Book Reviews

The title of Hilary Jank's book *Literacy and Power* is an intertextual nod to Norman Fairclough's groundbreaking *Language and Power*. It places literacy (and thus the classroom) rather than language at the centre, and goes to the heart of current debates about what is, and possibly always has been, a highly contested term. Janks says upfront that her book works against the dividing practices in the field, so this review will focus on how the book achieves this on several levels. As a critical linguist, words and naming are deeply important to her; the first sentence in the book makes the arresting observation:

> Many languages do not have a word for *literacy*: Sotho doesn't - neither do Xhosa, French or German. Do we need it? But having found a word for itself in a dominant language like English in the mid 16th C, it is born into trouble because it was born into a binary, to give a positive meaning to its Other, 'illiteracy'. So the word literacy itself always works to divide, and to split; it always draws a line, because illiteracy lurks on the other side.

Janks points to how, from this founding binary in the English language, various different versions of literacy 'wars' emerge, that keep reinventing themselves in either-or debates about whether literacy is a cognitive skill or a social practice (she refuses this binary, and argues that it is *both* skill *and* social practice); whether we should teach bottom-up or top-down, genre or process, whole language or phonics, the literary canon or popular culture. Instead she advocates a four-part model that takes into account a range of different approaches and scholarly takes on the critical, which she argues are profoundly interdependent. They revolve around four elements: domination, diversity, access and design, each the focus of a separate chapter. I have read journal articles where Janks sets out this interdependence model, but to have the model unfold in the course of this book, with rich examples and full discussion of how this interdependence works, is complex, convincing and enabling. In an engaging final chapter she moves beyond the model, acknowledging how critical literacy rests on an essentially logocentric and rational view of language, and looks

tentatively at what critical literacy might look like beyond reason, in the realm of the unconscious, desire and play.

There are two other ways in which this book works against the dividing practices in the field. The first is its refusal to separate practice from theory. It is vividly illustrated with activities that eloquently embody theory. This is a particular gift of the author's. The illustrations criss-cross time and space, from London in the mid-1970s to Adelaide in Australia, to Atteridgeville, but the sense-making base is always South Africa, from the shored up certainties of the apartheid regime to the much more complex terrain in which we are currently, where the need for the critical is just as important. This book is rich in offerings for practice, from a series of provocative questions about something as mundane as a cellphone, to tables for the analysis of ideology in texts, stories and rich descriptions of practice.

The last refusal of the dividing practices, and perhaps the most significant, is the author's inclusion of the personal as a thread that runs through the book. One of the dividing practices of the academic field is its tendency to split the head off from the heart - and from the body too - and she refuses both. A particularly satisfying part of the book is towards the end where she reflects on how what she calls 're-design' work is far easier spoken about than achieved, and how some classroom innovations have not been sustained. In struggling for an answer, she recognizes how resistant our embodied ways of being are to change, and offers her experience of using the Alexander Technique as a therapy to unlearn her own embodied ways developed from long hours of critical literacy work on the computer.

The book offers a mapping of a sphere for action that is thoughtful, hopeful and profoundly practical.

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This publication of an edited collection of commissioned papers by invited scholars on the future of literacy studies is timely, given the urgent need to improve literacy in schools and institutions of higher learning in South Africa, and elsewhere. Before briefly discussing each chapter, I would like to highlight four key issues that struck me as particularly relevant to the local situation.

Firstly, while I applaud the significant work done by New Literacy Studies (NLS) scholars to make visible the out-of-school literacies of children and adults, I also welcome the call from numerous contributors in this collection for NLS researchers to return to educational settings, in order to better understand the multiple ways in which written language mediates learning and assessment. Secondly, some of the concepts afforded by the lens of NLS such as literacy *networks, sponsors and brokers* can be better employed to shift the dominant debates and practices that still situate literacy in narrow, technical ways in South Africa. This could have particular importance in impoverished and overcrowded schools, where we need to construct ways of increasing literacy, and ways of making better use of communal resources and approaches, where these exist. Thirdly, teachers and researchers need to take up the challenge afforded by new technologies and to address the wide range of technology-related skills that young people bring with them to the classrooms. So, too, we should examine the ways in which new technologies can deepen the divide of the haves and have-nots. Snyder reminds us that simply providing the technology will not transform literacy education, let alone equip students with the necessary skills and agency to operate in the 21st century. Rather, the whole ecology of the school needs to be transformed, which includes how teachers are trained and valued. My final point refers to the influencing of public discourses: What is highlighted is the urgent need for educators and researchers to actively shape and mediate public opinion on matters of education in a moral and responsible manner.

Having identified what stood out for me, I now offer a brief review of each chapter.

Brian Street's opening chapter, 'Future of Social Literacies', immediately addresses the focus of the book. He provides the reader with an historical

account of his deepening understanding of the complexities involved in identifying what being literate means, and of the need to eschew crude notions of literacy as simply technical skills, or of literacy practices as only those of the West or of urban societies. He further explains the premises on which the ideological model is based and how the ways that people address reading and writing are always rooted in conceptions of their own 'knowledge, identity and being'. Street briefly outlines his work with colleagues at three distinct research sites and suggests that the lens of literacy as a social practice allows researchers a more nuanced understanding of literacy concerns at these sites. One site is his work with academic literacy among a group of English for Academic Purposes (EAL/EAP) university students. Another is a development project working with adult literacy and numeracy trainers, to train them in ethnographic research approaches that allow them to value the local literacy practices their trainees bring with them. The third site examines how new literacy studies and multimodality approaches can complement each other to develop more powerful ways of understanding literacy.

David Barton's chapter highlights the textually mediated world we live in and the intricate link between literacy, identity and power. He argues that understanding what people do with texts and what texts do to people allows us a deeper and more nuanced understanding of significant social issues and the ways in which people interact with texts to make sense of their worlds. He provides an historical account of the various contexts in which new literacy studies have been applied and highlights the importance of the ethnographic research methods used. He foregrounds the critical engagement with public discourses of education and the application of broader notions of what literacy and learning entail, in his identifying of areas of future research.

In her chapter, titled 'Writing Over Reading: New Directions in Mass Literacy', Deborah Brandt argues that much greater focus is now being placed on people's scribal skills, due to the increased demand on writing that the new communication technologies have enabled. She succinctly argues the need for a deeper comprehension of the cultural and political heritages of reading on the one hand, and writing on the other. In illustration, writing from the USA, Brandt contrasts her interviewees' pleasurable memories of reading with their more troubled memories of writing, which are often laced with recollected feelings of humiliation and embarrassment. She comments that reading and writing, and their study, take place within 'profoundly tacit cultural regimes' including long-standing patterns of sponsorship which have, over time influenced, how the two practices of reading and writing interrelate. For example, reading literacy has been more strongly sponsored in early schooling than writing, while in work sites, writing has been given prominence.

In chapter four, Catherine Kell presents what she refers to as a transcontextual approach to exploring literacy across space and time. She addresses critical questions around the problem of framing of one's research as local when it happens across various social spaces and across time. Where does the boundary of the local end and how does a place-bound framing of what is local constrain our understanding? Kell uses examples of her own research conducted in South Africa to share methods and theoretical concepts that enabled her to address this question.

Chapter five, by Roz Ivanic, deals with literacy practices in vocational and further educational settings. She begins by clarifying what she understands by literacy practices and warns that the notion has become too loosely applied. The examples taken from research in vocational settings pick up on concerns discussed in the previous chapter. Like Kell, Ivanic explores ways in which literacy practices located in a particular context can be resourcefully deployed in another. She argues that practices cannot be recontextualised wholesale (say e.g., from home to school) because the 'social domain changes the practice', and therefore a more detailed way of defining literacy practices is required. To assist scholars in differentiating between literacy events and literacy practices, Ivanic provides a detailed table describing the commonalities and differences of the elements that constitute the two. This table is an excellent tool for literacy researchers.

Any significant discussion of the future of literacy studies would be incomplete without referring to the huge shifts that have taken place because of digital technologies and electronic media. In chapter six, Mark Warschauer briefly outlines how using an NLS lens has enabled insightful studies on meaning-making with new technologies. However, he argues that more is needed to better understand how issues of power influence digital practices, particularly among low socio-economic groups. He suggests that an ideological model of digital literacy is required. An area he singles out as being under-researched is that of the 'blogosphere' (blogging). He also recommends that more research be conducted on technology use in schools as well as the design and implementation of technologies that facilitate assessment.

Ilana Snyder examines reasons why print-oriented approaches to teaching literacy still dominate and stresses the need for educators and researchers to take seriously the preparation of young people to take part fully in a world filled by new technologies. Writing from Australia, she says that despite the promise of computers, a technological revolution has not happened in schools, despite the huge investment being made. Her argument is important for the SA context where some educational leaders present electronic whiteboards as the panacea for all literacy problems. She also discusses how public discourses

can reinforce the binaries established between book literacy and digital literacies, by over-glorifying books and by warning of social evils brought about by social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace. Snyder concludes by stressing the need to find ways to integrate print and digital literacy effectively.

Chapter eight, by Doris Warriner, looks at the growing trend of transnational and transmigrational studies, and how transnational literacy studies can provide a window into local-global interfaces and flows. The notion of literacy's ability to 'travel, integrate, and endure' is indeed a fascinating one and it opens up many possibilities of research.

In Chapter nine, Lesley Farrell focuses on literacy research in work settings and explores links between literacy and the so-called knowledge economy: Global economic activities require that people have a repertoire of literacy practices, she says, which enable them to partake in both the local economy as well as in the global one, because of the networked nature of globalised production. Farrell argues that workplace sites, where numerous literacy practices are enacted, produced, reproduced and contested have been under-researched and that the methodologies and notions associated with the NLS have the potential to make visible the micro-processes of the globalization of work. The relationships between people and the organisations they work for are often textually mediated. Issues of discipline, regulation and surveillance often occur through texts such as registers, timing sheets and reports. Such record-keeping as part of regulatory regimes could be relevant to South African schools and teacher unions and is an area that requires far more understanding and attention.

The final chapter, on 'Morality, Literacy and the Media', examines the potential of the media to constitute moral public spaces. Glynda Hull and Mark Nelson argue that multi-modal texts construct opportunities for 'respectful, intelligent and compassionate communication across differences' and that the 'limitless quality of connectivity' afforded by new technologies across personal, linguistic, geographical and political divisions needs to be further explored.

To conclude, the theoretical and methodological insights provided by this collection, as well as the critiques and fine-tuning of salient aspects of the NLS, make the book highly valuable for those interested in literacy research. Useful too are the clear identifications of areas for future research.

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