Part 1  

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Living (in) literacy(ies) in new times  

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Travel note: Life’s journey takes us to many unexpected places. My journey into language and literacy education led to a border crossing I had not anticipated. Through a happenstance meeting of minds, I came to see how I had reduced language and literacy to a tool of communication—a linguistic structure of technical correctness—that was and still is a common, unquestioned stance of many language arts and second language teachers. Through an ongoing and difficult struggle to free myself of a comfort zone I had come to know so well, I entered rich and troubling borderlands where mechanical skills of reading and writing, and living processes of languages and literacy(ies) dwell in complexities that are not without conflict and confusion. This chapter is written out of, and beyond, the borders of such a dwelling place.

Literate societies enable the free exchange of text-based information and provide an array of opportunities for lifelong learning.  


Becoming literate, as a broad life skill in linguistic, social, cultural, and economic terms, sits at the centre of this important declaration, and those of us engaged
in improving the conditions for basic education in Pacific communities need to take heed. As the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006: Literacy for Life* (UNESCO, 2005:135) indicates, ‘it is difficult to separate the right to literacy from the right to education or the benefits of literacy from those of education’. Simply put, literacy matters. Our challenge as Pacific educators is to determine how best to address literacy learning in today’s classrooms.

New times are upon us. Profound and fundamental changes in forms of education designed for industrial times are being made as we move into a world of high technology, raising complex and often contradictory crosscurrent questions for education—literacy in particular. In these new times, a view of literacy classrooms around the world captures the shift in emphasis. This includes technical approaches (phonics, drill and skill, look and say), progressive approaches (whole language, process writing, ‘authentic’ literacy), post-progressive approaches (genre and functional linguistic perspectives, intersections of multi-literacies and multi-modality), and post-modern approaches such as border pedagogy.

Such global shifting works toward ‘privileg[ing] meaning over mechanical skills, with ‘meaning’ seen much more in terms of sociocultural processes than as private internal cognitive states or events’ (Lankshear, 2000: 3). Privileging ‘meaning’ from the stance of situated communication requires us to re-think ‘what meanings are, where meanings come from, how meanings get fixed, what authorizes particular meanings’ (ibid). However, these critical and innovative characteristics of literacy seem to be somewhat inactive within a broader push for a literacy economy that brings together education and employment (Spring, 1998).

How do we make sense of literacy in Pacific schools in these complex times? In the introduction to *Educational Planning in the Pacific*, Teasdale and Puamau (2005: xii) call for educators to ‘blend’ the best of the global and local in re-thinking Pacific education in ‘new and culturally appropriate ways’. It is in this spirit that I draw on global perspectives of literacy as a way of contributing to the larger project of reconceptualising education in Oceania.
Living (in) literacy(ies)

In schools, language continues to be the main medium through which literacy events take place. While some view language and literacy learning primarily in technical terms, a Canadian colleague takes an ecological stance and reminds us that learning (in) language wholly requires:

... [e]nvisaging language, not as an inert set of instruments that are at our beck and call, but as something that houses us, something we are in, something which responds to us and something to which we are responsible. We are “in” the community of language. And once we envisage language as a place in which we dwell, the emphasis of whole language on “communication” becomes immediately obvious, communication being the generative case of community. Also, understood as a “community,” language is understood to have a life and a history and a wisdom that both goes beyond the individual and that needs the individual (“the new blood,” to use an archaic term common to the initiation of the new ones into the community) for its own renewal. As a sustainable community or place, it includes both the old/established and the young/new and provides a place for each to find its source and limit, its comfort, in the other (Jardine, 2000: 57).

Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975: 404) similarly argues that ‘[l]anguage has its true being only in conversation, in the exercise of understanding: between people…. It is a living process in which a community of life is lived out’.

In new times, this sense of language and literacy as community/communication is taking hold. Understanding language and literacy as spaces of vital and vibrant intergenerational practices pluralises them—languages and literacy(ies). Multiple forms of language and literacy are created and recreated, as readers and writers constitute meaning in everyday community and communication events. Our ability to remain open to, and work within, new languages and literacy(ies) emerging from such ongoing generative efforts ensures the sustainability of the living communities and communication systems in which we dwell.

Within the multiple languages of the Pacific, this stance on languages and literacy(ies) is more profoundly felt. Understanding bi/multi-lingualism as a
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dialectic and complementary exchange between worlds, international curriculum scholar and friend Ted T. Aoki (2005: 240) offers this: ‘[l]earners of a second language do not alter their relationship to the world, but rather enrich and extend it through the world of the foreign language’. Such a view of language and literacy highlights the contextual aspect of meaning-making—of living (in) literacy(ies)—which technical or scientific understandings of language and literacy often neglect.

On the need to understand what is going on in literacy

‘Out-of-school’
In new times, a fundamental shift in the way we work has been triggered by an abundant access to technology globally. Recently, we have seen enormous investments in technology (connectivity through undersea cables and satellites, affordable computers, a proliferation of software—chat rooms, email, text messaging, search engines) creating an environment where language is being altered and intellectual work can be delivered from anywhere.

Travel note: Recently, when I was in the Philippines, it seemed everyone had a cell phone. But, you rarely saw the phone near their ear, it was always in their hands, fingers actively engaged in encoding messages. I asked a colleague about text messaging and she said, ‘You leave out the vowels as much as possible.’ A system within a system—first you have to know where the vowels go and then you systematically remove them. An emerging new literacy practice.

Through migration and international exchange—where people of difference occupy space—communities and communication edge each other in new, restless and sometimes disorienting ways. Homi Bhabha (1994:1) locates the question of culture in a moment of transit—‘where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity’. Gloria Anzaldúa (1999),

Text message:

| cn u mt tnght | nd wrk on | prjct du fri |
growing up between cultures—the Indian Mexican and the colonised Anglo in her own land—writes out of the many complex borderlands of her life. Trinh Minh-ha (1991), a Vietnamese in America, writes from the richness of a hybrid place—where edges overlap, coincide and, at times, conflict. And a student, a Japanese national studying in Canada, refuses to translate the untranslatable. New language practices are emerging from the borderlands, hybrid places, and the untranslatable.

One day, my phone rang. It was my best friend’s mother. She spoke in low tones, so I felt uneasy, and I instinctively knew that she was going to tell me something bad. 予感が的中し, she told me that her daughter had passed away that night. I was shocked and hardly able to believe my ears.

Ways of ‘reading’ wor(l)ds are also changing. While print has dominated the scene of communication for a long time, there is renewed interest in how other modes of representation—visual, audio, gestural, kinaesthetic, three-dimensional—play key roles in communicative practices (Pahl & Rowsell 2006). For example, on page 7, an image called *bwaninin te reirei* (the completion of education) by Pacific scholar and artist, Teweiariki Teaero, is used to communicate deep-felt meaning—meaning I make sense of in my own way as I bring to the reading other textual encounters I have had, including those with the artist himself. In acts of close reading, Wolfreys (2000: vii) offers:

... what is read is only a momentary recognition. It is perhaps a fleeting response to a certain pulse or rhythm...what is read is never wholly read. Something remains, something is left behind, something is missed altogether, something other is still yet to be read.
And so I read *bwaninin te reirei* (the completion of education) in ‘momentary recognition’ as ‘a fleeting response to a certain pulse’.

Enter at your own risk
the double-folds of different worlds
swollen with complexities
of imposed salvational urges and
delightful surprises in discovering the riches of the other

I read into this time/space of difference
readings of Homi Bhabha, Trinh Minh-ha and Gloria Anzaldúa nearby
listening to the shadows of the unknown and unexpected
witnessing the newness emerging in the
border zones of
connected languaging and shifting identities—
  fractured tongues and diaspora—
as postcolonial relations of Oceania life.

Always already working the overlaps, the contours, detours,
roadblocks, unmarked paths of our lives
footprints disappear reappear… yet the textual markings remain.

In the US and Europe, youths are using slam poetry—an intermixing of issues, poetry writing and performance—to speak. Composed and performed poetry set around social, political, and economic issues gives voice to youth (see *The Honolulu Advertiser*, Friday, April 21, 2006: 24). It is a multi-modal practice that has sparked communication, at least for some youth, in powerful ways that traditional learning has not. Personal websites where youth promote themselves, using layout and other visual elements of meaning are, for those with access to technology, intensive after-school activities.

The above serve as a few reminders that the way we ‘do’ everyday literacy is changing. New work contexts are emerging in which literacy is taking place. Outsourcing,
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one dimension of these new times, is a good example of this. Freidman (2006:6-7), in *The World is Flat*, tells of a company using trademark software to parcel out work. They ‘send one part to Boston, one part to Bangalore [India], and one part to Beijing, making it easy for anyone to do remote development’. Software takes apart, distributes, collects and re-assembles the project. And no one had to leave home.

Borrowing from Brian Street (2001: 2), I use the terms, ‘new orders—work, communicative, epistemological’ to describe the wider context in which literacy work is now taking place. The new work order is centred on the globalisation of production and distribution of work. It requires of its workforce flexibility, adaptability and teamwork—the ability to collaborate and negotiate on the development of ‘products’.

The new communicative order attempts to level out an emphasis on print and speech literacy and recognises key roles of other modes of communication, such as visual, movement and 3-D. A literate future includes not only teamwork literacies such as text messaging, but also competencies with iconic/sign systems such as those used in advertising. Literacy, as community and communication, is now understood as a wider range of semiotic systems that cut across reading, writing and speech. Hence, the use of the term ‘literacies’ recognises multiple ways of reading, knowing and communicating the world.

The new epistemological order comes out of a crisis of knowledge. A shift from seeking (and claiming) one universal ‘truth’ to valuing multiple ways of knowing has taken place. In parts of the world, different ‘knowledges’ have become commodities—textbooks, instructional resources produced and bought and sold in neat packages. In other places, collaborative efforts in the interests of equity and justice are taking hold (e.g. critical literacies, reflective practices, writing out of spaces of difference and identity). Such practices keep the global at bay, giving the local room to breathe and interact with the global on its own terms.
‘In-school’

Bourdieu (1991) claimed that school is a microcosm of the dominant culture. If so, we need to ask what literacy practices are being reinvented and perpetuated through education in Pacific schools? Consider the sidebar text below. What literacy do you see? What literacy do you hear? What are your assumptions about literacy? Are you looking for the writer’s logic, objectivity and rationality of thought? Do you depend on only linguistic cues for meaning? Did you assume the text is addressed to no one in particular, thus making the author essentially anonymous (it does not matter who the author is)? Is the meaning you made precisely what is represented in the sentences? Is the visual for decoration? ‘Yes’ responses to these questions relate assumptions to what Brian Street (1984, 1995) calls an autonomous model of literacy where literacy is understood as a technology and reading as a technical skill.

Reading is a social act. Knowing who the authors are and the context in which it was written (two eight-year-old girls co-authored it as part of their science project on fish in a local lagoon), we understand what they are trying to accomplish and appreciate the complexity. When we detach meaning from its social context, reading becomes technical; we attend to the text’s deficiencies. From a social perspective, even the solitary writer, by the very fact of using words, draws on a shared, social property—a system of communication that is contextually enacted within local and global communities. By producing such a text, these students are continuously referring to other texts they have experienced, engaging in a ‘funds of knowledge’ exchange (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). And, by sharing it with their teacher, they are deciding that this text, including the visuals, has some worth (social value). In turn, the teacher reading this text is affected by the literacy practices within the particular community to which s/he belongs (e.g. the assumptions s/he makes about literacy).
The reader or audience (imagined or real) plays a powerful role in the word and image choices the writer makes. Viewing literacy as the interaction between reader and writer acknowledges another social dimension. As communication, literacy becomes more than technical acts of word decoding and grammatical precision. As writers and readers ‘work the text’, they work and re-work who they are (their identities) in their continuous negotiation of meaning. In this pragmatic view of literacy, students not only need to understand the linguistic forms used in a text, but they must also possess, and appropriately apply, background knowledge (in many cases from other texts) and engage in different kinds of reciprocal exchange.

Assumptions teachers make about literacy significantly impacts what goes on in the classroom, the dominant assumption being that meaning resides in ‘the very words of the text’, such as the sidebar example above from an international student implies; another opens to a much greater variety of reciprocal and generative exchanges. Such openness leads to a shift from the autonomous model to a more pragmatic one with emphasis on the social character of literacy, where text is viewed as a social instrument, readers and writers as embodying social identities, and literacy skills as involving contextual sensitivity and social interaction. We must give serious thought to the assumptions that we make about literacy and once again ask ourselves: What literacy practices are being reinvented and perpetuated through education in Pacific schools?

Travel note: As I journey through the Pacific, I witness new literacy(ies) practices emerging in these new times. Earlier this year, I met students at the only internet café on one of the islands I visited. They were sending messages, co-creating personal websites while my impatience with the slow connection ends my time on the internet after checking just three emails. They seem not bothered with time as they chat and create community in person and on the web. The next morning, I enter classrooms where these students learn and find an ‘old’ literacy prominent in schools—in front of them worksheets they must do independently, silently, without community/communication. Disparities resonate between in- and out-of-school literacy practices.
Futures-oriented literacies in school

Rather than stand in support of a particular approach to literacy in Queensland, Australia, Luke and Freebody (1990) have taken a different turn. They argue for the inclusion of four types of literacy practices readers must engage in: code breaker, text participant, text user and text analyst. As code breaker, the reader works with the technical and linguistic forms of the written language engaging with the code (e.g. alphabetic principle, concepts about print, decoding the message). As text participant, the reader is activating his/her background knowledge (e.g. local and world knowledge, knowledge of text types and their structure) through connections with the text. This is where structure, content and cultural/contextual knowledge meet in various (dis)orientations (see Shirley Brice Heath's 1983 account of diverse readers, different reader roles and meaning-making). As text user, the reader participates in the social activities surrounding the text. For example, children interacting around a story that is read to them, learning what questions they can ask, and when, during story time. As text analyst, the reader reads critically, looking for evidence of the assumptions being made by the author and how, intentionally or not, they are being used to manipulate readers.

Each of these reader roles highlights different components of literacy. Luke and Freebody suggest that, while code breaking is a necessary component, i.e. readers need to be able to do it, that alone is not sufficient for readers to develop effective literacy practices. Pauline Gibbons, another Australian, concurs and suggests students need more than code-breaking skills ‘[f]or the successful reading of authentic texts in real social contexts—and the importance of knowing the code does not justify its teaching in contexts devoid of any real meaning’ (Gibbons 2002: 81). Instead, teachers must engage readers in what others call ‘… “higher-order” or “authentic” literacy practices through “[g]enerous amounts of close, purposeful reading, re-reading, writing, and talking”’ (Schmoker, 2006: 53). In a futures-oriented literacy programme, learning outcomes beyond decoding are key.

Work in Australia, north America, and western Europe has focused on literacy learning through the perspective of Russian researcher Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) work—a socio-cultural perspective of learning. Learning, it is argued, is the result
of participation with others in external dialogue around goal-directed activity. Gibbons (2002: 10) draws on the metaphor of scaffolding to describe language and literacy learning:

Scaffolding is thus the temporary assistance by which a teacher helps a learner know how to do something, so that the learner will later be able to complete a similar task alone. It is future-oriented: as Vygotsky has said, what a child can do with support today, she or he can do alone tomorrow.

For the Pacific, scaffolding holds promise in that it seems to share similar characteristics to learning in oral cultures. At the same time, its ‘apprenticeship’ elements require high levels of teacher knowledge and skills in the language and content being learned.

A futures-oriented literacy situates itself in goal-directed activity or interdisciplinary/integrated projects, not unlike what was described earlier in this chapter as the ‘new work order’. In learning, students are given various textual experiences within a variety of contexts. They learn ways of handling the communicative requirements of specific situations; they work with groups of students of distributed expertise; they collaborate within and between groups; and they engage in team work that includes the social skills to know when and how to lead and to know when and how to listen.

In a futures-oriented literacy programme of effective global literacy practices, four interlocking dimensions of literacy are embedded in project work:

- technical/linguistic forms or code of the language
- social practices of literacy performance
- resources to match culture, context, and content
- critical ways of untangling textual intentions, however explicit or implicit.

We need to ask if these are being practised in Pacific classrooms and in what ways they are appropriate (or not) for Pacific literacy learners.
Project-based learning

Project-based learning is not new. However, a resurgence in integrated learning is taking place, thanks in part to the growing need to attend to language across the curriculum. For example, recent developments in mathematics education highlight the need to teach the ‘register’ or specialised language of mathematics in second language education where support for English learners is needed in all disciplines. It is also thanks to the attention given to the new work order. Various forms of project-based learning can be found around the world. Yet Queensland, Singapore and Nauru are highlighted as exemplars of creating and implementing, albeit at different stages, project-based or ‘rich task’ curricula that embed language and literacy learning in meaningful ways. (For detailed information see Queensland’s New Basics Project at http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/).

_Nauru_—teachers gather to develop curricular activities and resources linked to community issues and the curriculum framework. Authentic, relevant, rich tasks hold meaning for the communities of Nauru, for their teachers and their students. Curriculum development is hard work—language issues, cultural concerns and content decisions are not an easy mix, and it requires teachers to have ‘deep’ content and language knowledge and pedagogy. A few examples of specific ‘rich’ projects in classrooms from around the world are described briefly below.

_American Samoa_—a group of students collaborates to document Samoan history using technology, primary and secondary research, archival photos, role-play captured on video, and voiceover to tell a story of Samoa at the turn of the century using DVD.

_West coast of Canada_—a group of indigenous students collects stories from their elders on the use of English in early colonial days. They share what they have learned and then each writes their own auto-ethnography (e.g. a critical writing back of one’s life experiences or those of family members). Throughout the project they offer process and content support to each other.

_Peru_—a group of students participates in a service learning project. They teach games to elders in their village and elders teach games to them. The materials are created, games are recorded, and game packages are exchanged. In the same
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project, students collect cultural stories from the elders, record and illustrate them and reproduce them for use with younger children. Students learn how to animate the stories before telling them to the children and elders. Similar rich tasks occur with the ‘games exchange’ between students.

Hawai‘i—a group of students creates art as participants in a programme called Image-to-word. With their teacher facilitating, they create images important to them and these are then written about in preparation for display and discussion in local hospices/hospitals. The students meet with the patients to discuss the artwork and ideas.

What is important to note here is that there is a shift happening in language education, from language as a subject of study to language as subject and medium of learning, (various approaches include language and content, content-based language learning, sheltered instruction). Project-based learning capitalises on this interest in language across the curriculum, as language, content, process and product outcomes help structure these integrated activities. Project-based learning reminds us that all teachers are language and content teachers. It encourages us to step away from the segregated acts of discipline learning that we have been engaged in for a long time and think more holistically about learning.

Approaching learning through project-based tasks places living and learning (in) literacy at the centre of student work. As students engage in holistic learning, they are encouraged to use literacy practices in multiple and contextually appropriate ways, recognising the interdependency and interconnectedness of texts for communication within the community and beyond. Within this milieu, encoding and decoding print are part of the learning activities, not ends in themselves. In such communicative exchanges, multi-modality challenges the status quo, and print literacy becomes one of many ways to communicate, as illustrated in the examples from Samoa and Hawai‘i. By inviting students to be responsive to the generosity of multi-literacies, we must take responsibility to call into question ways we ask students to demonstrate their learning. Multiple choice testing contradicts the very notion of project-based learning. Ministries and classroom teachers must re-think assessment practices, seeking new and innovative ways that value different ways of knowing.
Rich tasks are taking hold in Queensland, Singapore and Nauru. Pockets of project-based learning happen at teachers’ will worldwide. Those involved believe education framed in this way prepares their students for the new work order globally. In the Pacific, does this holistic approach to learning have the potential to prepare students for a productive life both locally and globally?

**Learning in more than one language**

Language and content approaches in Finland, Canada, the UK, New Zealand, the USA and now the Philippines are concerned with how knowledge gets structured, that is, how scientists classify and describe, how mathematicians conjecture and problem-solve, how value statements and time/order sequencing gets done. They approach curricular work by asking what the language demands of the curriculum are. For example, a grade four class is learning about ants—they observe them every day as they travel in familiar patterns across the classroom. These English learners draw what they see and then write their words next to the images, making conjectures about the predictability of the patterns of movement. In asking students to observe, draw and communicate, teachers not only need to recognise what language resources are required but be prepared to support and extend those resources as part of the learning.

A student may benefit from communicating in his/her first language, learning from the teacher the commonalities and differences between the first language and English so that appropriate structures and vocabulary in both languages can be strengthened (Hornberger, 2003). Using this approach, the teacher skilfully uses both languages to reinforce conceptual understanding, and linguistic and multi-modal competencies. This is another reminder that teachers in all disciplines should be able to address the specialised linguistic and academic needs of diverse learners and disciplines.

In the USA, August & Shanahan’s (2006) *Developing literacy in second-language learners: report of the national literacy panel on language-minority children and youth* highlights a number of research-based findings:

- English learners benefit from the same explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension that native speakers need
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- oral proficiency is of critical importance to literacy development for English learners
- first language proficiency (oral and print) facilitates English literacy learning
- current assessments do not adequately determine English learners’ literacy strengths and needs
- language experiences at home impact English literacy learning at school, but little research is available on the role of other sociocultural variables in literacy achievement.

For Pacific contexts and cultures, the role of oral proficiency in both the first language and English is reassuring. Storytelling and other oral communicative practices predominate in local communities. The research findings above strongly suggest that these practices must be embedded in meaningful learning experiences in classrooms (e.g. retelling, reader’s theatre, slam poetry, oral presentations). Teachers are encouraged to integrate rich oral language tasks within the curriculum, recognising the value of oral proficiency in and of itself, as well as its impact on English literacy development.

Recent developments in the USA have also capitalised on research in sheltered instruction (providing explicit language support in content areas) and comprehension for English learners. Two professional development models around English learners are taking hold. One, the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (http://www.siopinstitute.net/), highlights, among other things, the importance of language objectives in the content classroom. The other, Expediting Reading Comprehension for English Language Learners, addresses language across the curriculum with an emphasis on vocabulary and comprehension strategies and advocates for the formation of teacher learning communities at school sites (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, in press).

Project-based learning and learning in more than one language help us re-think traditional teaching and assessment practices, encouraging us to draw on alternative ways that value the complexity that diverse learners bring to the classroom. As educators interested in futures-oriented literacy education, we must build on this diversity and difference, involving students in authentic problem-posing and problem-solving activities that extend intellectual and literacy engagement and are meaningful to them and their communities.
Travel note: Journeys through global language and literacy practices in new times bring me to the Pacific, to islands where the local and global have already met. Outside of school, I experience pockets of community/communication where the local and the foreign enmesh to combine and interact in new practices that hold a vitality all their own—where the untranslatable refuses translation, where new possibilities of expression materialise. The borders of local and global languages and literacies are (e)merging—full of the vibrancy and life found within multiple and complex border crossings. These are the experiences students bring to school—already a ‘blending’ of the local and global—already at work in renewal and regeneration of living (in) languages and literacy/ies.

References


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