding this level of decoding and encoding, the Curriculum Model tries to be more explicit about the *who,* the *why,* the *when,* the *where,* and the *what* of literacy as well as the *how* of reading and writing. The Curriculum Model attempts to spell out: the contexts (the *where* and the *when*), the participants (the *who*), the motives (the *why*) and the content (the *what*) of literacy. It tries to integrate the notion of literacy as 'mastery of a written code' and literacy as 'participating in occasions featuring written texts'.

What about Oracy?

Also, notice that I have included 'talk' within literacy education. This is because 'literacy' is not defined as 'knowing the written code of English' but as 'participating in the activities associated with written text'. Learning to talk about written texts, their contents, their structures, their

elements, their intentions, and their strategies is central to any literacy education. As Jay Lemke points out:

> When we approach written text, we need to be able to do more than just decode letters to sounds. We need to be able to *make sense* of the text, to read it meaningfully, with the voice of interpretation. To comprehend it, we need to be able to paraphrase it, to restate it in our own words, and translate its meanings into the more comfortable patterns of spoken language.[4]

Oracy as literacy

In this sense, Oracy is an integral aspect of the 'literacy practices' of literate forms of life. Learning to talk to, about, around, and against written texts and their meanings is at the heart of literacy.[5] In fact we probably all know the odd individual we would want to classify as 'literate' even though their 'ability to read and write' is minimal. This is because they can participate in the discourses and occasions associated with literate culture, even though their actual 'text processing' capacities lags far behind. As Olson and Astington point out:

> we must construe literacy more generally than simply identify it with scribal competence .… To be literate, in this sense, is to be competent to participate in a certain form of discourse, *whether one can read and write or not*.[6]

Angles on the Four Literacies

Until now I have been using phrases such as: "contexts, texts, occasions and forms of activity associated with written language" and "forms of selfhood, … forms of social engagement, … forms of activity, … purposes, … forms of accountability; … forms of judgement" to describe what literacy is. In the rest of this article I would like to go slowly through some of these different angles on literacy. I will use them as a way of approaching literacy and try to notice what each perspective allows us to observe and what it hides. Each angle will foreground some aspects while backgrounding or overlooking others. Hopefully, by 'trying on' a range of ways of seeing literacy and its meanings we can develop a richer sense of what we are engaged in as ALBE educators.

Basically the problem in spelling out exactly *what literacy is* is that we are at an interface between two equally elusive things — textuality and society, or in more familiar terms, language and life — two things that are difficult to hitch together into a single schema. Nor is there a settled

vocabulary for saying how they do fit together. Should we talk about: contexts, activities, registers, genres, discourses, institutions, aspects of activities, forms of life, language games, dispositifs, locales, chronotopes, social imaginaries or domains? — all terms invented by theorists specifically to weave language and life into a single cloth.[7]

I will now explore a few of these angles for describing the four literacies.

Literacy and institutions

One way of approaching the notion of four literacies is by looking at the way these literacies capture or acknowledge *the diversity of institutions offering ALBE*. Institutions differ in their governing orientations, motives or purposes, so one way of looking at the four literacies is to look at the way they mirror the range of institutions in the ALBE field and their agendas

Although literacy is mainly associated with formal education institutions, this has never been true of adult literacy. Adult Literacy and Adult Education have typically scratched together a shadowy life on the fringes of mainstream educational institutions — on the margins, in the marshes. As a result, today we find a range of institutions offering ALBE: prisons, neighbourhood houses, community groups of various sorts, private industry, private providers, Skillshares, English Colleges, TAFE Colleges.

This institutional diversity is vital to the future of ALBE. Although ALBE is in transit from the margins to the mainstream, it is crucial that we retain this diversity of institutional sites and settings. If ALBE simply becomes 'school' for adults it will soon end up domesticated, ineffectual and lifeless. To keep faith with its commitment to the poor and disadvantaged, ALBE must continue to insinuate itself into workplaces, caravan parks, high rise housing, shop fronts, women's refuges and the streets as well as formal educational settings.

So, how do the four literacies deal with the different orientations, motives and horizons of these different institutional sites and settings? One way of making this connection between literacies and institution would be to divide institutions into four types according to their principle orientation or agenda and see if this can be lined up with the literacies.

Crudely, the four kinds of institution would be:

- modern bureaucratic organizations such as government services and workplaces

- local community organisations and grass roots groups

- organisations intent on participating in and shaping social and political policy

- educational institutions.

Adopting this angle on the four literacies we would say that: Literacy for Practical Purposes acknowledges the range of work sites offering ALBE; Literacy for Self Expression acknowledges Community Centres and Neighbourhood houses; Literacy for Public Debate acknowledges ALBE offerings located within organisations intent on achieving social justice such as work with homeless youth or in Koori communities; Literacy for Knowledge acknowledges educational institutions such as TAFE Colleges, the CAE, and private providers to the OTFE.

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Different course focuses

However, it is important not to assume that each institutional site offers ALBE courses focused only on its own institutional agenda or horizon. If we confuse institutional sites and the orientation or goal of ALBE courses we might think that worksites should only be involved in work–focused courses, that community settings will only provide offerings focused on personal and community development, or that educational settings will only offer courses focused on academic knowledge.

But institutional sites and courses are not the same thing. For example, a workplace site can offer not only vocationally focused ALBE, but also personal development or political education or bridging into further education and retraining. The same applies to all the other sites: a community house can offer not just courses that enhance self–esteem and confidence, but also courses for political awareness, vocational training or returning to study.

And because personal life, work life, intellectual life and political life are now all inextricably intertwined, there is a serious question for any site about which types of courses will best achieve even its own goals or

agenda. For example, it may be that the best thing a worksite could do to increase its productivity would be to help its workers feel more politically and personally engaged. It may be that for a community site the best way to improve people's confidence and self–respect would be to offer them a vocational course so they have saleable skills. It may be that a TAFE College should offer courses based on serious long–term community action projects as a way of reducing the alienation and abstraction of academic knowledge. And so on.

Differences between course focus and institutional site

Another way of making this point about the difference between *course focus* and *institutional site* is to say that all large contemporary institutions now contain significant internal diversity and differences. Modern organisations are finding it harder to stay oriented to just one agenda. Since the excesses of the 80s even for business organisations the dollar is not necessarily the only bottom line. Institutions are no longer clean Fordist hierarchies in which every Section or Unit or activity within the organisation can be mapped directly onto a single overriding purpose.

The new institutional culture

Just as the 80s saw the mapping of the values of efficiency and effectiveness onto institutions primarily oriented to social justice, so too in the 90s there is going to be increasing concerns around the social justice, cultural and community effects of all institutions. These issues are particularly brought into focus by the struggle for the conditions of women in the workforce, for child–care, suitable conditions of part–time work, sexual harassment and so on.

In other words, we could say that modern forms of organisation will have to acknowledge the cultural, political, and social agendas of their staff and clients virtually for the first time. ALBE classes will inevitably — willingly or unwillingly — be involved in this reworking of the culture of modern institutional life.

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Genres

Another way we can think about the four literacies is in terms of genre. The basic idea here is that there are relatively conventionalised ways of

reading and writing and that these ways have evolved into particular formats which are adapted to their different social contexts and purposes.

Memos and manuals

Two clusters of genre are associated with *modern organisations and their functioning*. One cluster – memos, forms, reports, minutes, various business letter formats and so on – have evolved for *transacting the roles and responsibilities* of modern organisations and institutions. Their very format highlights: who (institutionally) is being addressed, who (institutionally) the writer is, the topic, references to previous correspondence or communication, and the date. The body is usually 'short and to the point', containing very little elaboration by way of explanation or illustration; neutral language is used thus repressing any emotional, intellectual or political investment; and finally, an action or response is usually suggested or requested. Everyone involved in such writing is aware that these written texts will be filed and retained as a permanent record documenting that particular institutional transaction. The other cluster are the manuals, procedures and instructions focused on *telling people how to* adapt to the frequent changes in modern technologies, institutional routines and spatial locations. These tend to be highly stylised into bulletted sequences of actions; an impersonal direct use of the imperative that would in any other context be considered both impolite and rude in the English language; very little explanation; regular use of diagrams or other visual aids to clarify, supplement or replace language; and, in longer texts such as street directories or computer manuals, there are highly developed indexing systems for locating specific bits of information.

Letters and novels

Genres associated with expressing *personal experience* and responses are quite different. Here we find personal letters, poetry, diaries, journals, storytelling and novels. Uniting this cluster is the notion of narrative which emphasises the particulars of experience and context. These genres are adapted to articulating human experiences and action. Narrative, whether fictional or 'real', is a way of articulating the patterns and lines of continuity in the multiplicity of experiences, meanings, conflicts, social relationships and life circumstances we all live through. Narrative is thus a way of disclosing the personal and cultural history shaping our modes of engaging with events, others, situations, and life itself.

Academic essays and textbooks

The third set of genres are those associated with *formal education* such as academic essays and textbooks. These genres are fundamentally structured in order for participants or would–be participants in disciplines of knowledge to display their mastery of the theories, concepts, problems and paradoxes of modern knowledge. Typically these genres rely on a rhythm of abstract point followed by elaboration in the form of illustration or explanation before moving on to the next point; a rhythm that demands a highly nominalised grammar, especially at the points of transition between topics or between steps within an explanatory sequence. Finally, these genres usually demand that writers articulate and defend a particular position and reach (logocentric) closure in defending this stance in the face of other legitimate stances within that particular discipline or field of knowledge.

Editorials and current affairs

The fourth set of genres are those with *modern policy formation and political debate* such as editorials, newpaper columnists, talkback radio, current affairs programs, letters to the editor, parliamentary debate and so on. What characterises these genres is that they are dialogic and thus usually acknowledge the existence of competing points of view whilst arguing for their own view. Implicit in many of these genres is the notion that modern community is a field of praxis and that 'what is to be done' should arise out of consensual understandings.[8]

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Communicative purposes

Another way of thinking about the literacies is to see them as four underlying purposes of communication. Although our talk, reading and writing all serve many specific purposes, they can be clustered into four larger purposes.

mutual disclosure

One purpose of communication which is especially manifest in everyday conversation is what we could call *mutual disclosure*. This form of communication is principally concerned with generating intimacy, trust, friendship, empathy and insight into personal histories and motives. It is a form of communication in which as a rule women excel compared with men.

procedural information

Another purpose of communication is conveying *procedural information concerned with 'how to do things' or 'how things are done'*. Because modern societies are complex and changing rapidly, dealing with modern organisations or technologies often means learning new know–how. The huge explosion of brochures, instruction pamphlets, operating manuals, signs and so on are all ways by which modern organisations try to instruct their workers, clients and the general public about their (continually changing) procedures and routines. In traditional societies this form of communication was not so prominent — practical know–how, which possessed a far longer 'shelf–life' than modern know–how, was handed on through practical demonstration and imitation.

The public domain

A third underlying purpose of communication is for a community to engage in *discourse to and about itself*. All societies have special occasions or sites for renewing their sense of themselves, their traditions, their pasts and futures. In modern societies this form of communication which addresses the whole community usually takes the form of debate.[9] This is because modern societies are fundamentally diverse and thus any public utterance necessarily aligns itself as in favour or opposed to other points of view and social positionings. In this sense we can think of a modern society as consisting of many different local communities and cultures, each with its own local public domain — women's communities, gay communities, ethnic communities, Koorie communities, financial communities, neighbourhood communities, professional communities and so on. Yet each of these local communities must at some point enter into debate and dialogue with other communities. This dialogue between different forms of life all coexisting within the same social space we could call politics.

Knowledge

A fourth underlying purpose of communication is *developing knowledge and understanding*. Knowledge and understanding are different from 'information or know–how'. Knowledge and understanding mean being able to engage with, reflect on and criticise the underlying principles, concepts or theories behind our thinking, actions and cultural life. Typically, this will take the form of initiation into traditions of knowing carried by fields, disciplines or subjects. Traditionally, thinking about the underlying meanings of a community or culture was the preserve of a

small religious or intellectual elite who often employed a special language such as Latin, Arabic, Sanskrit or Mandarin for this task, a language divorced from everyday vernacular life.

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Communicative horizons

Another way of thinking about the four literacies is to think of four horizons of answerability. What this means is that any act of communication — any text, spoken or written — is answerable to four sorts of evaluation or judgement. Thus any text at one and the same time: enacts institutional roles and exercises power; creates interpersonal relationships with its audience; draws on background theories, concepts, and understandings; and projects a vision or picture of the community as a whole.

Evading answerability

Now the interesting thing about this is that genres as routinised text formats have evolved and become specialised precisely in order to evade this multiple answerability. For example, the information and 'how to' instruction sheets put out by bureaucracies and organisations do not explain or even acknowledge the background theories or political imperatives they are drawing on. Similarly, casual chitchat is often a way of temporarily hiding the fact that those involved represent conflicting social interests. Similarly, academic genres usually forbid one bringing in personal experience or spelling out institutional or political implications — thus hiding the way that knowledge is inextricably intertwined with personal meaning and institutional power. Similarly, genres in the public arena often hide the personal investment or stake of participants. We can see here the danger of a language and literacy pedagogy that confined itself to teaching genres as ritualised modes of communication.

Horizons as vantage points for reading from

It is at this point that it is important to foreground literacy as practices of reading, not just writing. The four horizons of accountability are in fact four forms of reading, four background contexts against which to interpret a text, four ways of bringing a text to account. We could put them in terms of four questions: what institutional power does a text invoke? what personal investments does it realise? what theoretical positions does it invoke? what political aspirations does it carry?

Competent adults must be able to interpret any text from all these perspectives. This will often mean unearthing the implied, the assumed, the concealed, the hidden — no wonder literacy is not just being able to decode the letters!

Prior knowledge

However these forms of reading are not simply a matter of asking abstract questions of a text such as: who? for whom? what for? on behalf of who or what? and so on. Reading against the grain depends on a relatively systematic initiation into an understanding of a range of relevant organisational imperatives, personal relationships, theories and political positions. It is then against this background or prior knowledge that adults can interpret the institutional, interpersonal, theoretical and political meanings of a text.

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Social domains

Another way of thinking about the four literacies is to think of them as the reading and writing practices used in four different and distinct domains or sectors of social life. This involves carving modern life up into four regions — home life; work life; community life and intellectual life.

Home life is a region which focuses on personal relationships; work life focuses on getting things done; community life focuses on social and political interests and purposes; while intellectual life focuses on abstract or 'higher' ideas and meanings.

This way of thinking about modern societies has been prominent in social theory. Basically the story goes something like this: in the old tribal days these domains were not separated out, so every action or aspect of social life served multiple ends. Thus killing a pig could propitiate the gods, cement community relations, renew the ecological cycle and initiate the young into tribal stories, rituals and skills.

Modernity as the development of distinct domains

However, with the development of modern societies these different aspects of activities have become separated out and positioned as the responsibility of distinct institutions or domains:

- the modern nuclear family separated off from the older extended family, thus intensifying a focus on individuals and their emotional investment in personal relations

- workplaces separated themselves off from other social sites so they could be functionally organised into a division of labour by capitalists bent on optimising surveillance and efficiency

- political institutions developed their own specific processes, procedures and forms of representation

- modern research and educational institutions developed as specialised vehicles for discovering, documenting, disseminating, and handing on knowledge, culture and skills to the next generation.

Modernity as separate domains, postmodernity as permeable domains
According to many social theorists, these different institutional domains have developed their own internal dynamic and momentum to such an extent that we should not even talk about 'society as a whole'. Modern society, on this view, consists of distinct institutions or sectors forced to cohabit with one another even though they have almost nothing in common, and find it very difficult — some would say, impossible — to talk to one another. However, as we have already noted, precisely what is at issue as we enter the late 90s is the permeability of these boundaries between spheres or domains of social life. The debates between modernism and postmodernism focus around this very issue.[10]

The four literacies have been framed in such a way that ALBE can participate in these debates, or rather, can be a site in which these debates take place. In other words, the framework has tried not to pre–empt this debate by secretly aligning itself with either modernism or postmodernism. The only clear decision that the framework *has* taken is refusing to frame literacy in terms of a simple opposition between personal meaning and institutional demands, between concrete meaningful creative action and abstract social rituals, between the individual and society.[11] This humanist schema which has framed much past thinking and theorising about literacy no longer seems helpful in trying to articulate the range, conditions and relationships between social roles and forms of subjectivity available to individuals at the end of the 20th century. ALBE will be a key site in which these issues of 'how separate or blended things

are or should be' will be discussed, worked through and practically enacted.

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Student goals

Another way of thinking about the four literacies is to think of them as student goals. What motives or goals do adults have for attending ALBE courses?

Some want to further their work prospects — either to improve their chances of getting work or to learn the literacy skills they need for handling a new position or restructured workplace. Others want to develop themselves personally. Others want to engage more in community and social life. Others wish to take up further study or training.

Of course these motives are not mutually exclusive — it is a matter of emphasis, but they influence how adults respond to ALBE offerings. Students mainly interested in learning practical work skills may find little relevance in discussing abstract ideas, exploring personal attitudes or learning academic forms of thinking. By contrast, adults intent on ALBE as a 'second chance' may find a focus on everyday functional communication disappointing: they would rather learn History than learn to write resumes.

Student needs

However, although important, student goals must not be taken as the only determinant of ALBE courses. In the past, Adult Education tended to take adults motives at face value in the name of 'catering to students' expressed needs'.

An example

However, in recent times this smorgasbord approach has been rethought. To take a simple case: youth, especially males, are often very practically oriented. They think of work as physical work, as something you do with your body. So, they think of education and training as a matter of learning how to physically manipulate and deal with tools, machines, and physical processes.

The new workplace

Yet, the shift to a more high tech. industry and towards a more service oriented economy means work is becoming less a matter of physical skill and more a matter of social and intellectual skill. The ability to get along with others, the ability to work co-operatively in discussions and teams, the ability to empathise and understand others, the ability to systematically develop a new range of understandings — all of these are now crucial workplace skills. It is this shift in the nature of work that the Mayer Report has attempted to address, a shift that may be invisible to young males whose main sense of agency lies in the skilled fluent use of their bodies as tools or instruments.

From old to new

ALBE teachers running a course for such youth would probably structure their curriculum to begin with the students' perceptions of their needs and the workplace but gradually grafts on new perceptions and understandings. 'Starting from where students are at' does not mean 'leaving them there'.

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Literacy pedagogies

A final angle for thinking about the four literacies is to think of them in relation to four pedagogies that have historically formed ALBE.

Functional literacy

One pedagogical strand informing ALBE can be traced directly to the military. Right from World War 1 there has been concern over the literacy of conscripts entering the military. As warfare became more technological the need for literacy increased. But the form of this literacy is quite specific — it is what is often termed *functional literacy or procedural literacy*. It is the forms of reading and writing needed to locate and interpret manuals, procedures, instructions and to provide information via formatted forms and standardised reporting forms within hierarchically structured organisations. Much of the research into Adult Literacy in the USA, for example, is still conducted by (and for) the military. In Australia, on the other hand, the military has been less dominant in defining our field — Essay question: Diggers don't like hierarchy. Discuss!

Industry and government

However, because industry and modern governments use the same forms of organisation and technology as the military, it is no surprise that both industry and governments also focus their concern principally on functional literacy. Governments want subjects who can conform to the bureaucratic routines and processes crucial to modern government; subjects who can fill in census forms, tax forms, vote forms, enter into contracts, ….

Minimalist literacy

Thus, functional literacy is a minimalist version of literacy. It is the literacy needed to survive the everyday reading and writing tasks associated with modern bureaucratic organisations and high–tech. tools and technologies. As Mikulecky and others have pointed out, functional literacy does possess its own specificity — reading technical computer manuals is different from reading novels.

However, we should take functional literacy a stage further by tipping it over into the other three literacies. Thus, we can also teach students how bureaucracies function, how to assert their rights and entitlements or complaints and how to take advantage of bureaucratic processes rather than simply remain victims of the 'front counter'.

Personal growth literacy

Another pedagogy underpinning our teaching practices in ALBE is what is often known as *the personal growth or personal voice model*. The key notion in this pedagogic approach is the sense that adults students attending ALBE classes are alienated from the wider society in general and from their own experience in particular. According to this view, the most liberating and significant thing ALBE can do for its students is to assist them to reconnect them with their own experience so they regain a sense of agency, authenticity and dignity. As a result this approach 'facilitates' this process by providing students with pretexts and contexts through which they can explore personal meanings and articulate feelings and experiences that are significant to them. The goal of this view of language and literacy is to assist students to find their own unique personal voice, a voice arising out of the uniqueness of their lived experience.

The 80s

It is worth pointing out that this notion has degenerated during 'the therapeutic 80s' into the vapid notions of self–esteem, assertiveness, time management and communication skills. These are what you get when Literacy for Self Expression is disassembled and recompiled as Literacy for Practical Purposes. Little wonder many educators from adjacent educational fields curl their lip at the very mention of the word 'personal' and begin to mutter 'macrame' under their breath.

Romanticism and the Humanities

So, it is important to trace the lineage of this pedagogic approach in a bit more detail. This approach to literacy is linked to the central imperatives of the Humanities over the last 200 years or so. Crudely, we could say that at the beginning of the 19th Century there was a significant reaction against the conventionalism, ritualism, materialism and empiricism of 18th Century Europe. This reaction, known as Romanticism, rejected the idea that the only way we could relate to reality was through science and counterpoised the idea of 'Bildung' or self cultivation.

English

These ideas developed by Goethe, Schiller, Hegel and others entered English educational culture through Coleridge and others, and they have remained the guiding impulse within the Humanities right up until the most recent attack on them by Deconstruction and Poststructuralism. Basically, Romanticism was an attempt to forge a new image of human beings as neither simply abstract cognitive rule–following machines on the one hand nor mere physical bodies subject to the regimes of pain, pleasure and need on the other. Instead, Romanticism located human beings precisely at the intersection of these two realms — the sensuous and the abstract — with the cultural life–task of integrating them.

Thus, the guiding idea of the Humanities is that certain types of reading and writing are key contexts for reconciling these contradictions, that reading and writing are key settings in which to acknowledge and rework these personal and metaphysical tensions, thus shaping a more robust and meaningful sense of self.

Second chance education

Another pedagogy informing our current repetoire of pedagogies in the ALBE field is what we could call *second chance education*. This is centred on the idea that adults whose schooling was unsatisfactory or is no

longer adequate because of credentials inflation, have a right to return to study and upgrade their education and training.

Women and ALBE

This dimension of ALBE has been especially pushed into prominence by the women's movement and the entry of large numbers of women into the workforce. The 80s has seen many women in ALBE classes, however as we enter the 90s many men are now also turning up — voluntarily and involuntarily —to ALBE classes as their jobs are restructured or wiped out.

Critical literacy

Finally, a fourth strand informing ALBE as an educational field is what we could call *critical literacy*, a strand mainly associated with the writings and literacy work of Paulo Friere. The key concept in critical literacy is that adults already live within a cultural world and that literacy practices will inevitably articulate this cultural world or silence and delegitimate it. According to Friere, mainstream education necessarily expresses the culture of the dominant class in a society. So, to induct adults from subordinate classes or cultures into these dominant literacy practices will merely alienate them from their own cultures and train them to mimic the dominant culture.

Cultural identity and social justice

From this analysis, Friere concludes that literacy practitioners should use texts, classroom practices and pedagogic processes that empower adult students by assisting them to articulate their own sociocultural location and identity and their economic and political interests within oppressive nation states. This means literacy is inherently political and should be positioned as the consciousness raising practices of community movements intent on asserting cultural identity and achieving social justice. This concept of literacy as a medium for exploring and articulating cultural difference has been especially significant in social movements assembled around gender, race, ethnicity, and indigenous cultures.

Insert diagram

Conclusion

ALBE in the mid 90s is a network of spaces and places in which these traditions of pedagogy can meet and enrich one another through debate, conflict and dialogue. This collection, *Writing Our Practice*, is an attempt to give voice to the range of motives, values, stances, contexts, agendas, topics, students and settings that go to make up the spaces and places of ALBE in Victoria. The vitality and creativity of ALBE as a field will depend on the vitality and vigour of these debates, conflicts and dialogues. To read the following case studies is to enter into these debates and discussions.

Although you will find some instructional and procedural segments in what follows that can be adopted or adapted into your teaching, mostly you will meet other ALBE educators (like yourself) trying to give voice to their sense of themselves, their values, their relationships with their students; and to their efforts to make sense of their practice as an aspect of a committed praxis in shaping the realities and possibilities of the present and future.

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[1] This article is not a substitute for the description of the four literacies contained in the Framework volumes, *Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework: Draft Competence Statements for Adult Reading and Writing*, now redrafted and republished as "Conceptions of Reading and Writing" in Section 4, "Background Works" of the *CGEA*. Because what I say here is mainly a cycle of reflective variations or improvisations on the theme of 'the four literacies'; they will make more sense to those already familiar with existing descriptions of the four literacies. For those demanding more rigour, I have attempted a more academic exposition of the four literacies in "Framing the Field: Adult Literacies and the Future", *Teaching English Literacy: a Project of National Significance on the Preservice Preparation of Teachers for Teaching English Literacy*, Vol. 2, 1991, and for an earlier version, see "Adult Basic Education: New Directions for Curriculum", in *Australian Journal of Reading*, March 1990, G. Pancini, P. Moraitis & R. McCormack.

[2] I myself think of it in Foucaultian terms as foregrounding 'the relationship of the self to the self', as focusing on technologies of the self, as the institution of a reflective ethical self.*Technologies of the Self*. eds Luther Martin, Huck Gutman & Patrick Hutton London:Tavistock Publications, 1988.

[3] See E.D. Hirsch *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. Notice that many Australian conservatives (as distinct from economic rationists) also invoke literacy for knowledge under the descriptions of cultural literacy and academic excellence in their opposition to competency-based definitions of literacy and education.

[4] Lemke, J. (1989), "Making Text Talk", *Theory into Practice*, Vol xxviii, no 2, p 136.

[5] NB the specification of the Certificates relies on a definition of literacy tied to the written mode in order to make room for an oracy defined as the spoken mode, thus regressively replacing functional definitions of the literacies with a single essentialist definition in terms of medium.

[6] Olson, David & Janet Astington (1989) "Talking about Text: How literacy contributes to Thought", *Journal of Pragmatics*, p 711.

[7] This listing adduces such theorists as: Bakhtin, Foucault, Wittgenstein, Halliday, Habermas, Giddens, and Castoriadis.

[8] I have discussed the genre of public life at greater length in "ABE — Everywhere and Nowhere?" in *Adult Basic Education Resource and Information Service (ARIS) Bulletin*, 4:1, 1993

[9] See *Habermas and the Public Sphere* ed Craig Calhoun MIT 1992 for a number of articles re-examining the emergence and meaning of the bourgeois public sphere.

[10] See *Critical Literacy: politics, praxis and the postmodern* ed Colin Lankshear and Peter McLaren. State University of New York Press: Albany, 1993 for a collection focussed on these issues.

[11] This binary schema contrasting the coldness, inhumanity, anonymity, ritualised deadness, analytic technicality and alienation of the inauthentic literacy inflicted on us by 'them' versus the richness, wholeness, spontenaity, warmth, meaningfulness, uniqueness and creativity of 'our own' authentic literacy underpins much theorising in the literacy field. The four literacies has tried to acknowledge this tradition but contain its imperialism within the concept of Literacy for Self Expression.