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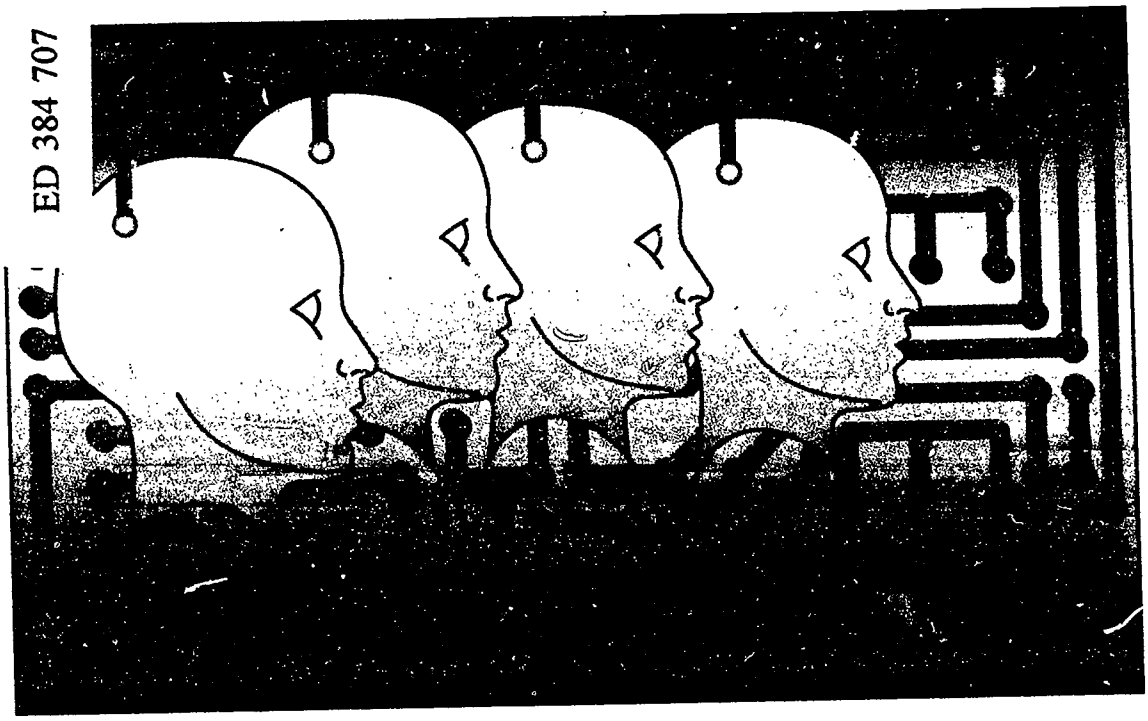
ABSTRACT

This book is part of the study materials for the distance education course, Language and Literacies: Contexts and Challenges in the Workplace, in the Open Campus Program at Deakin University. It contains five essays about literacies in the workplace. The "Introduction" (Mike Brown) discusses the following topics: literacies in the workplace: competing discourses in TAFE curriculum; the competency agenda; planning and competency-based training (CBT); reviewing a self-paced professional development package on CBT; flexible learning; and discourses for a democratic curriculum. The essay "Literacies, Workplaces and the Demands of New Times" (Allan Levett, Colin Lankshear) develops the case that workplace literacy is a distinctive facet of adult literacy which in turn is part of lifelong education. The following topics are examined in "Fears, Fantasies and Futures in Workers' Literacy" (Peter O'Connor): developing a critical theory of workers' education, the context for workers' literacy, individual skills for individual problems, neo-Fordism and the Shamrock theory, economic rationalism, and a critical workers literacy. "Language Learning and the New Industry Context: Issues of Language and Power" (Crina Virgona) addresses the following: English language teaching practice, language theory as a corollary to teaching practice, Fairclough's approach and the relationship between language and power, and industrial cultures and their training implications. The following topics are discussed in "'Just Like Farmland and Goldmines': Workplace Literacies in an Era of Long-Term Unemployment" (Rosie Wickert, Mike Baynham): the context for workplace literacies in new times, the theoretical underpinnings of the "new literacy studies," and investigations of literacy practices in context. All five essays contain bibliographies. (MN)



LITERACIES AND THE WORKPLACE

A COLLECTION OF ORIGINAL ESSAYS

INTRODUCTION BY MIKE BROWN

EAE646 LANGUAGE AND LITERACIES:
CONTEXTS AND CHALLENGES IN THE WORKPLACE

LITERACIES AND THE WORKPLACE: A COLLECTION OF ORIGINAL ESSAYS

INTRODUCTION BY MIKE BROWN

Deakin University

This book has been produced as part of the study materials for EAE646 *Language and Literacies: Contexts and Challenges in the Workplace*, which is one of the units offered by the Faculty of Education in Deakin University's Open Campus Program. It has been prepared for the unit team, whose members are:
Mike Brown
Sally Leavold
Doris Tate
Steve Wright

The study materials include:
*Literacies and the Workplace: A Collection of Original Essays**
Literacies and the Workplace: A Reader
J. Newcombe, *Literacy at Work: The Workplace Basic Education Project Model of Delivery**

* These books may be purchased from the Faculty of Education, Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria, Australia 3217.
Enrolled students also receive a course guide.

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CONTENTS

SERIES INTRODUCTION

The nature and purpose of education in the workplace has been the subject of much debate in Australia in recent years. While the vagaries of local and international competition have led many firms to reconsider the role of their workforce and the training requirements this entails, governments have been equally keen to adapt existing education systems to the perceived needs of industry. Leading union bodies have been distinguished in this debate by their pro-active role, outlining the path by which a reconstructed industrial climate can win the nation a new place in the world economy.

The study materials of which this volume is a part explore the approaches to learning currently modelled within industry. In the process the question inevitably arises as to whether existing orientations and practices are in the best interests of the various stakeholders in the workplace.

The arguments developed in these volumes address themselves to a range of contemporary issues in industrial education. To date, prevailing approaches have rested upon narrow, instrumentalist notions of learning; in their different ways, the writers have set out to challenge this orthodoxy. In doing so, they highlight the silences—on questions of gender, class or ethnicity—that underpin the behaviourist outlook still dominant in the world of training.

In preparing these study materials, the course team has sought to address issues that are of fundamental concern to those involved in the complex and demanding field of workplace learning. It is hoped that, in its own modest way, the pedagogy we have developed can serve to exemplify a different notion of what industrial education might become.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Mike Baynham works at the University of Technology, Sydney, where he teaches on the ABE and TESOL programs and is Director of the Centre for Language and Literacy. Before coming to Australia in 1989, he worked for many years as a teacher and organiser in Adult Basic Education and ESOL in London. He was a founder member of the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy bulletin and editor of *Language Issues*, the journal of the UK National Association for Teaching English and Other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA). He has written articles for *Prospect and Open Letter*, and has contributed to publications on ESOL and literacy issues. His book *Literacy Practices* is published in the Longmans *Language in Social Life* series. His current research interests include the role of language in adult numeracy classrooms and quoting reference and attribution in academic writing.

Colin Lankshear is Director of Literacy Studies in Education at the Queensland University of Technology. His current research and publishing activity spans literacy and disadvantage in local and Third World settings, workplace language and literacy, critical approaches to literacy learning, and primary school students' understanding and uses of genres. He has been involved over a ten year period with development and education projects in Nicaragua, including an investigation of the links between women's literacy and children's health. In 1988 his book *Literacy, Schooling and Revolution* was named 'Outstanding Recent Book' by the American Educational Studies Association. His recent books include two co-edited collections, *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis and the Postmodern*, and *Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire.*

Alan Levett is a social science consultant in Wellington, New Zealand. He has worked in second-chance education with delinquent groups, taught sociology and Asian studies at Victoria University of Wellington, and conducted social research in New Zealand and overseas. Since 1979 he has carried out market

development work in South-East Asia and East Asia, and he is actively involved in educational exchange programs with Japan. He was awarded a Japan Foundation Fellowship in 1985 and spent a year at the National Institute for Educational Research in Tokyo. A former member of the New Zealand Planning Council and convenor of the Association for Social Science Researchers, he has produced numerous research reports and published widely in the popular media. For the past two years he has been undertaking research into postcompulsory and lifelong education for the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

Peter O'Connor is Principal Consultant with Workplace Learning Futures, in the area of workplace language and literacy. He has worked in a range of industries, as a steelworker, production worker, in the community sector, and as an educationist. Peter has also worked as a union official in the timber industry, and managed vocational education projects for a national industry training advisory board. He is a founding and active member, and is current chairperson of the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Action Coalition, and an editor of *Critical Forum*. Some of Peter's publications include: *Skills at Work: A Guide to the Provision of Workplace Basic Education;* editor of *Pitfalls and Possibilities: Women and Workplace Basic Education; Making it Happen: Developing Effective Workplace Basic Skills Programs;* editing *Thinking Work, Volume 1: Theoretical Perspectives on Workers' Literacies;* an occasional paper *Crossing the Borders of Workers' Literacy* in ALBSAC's *Focus* series. Recent articles include 'Choosing sides in workers' literacy', and 'Negotiating out of neutral in workers' literacy'.

Peter has recently conducted work on a conceptual framework and guiding principles for assessing communicative practices in the food industry, and is currently developing and trialling assessment models which focus on collective and collaborative practices and learning strategies. Peter is also undertaking postgraduate studies in the area of adult learning and workers' literacy.

Crina Virgona has worked in industry in the area of language and literacy since 1986. She has conducted four research projects investigating flexible and integrated methods of delivering language and literacy training in the workplace within the context of industry restructuring.

Rosie Wickert currently heads the Department of Language and Literacy at the University of Technology, Sydney. She has been active in the field of adult basic education for twenty years as a teacher, program manager, teacher educator and academic. She has been responsible for the academic coordination and

management of a number of postgraduate language and literacy teacher education courses at UTS.

Rosie has participated in a number of advisory bodies. Until recently she was a member of NBEET's Australian Language and Literacy Council, and she chaired the NSW Ministerial Taskforce on Workplace Language, Literacy and Maths for its first two years of operation. She has also acted in a consultative capacity to government departments and represented the Australian Government at UNESCO and OECD Expert meetings. Rosie has had extensive involvement with professional bodies. She was foundation Chair of the Australian Literacy Federation, and has been President of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy and the NSW Council for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. She is currently on the editorial board of *Open Letter*. Her research interests and publications are concerned with the relationships between language and culture and with the underpinning philosophies of adult and language education. She is the author of *No Single Measure, A Survey of Australian Adult Literacy* (1989) and has contributed to a number of books and journals on language and adult education.

INTRODUCTION

MIKE BROWN

Each author who has contributed to this volume has written an essay that stands on its own. It is the intention of the course designers and lecturers that the job of sorting out the ideas, identifying common themes and synthesising issues be the role of those who are actually engaging with the program, that is the course participants and the teachers. This in some ways pre-empts the cleverly written introduction. However, there is a part for me to play and that is to relay some of my own thoughts on the field. What is significant here is that four years ago I would have described my job as TAFE trade teacher, but while the nature of the employment has changed somewhat so has my perception of what it was that I actually did back then. I was told that I 'facilitated and managed the student's learning' [sic] within the system in which I worked. This was described as being self-paced, individualised, and modularised, competency-based training. In fact students learnt by engaging with explanatory (pedagogical) texts and then attempting to follow up by demonstrating the achievement of a corresponding task or activity.

It is only now after doing the research and study associated with the preparation for this postgraduate unit, one that I originally thought of as auxiliary to the mainstream of the program, that I can appreciate the importance and significance of adult English language, literacy, and numeracy (Brown 1993c). Having studied these educational practitioners, and since undertaken tutor training and classes in the Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) field myself, I am struck by the diversity and disparity that exists between teachers in TAFE. It is not my wish to criticise or detract from the work of trade teachers, however, credit must be given to the teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL), and adult literacy for the often complex approaches to curriculum and pedagogy which these fields seem to take for granted. I remain perplexed that teachers working in some areas of TAFE have more chance of tenure than others, have better conditions, more status, have recurrently funded programs and are generally more secure. This though, as I would

contend is also the case in workplaces generally, is more likely to be associated with the predominance of white, Anglo, skilled, male workers within the area than with the abilities and capacities of people to do the work. From my perspective as a student of critical curriculum studies I am an admirer and a convert to the adult language, literacy and numeracy field.

In many ways these teachers epitomise the multi-skilled worker. They are autonomous and their practice often involves them in an absolute construction of curriculum. This follows an adult learning model, is student-centred and often individualised. These teachers participate actively and are constantly required to think on their feet; others might call this 'reflection in action'. Interestingly, the significance of the unit has been recognised by others in the university as it has now been designated a compulsory core unit in the new graduate certificate course.

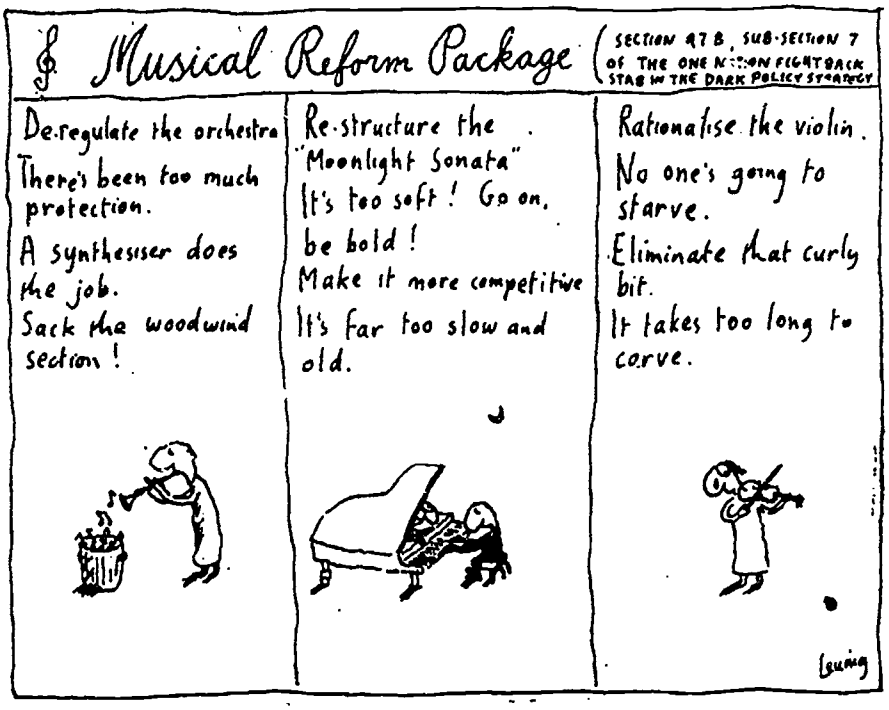
In doing the preparation and design of the program I was involved in learning within an unfamiliar field. As others may appreciate one of the initial observations that I was required to make was how I needed to learn new terms, concepts, jargon and of course acronyms. Accordingly the contribution which follows is based upon the notion that literacy is always plural and it is a relative concept.

I wish to acknowledge my original coworkers in the program, Steve Wright and Doris Tate and those of our colleagues who gave so freely of their time, some of whom work in other universities and institutions. Above all I thank them for the education. For me, it is very much a privilege to present these essays.

Literacies and the workplace: Competing discourses in TAFE curriculum

Throug' my work as a TAFE curriculum officer I am integrally connected to the demands and the changes that are occurring in the workplace. The government-sponsored committees, reports and policies provide a blueprint or agendas for these reforms. As educators, whose work involves teaching others in aspects of work-related learning, we are an important target group for the representatives of government, trade unions, employers and academics, all of whom are wishing to explain their interpretations of what is being called the Workplace Reform Agenda. It is the expectation of teachers that we then 'get it right' so that we can pass it on to our students. These parties recognise the political significance of our work, often better than we do ourselves. Centrally located within the larger Workplace Reform Agenda is the Training Reform Agenda and both of these are important to education and the work of teaching.

Figure 1 This Leunig cartoon humorously expresses this idea of reform agendas.



Source: *Age*, 11 July 1992, p.16 Extra

This paper argues that teachers need to develop their own literacy in relation to these agendas, in order to be active participants in the issues associated with their work, and their lives. The Vocational Education and Training (VET) teacher is involved in analysing and teaching others about work but is sometimes less familiar with the broader aspects of his or her own work.

For many years, the curriculum officers in TAFE colleges throughout Victoria have organised and held regular meetings and get togethers. This network has fostered a culture of cooperation and sharing. It is from this perspective that I offer these comments and critique. The purpose of the paper is to discuss and explore competing discourses in TAFE curriculum. One of these is the dominant discourse of the VET (and TAFE) system imposed through policy. Another is presented as democratic and is more critical. The latter is espoused by academics and teacher educators within Education faculties in universities. This paper is not meant as criticism of colleagues but rather reflection upon how these discourses impact on my work.

In developing my understanding of these matters I have found the work of Professor James Gee on discourses to be extremely useful. This work provides a framework for the discussion which follows. In a chapter entitled 'Discourses and literacies', Gee writes:

> What is important is not language, and surely not grammar, but *saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations*. These combinations I will refer to as 'Discourses', with a capital 'D' ...
>
> Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes.
>
> A Discourse is a sort of 'identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to [illegible] on a particular social role that others will recognize ... (Gee 1990, p.142)

For those of us looking for a snappy definition he puts this more succinctly:

> A *Discourse* is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'. (Gee 1990, p.143)

He follows this with five important points regarding discourses and these are precised and reproduced below. Interested readers are directed to the original and more substantive discussion by Gee.

1. Discourses are inherently 'ideological' ... These crucially involve a set of values and viewpoints about relationships between people and the distribution of social goods.
2. Discourses are resistant to internal criticism and self scrutiny since uttering viewpoints that seriously undermine them defines one as being outside them. The Discourse itself defines what counts as acceptable criticism.
3. Discourse defined positions from which to speak and behave are not, however, just defined internal to a Discourse, but also as standpoints taken up by the Discourse in its relation to other, ultimately opposing, Discourses. The Discourse of managers in

an industry is partly defined as a set of views, norms and standpoints defined by their opposition to analogous points in the Discourse of workers.

4 Any Discourse concerns itself with certain objects and puts forward certain concepts, viewpoints and values at the expense of others. In doing so, it will marginalise viewpoints and values central to other Discourses.

5 Discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society ... Control over certain Discourses can lead to the acquisition of social goods (money, power, status) in a society ... These Discourses empower those groups who have the least conflicts with their other Discourses when they use them.

(Gee 1990, pp.143 & 145)

Gee distinguishes different discourses and explicitly discusses three forms. The first of these are dominant discourses.

> Let us call Discourses that lead to social goods in a society 'dominant Discourses', and let us refer to those groups that have the fewest conflicts when using them as 'dominant groups'. (Gee 1990, p.145)

These are the powerful discourses. Understanding and adoption of these discourses as a way of acting, believing, feeling and speaking can lead to upward social mobility. Dominant groups are those that do adopt these discourses and have fewest personal conflicts with their use.

The two other forms of discourses which I would like to borrow from Gee relate to the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary'. Primary discourses are those associated with first language acquisition and as such are most often developed in conjunction with one's particular family, home and/or cultural setting. In contrast, 'secondary' discourses are those which are developed in other cultural contexts and circumstances. Importantly, Gee uses this terminology to provide a definition of 'literacy':

> Thus I define 'literacy' as: mastery of, or fluent control over, a secondary Discourse. Therefore, literacy is always plural: literacies (there are many of them, since there are many secondary Discourses, and we all have some and fail to have others). (Gee 1990, p.153)

It is in this manner that I am suggesting that as educators we need to improve our 'literacies'; in particular those literacies that are specifically related

to our understanding of the reforms that are associated with 'the changing workplace'. For it is these that relate to the dominant discourses informing our work in Vocational Education and Training (VET), TAFE and increasingly the Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) field (Brown 1993b). There is little doubt that these discourses are informed by economic imperatives and the drive to improve profitability within capitalist economies. The dominating rationalisation is economic efficiency in line with the demands of the market. These though need to be challenged.

The competency agenda

So intense have been the efforts of one union leader that in some circles the agenda for workplace reform is referred to as 'Carmichael-ism'. In a recent publication (Cherry Collins ed. 1993), Laurie Carmichael describes the four imperatives he sees driving educational change. The first he states as 'the computer based revolution which is eliminating a large number of the repetitious and laborious jobs'. The second, he contends is 'the emergence of markets for high quality products and services that are globally competitive'. The third is, 'increasing awareness, understanding, and legal accountability about the environmental and social effects of industry'. The final imperative is 'the emergence of work groups and teams as the most effective way of managing the new systems technology'. For those of us involved in VET and TAFE these have a familiar ring.

The corresponding revolution which is occurring throughout TAFE is the formation of the National Training System based upon competency. This revolution involves the development and introduction of a number of 'flexible' and compatible systems associated with the management of training and credentialling, the linchpin being the implementation/imposition of competency-based training (CBT). This is in evidence at a number of different levels. For instance even the development of a curriculum accreditation document needs to conform to the VEETAC/ ACTRAC (1993) 'template'. This sets the format and content for these documents.

Omitted from the present discourse on CBT is any mention of debate. Instead CBT is presented as unproblematic and rather the focus is upon how it is to be implemented and not why or whether it should be. Yet one of the main characteristics associated with the competency movement over its hundred or so year history must be its contentiousness and the subsequent debate that surrounds and accompanies its application (Brown 1993a).

These comments were written by a researcher from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER):

> ... why adopt competency-based training? Because those who have adopted it have found that CBT produces more skilled, more satisfied workers, more quickly. (Foyster 1990, p.2)
>
> ... competency-based training makes more sense for all of those involved. (Foyster 1990, p.3)

This centre for research like other educational institutions relies upon government support for its funding. It therefore shows a failing in carrying out independent research. It came as no surprise when the VEETAC working party charged with the responsibility of developing a strategy plan for Vocational Education and Training reported a distinct lack of critical research in the field (VEETAC 1993).

In contrast to the work of Foyster quoted above there is that of Nancy Jackson, a Canadian academic involved in work-related learning. She writes:

> ... there exists nearly two decades of scholarship, including theoretical critique and empirical research originating in philosophy, psychology, linguistics, education and sociology, which argues in various ways that the competency paradigm has not and probably will not 'improve learning' in most of the educational contexts where it has been applied ... To borrow words from Henry Giroux, it appears to 'begin with the wrong problems ... misrepresent the problems it endorses and ... advocate the wrong solutions' ... Recent British critics have called it a 'theoretically and methodologically vacuous strategy' for upgrading the vocational education and training system ... and one that a 'careful educator would be well advised' to avoid ... Yet the paradigm persists, indeed proliferates on several continents, as new generations of the competency model are introduced ... all claiming to be the new panacea in education and training reform. (Jackson 1994, pp.135–6)

Clearly the work of Jackson and that of Foyster are at loggerheads and are informed by competing discourses in curriculum. Interestingly, with regards to the implementation of VET policy, Foyster is representative of the dominant group.

Other striking contradictions can be associated with CBT, not the least of which is its connection to scientific management and Taylorism (Brown 1994). Historically, CBT has developed from the application of efficiency principles directly derived from the work of Frederick Taylor (Callaghan 1962; Davies 1976; Neumann 1979). Yet no mention of this appears within the agenda, instead Carmichael is promoting and justifying CBT because of its alignment

with 'post-Fordism'. A critique of this appears elsewhere (Brown 1993a). An appreciation of the association between CBT and Taylorism can be gained from the way in which the planning is conducted.

Planning and CBT

> ... competency based training (CBT) requires more planning and management than traditional education. Competency-based training is spreading, despite this 'handicap' of additional planning, because it usually works much more effectively to bring employees to the required skill levels than do traditional methods. (Foyster 1990, p.1)

Braverman (1974) argued that the extra planning that was carried out as a part of instituting Taylorist and Fordist work organisation was about management wresting control from the shopfloor workers. This allowed management to plan, instigate and monitor what work was done, along with how and when that work was carried out. The control over work organisation was seen by management as their right (managerial prerogative) and control had to be shifted from the possession of skilled workers. Clearly the issue is one of power. Skill is one of the criteria by which the wage of workers is determined. As the literature on skill shows, one of the main indices in determining levels of skill has traditionally been the worker's degree of autonomy. By controlling and shifting the control over work, management was able to de-skill the workers. Consequently, Fordism allowed for a shift in the profile of workers that could be employed and in the case of the Model T Ford, many farm labourers were employed to do the assembly work within the car plants.

Taylor (1919) argued that, 'in most cases one type of man is needed to plan ahead and an entirely different type to execute the work'. This is what Braverman (1974) called 'the separation of planning from execution'. Ursula Franklin in her work on technology also takes up this theme when she writes:

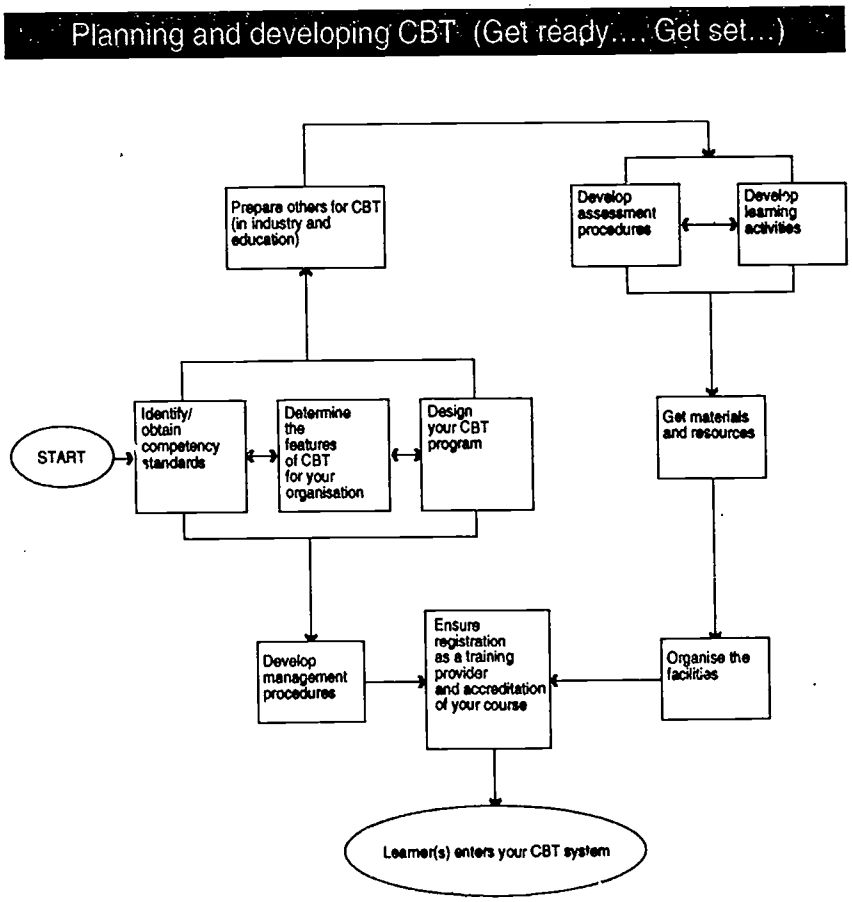
> ... [planning], Webster defines as 'making plans, arranging beforehand' ... [this] definition ... says ... there are planners as well as plannees: those who plan and those who conform to what was arranged beforehand ... the degree of effectiveness of participation by plannees in long term planning operations seems a true measure of democracy ... planning is so frequently carried out without the plannees' knowledge or consent. (Franklin 1990, p.81)

Franklin's work alerts us to the way in which planning can be carried out by some and imposed upon others as a regime for their conformity. In examin-

ing this theme more closely with respect to CBT it is interesting to review the work by Harris (1993) called *Getting to Grips with Implementing CBT*. Again this was commissioned and published by the NCVER. Of particular importance are the two flow charts that are used to illustrate this implementation.

The first of these is headed 'Planning and developing CBT'.

Figure 2 Flow chart showing the planning and developing of CBT

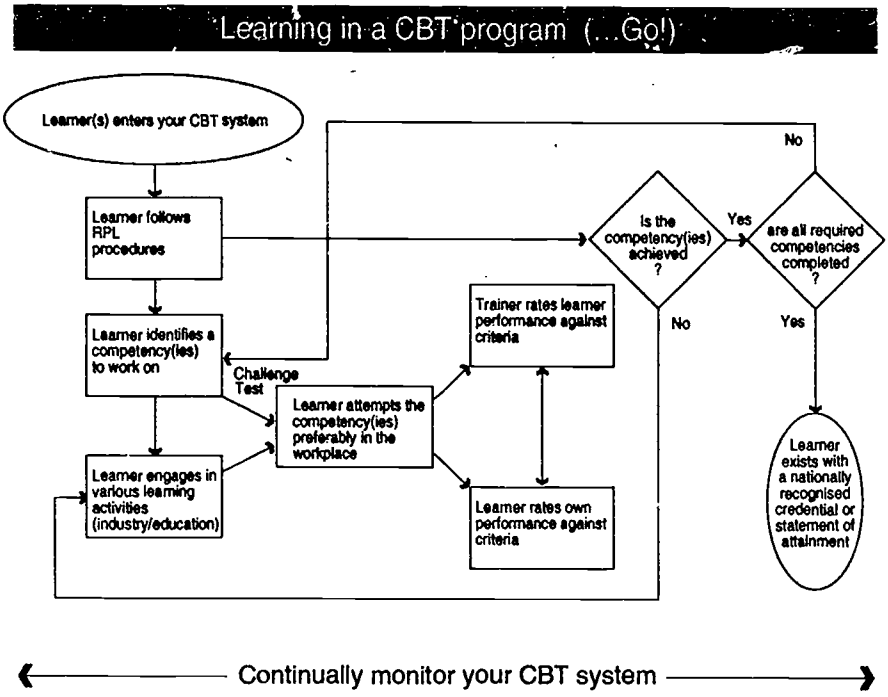


Source: Harris 1993, p.5

From this arise questions on the nature of curriculum development and the role of the student. Curriculum development is carried out in isolation from the learner for under this approach the learner is trained within a program which has been predescribed by others. The planning stage finishes when learners are said to 'enter your CBT system'.

This is followed by a second flow chart headed 'Learning in a CBT program'.

Figure 3 Flow chart which depicts learning in a CBT program



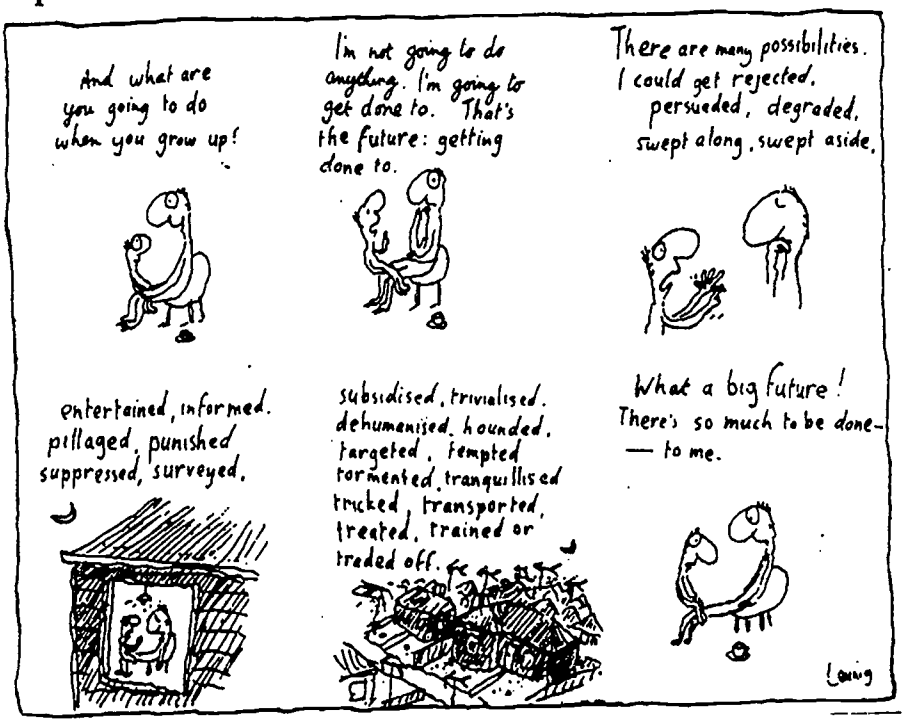
Source: Harris 1993, p.6

These flow charts seem to epitomise the arguments set out above. CBT seems to be fraught with a division of labour that for many educators is unacceptable. The second flow chart represents the learner's pathway through the course. Readers should note that on completion the learner is described as 'exiting with a nationally recognised credential'.

In times of high unemployment a need arises for indicators which show TAFE and the VET system to be working effectively. The social indicators that have been used in the past such as performance in employment are replaced. TAFE must revert to indicators that are not connected to actual employment because jobs are scarce. Thus the purpose of TAFE is reduced to credentialling. Under CBT, the content and requirements for these credentials are increasingly determined by employers. They set down what skills and knowledge they see as having value within the labour market. These are the capacities that they are

prepared to recognise and reward. In effect they are involved in determining what constitutes 'useful knowledge'. Unions for their part are satisfied to have this information overtly stated. This approach cleverly implicates the industrial parties, employers and union officials. Their involvement within the system stifles a major source for potential criticism.

Figure 4 This cartoon by Leunig is used to illustrate the imposition of curriculum.



Source: *Age*, 15 June 1992, p.16 Extra

The publication by Harris (1993) is intended for readers 'to get to grips with implementing CBT'. Clearly one of the most likely groups to be readers of this book are TAFE teachers. This raises the issue of the professional development of TAFE teachers regarding the implementation of CBT.

Within TAFE colleges some five years ago it was commonplace to have a staff member whose function was dedicated to staff development. However, as restructuring has drastically reduced the number of those in positions of middle management, so these positions have tended to be eliminated. Instead, the functions of staff development have been 'devolved'. In many instances

these duties have been reassigned to heads of department and/or curriculum officers.

Importantly, the people who become HODs and curriculum officers often do so because of their dedication to teaching and learning, and their commitment is often borne out and coupled to extra qualifications resulting from years of postgraduate studies. Through their participation in higher education these educators are exposed to and encouraged to engage with other discourses such as those relating to critical and feminist pedagogies. In fact, these comments by Stephen Brookfield outline the generic aim of professional development at postgraduate level:

> ... encouraging students to undertake a critical analysis of ideas embedded in adult educational literature is one of the most frequently espoused aims of programmes of university adult education ... many assignments in such programmes focus on this activity ... written critical analysis is focused chiefly on deconstructing adult education texts for the political and social values which frame and inform research, philosophy and theory ... (Brookfield 1993, p.64)

Reviewing a self-paced professional development package on CBT

Towards the end of 1992, TAFE colleges were allotted funding to organise and conduct professional development programs for their staff regarding the implementation of CBT. At least one college took this as an opportunity to develop a professional development package in a flexible learning mode. This section reviews aspects of the design and content of this package. In examining this package, no slur is intended to those involved in its preparation. In fact the package follows the conventions for this type of training to the point of being exemplary (Dick & Carey 1990; Gagné, Briggs & Wager 1988). Instead, the intention is to illustrate the degree to which the discourse is dominant and 'inherently ideological'. In fact, I have distributed the booklet to all the staff at the institution at which I now work, 'for their information' and cited it as exemplary on how multimedia, and in particular, text-based flexible learning materials are designed and presented.

The self-paced mode of delivery is not a necessary characteristic of CBT. However, I would argue that it is often an implied pedagogy and certainly one that is heavily aligned to the competency-based approach (Brown 1993a). Cleverly, this package under review has been designed to illustrate this mode of delivery in the course of learning about the competency-based approach.

This learning program has twelve pages of text. Accompanying this are some forty pages of additional materials for further reading, most of these being reproduced from government-sponsored documentation such as the National Training Board's *National Competency Standards Policy and Guidelines* (1992). The focus of this discussion will be upon the learning program and in particular just five of these pages as these illustrate and provide a sense of the overall design of the package.

The first page of the learning program provides an overview to the program (see Fig. 5). This is headed 'How to Use the Package'. In setting out the pathway through the program this sequence of five steps describes the design for this package.

The second page of text for review denotes the seven learning outcomes that are to be covered and achieved (see Fig. 6). As stated earlier, during times of high unemployment the role of TAFE is reduced to credentialling and unfortunately, in a similar way, learning within TAFE takes on a reduced meaning and can be defined as achievement of designated learning outcomes. Of particular significance to this review are outcomes (a) and (b). These outcomes refer the reader to the next two pages of text in the learning program, along with instructions to view a video, and reference to two of the readings supplied as additional resources.

The list of seven learning outcomes is followed by seven pages of text. As is often the convention with this type of instructional design, each page of the text provides content specific to a corresponding learning outcome.

The first two pages of content within the package are headed 'What is CBT?' and 'Why CBT?' respectively (see Figs. 7 & 8).

The final page for discussion here is entitled 'Self evaluation' (see Fig. 9). This page lists seven questions and if you have cracked the code behind this technology for instruction you will have guessed that these relate directly to the seven learning outcomes that are the purpose for the program. Assessment is not included within this program. In part this is due to it not being an accredited award course.

Figure 5 This is the first page of this learning program on CBT. The sequence of steps sets out the design of the program.

AN OVERVIEW

How to Use this Package

This is a self paced approach to professional development

Over the next week...

1. Book time on a computer at Curriculum Services.

Watch the slide show for an overview – allow about 20 minutes.

2. Watch the video 'Simply Explaining Competency Based Training'.

The video is on Reserve at the Library Resource Centre. Running time is approximately 10 minutes.

3. Make your way through the learning outcomes listed on page 5.

Allow about 2 hours for this section. This includes viewing a 15 minute video, 'Captain Competency', which is on Reserve at the Library Resource Centre.

4. Staff from Professional Development will call you to discuss your progress.

5. Complete the self evaluation and Professional Development evaluation sheets.

Good luck! Call us at Curriculum Services on ext.708 if you need help.

Source: Curriculum Services Unit, Moorabbin College of TAFE 1993, p.1

Figure 6 This page lists the learning outcomes to be dealt with in this package and defines the pedagogy for the program.

1. Learning outcomes

At the completion of this module you should be able to:

(a) Define Competency Based Training (CBT)
- View video 'Simply Explaining Competency Based Training'.
- Refer to page 6, 'What is CBT?'.

(b) Outline the development of CBT
- Refer to page 7, 'Why CBT?' and 'VET system', and to Further Readings A and B.

(c) Identify the role of the National Training Board (NTB)
- Refer to page 8 which covers the NTB and its role and to Further Reading C.

(d) Identify the relationship between National Competency Standards and Curriculum
- Refer to page 10.
- For the standard format of competency standards refer to Further Reading D.

(e) Match curriculum to Australian Standards Framework (ASF) levels
- Definitions and the diagram on page 9, and Further Reading D.

(f) Explain the links between competency standards, flexible delivery and recognition of prior learning (RPL)
- Diagram on page 10 shows the way standards are developed into curriculum.
- Curriculum Policy Principles for the State Training System are listed on page 10 and some CBT jargon is explained on page 11.
- The principles of RPL are discussed in Further Reading E.
- A sample curriculum module is included in Further Reading F.

(g) Identify industry's perception of CBT and its implications for training
- At this stage you should watch another video, 'Captain Competency – Assessing Competency in the Workplace' which was prepared by NSW TAFE.

Source: Curriculum Services Unit, Moorabbin College of TAFE 1993, p.5

Figure 7 This is the first page of information or content in this package and provides two definitions explaining CBT.

COMPETENCY BASED TRAINING

2. What is CBT?

CBT is a system that contains:

OUTCOMES to national standard specifications of competence.

CURRICULUM that gives learners a clear indication of what is expected of them to demonstrate competence.

DELIVERY methods that do not oblige learners to undertake training or continue to be trained for skills they already possess.

ASSESSMENT of competence which is available when learners believe they are able to demonstrate competence.

RECORD of competencies gained available to learners upon successful demonstration of competence.

Source: Competency Based Training: A Systematic Approach Information Statement No 2, May 1991, State Training Board Vic.

2.1 Another Definition of CBT

'CBT is a way of approaching vocational training that places primary emphasis on what a person can actually do in the workplace as a result of training, (the outcome), and as such represents a shift away from an emphasis on the process involved in training, (the input).

It is concerned with training to industry specific standards rather than with an individual's achievement relative to others in a group.'

Source: CBT Proposals for the Australian Vocational Education and Training System, Confederation of Australian Industry July 1991.

Source: Curriculum Services Unit, Moorabbin College of TAFE 1993, p.6

Figure 8 This is the second page of information or content in this package and provides the rationale and justification for CBT.

3. Why CBT?

- The restructuring of industry and industrial awards based on competency standards endorsed by the National Training Board.
- Individuals need to be more highly skilled and adaptable.
- Key competencies needed by workers include more general competencies than previously required.
- Workers need to integrate higher levels of understanding into all levels of production and service activity.
- Industry prefers modular training combined in different ways to meet the specific needs of the learners involved.
- Implementation of CBT is a Government priority.

3.1 Vocational Education and Training System

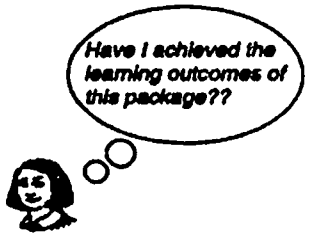
OLD APPROACH	NEW SYSTEM	ADVANTAGE
Series of credentials in each State and Territory.	Registered credential recognised Nationally.	National consistency.
Credential = course completion.	Credential = gaining competencies.	Proof of ability.
Accreditation different in each State/Territory.	Accreditation in any State/Territory recognised Nationally.	National recognition.
Curriculum based on time served in learning.	Curriculum based on competencies required.	Competency not lock-step learning.
Recognised TAFE providers, private providers had minimum standing.	Providers to be registered and quality monitored.	Wide range of providers; recognition of competencies.
Credit for prior learning through challenge tests and ad hoc arrangements.	RPL system to formalise the recognition of competencies held.	Less duplication of learning.

Source: Curriculum Services Unit, Moorabbin College of TAFE 1993, p.7

Figure 9 This page appears towards the end of the package and allows the learner to evaluate his or her learning within a binary system of 'yes' = competent, or 'no' = not yet competent.

Self evaluation

	Need further training	Achieved competency
Define CBT	☐	☐
Outline the development of CBT	☐	☐
Identify the role of the NTB	☐	☐
Identify the relationship between National Competency Standards and Curriculum	☐	☐
Match curriculum to ASF levels	☐	☐
Explain the links between competency standards, curriculum flexible delivery and RPL	☐	☐
Identify industry's perception of CBT and the implications for training.	☐	☐



Source: Curriculum Services Unit, Moorabbin College of TAFE 1993, p.13

Here the learner carries out an evaluation of his or her own learning, after all the learners are adults working at a professional level. This is done by ticking one of the two boxes set out next to each question. A tick within the boxes in the first column will indicate that the participant believes that he or she 'needs further training'. Meantime a tick within the boxes in the second column indicates that the participant believes that he or she has achieved competency.

This supports the claim earlier that learning in TAFE is equated with the achievement of prespecified learning outcomes. Incidentally, these outcomes have been designed by someone other than the learner.

Missing from the text of the learning program is any notion of debate. According to this learning program, CBT is entirely unproblematic. In defining, 'What is CBT?' the text presents the reader with two definitions. The first is that of the Victorian State Training Board; for TAFE teachers, the intended reader and participant for this package, this body is their employer. In compounding this the second definition provided is drawn from the Confederation of Australian Industry (CAI), another employers group.

A more realistic alternative for this section might be the inclusion of the comments by these two senior lecturers in vocational education at the University of Technology in Sydney. In a recent publication they wrote:

> A widely accepted definition of CBT does not currently exist. (Gonczi & Hager 1992, p.38)

They go on to discuss the seven criteria for determining the degree to which a course can be rated as being CBT. Depending on the number of criteria that are met, the course can be classified as either low, medium or high CBT. This approach was originally developed by COSTAC and has been used in this way in a previous study by Thomson (1990).

Under the section, 'Why CBT?' is presented a list of six points, and a table comparing the old system with the new competency-based approach, and a column stating the advantages. Maybe point six says it all: 'Implementation of CBT is a Government priority'? Within the discourse the imposition of CBT is seldom named in this way. An exception was the theme for the 1993 VALBEC conference—ALBE Curriculum: State of the pedagogy or Pedagogy of the state? It seems ironic that such imposition occurs under the auspices of workplace reform and with the sanction of trade union officials.

Maybe the first box on the evaluation sheet should be reworded 'has been trained to the preset competency within the dominant discourse on CBT'.

Flexible learning

This learning program is typical of many self-paced training programs used for work-related learning.

Carmichael writes:

> Modern communication and information processing technologies has greatly increased the dissemination of knowledge ... such technology has provided another medium which, when effectively applied and utilised in conjunction with other modes of teaching, can create a greater productivity of learning. (Carmichael in Collins 1993, p.15)

Alongside the application of these technologies for flexible learning and the rhetoric of access and social justice, consideration needs to be given to the consequences of deinstitutionalisation. What will this mean for learners? Flexible learning opens access to some learners, though in some instances it controls content and isolates the learner.

One of the spin-offs that needs to be guarded against is that flexible learning strategies do not become just another way that employers can intensify work, coopting recreation time for work-related learning, as unpaid work.

Clearly flexible learning constructs texts in particular ways. Texts assist TAFE colleges to demonstrate explicitly their competency in covering a subject in a way that employers like, for the learning program as a text is presented as a package. This is a product, an object which appears in a concrete format and as such can be handled and physically examined. These texts assist TAFE in their 'management of perception'. The packages are considered more easily accountable than having a teacher come in and conduct classes, because non-educators cannot see the content in a classroom, it is not accessible as a product, it is harder to scrutinise and it is not as readily appraised.

In these times it is not enough to criticise so what follows is the basic outline of alternative curriculum discourses. These are founded on a commitment to the search for democratic forms of curriculum.

Discourses for a democratic curriculum

The work of Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School has become a much cited example of worker education. This extract is aptly quoted by Michael Newman (1993) in the conclusion of his book on trade union training. It is used here to highlight the belief that the defining of democracy is an ongoing process and that by necessity it is also a collective act.

> To have democracy, you must have a society in which decision making is real, and that means replacing, transforming and rebuilding society so as to allow for people to make decisions that affect their lives. These decisions shouldn't be counteracted by an economic structure in which maximising profits overrides all other values. It's a growing concept that has to do with moving in a certain direction. All you can talk about is the direction and some of the elements you want to see built into the kind of society that you don't have now but would like in the future. But as you move toward it, you may notice lots of weaknesses and limitations in your concepts, so you change them. This is why I've never been able to define democracy. Somebody once said of me that I purposely refuse to state what I mean by democracy. As if it were a secret. It's just that for me it's a growing idea. (Horton 1990, p.174)

Alongside this can be placed the work of the Public Education Information Network. The work of this group is cited by Michael Apple (1988) in his book, *Teachers and Texts* and significantly this occurs in a section entitled 'Restructuring education'. Apple reports what this network identified as three constitutive elements of a truly democratic curriculum:

> The first is 'critical literacy' ... Not just the ability to read and write, but particular kinds of dispositions are important—e.g., 'the motivation and capacity to be critical of what one reads, sees and hears; to probe and go beyond the surface appearances and question the common wisdom'.
>
> The second element includes 'knowledge and understanding of the diverse intellectual, cultural and scientific traditions.' This is not limited to the traditions of high or elite culture and the academic disciplines. It needs to go beyond these to 'the histories and cultural perspectives of those people, including women and minorities, traditionally excluded from formal study.'
>
> Finally, a democratic curriculum must include the 'ability to use knowledge and skill' in particular ways to create and 'pursue one's own interests; to make informed personal and political decisions; and to work for the welfare of the community.' (Apple 1988, pp.189 & 190)

The first element above provides an initial and important definition for the concept of 'critical literacy'. As is the case with most educational concepts, understanding of what constitutes a 'critical literacy' has undergone considerable change since the time that this was originally written in 1986. While this definition is a useful starting place, thinking about 'critical literacy' could be said to have moved on into a second generation, and readers looking for more

extensive descriptions are directed to the recent publication compiled and edited by Colin Lankshear and Peter McLaren (1993).

The second element begins to proclaim cultural diversity and respect for differences. Specific mention is made to incorporate the histories and perspectives of less powerful groups within our society including women and minorities. This element makes explicit the reference to power relations.

The third element calls on the use of skills and knowledge in particular ways, for specific purposes. The skills and knowledge are to be used in one's own interests and for the good of the community. Agency for action is here squarely seen as being restored to the individual. This is implicitly juxtaposed against the cooption of action to the subservience of other interests, such as those of capital and management.

Conclusion

Part of my job as a curriculum officer in TAFE is to organise and conduct professional development for staff and teachers for the introduction of CBT. The work done by James Gee gives me another way of understanding my work. This is that my role includes an expectation that I will induct staff into the dominant discourse in TAFE curriculum—CBT. How well I do this will involve the extent to which this might clash with my personal ideologies, values and world view. I feel that somehow political struggle, space and opportunity are also involved.

Subsequently, the literacies which TAFE teachers will find useful are similar to those which will be useful to all workers. It is a critical literacy that in part involves the reading of texts in a critical manner, interrogating the text and ascertaining what is being stated, what is not being stated and whose interest is being served. This needs to be coupled to a truly democratic curriculum. Clearly it is a contrary approach to the dominant discourse in TAFE, an approach that does not attempt to stifle debate, control and direct content, and/or the processes of learning. It represents a critical literacy for teachers and curriculum officers. It represents a critical literacy for me in my workplace within TAFE.

I wish to continue this project and would appreciate any comments, ideas and reactions that readers could offer, and would encourage your feedback.

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LITERACIES, WORKPLACES AND THE DEMANDS OF NEW TIMES[1]

ALLAN LEVETT AND COLIN LANKSHEAR

Introduction

What is the meaning of the burgeoning industry in adult literacy in Australia? There are hundreds of adult literacy teachers in a variety of institutions. They offer a range of courses in English as a Second Language for migrants, workplace literacy, adult basic education, special teaching for impaired people and so on. Teacher education in colleges and universities provides specifically for training adult literacy workers. Australia now has an Institute for Languages policy that includes adult literacy in its purview. The government has produced a white paper on the subject. Inevitably scholars have turned their attention to adult literacy, substantial research funding is available, and there is a growing theoretical and technical literature on the topic.

From any point of view the adult literacy scene in Australia is impressive and sophisticated. It reflects a comprehensive response at the level of Federal Government and state government policy to the complex literacy needs of an intricate society in a period of rapid and far-reaching change: change which, as we will show, threatens, as never before, the tenability of adult life for those who lack command of written text. The phenomenon is not only to be found in Australia but is worldwide in the so-called developed societies. Each has its own more or less elaborate provision for adult literacy requirements.

1 Some material contained in this paper is the result of work we have done under contract to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. We wish to acknowledge the opportunity the Authority has given us to develop our ideas about postcompulsory education and its economic support for our work.

Are these developments simply a later twentieth-century version of the 'human capital' approach to education which maintains 'that an investment in state educational systems geared to increase skill levels will provide a direct impetus to industrial productivity, the growth of wealth, and a better distribution of wealth to previously unskilled groups'? That is, are they reflections of a 'new literacy myth' which asserts that 'today's "high tech" society requires ever greater levels of literate competence of all workers' (Luke 1992, p.4)?

Or are they part of something larger? Is it possible that we are seeing the emergence of a fourth stage in modern formal education? Mass compulsory primary education emerged in the nineteenth century; widespread secondary education early in the twentieth century; and mass tertiary education followed in the decades after the Second World War. In our view we are witnessing the full flowering of the latest component of formal education systems, *lifelong education*. Adult literacy, and workplace literacy specifically, are part of this global development.

Literacy and educational demands are escalating worldwide, as a result of changes in economic activity and profound social developments that partly reflect economic changes but also have their own dynamic. The central thrust of the post-industrial economy with its dramatic technological advances calls for higher order literacies to be much more widespread in the population than ever before. Higher order literacies can no longer be confined to a small elite. Specifically, there is a strong demand for upskilling in the workplace across the entire workforce, but particularly across what might have been regarded as the bottom fifty per cent (Thurow 1992, p.52). In becoming dominant, these literacies have consequences for the ways in which groups of people become marginal, remain marginal or escape from marginality.

Socially we have seen the end of the traditional linear life course. Marriage is less binding and families more vulnerable at the same time as work is less certain. Unemployment and part-time work are seemingly permanent features affecting increasing proportions of populations. Indigenous peoples claim recognition of their rights. There is substantial migration to and from countries and some, like Australia at present, have more than twenty per cent of their population foreign born. Local communities reflect greater diversity. Amid this complex change the role of the state itself is being redefined, with consequent institutional changes that impact on the daily lives of all citizens.

The case we will develop is that workplace literacy is a distinctive facet of adult literacy which in turn is part of lifelong education. We will explore the nature of workplace literacy and suggest its connections to other areas of lifelong education. The demand for workplace literacy arises not only from changing economic and work demands but also from circumstances people find themselves in as a consequence of social processes impacting in New

Times. People now move in and out of competency during their lifetime and there are periods when they need an opportunity to catch up. The adequacy and success of workplace literacy provision will depend on policy-makers, program designers, and adult educators understanding and responding to the larger context in which it is located. There are both pedagogical and institutional implications here.

The outline of our argument is as follows. First we will address key features and changing demands of New Times. We will next examine workplaces, paying particular attention to 'leading edge' forms of work, that is types of workplace organisation that are setting the standards for most other forms of work. In the final section we will outline a theory of literacy pedagogy that shows the connections between different forms of literacy education. We will also take a particular case of workplace literacy from the US that shows the necessity of linking it to lifelong education as a whole. This case illustrates an approach to partnership between industry and education providers which may help us to sharpen possible approaches locally.

New Times

There is wide agreement that a significant transition has been occurring worldwide. Various names are used to define the current era including post-Fordism, the information society, the postmodern condition, the post-industrial society. The Fordist metaphor is too narrow to capture this change, pointing to blue-collar work in manufacturing. Most employment now is in services, as a result of greater productivity in machine-based industry. On the other hand, 'services economy' suggests that manufacturing no longer matters. In fact, though changing in character and requiring fewer people, manufacturing is still hugely important as a generator of wealth and source of employment, including knowledge-based occupations (Cohen & Zysman 1987). 'Information society' is likewise too limited. We recognise, of course, the usefulness of the concept 'postmodern condition' for a full account of New Times (Hall 1991). Some features of this condition will be used later in this essay but it is not as central to our concern for workplace literacy as post-industrialism.

Post-industrialism captures both the changing nature of goods production and the growth in tertiary employment. Most importantly, as Myles points out, the term identifies it as an historical process (Myles 1990, p.281). Post-industrialism indicates that we have moved beyond industrialism, seen now as a particular period in capitalist development. Block notes that the term 'industrial society' did not become widely used until long after the industrial revolution had begun, and it may be some years before this new phase in human

history can be adequately characterised (Block 1987, p.6). The current period is analogous to the transition from the agricultural to the industrial economy. The implication clearly is that we have moved on from the industrial or modern era to some new period, seemingly a period of transition. We call this period New Times.

New Times are characterised by a number of trends in developed soc' -ties. We are interested in two particular trends here. First, major economic changes affecting the nature of work and the ways people participate in the economy—these will provide one focus of what follows. Our second focus is those social changes that affect the nature and number of adults requiring all kinds of literacy provision.

We will identify changing social patterns to show that modern society is continuously providing conditions under which adults can gain or lose literacy skills. This has obvious implications for literacy and workplaces, particularly how to bring those who have fallen behind in relevant knowledge and skills up to the point where they can enter employment and take advantage of available workplace education.

Some major economic changes

It is almost a truism to observe that the New Times have 'upped the ante' for literacy, and indeed for all education in Australia, because its economy is being forced to change and because of its large migrant population. If it is a truism it is one of profound importance. Here we will first consider international trade and its effects on the economy generally, and then the growth of services and changes in manufacturing arising especially from the impact of theory-driven new technology.

International trade

In the global economy, trade in primary products has become relatively less important within world trade. This is because food and most raw materials are now adequate, if not in a state of oversupply throughout the world. Prices are both comparatively low and liable to vary more than hitherto. The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the return of capitalism in Eastern Europe will allow those countries to produce food for export as they had done for centuries, and add to the glut of food worldwide. This will further disadvantage distant food producers like Australia and New Zealand. Sustainable comparative advantage no longer depends on the natural resources endowment upon which we have relied for over one hundred years. Such countries are now forced to base their

economies on higher value-added production which requires more manufacturing and marketing skills, more financial and other services, all of which will mean more use of high technology and more abstract thinking, and thus increased levels of education throughout the workforce.

Another feature of the modern world economy is the dominance of three main trading blocks: the European Community led by Germany, East Asia dominated by Japan, and North America led by the United States. Europe and East Asia employ new ways of playing and succeeding in the economic game, ways that will be required of all that wish to keep up. According to Thurow (1992) these new ways comprise a communitarian form of capitalism which challenges the formerly dominant individualistic capitalism of the Anglo-American countries, including Australia.

Communitarian capitalism favours business groups over brilliant entrepreneurs, and producer economics over consumer economics; prefers increased market share to short-term profit maximisation; stresses social responsibility for skills, teamwork and loyalty to the firm (labour force turnover is seen as counterproductive), rather than individual responsibility for skills, large wage differentials and easy hiring and firing; and employs industrial strategies, active industrial and commercial policies that promote growth (Thurow 1992, Chap. 2).

Furthermore, in Japan and Germany the educational level of the workforce is markedly higher than among their competitors. In Japan the entire bottom fifty per cent of the educated population is higher than anywhere else, while Germany is regarded as having the best educated workforce across a broad range of mid-level, non-college skills (compare Thurow, p.52).

Other countries are inevitably affected by these developments. The impact of Japan on Australia is already significant in business organisation, finance, tourism and most areas of work. In order to deal with Japan effectively and understand the nature of its impact, Australia devotes considerable resources to developing Japanese skills, language and cultural awareness among its population.

At the same time, for Australia, the global economy is more than the three dominant trading blocks alone. Modern transportation and telecommunications allow global sourcing of products and the development of a world capital market in which it can trade anywhere. Australia can develop international niche markets in either or both of two ways. It can find the markets and then acquire appropriate language and cultural skills to service them; and/or can make use of the language and cultural skills it already has in its population to locate and develop markets. Thus there is an economic place as well as an ethical rationale for the community languages of migrants.

The growth of services and changes in manufacturing

Mass production manufacturing had dominated goods production in the twentieth century. During the rapid growth period of the 1950s and 1960s new forms of services—associated for example with the sale, repair and maintenance of consumer appliances, eating out, tourism—absorbed most of the labour released from direct goods production. It is argued that the enlarged and increasingly wealthy middle classes expressed a growing diversity of consumer preference which in turn led to a decline of interest in the standardised goods of mass production.

The new microelectronic technology, in part, enabled efficient production of more specialised and higher quality goods for niche markets (Sabel 1982; Piore & Sabel 1984; Gershuny & Miles 1983). The often quoted example for western societies is that of bread, where the standard white loaf of the 1960s was largely replaced in all urban regions in the West during the 1970s by a huge range of bread products of different shapes, sizes and composition, including the traditional loaves, rolls, buns, scones, croissants of all European societies. These cannot easily be mass produced and the period has witnessed a decline in large bread factories and the emergence of many small specialised bakeries. The same trend is observable in most consumer commodities from cars to clothes pegs.

The diversification of markets and the greater fluctuations in levels of demand during the 1970s prompted a variety of responses. Some large manufacturers sought cheaper labour either domestically or off-shore; others decentralised production to smaller units or increased employment of subcontractors. The most effective response, which came about both adventitiously and purposefully, was the development of flexible specialisation and increased innovation. These had far-reaching consequences for the organisation of factory work (Sabel 1982; Piore & Sabel 1984; Best 1990). They laid the basis for the new forms of competitiveness which will be considered later.

Diversification also prompted increases in the services directly related to manufactured products such as finance, wholesaling and retailing, and in small business enterprise more generally. Some of the small businesses arose in areas of high unemployment and there was a high failure rate. There are great differences between the small new technology-based firms that have sprung up near the great universities in the Boston area of the United States, the growth of self-employment and community enterprises in the depressed industrial areas of north-west Europe, and the family businesses of artisans, farmers and fishing people in Denmark. Rates of small-firm formation do not themselves indicate a successful flexible economy (Best 1990, p. 256).

Education is essential to success in this new economy. The highest rates of new firm formation, and the lowest failure rates, have been found in those areas where there are already high levels of education, a preponderance of managerial and technical skills and where there was relatively easy access to start-up capital. These have been mainly in the diversified metropolitan regions (Whitley 1991).

The impact of theory and technology

The invention and the diffusion of microelectronics throughout societies continue to have a profound and pervasive impact on most aspects of life. Referring to the period from the late 1970s, Sharp speaks of a:

> secondary round of innovation and investment as microelectronics breaks out of its mainstream line of development (computers) and spills over into a host of new applicants (for example CAD, videotext) and new process technologies (robotics, CNC machine tools, electronic telecommunications, switching etc. (Sharp 1986, p. 289)

When applied in manufacturing they remove much routine work and result in substantial reductions in the demand for unskilled labour. It was this development more than any other which led to high levels of unemployment in most developed countries from the late 1970s. Interestingly, the countries where robots were most used, Japan and Sweden, experienced the least unemployment (Katzenstein 1985). This depended in part on the way they were able to take advantage of microelectronics.

The high general level of education and the availability of sufficient science and technology graduates facilitated a speedy diffusion of the new technology, with enormous increases in the productivity of manufacturing. With equal skills among management and marketing, these advantages resulted in greater wealth and employment in the society (Hall 1986).

The major innovations of the period, including microelectronics, aerospace and biotechnology, and their intrusion into many areas of life, signal the application of theoretical knowledge to the processes of innovation and diffusion. All the new developments discussed in Sharp's sector studies of innovative technology in Europe derived from scientific discovery (Sharp 1986).

On the other hand, the industries that emerged from the nineteenth century, for example steel, electricity, telephone, automobile, were all created by what Bell calls 'talented tinkerers' rather than through the application of scientific theory. Science operates on the basis of establishing the various properties of phenomena and the underlying principles of order, which enable

discovery and extension to new products. Bell speaks of theoretical knowledge operating on the basis of an algorithm, or decision rules, which apply to many situations, rather than the intuitive judgment that operated earlier (Bell 1974).

Theoretical knowledge became important to key industries in the latter third of the nineteenth century and has since been applied to steel, electricity, telecommunications and the automobile. This theoretical capacity is a crucial element of post-industrial societies, indicated by the marked growth of appropriately trained people—the professional/technical component—in the workforce, not only to undertake the necessary research and development work, but to ensure its diffusion and application (Freeman 1987). OECD countries, on average, spend nearly two per cent of GDP on research and development.

Later we will examine the effects of these broad economic changes on work more specifically. It may be noted here that the raising of educational requirements by leading sections of the economy has profound consequences for literacy demands in a society. For example, it is easier to fall behind quickly by stagnating in a dead-end job, or by being unemployed. Once out of touch there is further to go to catch up. This is not only a consequence of economic change. There are also social conditions that affect changing literacy demands, and it is to these we now turn.

Some major social changes

Decline of patriarchy

The growth of the women's movement and the extensive entry of women into the paid workforce of many developed societies have been accompanied by a dramatic change in the role of women in society. While it is arguable how far the trend has gone in different societies, Block's phrase, 'the decline of patriarchy', does not seem too exaggerated. He refers to the decline in the subordination of women especially emphasised by confinement to the domestic sphere. At the same time there has been an elaborate critique of inequalities based on gender, and the consequences of the changed role continue to ripple through societies and still require various kinds of formal action in legislative and administrative provision, including education, as well as in attitudes and expectations.

So far little adjustment has been made to ensure provision for the unpaid work of child care, care of the elderly, maintaining neighbourhood ties and the elaborate structure of voluntary community activity formerly undertaken by women. There has been no reduction in men's hours of work and little growth in compensatory community services. Much domestic responsibility continues to be carried out by women. The result is considerable stress for women and

families, and the community-related tasks are often abandoned. In some areas unemployment and early retirement have provided a pool of people who have stepped into this breach.

Breakdown of the linear life course

In addition to the decline in patriarchal arrangements, Block identifies rather dramatically what he calls an end to the 'linear life course': that is, an end of the one-career, one-marriage pattern. The likelihood is that both men and women will move in and out of the fast-changing workforces at various times during their lives. While the trend is not universal, a high proportion of adults now have more than one long-term partnership during their lifetime and while present social and economic conditions remain the pattern is likely to continue.

These two features, decline of patriarchy and breakdown of the linear life course, are general trends. They can have specific outcomes that have implications for literacy. When both work and family life are more unstable, marked by increases in the rates of break-up and reformation of parent partnerships, atrophy of literacy can occur among more vulnerable individuals. For example, long periods of unemployment, solo parenthood, being a victim of violence, or having a bout of alcoholism or drug addiction, can each make for a withdrawal from mainstream contexts where literacy practices are being constructed and advanced, and are constantly changing. Let us consider in closer detail some of the conditions associated with unemployment and migration that can contribute to the atrophy of literacy.

Unemployment has arisen largely from restructuring and economic downturn, but in addition there are a variety of non-economic conditions that cause people to drop out of the paid workforce, including, for example, mental and physical illness, alcoholism and drug addiction. Unemployment does not always lead to withdrawal and atrophy of literacy skills. For some it is a chance to take time out, and there are those who simply prefer a freer lifestyle: in both cases unemployment can be associated with forms of personal development that may keep people in touch with the mainstream.

In our societies recent unemployment most affects females, the young, and the least skilled for the modern economy, but has impacted on a wide range of people and occupational types, some of whom, as suggested above, may develop new skills while unemployed. Many government programs for the unemployed are designed to promote this kind of activity, but so far they do not reach far enough into the affected population. Furthermore it is not always possible to know in advance the kinds of literacy required for the new job. Because work requirements are changing, people seldom return to a job using similar knowledge and skills to the ones they used when they left the workforce.

Unemployment for many is a transient phase. It is most likely to be debilitating and lead to literacy atrophy when associated with debilitating conditions. Getting back into the workforce for these people can mean developing awareness of the other factors in their lives as well as unemployment. For example, the victims and, indeed, the perpetrators of persistent violence, often need new understanding of ways of managing their personal relationships, as well as skills for relating effectively to social agencies and techniques for seeking work in addition to new work skills.

The conception we have is of people moving in and out of the need for literacy assistance, a constant flux and a steady demand from new sources.

Furthermore the people affected in these ways, especially the unemployed, are seldom gathered together in one place, and seldom have a shared recognition of their situation.

In providing a safety net, the welfare state acts to lessen or mitigate impoverishment in various ways. But it also has the effect of weakening awareness of the situation of 'being unemployed' and gives the clients the common role only of beneficiary. The modern, or postmodern condition is not one of large numbers of people all aware of similar deprivation who might mobilise and create political demand for appropriate education, as occurred in the nineteenth century and during the depression of the 1930s. Rather it is one of fragmentation and separateness among people without adequate literacy, but nevertheless participating in a range of often satisfying discourses. The stigma of inadequate literacy, especially when it involves writing and numeracy deficiencies, may add a personal unwillingness to mobilise publicly on that issue.

Migration is another feature of modern societies that creates demand for basic adult education (Wickert 1989; Kalantzis, Gurney & Cope 1986). There is deliberate immigration as a consequence of government policies, immigration from nearby semidependent countries and the acceptance of refugees.

The movement of people from non-English-speaking societies to Australia has led to the regular provision of educational facilities and to well-established pedagogical techniques. Certain groups within the migrant community seem to be able quickly to acquire the necessary levels of English and wider proficiencies, not only to enter the workforce but to secure quality employment. Furthermore in many cases their community languages and home country contacts are proving valuable to Australasia's international trade and diplomacy as well as enriching cultural life. The language policies of both countries now provide for the active retention of community languages, though some commentators have expressed reservations over whether they go far enough (Department of Employment, Education and Training [DEET] 1991a;

for a comment see also Clyne 1991). Within New Times multilingual and multicultural diversity are among those diversities that are now celebrated.

However, there are groups of migrants who remain at risk. As stated in *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (DEET 1991a):

> approximately 360,000 adult immigrants have little, if any, English. Two-thirds of these are not in the labour force and the rest are mainly in low-skilled and poorly-paid jobs, and are neavily at risk in the industry-restructuring process. (p. 2)

Not all populations similarly affected are migrants, however. They include also the indigenous peoples. Among the migrants and indigenous people, some have been disproportionately successful in quickly acquiring English language skills and making their way in society: and others have been disproportionately unsuccessful in acquiring and using the written texts that allow access to advantage.

The observation calls for more research into the patterns and the causes of success and failure, and also into ways of addressing underachievement. One commonly observed pattern is that the successful groups are highly represented by people from *lettered* cultures (i.e. cultures with writing and established literatures), while the unsuccessful groups contain many from cultures without a written literature.

In other words the successful are those who have a tradition and the direct experience of language learning. In Gee's terms they have employed both learning and acquisition with their own language, and so when they come to the second language they have meta-level awareness. On this point Gee notes:

> We should realize that teaching and learning are connected with the development of meta-level cognition and linguistic skills. They will work better if we explicitly realize this and build the realization into our curricula. (Gee 1991, pp. 9–10)

We will return to this point later.

New requirements of workplaces

In this section we will describe patterns of work organisation which are emerging as the dominant forms because they are proving to be the most effective for the demands of the post-industrial economy. They also capture

certain preferred values increasingly held in post-industrial society. These patterns specify ways in which people relate to each other at work and in other organisations. They have implications not just for curriculum content in educational institutions but also for the way the institutions are run, teachers relate to their students and for teacher-initiated interaction in learning situations.

We will describe the new patterns under two headings: new technological requirements of work and new social requirements of work.

New technological requirements of work

The evidence from studies in a range of countries suggests that work in offices, factories, retail shops and repair operations increasingly will require the ability to handle high technology processes involving microelectronics, using computers, monitoring processes, interpreting symbols and the like, in addition to simply reading instructions.

Modern market demands no longer call for standardised mass production, but for variety, consistent high quality and continuous innovation (Best 1990; Thurow 1992). It is not efficient to have workers just do as they are told. They are required to take an active part in the production process; to identify errors, make corrections themselves or seek help and explain the problem; to understand the reasons for quality and consistency; and to monitor the operations and products and suggest modifications. They will take part in, and contribute to, discussions about new products, improvements to processes, and marketing (compare Wiggenhorn 1990).

The old approach to newcomers in most workplaces was to train them by watching others. Even when technology changed every five years such on-the-job training made sense, but people cannot handle constant innovation by watching one another. Nowadays work requires basic and continuous upskilling. This requires not only relatively high levels of reading, writing and comprehension; but also understanding of mathematical and other abstract processes and the technology used.

It is important to recognise that here we are talking about what might be called 'leading edge' work and workplaces as opposed to all work as presently exists. Our description is reminiscent of the position developed by John Mathews in *Tools of Change* (1989) and numerous other writings. This position has properly been challenged by several Australian writers in so far as it purports to be an empirically accurate account of current work *in toto*.

Allan Luke, for example, agrees with McCormack (1991) that 'many key areas of work require increasingly varied and complex literate practices, and in some sectors productivity is visibly deterred by levels of worker skill and

English literacy' (Luke 1992, p.8). He adds, however, that 'other studies have revealed actual declines in job skills required' and that 'taken together, these trends suggest an economic environment where some will require higher levels of literate competence in parts of the expanding service and information sectors, but many, particularly those in lower paying and part time work, will require repetitive and deskilled textual competence' (Luke 1992, p.9).

Gahan (1991) argues that Mathews appeals to 'decidedly selective empirics' in support of the applicability of the 'new production concepts' of post-industrialism to mainstream work in Australia. Mathews's case study is confined 'almost exclusively to the manufacturing sector'. Gahan asks 'how about banking finance and clerical work ... the shop assistants, building workers, supermarket cashiers, the kids behind the McDonald's counter'? Moreover, Mathews's account 'fails to consider the sexual division of labour'. Only a very small percentage of total female employment is found in the core manufacturing sector. Gahan notes, as well, that a number of studies 'point to trends of deskilling and degradation of work within the same industries and regions where democratization, new production concepts and flexible specialization are characterized as being dominant', concluding that the empirical evidence in support of claims that work has undergone profound change 'is far from satisfactory or convincing' (1991, pp.171–3).

With regard to computer-based outwork in Australia, Probert and Wajcman (1988) argue on the basis of their study of word processors and computer programmers that whereas post-industrial theorists see such work as 'part of a positive future, for others it evokes the ugly spectre of "sweated" self-exploitative piecework' with virtually no autonomy and strictly minimal prospects for innovation, creativity, and personal development and challenge (p.436).

As far as the experience of their sample of word processors was concerned, 'the evidence seemed to support the pessimists' view of new technology outwork as just another form of sweated labour' (p.442). By contrast, the experience of the computer programmers seemed more in line with the optimists' view of 'the technologically based reorganisation of work' as affording greater scope for flexibility, autonomy, skill, challenge, and improved conditions. Probert and Wajcman add, however, that 'the relatively privileged position of many software workers may be a temporary condition', subject to being displaced as and when computer programming demands are increasingly met through technological advances which do away with personal expertise and skill (p.445).

We have no argument with the empirical accuracy of these qualifications nor with their portent concerning new forms of inequality arising from the advent of post-industrialism in Australia. Our concern, however, has been to describe leading-edge workplaces here and throughout the world (Best 1990),

occurring in numerous *regions* in many countries (see e.g. Sabel 1982), but *widespread* in Japan (Friedman 1988), Sweden and Germany (Sharp 1986). In New Zealand it has been described for industries as diverse as meat-processing (*New Zealand Meat Producer* 1992), automobile assembly (Callister 1989), and the manufacture of window stays (Gilbertson & Knight 1992). Australia has comparable examples. The point is to describe the present and future of work within economies that are most successful as assessed by conventional measures, and as envisaged in policies intended to promote 'a clever country' and backed by supporting initiatives (DEET 1991b, p.5).

Indeed, it is necessary to add still further dimensions to our account so far of 'leading-edge' work and workplaces. In particular, we must recognise key features of what we have described elsewhere as 'the new social requirements of work' (Levett & Lankshear 1992).

New social requirements of work

Michael Best's important 1990 book summarises and reinterprets more than a decade of research and writing, which, tentatively at first but with growing confidence, described and showed the significance of new forms of work organisation. Best begins his book with a 1988 statement by Konosuke Matsushita, the successful Japanese industrialist who founded the Matsushita Electric Industrial Company, one of the largest and most up-to-date electronic manufacturers in Japan. The statement touches on the key participative ingredient in the new pattern of work organisation which is becoming pervasive in the developed and the newly industrialising societies, including New Zealand. It is gradually transforming the less flexible and less innovative mass production that was the dominant form of work organisation in the immediate past.

> We will win and you will lose. You cannot do anything about it because your failure is an internal disease. Your companies are based on Taylor's principles. Worse, your heads are Taylorized too. You firmly believe that sound management means executives on the one side and workers on the other, on the one side men who think and on the other side men who can only work. For you management is the art of smoothly transferring the executive's idea to the worker's hands.
>
> We have passed the Taylor stage. We are aware that business has become terribly complex. Survival is very uncertain in an environment filled with risk, the unexpected, and competition ... We know that the intelligence of a few technocrats—even very bright ones—has become totally inadequate to face these challenges. Only the intellects of all employees can permit a

company to live with the ups and downs and the requirements of the new environment. Yes we will win and you will lose. For you are not able to rid your minds of the obsolete Taylorisms that we never had. (quoted in Best 1990, p.1)

Though Matsushita's point is well taken, his pessimism was misplaced and he did not mention the downside of Japanese production: an overwhelming emphasis on teamwork and loyalty to the firm can mean long hours there and put enormous pressure of the relationship between work and the family. Even as Matsushita was speaking, the particular feature of effective work organisation he described, and many variants of it, were already catching on and spreading throughout the world; not only emanating from Japan, in such forms as 'the Nissan way', quality circles and the like, in New Zealand, Australia, Korea, Singapore and South-East Asia, but as separate successful indigenous variants, in Italy, Scandinavia and Germany; not only in factories and on ships and a wide variety of workplaces, but in whole regions in Asia, Europe and the Americas. There is more to the new pattern of work than relationships between staff within factories.

There had long been movements in the West to counter the worst effects of work in mass production factories based on Taylorism. One of the more effective, under various titles such as 'worker participation' and 'industrial democracy', was partly driven by ideology and partly by social science research. Promising developments occurred in Scandinavia emanating from the Work Research Institute in Norway (see for example, Emery & Thorsrud 1969) which, when microelectronics became available, eventually bore fruits, particularly in Sweden (see for example, Katzenstein 1985). The work was redesigned so that workers could operate in multi-skilled teams where the tasks were interchangeable and much more left to the teams to decide than when they were part of the assembly line. There were also a variety of ways for workers to participate in management decisions affecting them (Emery & Thorsrud 1969).

Initially these developments were regarded as add-ons and despite various successful applications in many countries outside Scandinavia, they did not at the time undermine the supremacy of Fordist mass production. The more massive Japanese challenge did, though it was not widely recognised until the late 1970s (see for example, Vogel 1979) when planning mechanisms and quality circles were given more prominence than the overall pattern that included decentralisation of manufacturing, and it was not fully analysed until more recently (see for example, Abegglen & Stalk 1985; Friedman 1988).

Circumstances in the late twentieth century, including market fragmentation, global resource uncertainties and microelectronic technology, have

combined to provide small-scale flexible manufacturing with commercial advantage over large-scale mass production. More and more of the world's goods require not standardisation and modest quality associated with mass production, but higher quality, continuous innovation, design and production changes. Flexible production and high quality in turn require different organisational structures and work practices. These different social relationships of work are becoming pervasive and are not only limited to industry. They have important implications for education which we will now specify, using the analytical categories of Best.

Best distinguishes the 'new competition' from the old, on four grounds: (1) organisation of the firm; (2) types of coordination across phases in the production chain; (3) organisation of the sector; and (4) patterns of industrial policy. These have been hinted at, though not fully described, in the foregoing examples.

The new competition firm is entrepreneurial, as distinct from hierarchical and has a strategic orientation, that is, chooses its terrain on which to compete. It achieves comparative advantage by continuous improvement in process and product. 'Innovation is not about abrupt changes (produced from time to time by research and development) but by the accretion of marginal adjustments in product, process and organization.' Working practices are seldom routinised.

> Improvement is always possible and ideas can come from everyone including consumers, workers, suppliers, staff and managers. As a social process, innovation involves the interaction of people engaged in functionally distinct activities. It demands persistent and comprehensive re-examination of productive practices ... A strategy of continuous improvement demands an organization in which a persistence to detail operates at every activity level. The persistence to detail is about incorporating learning from doing into improved ways of doing. (Best 1990, pp.12–13)

The entrepreneurial firm usually makes use of sophisticated technology and integrates thinking and doing and promotes teamwork, in order to be entrepreneurial. It seeks to compete by enhancing the peculiar human capabilities of perceptual discrimination, learning and inferring from experience, reasoning, making fine judgments, and coping with unforseen events. Needless to say a high general level of literacy is assumed.

Best has a useful caution about the application of the term 'entrepreneurial' in this context. He does not have in mind the traditional view of enterprise. The entrepreneurial firm, though often small, is not:

> an extension of the 'triumphant individual', a morality tale that is deeply embedded in American culture; the small firms of the New Competition are elements of a networked association of firms. Here the institutions of cooperation are as critical as those of individuality. (Best 1990, p.258)

The production chain requires consultative coordination. The examples of Italy and Japan showed that in order to be innovative and flexible there was consultation and cooperation amongst the mutually dependent firms, large and small, each of which specialised in distinct phases of the same production network. The requirement would have effects on the skills and activities of workers and the tasks of management, and explains why successful large assembly firms limited the number of suppliers. Nissan for example has 120 suppliers (compared with over 300 for American automobile plants).

> It is crucial that the production engineers at Nissan and the suppliers know one another and can directly and personally discuss problems and explore new possibilities. This requires the nurturing of personal relationships and a common production language. Neither can be accomplished without cooperation which takes time. (Best 1990, p.16)

The human capabilities required at this level of organisation, involving bench-level operators in firms as well as engineers and managers, include conferring, consulting, listening and negotiating skills and responding positively to pressure.

The sectoral level shows both competition and cooperation. The latter can include a variety of inter-firm practices and agencies such as trade and professional associations, apprenticeship and worker education programs and facilities, joint marketing arrangements, research financing and regulatory commissions. 'Strategically managed inter-firm associations can promote the long-term development and competitiveness of a sector' (Best 1990, p.19). Competition without such agencies can result in undercutting and other debilitating outcomes.

The human capabilities required again include negotiating, consulting and conferring skills. The same kinds of attributes are necessary for market development and selling, most particularly in international business. In addition linguistic skills may be required along with a curiosity about, and tolerance for, other cultures, and an international outlook.

At the governmental level, nationally successful countries have developed industrial policies that according to Best are designed to shape the markets, focus on production as opposed to distribution, and target strategic

sectors to maximise industrial growth. He has in mind not only Japan—Johnson's notion of the developmental state (Johnson 1982)—but also what Thurow has called 'communitarian capitalism' in small states in Europe (Katzenstein 1985) as opposed to individualistic capitalism (Thurow 1992). The active industrial policies which Best and others have found to be the most effective put pressure on policy-makers and on sectors, especially education, to think long-term.

There is a lot of support in the literature for Best's characterisation of innovative firms as participative organisations in which the talents of all members are used. Kanter, in a study of innovation in several major United States companies, points out that innovation is not just invention but includes 'creative use' of new technologies as well as new techniques and social arrangements. Innovation can occur in any part of a dynamic organisation. Kanter also notes the importance of cooperative and consultative skills at many levels of innovative firms whose structures and cultures she called 'integrative'. These 'integrative' firms foster collaboration, as opposed to the least innovative, which she called 'fragmented' because they make cooperation difficult to achieve. The fragmented firms are over-specialised and compartmentalised, which inhibits innovation (Kanter 1983).

Sabel (1982) notes that Fordist systems of production in which workers are not presumed to share the owner's goals are low-trust systems. He shows that high-trust organisations can adapt to shifting goals because each worker is able to elaborate incomplete rules since she or he understands their connection to the organisation's overarching goals. Having helped to establish the goals she or he has a stake in their realisation. Sabel rated (pre-unification) West Germany as a high-trust culture in which manufacturing organisations were more readily able to respond to the demand for flexible production and specialisation.

Countries and regions that have developed these particular forms of work organisation and trading arrangements have achieved significant gains in productivity and success in trade, and in general are faced with lower rates of unemployment. Countries and regions that have not changed are being forced to by the sheer effectiveness of the new pattern, which thereby has greater justification in many areas of work beyond manufacturing.

Successful manufacturing under modern conditions calls for dynamic flexibility—the ability of a firm to increase production steadily through continuous improvements in production processes and innovation in the product. At the core is the ability to make rapid use of new technologies, requiring a high level of education, but this is far from sufficient. Organisations are required to be enterprising and this calls for the fullest participation from all staff. Innovative firms require from their members both technical skills of a high order and

consultative and negotiating capabilities. These talents will not be developed in classrooms of the traditional kind, where teachers talk and students listen, and where knowledge is thought to be gained by academic learning alone.

The significance of leading-edge work

Obviously, the move to a theory-led high technology workplace characterised by flexible specialisation aimed at market diversification, and emphasis on quality, social responsibility for skills, decision-making and teamwork, is driven by the desire to achieve comparative advantage in a competitive world economy.

Moreover the examples of Japan and Sweden suggest that having a highly educated workforce is a way to have a high wage and low unemployment economy. These two countries, and others with a Germanic education system that produces high levels of knowledges and skills across a broad spectrum of their workforces, have been the first to take greatest advantage of new technologies because of the availability of suitably educated workers. These examples and a careful study of new industry in Europe have led Sharp (1986) and others to assert that 'the mix of available skills shapes the evolution of the technology. If we want the technologies that support a high-wage, high value added economy we have to ensure the education and skills to make that possible' (Cohen & Zysman 1987, p.7).

This line of thinking suggests that in Australia the diffusion of high technology workplaces will be affected by the availability of sufficient numbers of educated workers. At present these are most arguably in scarce supply. Nonetheless, these leading-edge workplaces set the standard. By requiring so much more than traditional workplaces they make for bigger gaps between their workers on the one hand, and on the other the unskilled, the undereducated, and those with literacy problems. It is a bigger *knowledge* gap and a bigger *wages* gap.

They have raised the average level of knowledge and skills for all adult basic education. More than that they have called for a particular mathematical and technological knowledge, and for abstraction skills, where literacy in the dominant language—English, in our case—is an essential prerequisite. If, as Kalantzis says, 'The aim of literacy has to be access to economic wealth, political power and symbolic representation [and] literacy is a critical aspect of negotiating this' (Kalantzis 1991, p.19), it can be seen that the gateway is now much higher and more difficult to reach.

In fact the situation is even more complex. Those who lack the meta-level competencies necessary for taking full part in an economy where work requires

continuous innovation, face limited opportunities for rewarding employment and life chances. For those without literacy the situation is grim and the penalties are severe: wages are lower, work options are fewer, unemployment is more likely to occur and to last, and catching up to the new standard is more daunting. That goal is further away.

Literacy

In this section we wish to draw together the threads of the earlier sociological description of New Times and changing workplaces and show their relevancy to literacy work. There are three main points.

1 The connections will first be made at a theoretical level. It is important to gain a clearer conceptual understanding of the links between literacy and workplaces. This is best achieved by starting at a general level from which we can derive specific applications in pedagogical practices and institutional policies. In our view further work of this type is necessary in Australia. We will make use here of some literacy theory, actual model-building, advanced by James Gee (1991), and a conceptual framework proposed by Rob McCormack (1991).

2 Using the case study mentioned earlier (Wiggenhorn 1990), we will apply Gee's model and McCormack's framework to make a general pedagogical point about workplace literacy and, for that matter, other kinds of literacy work.

3 The case study also gives an example of institutional innovation which challenges us to think about the kinds of partnerships that make best use of existing resources in order to meet the demands of New Times. In addition the innovation suggests institutional connections within an overall system of credentialling which can be made for those who are out of the mainstream or who have fallen behind.

To us, workplace literacy and other forms of adult literacy provision should be seen as part of a national integrated *system* of lifelong education. The system we envisage represents a fourth stage in the historical development of formal educational provision required by nation states. The ingredients of the fourth stage have existed piecemeal for many years, but now under the imperatives of New Times, should be drawn together as a cohesive system.

Theory

Gee speaks of literacy as 'control of secondary uses of language (or uses of language in secondary discourses)'. To be illiterate, then, is to lack control of uses of language in secondary discourses.

Discourses are modes or ways of being and experiencing organised around socially constructed and accepted ways of using language and related ways of thinking, acting/behaving, valuing, feeling, believing, and so on. By reference to the discourses we live in, and through, we can identify ourselves as members of socially meaningful groups or 'social networks' (Gee 1991, p.3).

We encounter and develop our *primary* discourse through 'face-to-face communication with intimates' (Gee 1991, p.7), or what sociologists call primary socialisation. Primary discourse is grounded in oral language, our primary use of language, which is preliterate. Through the process of enculturation among intimates we are inducted into using language, behaving, valuing, and believing to give a shape to our experience.

We develop *secondary* discourses 'in association with and by having access to and practice with ... secondary institutions' beyond the family or primary socialising unit: for example, school, church, workplace, clubs, bureaucracies (Gee 1991, p.8). Secondary uses of language are those involved in participating in the discourses of secondary institutions. These secondary discourses build upon, but go beyond, those acquired within our primary discourse and include, notably, forms involving texts (printed, visual, electronic, etc.). Literacy, then, belongs to the level of secondary uses of language within secondary discourses. Hence literacies in workplaces are examples of uses of languages in secondary discourses.

Gee goes further by distinguishing between literate practices which essentially comprise *performance* and those characterised by processes of *conscious knowing*. The notion of performance emphasises the skill that can be obtained by being in settings with others who use it, that is, by watching and listening to others already skilled in the task. Adequate skilled performance in many work tasks has been acquired in this way. The acquisition is often made more effective when the tasks are formally taught. In this case the teacher assists in providing a conscious knowledge about and of the task, by means of explanation and analysis—for example breaking the thing to be learned into its analytic parts. Gee adds that this process inherently involves the learner attaining 'along with the matter being taught, some degree of meta-knowledge about the matter' (Gee 1991, p.5).

New forms of work, and especially leading-edge work as already described above, increasingly require such meta-level knowledge, and as leading-

edge work becomes widespread more of the workforce will use 'meta-level knowledge' than previously. With meta-level knowledge one does not merely know how to perform a task but knows the kind of task one is performing, why one is performing it, and how it relates to other tasks that are part of larger processes. The use of the concept 'meta-level knowledge' and its significance will be illustrated in the case analysis which follows.

To complete this theory component let us turn to McCormack's framework of literacy *regions*. McCormack begins from a premise we share, that adults with literacy problems 'do not need something called literacy. They need an education' (McCormack 1991, p.6). Literacy, then, must be conceptualised in terms of adults' *educational* needs. To this end McCormack analyses the place of literacy within adult lives and life needs. He identifies four 'regions' of literacy, or sites of meaning-making employing text, which he calls epistemic, technical, humanist, and public literacy. According to McCormack, adults must be able to mobilise all four forms of meaning on any given social site, hence an education adequate for New Times consequently calls for developing competence in all. We agree with McCormack that there may be further regions of literacy than the four he has identified. His main insight, however, is well made. Epistemic literacy refers to understanding categories of knowledge. Technical literacy is involved with understanding what is to be done and why in areas of practical action. Humanist literacy refers to constructing our selves, our identities. Public literacy is related to processes of democratic participation. We will enlarge briefly on epistemic and technical literacy to illustrate McCormack's idea.

We draw on categories of knowledge (epistemic literacy) when, for example, explaining what is wrong with a machine or a process, or knowing which section of a welfare agency—income maintenance or custody?—to go to for a given need. Epistemic literacy involves reading and writing in order to understand the categories we need for operating in daily life. As we will show later in relation to work (and for citizenship as well, although we will not show that here), the daily demands on adults at large call for increasing command over categories of knowledge. Abstract knowledge is no longer the preserve of elites but impinges increasingly on the everyday lives of all adults.

We draw on technical literacy when we use written and electronic texts in following instructions and requirements in work tasks or in learning how to operate a video recorder at home. The nature of 'procedural knowledge' has changed. In New Times tacit knowledge, 'habitual routines of "know how"', are giving way increasingly to forms of procedural knowledge and competence dependent on 'explicit instructional and expository material' (McCormack 1991, p.16). Mastering work processes is much less a matter of being shown what to do and thereafter repeating the same processes than previously. It involves much more the process of understanding and applying written text,

diagrams, visuals, graphs, numbers, and so on (McCormack 1991, p.24).

The theoretical connection here is that any social site in which meanings are being made—for example teaching—involves at least these four dimensions. Consequently, good pedagogy makes people aware of these dimensions, through creative use of their experiences and prior knowledge. One of the advantages will be the development of meta-level understandings, to use Gee's term, and this will enhance the generalisability of a skill and its fullest meaning.

Pedagogy

The case study used in this and the following section concerns the huge US manufacturing company, Motorola, whose development of work-related educational programs has been well described in an article in the *Harvard Business Review* (Wiggenhorn 1990). Wiggenhorn considers Motorola's corporate education and training program to be among the most comprehensive and effective in the world, having recently included university-level courses. Accordingly, he says, 'Successful companies in today's business climate must not only train workers but build education systems' (p.72).

The experiences of a giant corporation in the huge US economy may seem of limited applicability to workplace programs in Australia's smaller economy. We do not expect that any Australian company would necessarily envisage an educational program of the scale of Motorola which invests $120 million annually in education. Motorola provides an excellent example of a leading-edge enterprise and documents today what will increasingly become workplace challenges and work-related education responses of the future. While Motorola's particular approach may not apply in Australia, the problems identified arise from similar trends and, indeed, are similar. The problems are partly pedagogical and partly institutional. Both will have lessons for Australia. It should be noted that the article contains much more of interest and potential relevance to Australian workplaces than we have space to use here.

Wiggenhorn sets the scene for the advent of New Times in manufacturing and describes how the company responded.

> Ten years ago, we hired people to perform set tasks and didn't ask them to do a lot of thinking. If a machine went down, workers raised their hands, and a troubleshooter came to fix it. Ten years ago, we saw quality control as a screening process, catching defects before they got out the door. Ten years ago, most workers and some managers learned their jobs by observation, experience, and trial and error. When we did train people, we simply taught them new techniques on top of the basic math and communication skills we supposed they brought with them from school or college.

Then all the rules of manufacturing and competition changed, and in our drive to change with them, we found we had to re-write the rules of corporate training and education. We learned that line workers had to actually understand their work and their equipment, that senior management had to exemplify and reinforce new methods and skills if they were going to stick, that change had to be continuous and participative, and that education—not just instruction—was the only way to make this occur.

Finally, just as we began to capitalize on the change we thought we were achieving, we discovered to our utter astonishment that much of our workforce was illiterate. They couldn't read. They couldn't do simple arithmetic like percentages and fractions. At one plant, a supplier changed its packaging, and we found in the nick of time that our people were working by the color of the package, not by what it said. In Illinois we found a foreign-born employee who didn't know the difference between the present tense and the past. He was never sure if we were talking about what *was* happening or what *had* happened.

... From the kind of skill instruction we envisioned at the outset, we moved out in both directions: down, toward grade school basics as fundamental as the three Rs; up, toward new concepts of work, quality, community, learning, and leadership ...

Today we expect workers to know their equipment and begin any trouble-shooting process themselves. If they do need an expert, they must be able to describe the malfunction in detail. In other words, they have to be able to analyze problems and then communicate them.

Today we see quality as a process that prevents defects from occurring, a common corporate language that pervades the company and applies to security guards and secretaries as well as manufacturing staff. (Wiggenhorn 1990, pp.71–2)

The Motorola story illustrates vividly the importance of the new starting level for factory workers in New Times: it is much higher than previously. In 1990, by which time several layers of middle managers had been removed, Motorola required its new manufacturing employees to have communication and computation skills at 7th grade level, soon to be raised to 8th and 9th grade levels. Much effort was spent in getting employees up to these levels. They found, for example, that poor maths performance (only forty per cent of employees at one plant passed a test containing questions like 'ten is what percent of 100?') was largely a function of the inability to read, or in the case of many migrants, to understand English as a second language (p.77).

It will be noticed that the nature of New Times work as described by Wiggenhorn calls for an understanding of work processes by all staff. The employees must know why they are doing what they are doing, how that fits in with the overall operation on the site, and they must be able to explain, analyse, conceptualise and communicate the tasks of their work area. Each worker has to become his or her own troubleshooter. In Gee's terms this is meta-level knowledge, which is what tasks require. It dictates both what is taught and the approach to teaching it. If meta-level knowledge is essential in New Times workplaces then it will be necessary in preparatory basic education as well.

McCormack's conceptual framework is also apt. The linked nature of the tasks in Motorola's new factories requires an approach that takes account of McCormack's different regions of literacy. Take the case of quality control. Motorola recognised that every employee had to understand the importance of maintaining high quality in all operations. At first quality was taught by means of a five-part curriculum: statistical process control, basic industrial problem-solving, presenting conceptual material, effective meetings—emphasising the role of participant as well as that of chairperson, and goal-setting. Much costly time was allocated to this program. It proved to be inadequate, especially where the lessons were kept separate from work and managers failed to reinforce the lessons in daily work. It was only when the managers realised that each technical component had to be understood and applied daily in the light of the overall purpose of quality control that the program was successful.

In McCormack's terms, each part of the curriculum is a technical area. It is only when each technical aspect is grasped *epistemically* that its real nature and significance as a part of a whole activity can be understood. Motorola originally had a linear technical conception of quality control (first there is statistics, then problem-solving, then conceptual aspects, and so on) and taught it as a sequence of separate components. They spent several years, and a lot of money, before discovering the limitations of this narrow approach. The need to reinforce their daily application was not recognised because the epistemic understanding was not in place. Once it was, behaviour changed. It may be that wise managers and teachers in Australia, using this, or some similar pertinent analysis, can circumvent the waste of time and resources that resulted from Motorola's long use of a narrower concept.

Institutional implications

In the light of our analysis the case of Motorola can be used to suggest three important institutional implications for Australian education. First, we see a need for new structures or partnerships between industry and educational

institutions. Second, the new forms of education which arise should be credentialled. Third, we would suggest that workplace education, as well as basic adult education, become part of a formal system of lifelong education. Credentialling will provide crucial links for the 'pathways' within this system. Uncovering widespread maths and reading problems was a great shock to Motorola, but it was the watershed discovery that shaped the future development of the company's educational plans. The discovery resulted in three important decisions.

1 Remedial education was not something Motorola could do well and the company turned to community colleges and other local institutions for help.

2 Motorola decided to examine other skills. It was assumed 'that high school and junior college graduates came to us equipped with technical and business skills like accounting, computer operations, statistics, and basic electronics ... we discovered they did not ... the courses weren't quite what the titles implied. The community colleges had fallen behind. Their theories, labs, and techniques were simply not up to modern industrial standards. They hadn't known where we were going, and we hadn't bothered to tell them' (p.79).

3 The third major decision was to begin building educational partnerships and dialogues.

Motorola has worked with a wide range of educational institutions ranging from local colleges to important national and international universities and research centres, including Northwestern University and Asia Pacific International University.

> Some educators and academics believe business people are universally unprincipled, that the reason for our involvement in education is to serve ourselves at the expense, somehow, of the community at large. (Wiggenhorn 1990, p.79)

Motorola's experience of industry workplace–educational partnership has produced interesting and mutually beneficial outcomes.

> Some of our strongest support comes from the people who teach remedial education and math. They know how widespread the problem is beyond Motorola and seem grateful that we're eager to attack illiteracy without

assessing blame. The point is not that our concern with education is utterly altruistic but that better and more relevant education helps business, labor, and the schools themselves. (Wiggenhorn 1990, p.79)

Educational institutions which are often resource-poor benefit from Motorola providing them with students, donations of equipment, access to Motorola plant for instructional purposes, summer internships for teachers, and use of Motorola labs and equipment. 'We believe—and I think they believe—that the mutual benefits are huge' (Wiggenhorn 1990, p.79).

First implication

The Australian situation may not provide a Motorola but it calls for industry and education to work more closely together, to identify and articulate coherent workplace needs and to develop jointly appropriate curriculum and pedagogy. The principle rather than the details provide the important lesson.

If, for example, sectors of Australian industry, comprising many medium and small companies, wish to have the kind of role in education which Motorola has developed, they will need to develop at least effective sector-wide structures to determine their education requirements and to handle relations with educational institutions. The groupings within the timber industry of Sweden and Finland might provide useful models.

Second implication

Beyond the immediate requirements of modern industry, there remains that large pool of people whose educational backgrounds currently preclude them from even applying for such work as would admit them to Motorola-type educational experiences. Herein lies a major challenge to existing educational provisions in Australia. Furthermore, basic adult education as presently arranged does not set them on a track that would get them to the point of entry to these experiences. A system of credentialling *all* postcompulsory education, of which basic adult and workplace education would be important components, will provide a linked network and incentives for people to move from one educational sphere to another with full and public recognition of what they have attained.

Third implication

Implicit in the proposal for credentialling is an obvious need for the present fragmented elements of postcompulsory education to be developed into an enlarged and integrated system of lifelong learning.

In ending, we are conscious that industrial purposes do not exhaust educational purposes. Here we have addressed workplace literacy solely in terms of the needs of industries in the modern economy. In so far as critical faculties are brought to bear in this context they will be used to analyse workplace processes.

There are also wider educational purposes which include critical assessment of industry itself and, indeed, of the entire economy. We do not deal with these wider purposes here, but recognise that they should always be included in a fully rounded program of education for workplace literacy teachers.

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FEARS, FANTASIES AND FUTURES IN WORKERS' LITERACY

PETER O'CONNOR

Looking to the future

There are many dangers lurking in the swamplands of the workplace environment for unsuspecting, unprepared or under-resourced educationists. The landscape is dotted with the occasional quicksand trap which will claim the novice trekker. As with many distant places, for many educationists the world of the workplace has been coloured with an exotic hue, and continues to provide the inspiration for many fantasies, flights of fancy and baseless fears. There is much talk of gremlins and other beasts waiting in ambush for fresh teacher, and reports of the odd snark, though to date no actual sightings have been recorded.

Probably the greatest threat posed by the workplace is the threat of being devoured by the jabberwocky rising up from our own fears, ignorance and confusion. This, and other monsters can be repelled by educationists developing, understanding, reflecting on, acting on, and being committed to their political stance in workplace basic education. Ultimately, we must take full responsibility for our interventions in the workplace as elsewhere, and be clear as to whose interests we are serving. There are also many oases and wide open spaces inviting sensitive and creative development. Our challenge is not simply to navigate the terrain with a minimum of mishaps, but to respect it and its inhabitants, and to contribute to its growth and enrichment.

Many of the initial responses or reactions to workplace basic education can be attributed to changes which are bringing this exotic faraway land closer to us, and our ability or inability to respond to these changes. However, we must change if we are to participate in, and contribute to, some of the openings that are unfolding. This may involve redefining our educational and political

understandings of our work, acquiring new skills, and the development of theories and practice which more closely and accurately reflect and accommodate workers' daily realities.

There are also a number of random predictions which can be safely made about some of the futures in workplace education. Workers' literacy can no longer be viewed as it was when the Sunday School Movement was attempting to build honest, obedient servants for God and capital—nor will it tolerate the same missionary zeal. Its requirements will be mostly met outside familiar college classroom walls; it will not be restricted to print-based texts; literacy needs of workers will no longer be viewed as an individual, isolatable and alienating learning exercise; no individuals or organisation will have a monopoly or inalienable control over the information, resources or processes.

Workplace basic education will generate its share of rivalries and turf battles; there will be squabbles, developments that we feel uncomfortable with, serious disagreements, and at times, profound debate around the ethics, politics and practice of our interventions. Workers' literacy cannot afford to continue to draw its theory, language and practice from our work with children and school education. Instead, it must grow out of, and have as its reference points, our evolving theories and experiences of adult learning, workers and work.

All of us involved in this area must acknowledge the diversity and often ill-defined nature of the demands in workers literacy, what new demands (educationally and politically) are evolving, and explore our solutions to them. A part of this is to be critically aware of the industrial imperatives operating in this area. If the futures in this area are to include more democratic, equitable and relevant learning; if they are to enable workers to take much greater control over the choices, content and structures of their learning, then we need to be involved in, and involve workers in, developing political theories and practices which promote collectivity, opportunity and cooperation, and which extend the educational and political frontiers of adult learning. We will need to be constantly aware of the diverse interests and motives of different stakeholders and the initiatives they promote, to reject the perpetual efforts to simplify and conservatise adult education, to build bridges between contemporary workplace reforms and education, to address the three dimensional (rather than the linear) nature of skills development and growth and avoid limiting our practice to a complicity in narrow vocationalism.

Workplace basic education is at an exciting crossroads, requiring innovative and creative directions. Through developing our own understanding, through constructing a theoretical and research base to draw on, by discarding some of our own traditional baggage and shackles, we can contribute to a strong

and positive future which expands the learning and social potential of workers. An essential element in these processes will be for all of us to examine critically and re-examine our own politics, our own resistance to change based on historical attachments and cultural familiarity, and for us to be prepared to take full responsibility for our contributions and obstructions to the change processes. We must abandon our fears of the unknown, not become preoccupied by the whims, fantasies and diversions generated by some, and begin earnestly to seek out some of the possible futures.

This paper attempts to dismantle some of the madness which has attached to this area, and premised on a loose critical theory of adult learning, propose a number of solutions or responses. Further, the argument is not only for a critical theory of workers' education, but also that without it the area is destined to the failings and limitations of the past, will continue to be dominated by the ideology of the new (sic) right, and will be incapable of genuinely serving and furthering the interests of workers. In this context, I am concerned first and foremost with the future/s; with fear only to the extent that it is fear of ignorance or apathy (but not reality), and fantasy as an indulgent diversion. When we discuss workers' literacy we need to do so with a clear and positive fix on the future, and in the process knock over some of the fears and reject the fantasies. There is an urgent need to move away from some of the current fear-induced defences in this area of work, and find ways to inject some reality into the rhetoric. The adult basic education sector has been beset by a dangerous conservatism which must be overcome in favour of more constructive approaches.

Starting in our own backyard

A part of this critical exploration is to expose ourselves to a rigorous scrutiny, to extend our own parameters, and to stimulate a healthy debate in a sector which needs to be opened up to new ideas and influences rather than the tired and sheltered approach which some promote. Some of that scrutiny must focus on leaderships, organisational structures and those who covet personal power or status over the interests of the sector. There are those in the adult basic education sector (albeit a small elite), who view themselves as the guardians of high principles and appoint themselves as the voice of the sector. They are the same people who will turn out the fine-sounding talk of 'critical reflection' at conferences and professional gatherings with monotonous regularity, as a means of preserving the benefits which they enjoy from their own empowerment, seldom moving beyond the reflective stage. As with the ritual chants of

any closed or cloistered order, the notion of 'critical reflection' has virtually been emptied of any meaning; it has been used to immobilise rather than activate; it is presented as an individualised, self-contained and self-sustaining process; and as an indulgence rather than a catalyst.

Jean-Pierre Velis (1990) has argued that this closeted nature of parts of the adult basic education sector can be viewed as an international trend, and that it risks further alienating the sector from a range of processes. He refers to the 'emerging international community of functional illiteracy instructors' and describes it as 'a community with its own centres of interest and its own specific terminology and cultural and historical yardsticks. It already has its own big names and its iconoclasts, its coteries and its cliques, its gurus and its intellectual cheerleaders' (p.57).

There has been a constant cry from the middle-class social club, bemoaning encroachment on the sacred patch of turf which is imagined theirs, nostalgically mourning the passing of a 'golden age', and posing rhetorical questions to problems and issues which they are content to leave unresolved. This tiny, but ever present, group has trivialised 'critical reflection' to a narcissistic art form.

Maintaining power or simply dreaming?

A clear instance of this narrow, conservative and potentially dangerous approach to the relationship between the institutional arm of the adult basic education sector, other interests represented in that sector, and the broader community, is that proposed by Rosie Wickert (1991), in an article in the journal *Open Letter*. The thrust of Wickert's thesis is a plea to 'maintain power over the literacy agenda'—primarily through excluding others with a legitimate interest and contribution to make. The article relies on a linguistic analysis of those who are attempting to invade the patch of turf, but sadly misses the point that the landscape has changed, and some of the voices are more relevant in 1992 than Wickert's. Her conclusion as to why the audience responded enthusiastically to a speaker from the ACTU and not her, was quite simply that they had all been positioned and manipulated by his well-crafted discourse. Another possible interpretation may be that the offer of broadening our work through collaboration with the union movement and organisations such as the ACTU is more attractive than the isolationist alternative. Wickert's scenario identifies too many 'outsiders' and too few 'insiders'.

In her preoccupation with playing with words, Wickert was distracted from the actual discourses and their meaning, and demonstrated an appalling lack of understanding of the contexts from which the words and agendas are

drawing their meanings. The premise of whose agenda is literacy has to be questioned on at least two counts: whether it has historically ever been the case, and more importantly, as to whether it can (or should) be the future of this sector. The 'agenda' (if only there was one) has never been controlled by educationists, unless we believe that education serves no political or ideological purpose, and has somehow miraculously remained outside or untouched by the economic, political and social structures and forces which own and sustain it. This has never been the case, even in the adult basic education area which may have enjoyed a short period of protection through anonymity. As areas like literacy and basic skills attract more interest, develop more value, the more groups will want a covert stake and be prepared to contest the area.

Wickert does not pose an oppositional strategy to the historical forces which have shaped and dominated the sector. She raises a narrow status quo conservatism to maintain the limited power of the sector's elite. To believe that the adult basic education sector (conveniently and selectively defined) as a subsector of adult education, which in turn is a subsector of education, can or should exercise (or is capable of exercising) control over an 'agenda' which affects other educators, the labour movement, governments, whole industries, and millions of independent adults, is bordering on sheer fantasy. This simplistic view of power relations can be likened to owning a light bulb and believing that you possess or control the source of the power which allows you to use it.

A more constructive approach may be to celebrate the growth of the adult basic education sector into new areas, and for literacy practitioners, theorists and advocates to seek out new options and openings to influence the agenda(s). The influence of high standards, coherent theories, reliable research and data, excellence in practice, and participation in the debates gives at least the scope for limited power over the agendas. The influence of our ideas and practice can only effectively be extended through building political alliances and actively pursuing coalitions (with social forces much larger and better connected than the current adult basic education sector) at every level of our activity. We also have to reject the implicit assumption that any of us have an inalienable right of place or tenure in any of these developments.

The *ALBSU Newsletter* (no.46, Summer 1992) addresses some of the developments occurring in the UK and identifies a number of changes which will need to be made in order to respond effectively to and participate in these developments. An article entitled 'Basic skills—what changes?' states:

> We don't believe that basic skills should be seen as the preserve of a particular sector, such as adult or further education; rather it should be a central part of the concern of a host of agencies including social services,

> health, housing, employment, economic development and regeneration and voluntary bodies concerned with disadvantaged groups and individuals in our society. To limit basic skills to one sector or service area is to lessen its importance and reduce its influence ... Wide ranging and cross sector basic skills will involve a range of funders and providers and, whilst further and adult education will continue to be important, neither will be the exclusive providers. (p.3)

These views are echoed and supported locally by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Action Coalition (ALBSAC), formed in late 1991. The editorial of the first issue of *ALBSAC News* (May 1992) argues for stronger links between the adult basic education sector and other sectors as a means of strengthening and extending work in adult basic skills. The coalition's stated aims are:

> ... to open dialogue on critical issues affecting the sector by developing constructive working relationships with the myriad of players involved and interested in basic skills development, including trade unions, public and private sector employers, industry bodies, community service organisations and education providers and institutions.
>
> In an era of conservative economic rationalism, contracting resources and shifting priorities, ALBSAC feels that it is critical to draw together the various interests who can collectively challenge and influence agendas and directions more effectively than any one of the sectors alone. There is a risk that if we remain divided and defensive, our responses will become insular and leave us and the people and values we represent in a more vulnerable position. Adult basic education will be more positively served by clear strategies, strong alliances and sustainable structures. (p.1)

There is currently an atmosphere of guarded apprehension and suspicion among some providers in adult basic education, and in the area of workplace literacy in particular, which manifests itself in a defensive protection of what is perceived to be our inalienable patch. Before we can sensibly talk of open competition, partnerships or cooperative efforts, we need to move beyond mere tolerance to a culture of 'openness', which genuinely seeks out political and educational allies and exposes our own practices and theory to public scrutiny. Jack Pearpoint (1989) described the scenario which would develop if we maintain a preoccupation with our own special place and use our energies jostling for front position, rather than pursue a more disciplined, open and focused approach.

> Since literacy has been a tiny piece of turf with few benefits and enormous liabilities until now, the short term will be characterized by 'turf' battles with the various potential players racing to garner credit with minimum cost. Since bureaucratic guidelines and systems are only just being developed, competing systems will be established that have little to do with teaching reading and writing and an enormous amount to do with finding things that can be 'counted' and audited ... Consultants will have a field day. A well established pattern will be repeated. Enormous sums will be spent to study and publicize 'good projects', but the support will be substantially less than the study and promotions budget. (p.425)

Harriet Malinowitz (1990), in describing the need for teachers to relinquish some of their power in the classroom, addresses a more general aspect of how we view power, which can be usefully extended to this context. She asserts that:

> to engage in this collaboration sincerely, teachers must be willing to give up some of their own power. To give up [I would also add 'to share'—P. O'C.] power does not mean to make oneself neutral, inconspicuous, ignorant, unavailable, irresponsible, or value-free. Rather, it means to investigate the social foundations and the limits of one's own process of making meaning, recognizing that this construction is political, as well as technical. (p.155)

The posturing of those who bemoan a loss of power in this sector usually extends no further than a desperate tribalism, based on defensiveness and exclusionary tactics. The same passion is generally not afforded to other disenfranchised participants, namely, to the students and workers who should have the power to control their own educational requirements and resources. In our deliberations and activity in workplace literacy we must challenge the clan mentality, revitalise genuine debate in the sector, and reinvigorate our concept of 'critical literacy' to give it the force of meaning, and to ensure that we do not continue to apply it selectively to some situations and not others. We need to avoid the temptation to preserve a critical perspective in the comfort zone of our own company, and for our own selfish purposes, and not extend it beyond the factory gate and onto worksites.

For those only concerned with their own immortality and self-importance, I would offer the same advice offered by the poet Henry Lawson (in 'The Uncultured Rhymer to His Cultured Critics') to Professor E.E. Morris, one of his critics:

Must I turn aside from my destined way
For a task your Joss would find me ?
I come with strength of the living day,
And with half the world behind me;
I leave you alone in your cultured halls
To drivel and croak and cavil:
Till your voice goes farther than college walls,
Keep out of the tracks we travel!

(quoted in Stone 1974, p.324)

The Declaration adopted at the end of the International Symposium for Literacy, held in Persepolis, 3–8 September 1985, may also provide some direction in approaching our work in adult basic education, whether it be in the workplace, colleges, or the broader community. The Declaration states that:

> Literacy teachers should not form a specialized and permanent professional body, but should be recruited as close as possible to the masses undergoing literacy training and should belong to the same or to a related social and professional group in order to make dialogue easier.
>
> The effectiveness of this mobilization will be increased if greater respect is paid to the initiatives of the populations concerned and to consultations with them, instead of abiding by bureaucratic decisions imposed from outside and above ...
>
> Literacy work of this kind would constitute the first stage of basic education designed to bring about the individual development of men and women through continuing training and to improve the environment as a whole. It would permit the development of non-formal education for the benefit of all those who are excluded by the present system or are unable to take advantage of it. Finally, it will imply a radical reform of the structures of the education system as a whole.

The Declaration goes on to state that: 'Literacy work, like education in general, is a political act. It is not neutral, for the act of revealing social reality in order to transform it, or concealing it in order to preserve it, is political' (cited in Velis 1990, pp.90–1).

A context for workers' literacy

Economic and education crisis

For the past decade in Australia there has been a rhetoric of panic and crisis around notions of workers' skill deficiencies, restrictive work practices, industrial relations, productivity levels, ratios of imports to exports, competitiveness of Australian capitalism, and the failure of school and post-school education in this scenario. There have been dire warnings of the 'banana republic' type consequences of allowing Australian business to slip further behind its industrial competitors. A constant corollary to the economic warnings has been the argument for the need to orient education and training more closely and explicitly to the immediate demands of capitalist rationality and the values of an unregulated 'free' market. Thus, the argument goes, it is an economic imperative and central to the 'national interest' for Australia to become a 'clever country'.

Politicians of all leanings (with and without pinstripes), business, trade unions and educationists have joined the chorus of the need for massive change in the way that work is performed. The unanimous focus, however, has not been on the failings of international capital. but individual worker's deficiencies and the failure of education systems to address these deficiencies adequately. Thus, the solution to many of the problems is through micro-economic reform grounded in education and training policies. The emergence of this theme can be traced through a number of major government, business and trade union policy documents.

Furthermore, there has been a renewed interest by the business community in pushing for educational reforms to meet its requirements, actively defining educational policy, controlling and limiting worker education and training and, to a lesser extent, becoming involved in worker literacy activities. Playing to the fears of foreign capitalism, national debt, the growth of an alienated 'underclass', declining wages and living standards for workers, and in the absence of any organised resistance, business has been able largely to manipulate and dictate the terms of the debate. The education sector has been conspicuously silent and timid in its contributions and critiques.

As the Accord Mark VI wearily holds together long enough to see out the Federal Labor Government which has been drip-feeding it, the award restructuring process while forcing some change, from unions and their members, is giving way to the more specific, individualised focus of enterprise bargaining. The moves towards consultative workplace practices, national competency standards, a new education and training ethos, and a culture which has workers

and employers at an enterprise level 'harmoniously' agreeing to wages and conditions based on productivity outcomes, has been painfully slow. The National Training Board has endorsed only fourteen national competency standards and the proportion of workplaces with functioning, effective consultative mechanisms is negligible. There has been no obvious widespread cultural change, which is evidenced by the relatively few and limited scope of enterprise agreements to have come before the Industrial Relations Commission since its green light to enterprise bargaining as the newest approach to wage-fixing in the October 1991 National Wage Case Decision.

How big is our picture?

In our enthusiasm to be involved in some of the social and industrial reforms taking place, educationists have often failed to understand critically the 'big picture', and instead have accepted its dimensions, assumptions and premises. If we are attempting to read the world correctly in order to locate meaningful roles for adult basic education, we must endeavour to construct an accurate big picture. Much of the uncritical enthusiasm has been based on the desire to find a place in 'mainstream' activities for basic education. There can be little argument that many of our educational efforts do need to be closer to, or a part of, the mainstream (some do not!).

It is questionable that our strategy should consist of donning more conservative apparel in order to blend in better. Alternatively, we should be bringing to the debates and forums of the mainstream a critical awareness of its failings and limitations, and establishing some of our criticism, principles and initiatives from the 'margin' or 'fringe' within the mainstream developments. There should also be acknowledgment and respect for the fact that some innovations will continue to come only from the fringe.

We are too ready and willing, in our quest for acceptance, to forego thorough analysis of the changes occurring. In our examination of what Lankshear (1992) refers to as the 'New Times', we are too eager to take on the rhetoric of often 'illusory' changes. In considering and developing our strategies for adult basic education work, therefore, we often commence our construction on the false promises and false hopes proffered by the architects of the 'new times'.

There is a danger in viewing the developments and reforms in the economy, social welfare, education and industrial relations in places like Australia and New Zealand as somehow unique, rather than a part of an international series of adjustments affecting and common to most developed advanced capitalist societies. That is, we choose to view them as domestic rather

than international problems and responses, and in the process become entrapped in nationalistic jingoism. We look for our answers to simplistic and superficial case studies which at best fit poorly to local circumstances, whether from Scandinavia or Asia. We assume that 'if we can do as they do, then we also can be saved from economic and social peril', but refuse to analyse the histories and cultures which give rise to one nation state enjoying economic advantages over others at any given period in history.

This is the empty rhetoric of the conservatives, the inferiority or 'catch-up' approach to economic development. By implementing approaches that other countries have employed we too can be like them. Presumably, if the objective is to compete and overtake other economies and social systems, solutions need to go beyond those of the competitors. The sporting analogy would be to set out to win a match against a superior team by attempting to play exactly the way it does, rather than devising game plans which would result in yours being the superior team.

Thus, in our search for answers we must be cautious of simplistically seeking out a model which seems to be working and attempt duplication. Many of the industrial and social reforms of the late 1980s were loosely fashioned on Sweden as the early case study, more recently the shift of focus has been towards Taiwan, Korea and Japan. Much of the early enthusiasm for the Swedish model has waned as closer scrutiny exposed cracks which have been widened by a recent change in government and policy. The fad is now Asia, and in particular we look in awe at Japan and select aspects of that society which suit our arguments (high education levels, industrial harmony, efficient production methods and so on), without considering whether we are prepared to take on other cultural aspects of this society to achieve our goals; whether this is possible or desirable; and whether it can be transposed and have even similar outcomes.

As with Sweden, some of the romance is already fading from the Japan beacon as its stock market becomes as shaky as many of its Western counterparts in recent years, as some of its economic and social experiments fail, and it also casts about for equally desperate solutions in order to 'match it' with its competitors. We must draw from the depths of these experiences and apply any appropriate lessons to our own cultures and identities. Glibly to isolate one indicator such as education (school retention rates, post-school education levels, participation in vocational training) may be to miss the point. Our educational limitations and progress will depend as much on 'home grown' initiatives, innovations and strategies if they are to advance effectively the solutions which best fit our requirements.

Individual skills for individual problems

In finding a place in the sun and warmth of the 'mainstream', sections of education seem content to premise their arguments about industrial and education futures on the thesis concerning the technology revolution, and skills upgrading leading to higher wages. The assumption is that most work of the future will be high-tech and therefore workers will need high-tech skills, which in turn will lead to higher wages for workers. Another connecting thread of this assumption is that most of the micro-economic reforms occurring in the workplace have resulted in more democratic and participatory practices, without acknowledging even the generic skills and structural changes required of democracy. Our assumptions build on themselves until we feel comfortable in the belief that we are experiencing a ground swell of employers, workers, and unions who have embraced the culture of the 'new times' as one of unprecedented opportunity, of mutual interest and cooperation, lifelong learning, higher wages and living standards based on a more highly skilled workforce. The 'new times' will herald education's nirvana.

In making these assumptions we have ignored the arguments and empirical data which point to the dangers in the trends toward high technology that result in displacement and de-skilling, or a devaluation of workers' skills and learning opportunities. These assumptions fly in the face of direct empirical evidence contradicting the correlation between skills development and other reforms leading to higher wages. ABS statistics indicate that much of the reform process has resulted in decreases in real wages, and the maintenance of the same disadvantages and hierarchies of opportunity in the workforce. More alarmingly, these assumptions play directly into the argument that the solution to the economic and education 'crises' is individual skills acquisition. The problem, clearly, is with individual workers and school leavers who have inadequate skills. While this is simply not the case, it also raises suspicion about the political projects driving many of the reforms.

John Burgess (1989) argues that much of the productivity debate and rhetoric has focused on the issues of trade union power, restrictive work practices and the prerogative of management to manage; that is, that productivity is being pursued and promoted as primarily a worker problem. This, he claims, is misrepresentative of the processes and forces generating productivity growth.

> Behind the public pronouncements on microeconomic reforms in the labour market are hidden judgements concerning the nature of work and employment, and the process of productivity generation. The obvious judgement is the ideological one—that is, the fault for poor economic performance is

> attributed to labour, or its trade union representatives ... The other judgements involve assumptions about productivity generation—namely that changes in work practices, combined with a diminution of trade union power, will generate a productivity surge. (pp.23–4)

In addressing the broad changes occurring in the workforce, Alex Butler (1989) argues against a narrow focus and for any changes to embrace the notions of lifelong learning. She claims that it is:

> becoming not just desirable but essential to involve people of all ages in a continuing process of education and training. Moreover, many of the very narrow forms of training for specific and highly specialised occupations which have been prevalent to date, especially in the skilled trades area, are rapidly becoming obsolete. (p.1)

These observations are reinforced by the research of Larry Mikulecky (1989) and others which points to evidence of not more jobs becoming high-tech, but rather more jobs being affected by the introduction of more sophisticated technology. The consequence is that the growing demand is and will be for 'broad technicians' rather than 'high technicians'. This argument starts to get closer to an appropriate place or context for a range of skills including literacy, numeracy, computing, language and communication skills in the workplaces of the future. These arguments will be treated in more detail in the following section of this paper.

Through uncritical acceptance of the premises of the conservative arguments, we start to adopt unconsciously their language and adjust our practices and strategies to more closely resemble theirs. We begin to speak condescendingly of 'unskilled' workers (the unknowing learner or empty vessels?) who will benefit from 'skill formation' (partial filling of the vessels by expert imparters of knowledge). We start to believe in and argue in support of the 'crisis' in education. We believe that the answer to productivity, competitiveness, industrial democracy (if these are our objectives) rests in strategies to develop more educated workers. That is, in fixing the individual skills problem.

In doing so, we contribute to a further devaluation or negation of the existing skills, experiences, competence and knowledge of workers, and fail to examine critically how these skills and competencies have been traditionally and are presently under-utilised, exploited, undervalued, under-rewarded, contested and ignored politically, industrially and educationally. It does not touch upon how work and capital is organised, how wages and working conditions are determined, how people are excluded from education, what

investments are made, or what research and development is undertaken to support these activities. We dangerously talk of offering language, literacy, basic skills and other workers' education as a tool to assist in fixing these problems, rather than promoting and building learning cultures, or concepts of generic skills development, non-training learning environments, and the benefits of workers with broad generalist competencies rather than narrow specialised skills. As Peter Watkins (1991) argues, 'education must be relocated from such a narrow human capital agenda and placed on a more critical and reflexive agenda' (p 48).

The myth of one reality

In our enthusiasm for the 'new times' we have also embraced the generalisations of one society, commonly shared problems and responsibilities, the 'homogenous' community, and the need for a collective solution to benefit that community. In parading our 'best practice' case studies we have begun to imagine that the exceptions are now (or could be) the universal reality. It is essential that we understand that the contexts and motives for these reforms are complex and are very different for the range of participants. Our interventions in workplace education cannot afford to generalise or be complacent about 'award restructuring', about 'skills development', 'workers', 'industry', 'employers' or 'unions', or the contexts in which they are operating.

For example, while award restructuring may be premised on a general framework, its application is as different in the metals industry as it is in the timber industry, as it is in retail, which is different again from community services. Similarly, the unions involved in these industries have very different histories, politics, resources and responses. Within and between these groupings there are tensions, conflicts and ideological differences, which will manifest themselves in a variety of predictable and unpredictable ways. Similarly, local workplace or community cultures and customs will deliver vastly different details, images and results from the same industry processes.

Therefore, while a consensus may exist between government and the larger companies, employer associations, unions and industry associations in relation to many of the reform processes, it is as limited as any consensus in that it is necessarily general in nature. Terse agreement may exist between some of these parties as to what some of the main signposts may look like, but this agreement quickly dissolves when it comes to describing the vehicles to be used, the intervening landscape, or the end point of the journey.

Neo-Fordism and the shamrock theory

The vogue of the 'new times' which has heralded the end of Taylorism in the workplace (and society?) promises an era where management relinquishes control over its workforce in favour of autonomy and industrial democracy; where the stopwatch is replaced with consultation and industrial harmony focused on a growing mutual interest between bosses and workers; where flexibility and multi-skilling; replace tight preset specifications of tasks embedded in a rigidly hierarchical division of labour. The 'new times' represent a radical departure or rupture with the past domination of Taylorist and Fordist management methods. The 'new times', like the 'new right', may not be as new as they first appear, and the post-Fordist zenith may yet be more accurately judged and redefined as neo-Fordism.

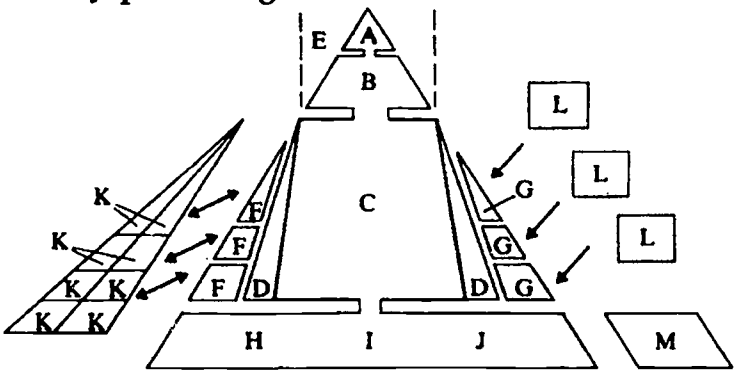
Contrasted with these predictions of a brave new world is a line of argument with its origins in Braverman's (1974) orthodox labour process theory which poses the spectre of the correlation of the introduction of new technology and the systematic de-skilling of workers. The argument goes further to maintain that given the centrality of Taylorism or Fordism with the control of labour under capitalism, it would be folly to talk of an end to Taylorism or Fordism without an end to capitalism. Thus, the 'flexibility' and the 'labour process' theses may be seen as two extremes of the theoretical spectrum, while somewhere between these two points may be a position which reflects a transformation occurring within Fordism and Taylorism; a point which can be described as neo-Fordism. This may be the point at which we can most accurately locate our 'new times'.

It may be the case that traditional Fordist production methods have reached a point beyond which no further substantial productivity gains could be achieved without some fundamental changes in the way that production is organised and controlled. The notion of neo-Fordism addresses this 'crisis' in Fordist methods by altering the way things are done rather than the structures under which they are done, achieved through changes in levels of automation, and/or task structures of companies, and/or the spatial division of labour. Thus, we may be able to locate what is actually occurring through award restructuring and related workplace reforms somewhere between the absolute de-skilling and upgrading scenarios.

What characterises this point in the history of these developments is not the hype that goes with the exceptional case studies which may be cited in support of a new workplace culture of democratic flexibility, but instead trends in work organisation which resemble the Japanese approach to labour utilisation and subcontracting. If we study workforce participation statistics we find

support for the trend towards what Atkinson (1988) terms the 'core-periphery' model of work organisation, or what Handy refers to as the shamrock theory of labour organisation and management. The new managerialism can be divided into three distinct but related sections. The central leaf or section representing the core of 'essential', permanent and often highly skilled employees, supported by an outer strand of specialists who are contracted for their specialist skills, and the third strand or section consisting of peripheral workers to perform more 'menial' functions also on a contract basis.

Figure 1 A Japanese organisational model



Segmented hierarchy of the workforce directly or indirectly employed by a big company

Key:
- **A:** top management
- **B:** middle management
- **C:** male regular employees
- **D:** female regular employees
- **E:** ex-senior-employees screened off from [B] or retired ones
- **F:** subcontractor's employees working within the parent company
- **G:** more or less specialized workers dispatched from independent labour-force supplying firms [L]
- **H:** seasonal or temporary employees
- **I, J:** part-time workers, mainly housewives and students
- **K:** subcontractors or suppliers and their employees, the lower half of the so-called dual economic structure
- **M:** foreign cheap labour employed abroad

Source: Kumagawa & Yamada 1989, p.111

In order to achieve maximum flexibility, companies will increasingly utilise subcontracting of a range of functions, and further reduce and segment their workforce by maintaining a core workforce which is multi-skilled, flexible, and can be used across operational functions, and a peripheral workforce which is more disposable, based on part-time and temporary work, short-term

contracts and fewer employment rights and entitlements. The trend is becoming increasingly apparent in areas such as retail with the extension of shopping hours (or working hours depending on perspective) utilising a larger pool of casuals controlled by a core of regulars. The privatisation and contracting out of a range of public services (such as cleaning, road-building and revenue, health services) is further evidence of this trend. Thus we have flexibility being put in place for some at the expense of others in the labour market, and greater control being exercised over the workforce, which can hardly be described as new.

A number of writers have suggested that this 'core-periphery' represents a dualism between the Fordist and flexibility positions, with flexibility characterising the core and traditional Fordism remaining intact and even being intensified at the periphery (see, for example, Goldthorpe 1985; Pfeffer & Baron 1988; Christopherson & Storper 1989). The gender implications of this dualism are that the core remains the domain predominantly of men, providing more skills flexibility and development and diverse work, while the periphery is predominantly the domain of women workers, with fewer opportunities and further de-skilling and control.

Pollert (1987) raises the possibility that neo-Fordism, characterised by the 'core-periphery' dualism, merely extends and intensifies labour market segregation by gender, race and age, and the wide repertoire of management strategies, including lower labour costs and rationalisation. This approach locates flexibility as only one managerial concern and strategy which cannot be separated from other management strategies, objectives and areas of interest. Thus, we may simply be experiencing a switch in management strategies which rather than delivering democracy and greater opportunity in the workplace, further enhances and extends managerial control.

Preparing for the high-tech future

Many of the current arguments for skills upgrading and flexibility warn of the impending tidal wave of new high technology to flood the workplace, and the need for workers to acquire the high-tech skills to enable use of this technology. This is despite the volume of research which indicates that in fact very few jobs in the foreseeable future will be directly in the use of high technology, but rather the majority of jobs even in high-tech industries will be low-skilled and low-paid. For labour process theory, new technology has no influence on work organisation independently of management's need to control. Noble (1979) argues that new technology is significant in so far as control is built into its very nuts and bolts, or to be more accurate and contemporary, into its wires, fibres

and chips. Thus, flexibility in the workplace cannot be automatically translated as skills upgrading but instead may be viewed as a means of effectively controlling workers and gaining their compliance in performing more tasks and a broader range of work. Thus, before we embrace notions of total quality management, quality circles, consultative processes, and before we redirect our workplace education to computer-based, we must consider whether these are trajectories for a new set of futures or whether they are managerial responses to new problems of control, or even attempts to destroy remaining areas of worker control.

Much of the available evidence suggests that there has been a false correlation made between the high technology industries and the occupations within those industries. Assumptions are made about job creation and skills development as the result of the introduction of new technology. Yet, there has been wide reporting of how the computer industry in the Silicon Valley has exported many of its production line and component assembly jobs to Asia to be performed by low-paid and poorly trained workers.

Watkins (1991) reviews some of the major research in this area and argues that the view that high-tech industries will require large numbers of workers with high-tech skills is flawed and unsupported by the research:

> Such visions of the new high technology workplace seem ignorant of a number of research reports about what is actually happening in the workplace and the labour market. Even Hoyt, a leading training and vocational educator, has concluded from the recent work of researchers such as Levin, Rumberger and Kirkland that 'it seems unlikely that high technology will have great impact on the basic nature of the occupational society at least up to the year 2000' ...
>
> Using the US Bureau of Labor statistics estimate, Levin and Rumberger ... suggest that while most industries related to high technology will indeed be undergoing rapid rates of growth, this will entail only a small percentage of new jobs. In fact their projections indicate 'that high-technology industries will provide only three to eight percent of the new jobs in the future economy' ... (p.46)

Thus, findings that a large number of jobs will be created in the areas of clerical, sales, hospitality services, and cleaning, adds weight to the argument that one of the main effects of new technology (especially technology which can take over many of the mental demands of workers) will be to reduce the demand for highly skilled workers.

Likewise, we cannot approach the technology itself, or its introduction, as somehow industrially or politically neutral. The argument to this point has

been that while some workers may benefit from their core position in the flexibility process, many more workers run the risk of being further disadvantaged in their employment and education opportunities, and further separated from the organisation of their work. Michael Apple (1987) forcefully reminds us that:

> the new technology does not stand alone. It is linked to transformations in real groups of people's lives, jobs, hopes and dreams. For some of these groups, those lives will be enhanced. For others, the dreams will be shattered. Wise choices about the appropriate place of the new technology in education, then, are not only educational decisions. They are fundamentally choices about the kind of society we shall have, about the social and ethical responsiveness of our institutions to the majority of our future citizens. (cited in Watkins 1991, p.55)

Wood (1989), and many of the contributors to his book, have argued that very little empirical evidence exists to support many of the claims of skills upgrading, significant changes to job content, increased worker participation or flexibility, or increased employment prospects or opportunities for reward on a wide scale, of the 'new times' thesis. The same author raises a host of questions in relation to how much management approaches are being transformed, and concludes that in many situations, multi-skilling and flexibility amount to little more than a simple management strategy for the more effective deployment and control of labour.

Similarly, a longitudinal case study (Cordery, Mueller & Sevastos 1992) of multi-skilling programs and related changes to work organisation in a leading minerals processing firm found that 'the multi-skilling programme and associated changes to work organisation only marginally altered skill requirements for jobs' (p.268). Further, their findings were that there was no evidence to suggest a fundamental departure from Taylorist and Fordist orientations towards management and employee relations, and towards skills development and work organisation. The study concluded that:

> the flexibility achieved to date is increasingly set within rather rigid boundaries ... We would conclude that the nature of the multi-skilling programme and its effects in this case have not amounted to a fundamental change in the division of labour and skill, or to patterns of management. Considering that this company must be classed as something of a leader when it comes to micro-level reform in Australia ... the findings also suggest that the path from Taylor to beyond Ford will take some time to travel. (p.282)

The conclusions we draw from these arguments will determine whether our educational interventions extend opportunities for workers or reinforce disadvantage and injustices. They will determine whether our concern is with 'transforming people to enhance productivity and profitability rather than on transforming technology and the workplace to promote such concerns as intellectual development, equity and social well-being' (Watkins 1991, p.45). We must constantly ask whose interests our interventions are designed to serve, and whose interests they actually serve.

Before we get too much more excited about our 'new times' theses, we may wish to pause for a moment to paint in the background by considering the developments in industrial relations in New Zealand over the past twenty years. The efforts of consecutive National and Labour governments has resulted in what has euphemistically become known as the New Zealand 'experiment', characterised by a severely weakened central arbitration system and individualised employment relations reinforced by the Employment Contract Act. Some are attempting to repeat the experiment in Australia. We might wish to consider the New South Wales Industrial Relations Act 1991 and its implications for industrial democracy and flexibility, or the announcement to wind up the Education and Training Foundation. If we are still uncertain about what the landscape of the 'new times' looks like after this preliminary research, we could go on to contemplate the individual contracts and decentralised industrial relations framework assembled by the Kennett Government in Victoria, or study the detailed proposals in the Federal Government Opposition's 'Fightback' package, or the industrial relations policy, 'JobsBack!', launched in October 1992.

If the political realities of the direction in which workplace relations are heading in this country and the implications these have for workers' education and employment are not sufficient to sober or temper our enthusiasm for the 'natural' evolution towards skills development and 'mutuality of interest', it is unlikely that we would put any store in the empirical evidence which also casts serious doubts on the transformations being delivered through micro-economic reform. I have presented some of this evidence for those who may still have a nagging doubt that the future of work and education will be anything but rosy.

Our pronouncements and strategies in workplace basic education should not just wish for 'good' times as their premise and merely proceed on that basis. We need to study the unfolding contexts and sites for adult education, including the 'bad' and 'hard' times ahead, in order to recognise and understand more fully the possibilities, and confidently locate, and direct our efforts to, the windows of opportunity which present themselves. This is in preference to either unwittingly (due to ignorance of large chunks of the 'big picture')

assisting dangerous and unjust developments, or to mounting yet another rash of rearguard responses to change which is consolidated and unlikely to be reversed or substantially modified. By understanding as much as we can about the contexts we are moving into, and being alert to the conflicts and paradoxes within some of those contexts, by studying our subject carefully and critically, conducting our own quality research and analysis, we are in a better and stronger position to contribute significantly to and shape some of the future directions in workplace basic education.

Watkins (1991) summarises some of the main dilemmas and suggests a way forward for educational projects in the 'flexible' workplace in the following passage :

> Education and training for any new flexible workplace should approach the inherent concepts critically. It should examine the relationships between society and the industrial sector. It should be more than the narrow training of technicians in technical tasks, either specific or more general, as required by the new, more flexible workplace. Even the call for an adaptable, flexible work force implies a docile and passive capacity to adapt to the latest technological innovations introduced by management rather than an ability to question their origin, whose interests they enhance and why alternative processes were not debated ... Any education in the workplace should present an examination of the options and choices which exist, and ask: who decides? in whose interest? who gains? who loses? who controls? (p.54)

Competency-based everything

It is questionable whether the enthusiasm for competency-based training will assist in the acceleration of these developments, or whether it can deliver its promises of skills development, enhanced productivity, higher wages and equality of opportunity. This approach offers little in expanding the quantity or quality of educational opportunities for workers who have historically experienced obstacles in accessing education. For those who have been able to access education, through school, trades and university education and have therefore always been on a linear progression competency basis, many of the new processes simply formalise these processes further. The simplistic and arbitrary formulation of competencies into equal (four based on the metals industry) numbers of elements and into strict progressions to job vacancies that do not exist, has the potential to provide the most industrially strong workers with greater access and scope to maintain relativities through skill qualifications. When the concept of skills is viewed as a three-dimensional intersecting series of relationships (which if plotted would have the dimensions and movement of

a Rubik's cube), when workers can be assured of being recognised and paid for formal and informal skill acquisition, and when genuine vertical and horizontal career opportunities exist based on structured EEO and affirmative action strategies and notions of lifelong learning, when the majority of industrial awards in the private sector provide adequate paid education leave, then many more workers may view these exercises less cynically. (For details of workers views on who benefits from productivity enhancement, see Savery and Soutar's 1992 survey findings.)

Probably the clearest and most generally accepted statement on competency-based training is that of the Confederation of Australian Industry (1991), which describes it in these terms:

> Competency-based training is a way of approaching vocational training that places primary emphasis on what a person can actually do in the workplace as a result of the training (the outcome), and as such represents a shift away from an emphasis on the processes involved in training (the inputs). It is concerned with training to industry standards rather than with an individual's achievement relative to others in a group. (p.1)

This definition has been adopted verbatim by many of the skills 'formation' bodies and working parties (see, for example, VEETAC 1992, p.1).

The enthusiasm for competency-based standards and training as an essential plank in the national skills 'formation' framework is not only the stuff of dreams for employers, but is also championed by unionists and academics. Peter Ewer et al. (1991), writing from a labour movement perspective, are comfortable to use glowing terms such as 'dynamic', 'egalitarian', 'political potential', 'equity' and 'efficiency'. The writers conclude their discussion in language which has become indistinguishable on the basis of its political source. They describe the 'mutual' benefits:

> As to the firm's efficiency, there are obvious gains for both the employer and the workers. Devolution of such work to formerly unskilled workers will enable the more qualified tradespeople to undertake more demanding work. There will be less machine downtime. The work of the production workers will become more varied and interesting, and productivity gains could be expected as they experiment with innovations in the production process. (p.154)

Among the academic cheerleaders for the application of competency standards and training for the professions are Paul Hager and Andrew Gonczi (1991) from the University of Technology, Sydney. The authors claim that:

> Their (competency-based standards) uses include the maintenance of professional standards and increasing labour market efficiency and equity, particularly during periods of labour market shortages ... In addition, competency-based standards can enhance career progression by providing a valid basis for promotion. They also enable artificial barriers between occupational levels to be removed. Competency-based standards also offer a powerful basis for improving the courses that prepare people for entry to the profession. Another advantage of competency-based standards for the professions is the potential for boosting morale within the professions ... (p.29)

While the support for these views is much wider, the three advertisements for competency-based everything outlined (that is, everything important) have been selected because they contain elements which go to the core of some major criticisms of this approach, but also for the interests they represent. It is understandable that an employers association would promote outcomes required by employers, both in order to be more selective and deliberate in matching skill requirements to productivity and in order to maintain management control of labour. While disappointing, it is also not difficult to comprehend or locate the labour relativities argument and defence of historical hierarchies of workers skills and values based on craft and trade specialisations and bargaining power, promoted by our former Metal Workers comrades. Thirdly, we have professionals promoting a system which will reinforce the status of the professions and potentially add further restrictions on entry-level requirements and qualifications, and more credentials attached to promotional opportunities.

Competency-based frameworks are providing fertile ground or arenas for old power struggles, for the shoring up of the spoils of the past as well as those on offer presently. Within the new framework we have a desperate defence of relativities, elites and status being played out, relying on historical inequalities, bargaining power and dominance, and finding a receptive environment and useful tool for the contests in the national skills agenda. Closer to home, apart from the fact that even the responsibilities for professional competency have been entrusted to NOOSR (National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition), while the rest are tended by the NTB (National Training Board), teacher competency debates are an example of this power contest.

Competency standards have been endorsed for workplace trainers which only cover competencies relating directly to identifying, conducting, preparing, evaluating and managing training. They do not extend beyond strict training functions to broader, more creative, or higher order skills and attributes. The debate is now occurring around the relative position of say, TAFE

teachers, on the Australian Standards Framework in relation to workplace trainers. The more popular argument (among TAFE teachers) being advanced, and which will probably succeed, is that workplace trainers can appropriately be located at Level 4 on the ASF, and TAFE teachers between Levels 4 and 8. Thus, the novice 'professional' is viewed as entering at the level of an experienced workplace trainer, who may possess higher formal qualifications, broader experience, who may even be a former TAFE teacher. These arguments simply cannot be sustained on any equitable or objective basis, and can only be run along 'professional' status (them and us) lines using the language of competency to rationalise rather than explain the higher ranking.

Many of the main criticisms of competencies-based approaches to skill development, with which I have considerable empathy, have been well documented and will simply be summarised here. A major criticism is that in the name of 'dynamism', 'flexibility' and 'opportunity', the approach institutionalises a 'Taylorist' system of fragmented skills development, through a stackable storage system of skills based on equi-dimensional boxes (or units) of competencies containing elements within each block. While it is neat, and has the simplistic appeal of building blocks, it does not allow for deviation of shapes or forms, and certainly does not allow for much in the way of contours or relief.

Further, the criticisms are that the system attempts to isolate or 'atomise' discrete skills which are then dissected into tasks and competencies, sub-tasks and sub-competencies and so on. The assumption of the definable or describable skill in a vacuum is itself problematic. Its usefulness is equally troublesome. There are legitimate concerns being expressed that this approach will lead to increased centralised control and standardisation over curriculum in schools and further education, leading to more prepackaged 'off-the-shelf' training.

Nancy Jackson (1991b) summarises other related concerns that competencies-based learning is behaviourist and preoccupied with outcomes for particular purposes. She cites critics who claim that this:

> leads to a 'pre-fabricated' and 'encyclopaedic' notion of knowledge, to 'shallow' procedures that are 'quick and easy' to put into effect, and to place emphasis on unimportant, routine, even 'trivial' aspects of the learning process. They argue as well that this kind of approach to classroom learning blocks the development of an elaborated knowledge, or the formation of coherent consciousness about work. (p.11)

Hager and Gonczi (1991) claim to be free of most of these criticisms because they promote a 'holistic', 'integrated' and 'three dimensional' ap-

proach, incorporating both attributes (knowledge, skills and attitudes) required for work, and performance (series of roles or domains, of roles, tasks and sub-tasks to be performed). This integrated approach is promoted as non-behaviourist, nor does it 'atomise' discrete skills. It would also seem that the arena of 'attributes' as it extends to values, judgments, creative thinking, attitudes, political or religious beliefs, is also viewed as unproblematic. However, as Trudi Cooper (1992) points out: 'Where competence rests on the ability to make complex judgements, to which there are no universally agreed right answers ... equitable assessment of prior learning is very difficult' (p.19).

One of the strengths of a competency-based system, according to its more ardent supporters, is its measurability, predictability and testability. It is easier to test selected tasks against predetermined criteria, and to test them individually or in isolation. A question which must be asked of this sort of criteria is whether our assessment and testing is determined and evolves from the competency standards and training, or whether in fact the reverse is true, where the assessment precedes the standards and training. Similarly, the three dimensional model of our UTS colleagues is nothing of the sort. In order for any such model to be ascribed with characteristics approaching three dimensions, it would need to include external environmental factors beyond the tasks, performance and attributes of a particular job. The model describes the molecular structure of a single atom against the dark background of open space. Its third dimension would be acquired when the atom was located in a given context and its relationships with surrounding atoms were incorporated into its identity.

A substantive weakness of competency-based training, which is often only implicit in other criticisms, lies in some of the industrial relations implications, especially those which relate to equity. I have argued that some of the main planks of the national skills and training agenda formalise and extend a range of labour force hierarchies and traditional barriers to opportunity. A related concern, however, is the implications this has in social justice terms, and whether some of the disadvantages of sectors of the labour force will in fact be intensified through these processes. The focus on competency-based training, in particular, will have the effect of spreading credentialism and paper qualifications to industries and/or occupations where they were previously not required, thus imposing tighter entry qualifications and excluding those who do not possess them. A related paradox of this system is the current preoccupation with reinforcing youth wages and conditions, contrary to its own logic, placing more emphasis on the 'youth' factor than the competency factor. Age would still seem to be a dilemma for many unionists and employers alike. The prospect of $3.00 per hour is unlikely to impress too many young workers as to the merits of the flexibility–higher wages equation.

Another immediate concern for workers is that while the reforms are being implemented, the necessary structural change and supports are not being put in place on the ground. Organisational structures and the distribution of opportunity and reward within those structures is still pyramid-shaped, with production workers at the base, tapering to single or few executive or professional positions at the apex. Thus very few promotional opportunities will exist. Even for this limited structure to deliver expanded opportunities it must be premised on recognition of, and reward for skills acquired as opposed to the common employers' response of payment for skills as they are utilised. The deception inherent in this latter stance, at its simplest, is that workers who possess high level skills and knowledge always use them and provide employers with a constant and available 'multi-skilled' workforce.

Similarly, training and skills development opportunities must actually exist and be accessible internally and externally. The range of training and activities beyond some core vocational training exists in very few places. What opportunities will exist for rurally isolated workers, and workers in small companies? Further, many workers in the private sector have no paid education leave entitlements in their industrial awards. That is, there is no minimum requirement on many employers to provide training, and obviously those who do will determine who, when and why.

If we return to the 'core-periphery' analysis of the way in which labour is being organised, it will be that core of permanent employees who may gain opportunities and rewards from these processes, while the periphery will fall out of the bottom of the system. This relationship between the winners and losers from the 'new' system must constantly be referenced to the key role and extent of redundancy as a tool in the flexibility scenario. Many of the larger industries are achieving flexibility, multi-skilling and productivity enhancement through massive retrenchments, selective skilling and using remaining workers (not necessarily on increased wages) to maintain production. Education and training is often instrumental not only in potential opportunities, but also in the screening, selection, denial of promotion and sacking of workers. Educationists will never be neutral or innocent in these situations.

Perhaps among the greatest disappointments with the excessive taxonomy driving competencies-based developments is that in the quest for a 'quasi-scientific' precision, accuracy is being sacrificed. We are trimming the rough edges and leaving out those aspects of reality which do not comfortably fit within our schemas. Further, this approach, despite its promises seems incapable of extending in any substantial way either our understanding or application of adult learning processes. We are following a course which is not new, but merely formalises a number of traditional approaches to skill relativities,

acquisition and training. As Mike Brown (1992) has pointed out: 'The CBT models used in trade training have been the forerunner to and model-in-operation for all work-related learning' (p.2).

Brown (1992) also locates a major danger of this approach for adult education:

> The application and enactment of the competency agenda to the field of Adult Literacy and Basic Education is counter to the interests of practitioners and learners alike. The initiatives are not reforms but are rather hegemonic. The defining of learning and teaching using competencies has embedded within it an ideology of control intended for the regulation of participants. (p.12)

Nancy Jackson (1991a) issues a similar warning when she says:

> When we talk about training 'needs', let's be a little careful about whose 'needs' we are talking about: ours or the employers? Training 'needs' are not absolute or universal. They are not dictated from heaven or by some natural force of history... So we should think of them, not as 'needs' in some absolute sense, but as the employers' 'shopping list'—as the set of demands employers are making for training. (p.14)

Ultimately, we must oppose those demands or choices being issued by management which are unacceptable to us as educators and/or workers. We need to draw up our own 'shopping list' of alternative demands, develop our expertise in these areas and construct strategies to negotiate effectively and win some of these demands. We are obliged to attempt to realign the current focus, to challenge the new inequities and injustices being generated by the skill agendas, to fight to broaden the base of learning. A part of our project should be to direct attention towards a range of informal and non-training strategies, and the requirements of constructing a learning culture and environments which will be conducive to the growth and sustenance of that culture.

Helen Gribble (1990) provides a clear focus on the job ahead for many of us when she says:

> What's needed is a transformation of content and method too, so that our education and training system unleashes rather than represses national intellectual and creative development. Those of us who work in adult literacy and basic education shouldn't be bored or short of things to do in the 1990s. But we should expect to struggle against aggressive efforts to hijack our work, and more subtle efforts to persuade us that a vocationally specific

> approach is appropriate for adult literacy and basic education in the workplace. If we resist there's hope of success. Surrendering to narrow vocationalism without a fight is unthinkable. (p.15)

In the service of economic rationalism

The language of the industry and education debate is almost exclusively that of the economic rationalist construct of the 'market', where education is framed in the language of 'cost-benefits', productivity outcomes, stock offerings and economic rationales. Education is responding in terms of marketing, product development, production-line education practices, packages, and meeting the 'needs' of industry and other clients. There has been a dangerously uncritical adoption of business's agenda by sections of education. In the scramble to retrain in new skills, to satisfy the economic priorities and vocational training interests of the 'clients', many of the underlying principles and broader education goals of adult education seem to be getting lost or hijacked in a range of workplace basic education activities, and supplanted with an extremely narrow and short-sighted vocational functionalism.

Henry Giroux (1987) argues that the language of literacy in the US is almost exclusively linked to right-wing discourse that reduces it:

> to either a functional perspective tied to narrowly conceived economic interests or to an ideology designed to initiate the poor, the underpriviledged, and minorities into the logic of a unitary, dominant cultural tradition. In the first instance, the crisis in literacy is predicated on the need to train more workers of occupational jobs that demand 'functional' reading and writing skills. (p.3)

He cites Stanley Aronowitz, who claims that:

> at the moment, the neoconservatives have appropriated the concept of excellence and defined it as basic skills, technical training, and classroom discipline ... In adult literacy programs, the materials and methods used reflect an 'end of ideology' approach that fails to inspire students ... Few are prepared to speak the traditional language of educational humanism or fight for the idea that a general education is the basis of critical literacy. (p.4)

Approaches to workers' literacy as a process grounded in these narrow perspectives are, in Giroux's words, 'as disempowering as they are oppressive'.

This situation raises some fundamental questions regarding the purposes and likely impact and outcomes of this new educational activity. Sheila Collins (1989), writing of the North American situation, poses the dilemma in the following series of questions:

> Are we seeing an intensified effort—in the midst of the greatest gap between rich and poor ever recorded in the U.S.—to update the old 'frontier myth' of American education: that with the 'right' education the American class and caste system can be permeated?
>
> Is business's new concern for education the chance it has long awaited to wrest control from professional educators over socialisation of the values and attitudes necessary to maintain labor peace in a period of greater economic instability? Or can worker literacy be an opportunity to develop a more critical, creative and militant workforce? Is worker literacy a new tool for restratifying the workforce to meet the demands for a more mobile regime of capital accumulation? Or can it be the path to genuine upward-mobility, self-actualization, and economic democracy for U.S. workers? (p.27)

All care but no responsibility taken

International Literacy Year provided a useful addendum to the education and industry debate, and focused some of the headlines on adult literacy. It also provided a diversionary focus on 'evidence' which vindicated the warnings of educational malaise and economic peril, as well as reinforcing the need for the micro-economic reforms being assembled. The media regularly carried claims, 'human interest' accounts and testimonies of famous public figures who had 'suffered' from illiteracy (perhaps contradicting their own message!). These included actors, politicians, journalists, business and union leaders, as well as a host of 'ordinary' citizens.

The findings of a national survey on adult literacy, released in late 1989, were seized upon by the media and the adult basic education sector. The survey ('No Single Measure'), and various reports of it, told us that at least one million adults in Australia have reading and writing difficulties. The survey found that 32 per cent of respondents could not find the gross pay written on a pay slip; 31 per cent could not find a required heading in the Yellow Pages of the phone book; 38 per cent could not calculate their change from $5 for a lunch bill; 57 per cent could not calculate 10 per cent on a bill totalling less than $5; and based on a speculative generalisation from these figures, that one in seven workers cannot read or write adequately. (Wickert 1989). While this data may have been

useful in the general promotion of adult literacy, and provided catchy and ready-to-use statistics for media, government, companies and advocates of adult literacy, its uses in the area of workers' literacy is questionable.

The survey report did not tell us what the results might mean in any particular context, or what solutions or strategies might be pursued to address the problems identified in the findings. While there may be general implications for workplace literacy from this type of research, there are other sources of information available which indicate that the needs of particular industries and groups of workers deviate wildly from the general trends, and require significantly more sophisticated analysis and focused research to arrive at meaningful and useful information and strategies. We need to be careful not to limit literacy to a bean-counting or auditing exercise, but rather to broaden our understanding by providing detailed quantitative and qualitative research supported by sound and thorough analysis. This involves an intimate knowledge of particular industries, localities, workplace and workers' cultures, and the different needs and requirements they generate.

Evidence from other surveys conducted in various industries puts the actual number of workers with basic skills difficulties much higher, sometimes as high as 70–80 per cent. For example, a survey at Victoria's State Transport Authority showed that 70 per cent of workers could not write an accident report, take a phone message or fill out a worker's compensation form. A study conducted by the Adult Migrant English Service (AMES) in 1990 in the building industry, found that 37 per cent of workers could not describe their daily work routine, 82 per cent could not outline procedures to follow in dealing with an industrial accident (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1990). A workforce skills assessment conducted by East Gippsland College of TAFE in the south-east forest region of NSW found that 43 per cent of respondents were assessed as having limited skills in English, and 42 per cent in mathematics and would require assistance with basic skills development (Interim Report, 1992). Whereas all of these surveys suffer from the 'failure focus'—of what workers cannot do—there is the added danger of conflicting messages on the nature of, and solutions to, any basic skills 'problems'.

Whether or not a company decides to respond to a perceived basic skills problem may depend on how it is defined, calculated and presented. The response and strategies developed are likely to be very different in addressing problems which are quantified at 10–15 per cent of the workforce and those estimated at 80 per cent. Similarly, the strategies will vary depending on how broadly the problem is defined or whether it can be located in specific contexts. Further, our research and analyses themselves can add to the creation of problems which may or may not be present. As Velis (1990) has pointed out, 'illiteracy, like madness, is defined by society at a given moment in time'.

> There are currently tens of thousands or perhaps even millions of adults living in the industrialized countries who are threatened with functional illiteracy, but who do not know it. At the moment, there are men and women who may have quite a happy social, working and family life; nevertheless, they may be caught in the future by a form of 'functional illiteracy' that does not yet exist. (Velis 1990, p.84)

Many of the surveys of adult literacy are premised on a definition of literacy which views as paramount the context and purposes, and thus meanings that are created and relevant for the literate person. However, the surveys themselves decontextualise the literacy activities or events they are gauging through standard questionnaires and interviews based on standard questions and test items. The context, identity and peculiarities of the participants in the surveys are removed and sanitised to present an artificial homogeneity to the survey results. While the 'No Single Measure' survey has presented a summary of its findings, it has not provided essential information relating to detailed methodologies, sample selection and validation procedures to enable any thorough analysis of what the statistical results may actually mean. Likewise, this analysis has not been undertaken as a necessary corollary to the survey findings.

We are meant simply to accept and recite these survey results—and we have! If the national survey is as important as its author and promoters would have us believe, if it indeed provides profound insights into the nature of adult literacy issues in this country, then there is a responsibility on the researchers and others in the area to study, analyse and develop these findings. To date there has been no serious academic treatment, discussion, development or critique of the 'No Single Measure' findings. While similar studies (including the US study on which the Australian study was based) have received close and critical attention (see Aronowitz & Giroux 1991, and Gee 1991 in particular), there have been no such responses from the adult basic education sector here, either to condemn or to praise and extend.

Our analysis would need to consider the value attached to the items we are researching by those being studied. Jean-Paul Hautecoeur makes some interesting observations in relation to this point when he states that often the value attached to basic skills is based on whether people see schooling as important, whether they place any value in moving up the social or employm t ladder, and whether they believe that the acquisition of these skills is actually going to change their lives.

> According to the survey on illiteracy in Canada, half of the respondents from Quebec did not consider it important to be able to read well, write well

> or even speak well, or to have been to secondary school. Some 60 per cent of them did not feel that it was important to read to children; 44 per cent said they had not read a book in the past 6 months; 44 per cent had never written a letter more than one page long; 77 per cent had never been to a library; 38 per cent did not consider it important to be able to read and write in order to obtain a job; and 89 per cent said that they had never been at a disadvantage on account of their lack of reading and writing skills ... (cited in Velis 1990, p.68)

My interest or concern here is not to attempt to critique the specific details of the various research methodologies and outcomes of the surveys mentioned; there are others much better placed and with considerably more expertise to conduct this type of analysis. The focus here, given that there is a growth industry emerging to conduct 'research' in the workplace, to audit workers' skills, and seek out quantifiable problem areas, is to consider some of the broad implications that this has for our practice in this area. What often renders much of this 'scientific' educational research conservative in its applications is the researcher's failure to clarify the methodologies, assumptions, intentions, potential and appropriate uses of the research; to provide analysis and explicate inappropriate uses of the research findings. These omissions contribute to the general myth that research is politically neutral and that researchers have no responsibility for their research or its uses and abuses.

As mentioned earlier, much of the research in this area focuses on the 'failures' of adults in relation to basic skills.

> Much research in language and education provides both summaries and also richly detailed pictures of these failures, so much in fact that it is the 'scientific' mainstay, however unintentionally, of a 'failure industry'. As McDermott ... has said, millions of people are 'measuring, documenting, remediating, and explaining' these failures. What is conserving about all this activity is that it puts an analytic distance on failure and offers no countering 'language of possibility'. (Edelsky 1991, pp.5–6)

Edelsky (1991) makes an important distinction between the teaching, researching and evaluation of reading and writing, and the teaching, researching and evaluation of reading and writing 'exercises'. She distinguishes between 'reading' (where the reader 'aims to make a text meaning for herself') and 'NOT-reading' (for example, pronounce print in a foreign language 'without understanding a word'). Some of these events simply amount to an exercise, or the participation in a reading event created by another for the purpose of research, testing or evaluation. This distinction relies on a conception of reading

as both an underlying process and part of a variety of social practices, and requires a further distinction based on whether or not the role of the reader is positioned as a Subject or as Object in relation to others and the text.

If these distinctions are not made, Edelsky argues that:

> some major risks occur. It becomes all too easy to think one is researching reading but to actually be researching NOT-reading, to promise reading but deliver exercises, to promote literacy as a tool for empowerment but offer literacy practices that disempower. (p.76)

It is not just the social relations and practices, expectations regarding genres, audiences or purposes in relation to the text and the meaning made of that text, but also the meaning and purpose of the reading event which will determine whether the reader attributes any more meaning to it than a reading exercise for the purpose of evaluation or answering a survey question. The relative control which the readers have over these factors and processes will determine the extent to which they are, and feel that they are, participating in an event as an exercise or whether they are reading for their purposes and making their meanings of a text. One conclusion drawn from this analysis is that it goes some way to explaining why many people may do poorly on reading tests but can read adequately for their own purposes, explaining the difference, say, in reading a tortured test item and reading a letter from a friend.

Thus, the role of the 'other' person or persons (as teacher, researcher, evaluator or co-literate) can determine to a large extent the nature of the event:

> When the other's role is simply to evaluate the print use, the print user is out of the picture at the end. And, of course, when the other person's purpose is to evaluate the reading and the reader accepts that purpose because she only read in the first place in order to have the reading evaluated, the reading is an exercise. (Edelsky 1991, p.91)

Further, if another person has control over the event, was the instigator, shaped it, chose the topic, the duration and means of assessment, then quite clearly that type of event positions the reader as an Object. Edelsky summarises it this way:

> As Gilbert ... has argued, readers are positioned historically to construct gendered, raced, classed, ethnicitied, cultured, aged, able-bodied meanings, not just meanings reflecting their relational position in the literacy event itself. Still, control does matter (and indeed it is implicated in these dominance related constructions of meaning). If the print user is being

controlled in her print use—if someone else decides what literacy event will occur, how it will begin, what it will be about, when it will end, and so on, then the print user is positioned as an Object. (p.87)

A clear message for our work in workplace basic education is whether we set about constructing studies, assessments and programs which identify and encourage the diversity of meanings which workers will create from texts and situations, or whether we assemble a series of exercises which we put workers through as part of our programs. Workplace basic education researchers, teachers, administrators, curriculum designers and evaluators have to be conscious of these distinctions as we develop our programs, assessment and evaluation, and the extent to which we collaborate with and involve workers in their own education processes. We need to be clear about whose constructions of meaning we are describing and responding to in the workplace.

Promising the impossible

Contrary to some popular mythology (fantasy) literacy will not solve the problems of the world, nor will it provide satisfactory relief of arthritis, baldness or even those persistent minor irritations. To view or promote workplace basic education as the saviour of economic, industrial and personal problems can lead to unrealistic expectations and accompanying dangers. It is misleading to suggest that shortfalls in basic skills are responsible for lower productivity levels, the majority of industrial accidents, poor product quality or wastage, or missed employment opportunities. Obviously these processes are determined by a combination and confluence of direct and indirect factors. Nonetheless, basic skills upgrading does have a modest but significant role to play in alleviating some of these problems.

Some of the dangers in making bold promises in the name of literacy advocacy, and something for which the advocates must ultimately bear much of the responsibility, include the creation of an industry in 'failure', victimisation, sacking, inappropriate or misplaced blame for problems, and misguided solutions and strategies. Some employers have responded to recent literacy propaganda by discriminating against or sacking workers considered to have inadequate literacy skills. Nominal basic skills tuition has been used as justification for workers' 'failures' to demonstrate competence, often after many years of competently performing their jobs and their lives. Literacy, in this context, becomes another stick with which to beat workers and apportion blame for the failings of the company and its products, the industry, the society, or quick fix educational solutions. There is the constant danger of literacy being

perceived as a once-off problem which can be addressed by screening tests which attempt to select out 'illiterates', but fail to comprehend the existence of different literacies and the dynamic of lifelong learning requirements.

In some cases the way we have promoted literacy, either out of carelessness, indifference or in the self-interest of marketing our education services and products, has been directly responsible for abuse and hardship. What do we expect an employer to do if our message is that an 'illiterate' worker is unproductive, is a danger to other workers, produces substandard work, and generally costs the company tens of thousands of dollars through their personal incompetence? That is, we miss the point (often in trying to make it), that workers' literacy requirements are not isolatable commodities that can be dealt with separate from other activities, processes or outcomes. The problem cannot be 'fixed' in the same way as a faulty piece of equipment, by inserting a new component—literacy.

Similarly, in our enthusiasm we often raise to unrealistic levels workers' expectations in relation to what a literacy program can offer. We offer job opportunities, promotion, and greater enjoyment of life, but tend not to warn of the limitations, or the possible abuses of such programs. We forget to point out that there are no such guarantees or inevitable outcomes from the 'getting of literacy'. Alarmingly, through our own interventions we often fail to recognise these ourselves, or take necessary steps or responsibility for their eventuality.

The work of Harvey Graff (1987) provides a raft of historical evidence to demonstrate how tenuous many of the correlations between literacy and social or employment status, and economic growth have been in many different cultures at different times. Graff shows that in the nineteenth century, as now, literacy and other educational attainments were not as central to a person's employment level as many assume. Certainly it was not as central as one's gender, religion, ethnic origin, social class, particular craft or trade, industrial strength and bargaining power, availability of labour and other factors. He cites the labour historian, E.P. Thompson, who argued that 'illiteracy by no means excluded men from political discourse', and goes on to state that:

> much more than literacy or education is related to cohesion, consciousness, and activity; factors of social structure, economics, psychology, leadership and organisation, numbers, and opportunity are equally if not more important. Easier communications, which literacy may advance, may aid the process, but literacy is hardly the key variable. (p.168)

The work of psychologists Scribner and Cole (1981) with the Vai culture in Liberia found that literacy (in Vai or Arabic) in itself did not lead to higher

order cognitive ability, nor did it enhance particular skill groups, or lead to more contextualised or ordered reasoning. Gee (1990) and Graff (1987) also cite the work of Ivor Berg and Gerald Fry in the relationship between occupation and education. In discussing Berg, Gee states that 'not only did he find overeducation for job requirements, but there has been little, if any, relationship between changes in educational levels and changes in output per worker. Education may predict initial salary and job title, but not promotion or productivity' (pp.38–9). One of the conclusions of Fry's study, covering one hundred and forty nations, was that an expansion in education did not have a corresponding decline in inequality, or boost in economic growth: 'It appears that greater equality does not result from the expansion of schooling, but rather from fundamental structural changes that reduce dependency on foreign capital' (cited in Gee 1990, p.39).

We cannot afford to ignore the lessons of history, and in order to create a critical theoretical framework and andragogy, we need to be aware of the abuses and uses to which literacy has been recruited, and to be conscious and explicit in our intended uses. A part of this consciousness is knowing the tool that literacy has provided social, religious or political elites, and to avoid continuing to confuse workers' literacy with the interests, values and aspirations of the middle class. Gee (1990) concludes that:

> the most striking continuity in the history of literacy is the way in which it has been used, in age after age, to solidify the social hierarchy, empower elites and ensure that people lower on the hierarchy accept the values, norms and beliefs of the elites, even when it is not in their self-interest (or 'class interest') to do so. (p.40)

We need to be clear in our own minds and in our promotions, as a number of writers have warned (e.g. Turk & Unda 1991), that literacy does not cause unemployment—lack of jobs, labour market strategies do; literacy does not cause industrial accidents—unsafe working conditions, failure to adhere to safety regulations and procedures, and inadequate health and safety education do; literacy does not cause poverty—unequal distribution of wealth, lack of appropriate social support structures and short-sighted policies do; literacy does not cause low productivity—poor work practices and organisation, inadequate capital investment, market shifts, poor technology and so on do; literacy is not responsible for the lack of competitiveness of some areas of Australian industry—world markets, antiquation, fiscal management, economic planning, product quality and so on are.

James Gee (1990) encapsulates the historical hype and oversell of literacy in the following passage:

> The claims that have been made for literacy in the traditional sense of 'the ability to write and read' are nearly limitless. Such literacy is claimed to lead to logical, analytic, critical and rational thinking, general and abstract uses of language, a skeptical and questioning attitude, a distinction between myth and history, the recognition of the importance of time and space, complex and modern governments (with separation of church and state), political democracy and greater social equity, economic development, wealth and productivity, political stability, urbanization, and contraception (a lower birth rate). It is also supposed to lead to people who are innovative, achievement oriented, productive, cosmopolitan, media and politically aware, more globally (nationally and internationally) and less locally oriented, with more liberal and humane social attitudes, less likely to commit a crime, and more likely to take education, and the rights and duties of citizenship, seriously. The common popular and scholarly conception that literacy has such powerful effects as these constitutes what Harvey Graff has called the 'literacy myth'. (p.32)

Available research in workplace basic education indicates that correlations do exist between low basic skills levels and overall job performance, but also implies a certain level of caution regarding overstating the extent of that relationship. Mikulecky and Drew (1988) make the observation that lying behind the concern about workplace literacy-skill levels is the assumption that job performance is related to these levels. They state that the research suggests the existence of a relationship, but that it is not overwhelming or direct. Literacy and cognitive skills certainly do not explain job performance completely (only about half of the variance for job performance can be explained by even the highest correlations). They go on to state, however, that the research does suggest that literacy-skill levels can be used to predict job performance with a greater degree of success than many other variables. They reaffirm the need for literacy-skills training as part of good job training, but raise the issue of how such training is to be provided most cost-effectively.

What we do know is that there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that workplace basic skills programs are essential in meeting some of the needs of industry and the labour force, are an integral cornerstone in award restructuring, workplace reforms, industry restructuring processes and other vocational training strategies, and that the provision of this type of skills development can clearly be economically viable. Employers will ultimately be required to make a judgment regarding the value that basic skills training has in their organisational strategies. Many will realise that they cannot afford to ignore the provision of basic skills upgrading. This small step in itself will not ensure positive outcomes for workers; it does, however, provide an opening to allow workers to take greater control over some aspects of their lives, or it can attempt

to prepare them further to be more submissive, obedient workers, in a continuing process of alienation and dispossession.

Considerably more work needs to be done by education systems, and ultimately governments who have executive and financial control over those systems, to develop clear and just policies in relation to where workplace basic education will be provided, and the conditions, standards and resource levels under which it will be provided. This will involve substantially greater commitments of funds, research, policy and resource development, and more support and coordination structures than exist at present. Where the current institutions are unable or unwilling to meet certain needs, then new and innovative structures need to be encouraged and fostered to fill the gaps.

Similarly, education activists will need to be clear in their perspectives on workplace basic education, and will need to take a much larger role in the education and training debates, and in posing alternative processes, practices and structures, in order to develop and advance a philosophy of workplace basic education based on workers' cultures, realities and requirements, and equality of opportunity and social justice considerations. Educationists will also need to be conscious of incorporating these considerations into their own practice, and in challenging and attempting to change the institutions which employ them, wherever and whenever these considerations are being denied or diminished.

Towards a critical workers literacy

There is a body of work which stresses that the definitions we develop of literacy and illiteracy impact unevenly, are invariably arbitrary and ideologically loaded, and particularly disadvantage women, migrant, aboriginal and other disadvantaged workers. Knoblauch (1990) argues that '... no definition tells, with ontological or objective reliability, what literacy is, definitions only tell what some person or group—motivated by political commitments—wants or needs literacy to be' (p.79). Most definitions of adult literacy enjoying popular usage, and particularly those relating to workers' literacy, are conservative and restrictive and mostly serve the interests of capital and the status quo of the larger education institutions. The definitions are inadequate in addressing workers' learning requirements and as such are in desperate need of revision or replacement with more critical perspectives. We need to build on existing work of critical theorists in developing a coherent theory of workers literacy. If we accept that any definition is inherently political, then we are obliged not only to explicate our political theories and stances, but also to act

consciously upon them, and ultimately take responsibility for the consequences of those actions.

Ramdas (1990) in considering the global and gender imbalances of literacy needs and who controls those needs, concludes that 'literacy must be seen as part of the process of empowering underprivileged people. Literacy, I contend, is thus indelibly linked with people's quest for, and attainment, of justice'. Thus, to attempt to define literacy as an abstract entity or individual quality, or as politically or socially neutral and devoid of gender, race, class or other social content is at best naive, and at worst sinister and pernicious in its implications. Thus, it is necessary to explore more comprehensively and address workers' literacy requirements, and particularly their workforce requirements. Ramdas (1990) explains that: 'Given this orientation of development priorities away from the need for literacy, it is economically, organizationally, and administratively inconvenient to most nation states today to define literacy in any but the most narrow sense of the word' (p.31).

For progressive and critical theorists and practitioners, the method and practice of education is inseparable from the social, political and economic content, and the interests they represent. Paulo Freire described what he terms 'banking' education, where the teacher who knows donates words to 'fill the empty vessels', the unknowing learner. He contrasts this with a dialectical approach where coordinator or facilitator and learners are involved together in a critical dialogue. As Giroux (1987) observes in his introduction to Freire and Macedo's *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, Freire's insights go to the political basis of the creation of the illiterate. 'The concept illiterate in this sense often provides an ideological cover for powerful groups simply to silence the poor, minority groups, women or people of colour' (p.12).

Colin Lankshear (Lankshear & Lawler 1987) argues that there is a common belief among educationists and lay people that literacy is a quality or attribute that people either have or lack. 'Those who lack it are assumed to need it, and ought to acquire it'. Within this general assertion he identifies three closely related misconceptions, namely that 'literacy is unitary; that it is a neutral process or tool; and that it is an independent variable' (p.39). These misconceptions lead to the view that literacy is essentially the same thing for everyone, and is simply a technology or the skill to employ print, and as such is intrinsically neutral and separate from its social context and the uses to which it is put.

Brian Street (1984), in his 'ideological' model of literacy, rejects the professed intrinsic qualities of literacy in favour of understanding the forms literacy practice takes and their outcomes within given social contexts. Thus proponents of this ' "ideological" view "concentrate on the specific social

practices of reading and writing"; that is, on the forms reading and writing practice actually take, and the ways reading and writing skills are used, rather than as some abstracted technology' (Lankshear & Lawler 1987, p.43).

Thus, while literacy in itself does not provide emancipation or freedom from poverty or the unequal and unjust social and political structures, it potentially provides a means to engage in understanding and transforming those structures and power relations. Literacy, then, must be viewed as a double-edged sword which can serve to empower individuals or groups of individuals collectively to transform social relations, or to perpetuate repression and domination.

As Lankshear (1987) has argued, many standard accounts of literacy fail to see how literacy is integral to gender, cultural and language politics, and consequently they view learners uniformly and literacy is established as an isolatable, measurable, 'uniform' thing, a skill or commodity that can be acquired by participating in literacy programs. Jenny Horsman (1990) argues that this 'process silences and delegitimizes alternative forms of literacy, based on alternative life experiences'. She draws attention to the problem that when women are included and considered as participants or potential participants in programs, it is always in relation to their roles as mother and wife that they are deemed to 'need' literacy. No-one speaks of men needing literacy because they are fathers and involved in the parenting of the next generation.

While many adult educationists claim to have some commitment to these philosophies in rhetoric, and attempt to incorporate them through some aspects of their practice, many of these and other underlying principles of adult education seem to be getting lost, ignored or compromised in a range of workplace basic education activities, and are instead being driven by the more limiting of the economic and industrial agendas and imperatives. Further, approaches aimed at meeting the needs of a range of workers based on the broader developmental or individual 'empowerment' concepts, or even the more restrictive vocationalism, are receiving very little attention in theory or practice, with only low level debates being generated.

The temptation is to distinguish workplace basic education from any critical framework, to somehow view it as a neutral site of learning, when in fact the politics of the workplace are usually more evident than in other educational settings. Educationists must develop, understand, reflect on and be committed in action to their own political stance in workplace basic education, and be guided not only by abstract educational theory, but also its peculiar applications to this setting. There is an urgent need for workplace basic skills activities to be informed by a more sophisticated understanding of the social relations, forums, contests, interests and cultures which characterise and influence this

area. That is, there is an urgency which demands that educationists learn to read the world that workers inhabit.

Fundamentally, educationists must determine unequivocally in whose interests they are working, and ultimately must take full responsibility for their interventions in the workplace as elsewhere. At the core of any transformative education effort in the workplace must be the wishes and needs, and respect for the daily lives and aspirations of workers, and identified strategies to satisfy workers interests. A large part of our professional development in this area, then, must be in acquiring skills in listening to and comprehending workers voices, and to work collaboratively with workers.

Clifford (1990) suggests that:

> a critical theory of literacy be tied directly to the consciousness of readers and writers, for only in the hearts and minds of wholly literate people can a different story be envisioned. T..e spirit of a critical literacy hopes for change, for social justice in a more humane democracy ... Through critical literacy students and teachers become agents of change, enactors of attitudes and beliefs rooted in democratic values and a celebration of difference ... (p.255)

Carole Edelsky (1991) insists that any change in education must be viewed as part of other more fundamental social change aimed at transforming social structures and dominant ideologies. Edelsky is unambiguous in stating that 'transformative work in language and education in Western and Westernized societies is based on certain assumptions: that these societies are unjust and unequally structured; that the texts, voices and interests of the dominant drown out those of the subordinate ...' (p.2), and that while educational practices reproduce social hierarchies, they can also be the sites for challenging them.

The test of our critical theories is in their application in particular contexts, as a misguided or mismatched theoretical practice in a specific setting can be as damaging if it is drawn from an attempted conservative or critical stance. It is how well we arrive at a praxis—an acceptable harmony between our theory and practice—which will largely determine the outcomes of our activity. In the workplace, the good intentions of the critical theorist/practitioner, if not monitored and constantly reviewed, can be as unwittingly oppressive as the more politically naive or conservative positions. There are two obvious dangers which can be identified.

The first is that the imposition of a critical perspective inappropriately or 'out of context', that is, without thoroughly or sensitively considering and incorporating the workers' cultural identities, differences, and the diverse

realities of their daily lives, can lead to a worker being humiliated, victimised or sacked, unless other supports and safeguards have been constructed to create an environment in which critical voices have a legitimate place. It is no consolation for a woman worker to be informed of a host of rights in relation to domestic violence (many of which are designed to protect, or are only accessible to middle-class women), if the reality in her insistence upon these rights, or even her involvement in an education program, will result in a brutal beating when she returns home. Similarly, an unsupported critical response on the job by workers in many circumstances can lead to harassment by employers or coworkers, or to unemployment.

Suzanne McConnell (1992) highlights this problem in these terms: 'If we perceive empowerment to be a valid and valuable goal in the process and outcomes of literacy education then we must look at the ways this is translated into practice. We must also bear in mind ... "that access to education and literacy does not automatically ensure justice"...'. Furthermore, 'it is easy to see that in some communities empowerment may not be a "preferred outcome" and may in fact be the very opposite to what is desired' (pp.128–9).

Knoblauch (1990) states the potential danger more forcefully, by claiming that 'their (teachers) offerings of skills constitute a form of colonizing, a benign but no less mischievous paternalism that rationalizes the control of others by representing it as a means of liberation. To the extent that the non-literate allow themselves to be objects of someone else's "kindness", they will find no power in literacy, however it is defined, but only altered terms of dispossession' (p.80).

A second, related concern of particular relevance to workplace basic education, is that any struggle for critical literacy cannot be insular or self-contained if it is to have any chance of success. The activity must be consciously and integrally linked to other political struggles against an unequal and unjust society, and in opposition to institutions (including education) which sustain and perpetuate the inequality and injustice. It is essential that educationists understand past and present struggles of workers at a particular site, and that education strategies do not remain aloof from industrial or political campaigns, but rather attempt to link with them.

Critical educationists, through their practice must, in the words of Carole Edelsky (1991) be characterised by, amongst other things, 'resistance to educationally sponsored means of oppressing and interrogation of taken-for-granted assumptions about language, text, knowledge and learning'. Edelsky cites Ira Shor who surmised that 'if we do not teach in opposition to the existing inequality of races, classes, and sexes, then we are teaching to support it' (p.2). Thus, while the notion may be uncomfortable for many middle-class educationists whose liberalism allows the luxury of non-commitment, the reality of many

workplaces forces a choice. More simply, workers and their specific circumstances will often demand an answer to one of the most often asked questions (growing out of the popular miners' song, penned by Florence Reece during the vicious strikes in the Harlan County coalfields, Kentucky in 1931) in the labour movement—'Which Side Are You On ?'.

Back to the future

As in Harlan County in the 1930s, there are no neutrals in workplace basic education. If our understanding extends to the specific and broader ideological interests of particular employers and their corporate and political associates, particular unions and their history, internal and external politics, if it extends to a critical awareness of the political interests of the institutions we work for, and to geographic, demographic and cultural considerations, it must also extend to the acknowledgment that the various relationships are riddled with any number of tensions, paradoxes and inconsistencies within and between the groups of players and their connections. In this context the intervention of educationists is necessarily complex and prone to manipulation and abuse by any single or combined set of interests. Thus, our enquiries should not only lead us to examine the history, expectations, investments and multiple interests of other parties, but also to question closely and honestly our own political assumptions, class or professional interests, biases, values, limitations and our strategies for extending 'sound' educational practice in the workplace.

The terms and conditions we negotiate for our educational interventions, our methodologies, content, curricula, evaluation and assessment tools are not neutral. Depending on what choices we make; how thoroughly we research, analyse and prepare our work; how forcefully and convincingly we negotiate aspects of our intervention; whether we are ever prepared to withdraw our service, expertise or involvement if genuinely held 'principles' will be compromised, will determine what and whose interests we ultimately serve. We have a responsibility both to identify and choose the extent to which we are prepared to serve particular interests, but also to take responsibility for our own judgments and choices and their consequences.

There are many situations within workplace basic education where a range of different interests and objectives can be comfortably balanced and satisfied. On the other hand, there will always be some areas of conflict, which if detected, must be challenged and resolved if an intervention is to proceed. As with any other type of negotiation, educationists need to be clear about and committed to their bottom line. Much of the work occurring in this area is driven

by the commercial interests of educational institutions servicing the express interests of employers. Educationists will often discount their own expertise by developing programs based on an employer's perception of workers' literacy needs and in response to their perceived solutions to addressing these needs. An alternative is to develop our own skills, strategies and methodologies to enable workers increasingly to determine and control their own learning activities, resources and structures, rather than to continue to perpetuate and sustain approaches which merely use workers' learning as a means to satisfy other interests which often have nothing to do with learning, or individual or collective workers' needs.

To work in the interest of contributing to the potential empowerment of workers through intervening and shaping some of their formal learning is manifestly more difficult and demanding than simply delivering predetermined, non-stick, sterilised spray-on 'education' programs. It carries with it the burden of viewing skills acquisition as a holistic, complex set of related processes, as three-dimensional rather than narrow, one-dimensional and a vertically linear progression. It forces the critical educationist to challenge the prevailing vocationalism dominating formal worker education, and to contribute through debate, theory and practice in the classroom, at negotiating tables or in policy forums, viable alternatives. It requires a close collaboration with workers in everything we do with or for them, and a willingness and propensity to learn from workers how their interests can best be safeguarded and extended.

If there is a positive future in workplace basic education, it lies in the enthusiasm and ability of educationists and others to face the challenge of a problematic area, to locate the opportunities in the indeterminacy of the future rather than fear that which we cannot predict. The future cannot be viewed in terms of educational market opportunities or as a continuation of the attempts to scrub a messy reality clean of its past, its contradictions, its conflict and its injustices. The workplace as a site of formal learning, as all others, contains a plurality of voices and narratives, conflict and disunity, which must be incorporated into our understanding of the grounds on which human action is construed. Our theory and practice must develop to express and articulate the differences, as tools in extending learning opportunities to workers previously excluded or marginalised by education.

The opportunities exist to use and engage these sites in a political project of resistance and opposition to traditional boundaries and barriers. The intervention of educationists can assist workers in redefining the relationship between power and culture, representation and domination, into a more equitable and just social democracy.

Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) maintain that:

> to argue for a recognition of the dialectical quality of literacy—that is, its power either to limit or enhance human capabilities as well as the multiple forms of expression it takes—is a deeply political issue. It means recognizing that there are different voices, languages, histories, and ways of viewing and experiencing the world, and that the recognition and affirmation of these differences is a necessary and important precondition for extending the possibilities of democratic life. (p.51)

We must redouble our efforts to 'recognise and affirm' the differences and democratic opportunities of the workplace, and to maintain our suspicion of and resistance to attempts neatly or simplistically to define or universalise the area as another site of subordination, exclusion and marginalisation.

Developments in workers' education do provide professional and political challenges and positive opportunities for change consistent with the development of a more democratic and just society. Our work needs both to reflect and respect those opportunities, as well as take full responsibility for our contributions. We must ultimately take responsibility for our own expertise, biases, political stance, theories and practice we bring to workers' education, and for the quality standards and outcomes of our interventions—there are no innocent bystanders in workplace basic education.

James Gee (1990) puts it this way:

> A text, whether written on paper, or on the soul (Plato), or on the world (Freire), is a loaded weapon. The person, the educator, who hands over the gun, hands over the bullets (the perspective), must own up to the consequences. There is no way out of having an opinion, an ideology, and a strong one, as did Plato, as does Freire. Literacy education is not for the timid. (p.42)

What is your opinion of workers' literacy? What is your ideology? Which side are you on?

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LANGUAGE LEARNING AND THE NEW INDUSTRY CONTEXT: ISSUES OF LANGUAGE AND POWER

CRINA VIRGONA

Introduction

This paper is addressed to people working in the area of communication training in the workplace. It explores some of the issues around language and power in industry, and in the process uncovers some of the questions we might ask ourselves.

The paper begins with a thumbnail sketch of the road travelled in English language pedagogy over the past fifty years or so and then parallels the same period in linguistic theory. The linguists, or sociolinguists, take us into the issues of language and power and thus, into industry. Brief case studies are used to illustrate some of the paradoxes and anomalies in the power play in industry. With increased consultation, there has been a cultural shift leaving both management and shopfloor representatives grappling with their emerging roles. Cultural conflict has been replaced with cultural convergence and both parties are finding a new language.

At this very important crossroad, those of us working in communication in industry have some fundamental choices to make. The final section of the paper seeks the questions rather than the answers. The theorists who have provided the tools for the analysis of language and power have built their ideology on the social and political theory of Habermas. Habermas provides a radical challenge to the capitalist status quo.

Any theory, in fact any discourse, implies an ideological perspective. Much of this paper will trace the way ideology is expressed in discourse. While I have attempted to apply the analysis objectively, inevitably, a particular view

of social reality peeps through the cracks. As the theory explains, language implies an ideology and no attempt at objectivity can belie it.

A glimpse at English language teaching practice

What is happening in language classes today

If you were to visit an English language classroom, you would observe a particular methodology in action. Every methodology reflects a particular set of beliefs. These beliefs are founded on notions of the nature of language, and the way learners acquire language.

The 'average' classroom would lead you to conclude that the nature of language is *interactive*. (That may sound obvious but there would be many classrooms of yesteryear that would negate that tenet.) Based on this principle, learners spend a great deal of time questioning and responding to each other. Where at all possible, there is a *real exchange* of information so that interaction is, at some level, genuine. Learners converse within a defined *context*, for example in a language class in industry, learners may be apologising to fellow workers, explaining a problem to a mechanic. In fact, in most cases, the context seems to provide the unifying factor within the session rather than any grammatical pattern or language issue. Grammar and other language features fit around the context. Language is therefore deemed to be somewhat different in a work context than in, say, the home context where apologising and explaining problems also goes on.

Current methodologies focus on the ways in which these context differences are reflected in certain language features. Students learn, for example, that the task of giving instructions is characterised by certain grammatical features and a predictable structural pattern. They learn that a feeling of distance or familiarity with the listener is created by certain language devices. Learners develop fluency in applying these features in appropriate situations.

A few years earlier—the functional notional approach

If we were to go back just a few years we would find that English language teachers were more concerned to identify the different ways language does the same job. They were less concerned about the context that implies certain power relationships and social roles that impact upon language. Instead, they were more preoccupied with the different functions language performs; the way we greet each other or take leave or complain. Textbooks made lists of the different ways you could do the same thing—the different words you could use to

apologise, to congratulate, to request attention. Starting from a basic structure, learners would practise variations and learn to recognise variation in the experience of English language presented to them. Teachers were concerned to present language the way we experience it every day rather than the way the textbooks say it should be. Consequently, we saw written language clearly delineated from oral language and we saw a new interest in pronunciation looking particularly at the way rhythm and stress patterns create variation and imply meaning.

And earlier—the structuralists' approach

If we were to go back a bit further, we would see where these preoccupations came from. In Australia in the 1970s, language pedagogics thought of language as more static and formulaic than later scholars. Teachers at this time used drills as the mainstay of their teaching methodology. Drills are a technique where the learners repeatedly chorus a sentence. The underlying belief is that language is a set of habitual utterances, and, this is the way we learnt our first language.

As these language patterns become embedded in our language thinking mechanism, we develop an intuitive understanding of what sounds right and what sounds wrong. Supporting these patterns is a grammatical understanding, so drills practised a particular grammatical pattern and variations upon the pattern. Language was still taught within a context. In fact it was Australia that pioneered the notion of teaching language within a context. The context, however, was of less interest than it is in current teaching practice. The relationship between the speakers, and the social purpose of the interchange was not explored.

And still earlier—language in context

It was back in the 1950s when the flood of new migrants forced Australian language teachers to pioneer radical approaches for effective language teaching. Adult Migrant Education Services developed the 'Situational English' course. There were three books in the series and it formed the foundation of settlement programs for new migrants for some twenty years. The approach put emphasis on grammar through interaction within the context. The teacher would begin: "My name is Mary. What is your name?", and later "His yellow book is there. Where is your blue book?" or something of the kind. It is not unusual to hear similar 'conversations' echoing out of foreign language classrooms even now. ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms, by contrast, have long abandoned this approach.

Way back when—translation method

In other parts of the world, during the 1950s and later, English language was taught as a set of grammatical elements put together through the application of rules. Students laboriously translated texts corresponding word for word and identifying the grammar that explained the change in word order or the use of a particular tense. Such a methodology believed English language remained uniform in different contexts and social circumstances and that it was acquired, at least by adults, through an analytical process. It was a totally cerebral process. Intuition had no part to play and context and social roles were moving parts that could be added when the learner was released upon the English-speaking public. Within the classroom, these factors could be subtracted without major impact upon the core.

Where has the change come from?

The forces that have nudged methodologies along are first and foremost theories on the nature of language and of learning, but over the last twenty or thirty years we have seen the increasing influence of social theory. Language theory and language teaching has become more eclectic, drawing from a large range of disciplines. The contemporary industrial context offers a new dimension. Political and economic factors in industry are resulting in approaches that the regular ESL classroom never contemplated and which show little concern for the confines of a discipline.

A glimpse at language theory as a corollary to teaching practice

Before exploring our current complexities, let us track our inheritance a little from the perspective of language theory. This information will help to put into context current thinking on the way language functions and how that may be interpreted in the industrial framework.

Accounts of the history of the study of language tell us that, before the 1950s, linguists concentrated their efforts on the study of written language and on comparative studies between different languages. They were particularly interested in the Latin roots of the English language.

Linguistics as a science—the structuralists

In the second half of this century, things began to change rapidly. In Australia in the 1960s linguists pronounced themselves scientists, engaged in the study of language as a dynamic set of symbols with which speakers interacted:

> Linguistics involves a scientific understanding of the place of language in human life, and of the ways in which it is organised ... [English] instruction should proceed along logical lines open to rigid analytical procedures. Linguistic science offers just such an approach, a scientific grammar with controlled compilation and examination of data, a useful description of our basic sentence patterns and a worthwhile field of study. (Costigan 1967, p.178)

Linguists had at last moved away from our Latinate origins and were busy describing English as it is spoken, rejecting the false categorisations that had served for so many years: categorisations that had taught us that 'verbs are doing words' and that 'nouns are persons, places, animals or things'. The rules gained a new complexity and, at the same time, a greater accuracy.

This particular group of linguists identified themselves as 'structuralists'. They developed links with the behavioural school of psychology and viewed language as a set of habits learnt through repetition along behaviourist principles of learning. Hence, pattern drills were the mainstay of the language classroom.

The transformational generativists

At almost the same time, Noam Chomsky was taking a more radical approach. He set out to establish that speech was a creative act. As we learn language, we internalise the basic structures. We draw upon our language resource of internalised structures to create sentences that have never been uttered before. Our language resource Chomsky called our *linguistic competence*, which was based on a concept of deep underlying sentence structure. Our language production he called our *linguistic performance*. Our linguistic competence allows us to comprehend sentences that we may never utter ourselves because we subconsciously relate them to the corresponding deep structure.

Chomsky's approach was known as 'transformational generative linguistics' and a storm raged between the structuralists and the generativists for

years. Within English language classrooms, teachers oscillated between methodologies based on grammar drills, drawn from the structuralists, and sentence variations based upon a common deep structure, drawn from transformational grammar.

The study of language and the study of society come together

While linguists were still struggling with the structure of language, sociologists and anthropologists were developing a new interest in language.

The history books tell us that sociologists and linguists developed distinctly separate disciplines when Saussure, writing more than seventy years ago, had separated *langue* from *parole*, that is, language from speech:

> *Language* is the theoretical system or structure of a language, the corpus of linguistic rules which speakers of that language must obey if they are to communicate; *speech* is the actual day to day use made of that system by individual speakers ... For Saussure, the linguist's proper job was to study not speech but language, because it was only by doing so that he could grasp the principles on which language functions in practice. (Sturrock 1979, p.8)

As a result, students of the two fields, the grammarians and the sociologists, went about building their own frames of reference and methodologies. The late 1960s brought the two disciplines together and the field of sociolinguistics emerged, energetically drawing from anthropology, psychology, politics and literature. New fields were identified so we now have applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, comparative linguistics, pragmatics (the science of language use) and others. This gave birth to a great wellspring of intellectual activity within the area of language. I do not intend to pursue them all, but to consider a few theorists who have had an impact in the area of language and power.

The work of Bernstein

Basil Bernstein made one of the most significant contributions. Bernstein is an English sociologist with a teaching background who began writing in the 1950s.

Bernstein spelt out the role of language in socialisation. He discovered that typical working-class families and typical middle-class families use language differently. To add a caveat here, it should be noted that Bernstein set out to explore language difference not social class. He classifies language characteristics loosely into two groups which have separate cultural profiles. The profiles he describes, generally speaking, fit into the social class categories.

Bernstein noted that the two groups express feelings differently: 'within middle class and associative levels direct expression of feelings of hostility, are discouraged ... value is placed on the verbalisation of feeling' (Bernstein 1971, p.46). The middle-class child learns to articulate in a broad range of areas exploring the 'how', the 'why' and the 'what if'. The focus of her development is on her as an individual—there is an early process of *individuation*. On the other hand, the working-class family is more interested in the 'what' and uses more non-verbal language: 'gesture, facial expression, bodily movement, in particular volume and tone of speaking voice' (Bernstein 1971, p.49).

Bernstein made a distinction between working-class language which he called *public language* and middle-class language which he called *formal language:*

> Now if the words used are part of a language which contains a high proportion of short commands, single statements and questions, where the symbolism is descriptive, tangible, concrete, visual and of a lower order of generality, where the emphasis is on the emotive rather than the logical implications, it will be called *public language*. (Bernstein 1971, p.49)

Later he refers to public and formal language as 'restricted' and 'elaborated' codes.

The middle-class child by contrast develops language around emotion and logic:

> It is not the number of words or the range of vocabulary which is decisive but the fact that he or she becomes sensitive to a particular form of indirect ... expression where the subtle arrangements of words and connections between sentences convey feeling. (Bernstein 1971, p.49)

Bernstein goes on to explain how language works to shape our perceptions, and order our logic and our processing of information.

Bernstein is at pains to point out that he is exploring language differences and not deficits. He recounts the experiences of one of his colleagues with five-year-old children retelling stories (Bernstein 1972). When the children were given doll-like figures with which to tell a story, 'the working class children's stories were freer, longer, more imaginative than the stories of the middle class children. The latter children's stories were tighter constrained within a strong narrative frame' (Bernstein 1972, p.169). Middle-class children were locked within the story-telling mode which had been well rehearsed through exposure to literature. When asked to retell the story from a set of pictures, a more abstract stimulus, middle-class children coped with the task more easily.

Public language is group-oriented and reinforces one's social connectedness rather than one's individuality:

> As the structure of public language reinforces a strong inclusive relationship, the individual will exhibit through a range of activities a powerful sense of allegiance and loyalty to the group, its forms and its aspirations, at the cost of exclusion perhaps conflict with other social groups which possess a different linguistic form. (Bernstein 1971, p.69)

Bernstein gives examples of this:

> curiosity is limited by the low level of conceptualisation ... The concern for the immediate prevents the development of a reflective experience and a resistance to change or inherent conservatism is partly a function of a lack of interest in processes and a concern for things. (Bernstein 1971, p.69)

Bernstein also talks about boundary maintenance procedures and how middle-class communities with their focus on the individual and on choice of values, characteristically bestow authority on the basis of individual merit. By contrast, working-class communities with their social focus, restrict choice of values and authority is legitimised through position.

Predictably, education is founded on formal language codes: 'the value system of the middle class penetrates the texture of the very learning context itself' (Bernstein 1971, p.212).

Academia responds to Bernstein

Bernstein's theories set off a very heated debate. The criticism was headed by William Labov (1970), an American sociolinguist, who accused Bernstein of promoting a deficit model of language and set out to prove that working-class language was as rich and complex as middle-class language.

It would seem that Labov's interpretation of Bernstein's work did not take into account that public or restricted codes performed different language and social functions. Bernstein advocated changes to the organisation of schools in preference to establishing compensatory education programs aimed at changing the language patterns of working-class children.

Bernstein was criticised for his methodology and for his lack of data to substantiate his theories. Academics found evidence that contradicted Bernstein's theories in education systems and power structures. Finally he was dismissed by American intellectuals as a racist, a very effective label with which to stifle debate.

Education responds to Bernstein

In England, however, and in Australia, his impact was considerable. He alerted educationalists to different language codes so we looked anew at the way language served to limit the success of students. Programs emerged for second-phase learners (children of migrant parents whose home language was not English) along with ESP programs (English for Special Purposes). Adult literacy programs gradually appeared and bridging courses were funded. These courses recognised the importance of learning-to-learn principles as language and conceptual processes essential for academic success.[1] The schools launched 'language across the curriculum' initiatives and it was often quoted that 'every teacher is a language teacher'. At the same time, schools began to value a broader range of language codes. In a rather tentative way, children were encouraged to write freely, outside traditional restrictive boundaries.

Relevance to industry

I have devoted considerable space to Bernstein though most people feel his work is of limited interest today. I believe, however, that for those of us working in manufacturing industry with a shopfloor clientele, Bernstein's work can offer new insights and hypotheses. Furthermore, the majority of us have solid middle-class credentials, having been thoroughly socialised in educational environments founded on middle-class values.

- How many of us have been surprised at the strong camaraderie of union groups and work groups and found the boundaries firmly drawn, rejecting outsiders?
- How many of us have struggled to develop reflective thought among shopfloor trainees and met with a bewildered response which goes something like, 'this is all bullshit love'?
- How often have we approached a worker seeking an explanation of a feeling or a response, only to have the other party respond with a non sequitur.
- How many of us have tried unsuccessfully to convince trainees of the importance of developing language processes to accomplish language tasks, but have had comparative success when the process has been translated into definable action-based problems?

1 Learning-to-learn principles refer to the skills and thinking processes that efficient learners apply in approaching a learning task.

- How often have we failed to help trainees transfer learning from a training environment to the shopfloor because the training is too generic and unspecific?
- How many times have we found our exciting ideas have landed like the proverbial lead balloon until they have been made tangible?

While many will argue that these principles apply in all teaching environments, I believe that the class gulf is very significant and our ability to be effective in industry depends in part on our ability to bridge the language divide.

Others may say that the presence of high ethnic populations in the manufacturing workforce confuses the class categorisation. Many migrants are highly educated and from diverse social backgrounds. This is true, but, when the workplace provides the models for language learning and the social context is restricted, migrants are socialised within a working-class framework. Their English language patterns are confused by the interference of their first language, but their acculturation is within an Australian working-class society (Jupp, Roberts & Cook-Gumperz 1982).

Bernstein's thesis is particularly thought provoking as workers move into the area of consultation and enterprise bargaining with management. The culture of the negotiation table and of industrial decision-making is a well-established middle-class code.

The work of Halliday

M.A.K. Halliday is anothe sociolinguist whose work further explores issues of language and power. Halliday, like Bernstein, has been important in influencing the direction of language teaching. Halliday has been less concerned to identify the way different groups of people use language as a feature of their shared culture. He has not generalised about social groups, but works across social boundaries. He focused rather on the way language is used within a particular cultural context to achieve a particular purpose. Halliday tells us that language is inseparable from culture and context. We can only understand the language when we also understand the features of culture and context that are implied. Language is a systematic way of communicating meaning within a culture. We could use the example of the school.

A teacher is maybe speaking to the class about Pythagoras's theorem. Fundamental to this interaction is the understanding that the teacher is the

authority figure who is deemed to have specialist knowledge of the field and that the pupil's role is to learn from the teacher because the pupil is engaged in an educational process. The education system involves roles and responsibilities that students and teachers within our culture act out. Because of these shared cultural understandings we are able to predict the types of things teachers and students will say:

> We are always hearing ... about failures of communication ... But rather than being surprised at the failures, given the complexity of modern cultures, it seem to me we should be surprised at the successes. What is remarkable is how often people do understand each other despite the noise with which we are continually surrounded. How do we explain the success with which people generally communicate?
>
> The short answer, I shall suggest, is that we know what the other person is going to say. (Halliday et al. 1985, p.9)

As we learn our culture, we learn our language with its innuendo, assumptions and idiosyncrasies.

Systemic functional grammar

Halliday developed a grammar with which to analyse the way language interacts with environment. This is called 'systemic functional grammar'. It uncovers the system which the language uses to organise the ideas to achieve the specific purpose of the communication. The three features that interact to lay bare this system are *field, tenor* and *mode.*

The *field* refers to the subject matter of the text. It looks at the words that are used. *Tenor* looks at the social relationships in the text. It observes who is speaking to whom and the attitudes that are expressed or implied about the subject matter and about each other. *Mode* refers to the channel of communication that is used, whether it be written or spoken, in a memo, or on the telephone.

When the analysis is collated, it becomes clear that every register or subset of language has recurrent characteristics. These have become known as genres. A genre is a piece of communication that is recognised within the culture as having a special purpose. It is recognisable because it has certain predictable language features.

Text 1

V.B.U. NEWS

MAKE THE GOVERNMENT LISTEN !

TRADES HALL JOBS & JUSTICE RALLY

10 AM THURSDAY FEBRUARY 20

- PROTEST LOSS OF NISSAN JOBS
- DEMAND JOB CREATION IN THE COMING ECONOMIC STATEMENT
- HALT TARIFF REDUCTIONS
- DEFEND LOCAL MANUFACTURING
- PROTECT INDUSTRY AGAINST UNFAIR COMPETITION

JOIN OTHER MANUFACTURING & SERVICES WORKERS IN THIS PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION. SEND GOVERNMENT A MESSAGE THEY CAN'T IGNORE..

ASSEMBLE BEHIND THE VBU BANNER OUTSIDE TRADES HALL ON THE CORNER OF VICTORIA AND LYGON STREETS CARLTON.

10 AM THURSDAY FEBRUARY 20

MARCH TO STOCK EXCHANGE (351 COLLINS STREET) AND PARLIAMENT OFFICES (400 FLINDERS STREET).

VEHICLE BUILDERS EMPLOYEES' FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA
State Secretary IAN JONES 311 Howard Street WEST MELBOURNE 3003
Ph (03)326 9228

To take the VBU notice as an example (Text 1), when considering *field*, we would notice the strong opening action statement at the top of the notice and the action verbs, e.g. 'protest', 'demand', 'halt'. We would also note the 'where' and 'when' statements. In turning to *tenor* we would notice the declarative nature of the statements. The sentences are stripped of any unnecessary words and are also repetitive in form. We would notice that neither the author nor the audience are defined as individuals but as a class of people. When considering *mode*, we would study the way the information is structured beginning with the call for members to rally, followed by a list of reasons for protesting then a boxed statement giving details of where and when to meet.

This notice shares many of these characteristics with other notices announcing events. It shares even more characteristics with notices calling for support of a cause associated with an event. This notice is therefore an example of a genre.

It is evident that Halliday's approach provides teachers with a curriculum and a methodology. Using models for different genres, students can master the elements that characterise a particular genre. This approach has resulted in a move away from the language teaching practices that encouraged English language learners to interact freely in the belief that an understanding of contextual and cultural detail would be acquired automatically with increased fluency.

Halliday's system of analysis has moved even further from the notion of language as words strung together in patterns to make meaning. It has moved beyond the word and sentence level to the whole text and to the relationship of the text to the culture. The influence of culture and purpose has gained a significance unrecognised by earlier grammars. Grammarians are now looking at language as a means of expressing power and social control.

Systemic functional grammar directly addresses issues of language and power by considering the tenor of the text. Fairclough even takes this one step further. He has built upon Halliday's systemic functional grammar by amplifying the notion of tenor and focusing on the way language relates to power through ideologies. He has developed a tool to identify the way power is expressed through language. You do not need a linguistic background in order to use this tool. I have therefore provided a detailed example of it in the next section in the hope that it may be of use to trainers in industry. The appendix also offers a list of questions with which to apply Fairclough's tool to other texts.

Fairclough's approach—language and power

Ideology has never been a concept of great interest to linguists. Therefore, from Fairclough's perspective, linguists have not been able to harness the way power is expressed through language. Ideology encompasses our beliefs and notions about the world. As Fairclough sees it, power and hence ideology, is woven into the texture of our communication, in the conventions, presumptions and predictions of our interchanges.

> Ideologies are closely linked to power, because the nature of the ideological assumptions embedded in particular conventions, and so the nature of those conventions themselves, depends on the power relations which underlie the conventions; and because they are a means of legitimizing existing social relations and differences of power, simply through the recurrence of ordinary familiar ways of behaving which take these relations and power differences for granted. (Fairclough 1989, p.2)

Ideologies are overtly expressed in the media and in political arenas. They are less apparent but written into the conventions of almost every sphere of our lives. They are inherent in our relationships with our work colleagues, with work authorities, in the conversations we have with our children, our partners, with bureaucracies.

Fairclough has developed a method of analysis with which to examine the role of language in expressing, sustaining and asserting power. This method of analysis is called 'critical language study' (CLS). The analysis aims:

> to show up connections which may be hidden from people—such as the connections between language, power and ideology ... CLS analyses social interaction in a way which focuses upon their linguistic elements, and which set out to show up their generally hidden determinants in the system of social relationships, as well as hidden effects they may have upon that system.(Fairclough 1989, p.5)

Fairclough observes the way power is assumed by certain individuals and particularly by social institutions while other members of the community collude by accepting the status quo and by taking on complementary roles. We expect managers, teachers, policemen etc. to interact in a characteristic way

which connotes authority and particular social relationships. As workers, students or offenders, we assume a complementary stance which sustains and reaffirms the features inherent in both roles. We recognise the authority of the role usually showing deference and responding to instructions. Each player accepts the constraints of the role and draws upon the language (discourse types) that become his or her inheritance (Fairclough 1989, p.39).

Power roles are legitimised or delegitimised, usually unconsciously, by the language we use. Dominant ideologies are presented as the commonsense, universally accepted point of view—of course a policeman should reprimand, a lawyer should cross examine, a manager should give orders. Dominant ideologies have been *naturalised*, for example it is assumed that money gains are synonymous with success in our society or that exposing emotionally vulnerable people on the television news is exercising free enquiry, and that while losers are the vulnerable in our society, winners are wealthy. No apologies or explanations need be given.

Power is exercised with the consent of the community as we acquiesce to the roles and implicit values of our culture:

> I think that in modern society, social control is increasingly practised, where this is feasible, through consent. This is often a matter of integrating people into apparatuses of control which they come to feel themselves to be part of (e.g. as consumers or as owners of shares in the 'share owning democracy'). (Fairclough 1989, p.36)

This is a salient point in the light of increased consultation in industry. Since union officials have been drawn into the role of decision-makers, are they also coopted into the social control mechanisms? This is a point we shall explore later.

President's message

Let us apply the principles of CLS to observe the way ideology is expressed in the following article (Text 2). The article is the opening statement of an initiation program for new employees at the company. The company name is fictitious.

Text 2

President's Message

Classic Australia, along with the Australian Motor Industry is experiencing a dynamic period of change and restructuring as we pursue our goal to become internationally competitive in the 1990s.

This process of change will accelerate in coming years as we upgrade our facilities to achieve world standards and link in with the global strategies of Classic Motor Corporation of Elsewhere.

Classic's successes in Australia include the manufacture of cars and components, development of markets for our wide range of products and the creation of employment opportunities.

We are fortunate in many ways having an important competitive advantage in being able to draw on the vast resources of Classic Elsewhere's largest industrial organisation and one of the largest automotive groups in the world.

Among these benefits are Classic's dominance in many areas of research and development, automotive design and technology, manufacturing excellence and access to a range of products unmatched by our competitors.

These factors, combined with the initiatives and skills of our employees and a strong and dedicated national network of suppliers and dealers, are helping Classic Australia achieve its goals of market leadership and Number One in Customer Satisfaction.

I hope that through this program all employees of Classic Australia will gain an appreciation of our objectives and a greater understanding of our company and its goals.

J. Blow

President

If we look at the relationship of the writer to his subject, we look at the type of words used. We note how the choice of words projects a particular image of the company. We note the number of words that describe the company as strong and successful—words such as 'dominance', 'vast', 'unmatched'; a company that is fortunate and engaged in dynamic activity; one of the largest of its kind achieving leadership and excellence. There is a degree of repetition or overwording when we read about the 'initiatives and skills' of the employees

and the 'strong and dedicated' suppliers and dealers. Reference to international competitiveness, world standards and global strategies gives a sense that Classic Australia is involved in an initiative of mammoth proportions, it is bigger than parochial Australia and Classic is keeping pace.

There is an air of formality, even perhaps solemnity created by the use of long sentences with their embedded clauses. The choice of words adds to the formality. The opening line has a declarative tone 'along with the Australian Motor Industry ...'. The effect would be quite different if it were to read 'Classic, and all the other car makers ...'. Goals are 'pursued' and change is a 'process' which 'accelerates', jobs are 'employment opportunities'.

If we consider the relationship of the subject of the sentence to the verb, we establish an understanding of who or what is perceived as the initiator of action. The opening sentence is a passive sentence, so there is no person or event which has caused Classic to experience this period of change. However, it is specifically Classic which is upgrading facilities and achieving success. With the constant use of the inclusive 'we', the reader has a sense that Classic employees work as a team and are equally fortunate and equally responsible for the company's success.

The underlying ideologyis:

- that change will lead to international competitiveness and, by implication, once those standards are reached the change will cease;
- that success is to do with size, dominance and winning in competition; and
- that Classic is already a successful company and it is on the road to greater success.

This article would read quite differently if it were not written by management and not constrained to present a favourable image. The reality of the situation is in fact quite different from that suggested. The automotive industry in Australia is struggling for survival; it has lost market share and is threatened with closure if the tariffs issue is not resolved favourably; the parent company in Elsewhere is not concerned to nurture its offspring, Classic Australia; and, despite the team effort, the skills and the dedication that Classic employees and associates display, they will be unceremoniously severed unless the company pays its way handsomely.

For the sake of comparison, let us see the way the union expresses power and ideology (see Text 3).

Message from the secretary

Text 3

Message from the Secretary

1992 will be heralded as a year of the most significant change that the vehicle industry, and in particular the Vehicle Builders Union has ever undertaken.

We have been negotiating amalgamation for approximately two years with the MEWU and I am pleased to say that those negotiations are shortly to conclude

As a Union we are now in a position to come back to the membership with a considered proposal and discuss the merits of it with you. We will be conducting an education program over the next two to three months our Shop Stewards and our members so that they are informed of all the issues prior to having to cast their vote on this most important matter.

Many people would ask why bother to amalgamate? What's in it for us? What's in it for the Union? All very fair questions and I suppose it's best explained like this -

In the early 60's the Vehicle Builders Union had approximately 50 to 57 thousand members employed within the industry. Throughout that time there have been a number of recessions, changes in governments, and significant technological advancement., all of which in one way or another have contributed to the decline in employment within the vehicle sector.

World trends

As a Union we cannot ignore world trends and most assuredly cannot ignore the fact that with change in governments, comes change in policy, and over the years it has been that uncertainty of changing policy that has consistantly led to decline in employment opportunities.

As a Union we've had to recognise that there is a need to compete on the world stage. The Labor Government's Vehicle Industry Policy is designed to bring about that very objective.

We aren't competing simply for the sake of profits, we are competing for very precious and scarce manufacturing jobs, not just in Australia but throughout the world.

But despite the fact that Australia is now more cost competitive than many of its overseas counterparts we still face the stark reality that our industry will continue to contract

Amalgamation only defence against Vehicle Industry contraction

The view our Union has taken is that if we are going to be able to continue to represent members as successfully as we have done to date, particularly with the possibility of future conservative governments introducing even more draconian legislation, then the only way this will be successfully achieved is from a position of strength and that is what amalgamation, particularly this amalgamation is all about.

It is about making a strategic choice for our Union and for its members It is about ensuring we continue the significant political influence we have developed over the last three to four years and guaranteeing that our industrial strength is not only maintained but improved.

Industrial terror in Tassie

Many workers would have seen what is currently taking place in Tasmania. The APPM dispute is very clearly about employers challenging the right of Unions to represent members. This will become far more common place if the Australian public is foolish enough to elect a Liberal National Party Coalition Government Strength through amalgamation with the MEWU will guarantee that members' interests will be protected despite the attack from conservative governments.

Maintaining industrial muscle

Amalgamation will guarantee our industrial and political autonomy and the Commitee of Management will guarantee that you, the member, has the right to vote as to whether or not such an amalgamation is acceptable.

A 'YES' vote will ensure a continuing, strong, viable industrially powerful Union and very clearly a 'No' vote will guarantee that our Union is condemned to the back blocks of history

IAN JONES
State Secretary

Source: *In Tune*, VBEF Victorian Branch Newspaper, June 1992, p.1

Notice that both the union secretary and the president of Classic head their articles similarly referring to themselves by their role rather than by name. The secretary's message is the editorial comment from the union newsletter for June 1992. (It was reproduced in ten community languages in the same edition of the newspaper and also provided to members on multilingual audiotapes.)

Both articles set out to achieve a similar purpose. Both are addressed to a selected readership of automotive workers and both seek to convince the reader to share a common perspective with the writer.

As with the president, the secretary opens with a grand statement. He acclaims the challenge of the times. Words such as 'heralded', 'undertaken' and 'shortly to conclude' indicate a level of seriousness and a message of a challenge being met. The industrial relations language gives the proposal the authority of a legal document. The 'proposal' has been 'negotiated' and now the union is 'in a position' to discuss it so that members will be 'informed of the issues' before they 'cast' a vote. Reference to the time taken and procedure followed, give validity to the proposal as a 'considered' one and a 'most important matter'.

Both the president and the secretary use formality to project an authoritative tone which contributes to an impression that what they say must be true. At the same time, the secretary's repetition of concepts and level of redundancy make for a conversational tone while the density and economy of the president's message provides a bureaucratic distance.

In the fourth paragraph, the tone changes. The secretary writes as if speaking directly to individuals. Reference to 'I' and 'us' suggests we are all in this together. Then, rhetorical questions give way to a narrative as the secretary takes us back over the years. The series of events that have led to the decline in employment are presented dispassionately. The perpetrator is invisible. World trends and changes in policy are perceived as things that happen which the union has no control over. Responsibility is deflected away from the union. 'Change', 'uncertainty' and 'decline' admit vulnerability but the union has taken up the gauntlet. The response required is 'to compete' to protect the 'very precious and scarce manufacturing jobs'. Overwording emphasises the severity of the threat.

Pitched against the statements of change are several emphasising continuity. The word 'continue' appears repeatedly throughout the editorial, restating that progress or at least maintenance of current services will be ongoing as long as a 'yes' vote is returned.

The Labor Government's Vehicle Industry Policy is said to support the union perspective but the conservative government's legislation is 'draconian'. They will attack the unions, and the Australian public would be 'foolish' to vote them in. The 'yes' vote will 'ensure... significant political influence', 'guarantee' 'industrial strength', 'maintain industrial muscle' and 'political autonomy'.

The alternative is 'industrial terror', 'attacks' on unions, a challenge to the rights of union members and a union 'condemned to the back blocks of history'. For the secretary, strength is represented by a strong, fortified unit. Weakness results in vulnerability and finally defeat at the hands of terrorism.

The interpretation of the situation in Tasmania is presented as a certainty, beyond dispute, as are the consequences of a conservative government victory. The industrial predicament is synonymous with 'industrial terror' and would become a commonplace event in the new industrial relations framework. Fairclough calls this use of language 'creative ideology' because the writer's interpretation of an event is generalised to events beyond its frame of reference. By implication, industrial terror becomes the assumed reality under a conservative government.

The authority behind these statements is definitive. They are presented as facts not opinions. Throughout the article, the secretary refers to the union's position, the view of our union and the action that is required 'as a Union'. He is delineating the union's position from his own. At the same time, the photograph reminds us that the statement is personal, presented by a personable man with a direct, no-nonsense gaze.

The language is emotive and the process is overt. The editorial is unequivocally attempting to convince. The counter-argument has nothing to recommend it. In fact, we may well believe it is positively dangerous. The 'yes' vote is not only the sensible alternative in the face of a grim future but it is also the only morally defensible choice to make. You have the right to vote but there is no question about which way you should vote.

The underlying assumptions about the union are:

- that members have always been well represented (we will 'continue to represent members as successfully as we have done to date');
- that the union has considerable influence in protecting jobs ('ensuring we continue the significant political influence ...');
- that the strength gained from amalgamation will provide the best protection against conservative government aggressors ('members' interests will be protected despite the attack from conservative governments'); and
- that the union knows best because of its careful consideration of issues, because it has followed due processes (as quoted earlier) and because it is politically astute. Throughout the editorial, industrial situations are interpreted. We are told what initiatives and events are 'about' assuming their political significance

may escape the reader. Having established the conviction that the union has political insight, the advice on how to vote becomes more convincing.

CLS applied to oral language—the language of authority

Fairclough's analysis is also applied to oral language. The following transcript from a meeting exemplifies the way legalistic language provides this supervisor with the authority to announce a new rule as an edict:

> "You all seen this notice in the plant. Some of yous have been *challenged*. What is it? It's a notice about going to the locker room—*unscheduled breaks*. No one's going to *challenge* yous when you go to the toilet. Nature calls, you must go, but not to go in the locker room and get in a group and have a smoke. It's not the place to do it. What this notice is saying, we ... we ***reserve the right to challenge*** you and *that challenge may be discipline*. I'd like, if you got questions, to bring 'em up now ... If you got any questions on this at all. *I take it your silence* ... If you don't, *I take it your silence*, you agree ...".

The interesting mix of discourse styles shows the authoritative, bureaucratic language code superimposed upon the working-class speech. The bureaucratic language is the language of management allowing the supervisor to invoke authority. The inclusive 'we' asserts his membership of the management group.

The supervisor's bureaucratic vocabulary mystifies the everyday occurrences on the shop floor. A challenge is a lot softer and more democratic than an accusation. To 'reserve the right' calls upon the language code of formal legalistic documents. 'I take it your silence' draws reference to formal, public forum procedures. These features create a distance between the role and the individual allowing the supervisor to take on the garb of authority.

Industrial cultures

Having established the basic principles of Fairclough's CLS, I would like to use this tool to pursue some themes of the language and culture of industry. The purpose of this study is not to make generalisations but rather to take a case study approach and to highlight language incidents around topics of interest. Topics of interest I have pursued include ways of expressing identity, tactics in negotiation and the changing role of union shop stewards as they move increasingly into consultation and negotiation.

Expressions of identity in industrial groups

Let us look at the expressions of social identity evident in a consultative committee meeting at a works depot. On this occasion, the union organiser was present. This particular union is regarded as a less progressive union, highly suspicious of change. Its membership is exclusively trades people. Around the table were a number of worker representatives. The occasion was a meeting-cum-workshop. The agenda was to explore new training options and did not involve contentious issues. It was timetabled as a full day's activity. Nonetheless all the workers arrived in overalls and workboots. The organiser arrived in jeans and a jumper. He spoke briefly to the members and then took his seat among them. A number of management representatives were present. The most senior wore a suit. The most junior wore a tie, jumper and trousers. Everybody acknowledged each other before the meeting, the union organiser, however, refused to be engaged in social interchange and remained sternly occupied with his papers.

The management representative began by telling us of the importance of the task we had undertaken and that his company was a forerunner in experimenting with new approaches to training. He talked about the new role required of workers, their need to understand the whole organisation and the new demands upon their literacy skills. He also referred to the opportunities ahead for all those who wished to strive for them. He went on to talk about technology and the pace of change. He told anecdotes of his young children and their grasp of technological change and he went on to recall the change around the depot over the last eight years. He left us with a question to answer that day: 'Are we comfortable with the direction we are going in?'

The union organiser began similarly telling us that change is all around us. He talked about the new career structure telling us that 'a bloke from Year 10 can make it up to an engineer, but he's gunna find it hard'. There was a need for language and literacy training but the name should be changed because it 'sounds as if people are dumb or something'. He then went on to talk about the changes to the apprenticeship system and remarked that 'some people, including me, are not very happy about it'. He indicated that unless the system was corrected the union would fight it. He said that the new training programs had missed the mark in a number of areas and there was an argument for reconsidering the old methods. In Canada, he told us, they had returned to the 1929 syllabus. He told us of a number of situations where change appeared to happen but in fact there had been no change at all. He gave an example of a company, whose name he would not divulge, which had a problem with its state-of-the-art technology. 'There were a handful of highly trained blokes running around in circles', however one, who was minimally skilled, saved the day.

I hasten to add that the union organiser has a reputation in industrial circles of being a member of the old school. Nonetheless, he exemplifies some longstanding features of union culture. Before the meeting he marks out his allegiances drawing unambiguous boundaries around his group. His broad Aussie language code reinforces the boundaries. While he acknowledges the realities of the new training framework, he expresses caution in the matter of change and reasserts the value of tried and true methods that have served previous unionists well. He is the gatekeeper cautiously protecting the apprenticeship system. He expresses a culture where David can be triumphant over Goliath and what is more, Goliath can make some pretty silly mistakes sometimes. He makes it clear that he is 'in the know' about them, de nonstrating his political astuteness. The organiser demeanour presents a warning to all nonmembers.

The manager, by comparison, has an approach that is more inclusive. He does not sit at the front of the room. He attempts to dissolve the boundaries by appealing to our shared experience—of children, of the depot, of technological change. He tries to dissolve any notion of himself as a threat by telling us that his children can outwit him in the area of new technology. As we have seen in previous management documents, he warmly invites us into the family of this very progressive company.

If we refer to Bernstein, we can see that the culture of management is a meritocracy. It presents itself as open to individuals, even children, to succeed through performance. The success ladder is apparently uncluttered and open to all who wish to climb it and share in the achievement of the company. By contrast, the union requires strict credentials for inclusion. The emphasis is on protecting the unit and the organiser is carefully guarding its authority and its boundaries. It would not have been acceptable for an outsider to assume membership of the union clique. It would have been out of place for nonmembers to arrive in working clothes, to adopt a broad Aussie language code or to assume a jovial relationship with the organiser. On the other hand, members could move in parts of the management space without difficulty. Some of the members used a middle-class language code and could be jovial with management.

On the establishment side, the opaque values are that management is trustworthy, nonthreatening and open to suggestions. Symbols of status are expressed in the dress code and in the style of speech. He asserts leadership by inviting us to participate in the initiative and promising us his support. The reference to his children may well be perceived as an elitist statement where privileged children have access to technological equipment unavailable to others. The manager's final statement invites us to evaluate progress to date, and, by implication, redirect the process. Is that what he really intends?

Overt and hidden power

The manager wins or loses the trust of his workforce on their willingness to *consent* to his direction. Fairclough tells us that power is held by *consent* or *coercion* (Fairclough 1989, p.33). When we consent, we give permission or at least acquiesce to the authority. We accept their ideological assertions and take up the subject role. Coercive power is exercised by force which may involve anything from mild sanctions to military force.

Unionists have a culture of defiance in which lies their ultimate weapon. Michael Halliday calls this an anti-language because it is set up in opposition to the dominant type. An example follows.

At a consultative committee meeting, management and unionists have locked horns over the reclassification of the workers. The shop steward believes that some people have achieved higher positions because they have been unfairly favoured by management. As a result they have been classified at a higher level than others. These people have been awarded RPL (recognition of prior learning) and are not required to complete further modules of study. Others have been classified at the higher level but need to complete a number of training modules at their reclassified level before they can progress up the ladder.

Manager 1: I agree, there are anomalies in the system.

Manager 2: But there's got to be a point in time when you separate one level from the other.

S/Steward 1: Well they're not gunna train for nothing. You appreciate that, don't you?

Manager 3: Look, this is a national system. We want to improve skill levels across the country. It's for the country. It's not for nothing.

S/Steward 2: The company created the system. It's gunna stuff things up worse. [getting agitated] It put a freeze in place to let some of the good boys through the net (so they get a higher classification).

Manager 4: That's not true. There wasn't an official freeze until there was a translation (from old classification to new).

S/Steward 3: If there was a handful (of people in this situation), it is true. [getting more agitated]

Manager 1: What we need to do is get back on focus. What's the alternative?

S/Steward 2: [anger rising] When we first pulled it out, we had some sort of agreement, but not about these blokes. There's been a little nudge

nudge, wink wink to let these fellas get a cosy place on the pay system.

Manager 1: What's the other alternative when ...

Manager 3: [interrupting] What's unfair about that? These people have been doing the job. They have demonstrated their competence.

S/Steward 2: [very heated and loud] My dilemma is that the blue-eyed boys and the sucks who get this pay by sucking arse don't have to do anything. They got the car companies by the nuts, but that doesn't make it okay.

[stunned silence]

Manager 3: [subdued] You can't do that even if you want to do that because there's an agreement, a tripartite agreement.

S/Steward 2: You're missing the point.

Manager 1: We've been arguing this for an hour now and we haven't even started on today's agenda. I think we should consider this issue in a smaller forum and get back to the agenda.

The discussion moved on. Both the stewards and the managers attempted to resolve any ill feeling and to re-establish cordial consultation. They worked cooperatively through the agenda, occasionally affirming each other.

Shop steward 2 is knowingly breaking the bounds of the conventions of the dominant discourse. His defiance of the 'rights and obligations' of meeting procedure give him control over the debate regardless of the rationality of his argument. He is using an anti-language very effectively. If you turn back to Bernstein's definition of public language, you will see that the steward's debate provides a neat example.

The managers do not challenge the steward on his own terms. According to Bernstein, this would conflict with the middle-class language code. It is not permissible to appear to 'lose your cool'. In the meeting room values of rationality and objectivity are to be maintained.

The managers do not even attempt to rein him in. In Fairclough's terms, the dominant culture does not encourage direct expressions of power. Consultation values apparent equality. At the same time, it is not within management's interests to have negotiations break down. Since management cannot afford baldly to confront or reprimand, shop stewards have a valuable tactic in negotiation that is not available to management. If management were to respond with the same tactics, they would contradict the conventions that underwrite their power position.

Management not only avoids censuring but also avoids addressing the validity of the accusations. In a struggle to maintain professional meeting processes, the managers attempt to deflect the argument away from the individuals in question, reaching for the overarching principles (Manager 3). The stewards, however, maintain the control by refusing to be drawn into debate over principles or procedures (Managers 1 and 3). The discussion is halted by recourse to meeting conventions, but only after the stewards have made it clear that they will not be silenced.

Meeting conventions attempt to provide a forum for rational, objective debate, those being the opaque values upon which decisions should be made in our society. The two parties share their perceptions of a situation in order to establish the common ground and the points of variation. On this occasion neither party relinquishes conflicting perceptions on any point: the management refuses to respond to the union's accusations and the union refuses to concede that compromises need to be made for the sake of a workable system. The union's refusal to cooperate leaves the management bewildered and defeated.

Misunderstandings and communication breakdown frequently occur in cross-cultural communication, but this is not a case in point. Here, failure to take up the issues raised is part of the struggle between the two parties. They are talking at cross purposes in order to deflect the discussion in different directions.

The changing role of shop stewards

The role of shop stewards and managers, however, is changing. We are seeing fewer examples of belligerent intransigence on both sides of the divide.

An organiser described the work of stewards in pre-restructured industry by saying, 'their role was to mobilise members and to agitate effectively'. Their role now is far more complex. With the arrival of enterprise bargaining, stewards must perform many of the functions that were previously the province of organisers and the central union office. They must be able to operate in a range of forums from the shop floor to senior management committees, and, on occasions, in industrial legal spheres.

The demands on their skills have likewise escalated. They must be strategists who can identify the direction of prevailing forces, know what issues are winnable, and when and how to propose them. They must know when to agitate and when to negotiate. They must be politically astute, understanding global industrial issues and recognising them at plant level. They must be able to define issues, separating them from incidents and they need to appreciate

their political potential. They must research issues and gather data framing it in terms that are credible within management's value schema and in terms that are advantageous to both parties. They must be able to work with complex legalistic material, using the industrial agreements to argue fine points of interpretation. They must be very skilled communicators. They are the bridge that spans the chasm between management and workers. They need sufficient skills in negotiating with management to protect and hopefully improve the conditions of members. They must also be able to listen and accurately interpret members' responses and to communicate feedback effectively. They must be able to move between the two cultures maintaining credibility with both.

Where, in the past, stewards were required to be one-dimensional in their skills, they are now required to be multidimensional. Where in the past they have been the first point of contact in industrial relations, they will now be the first and often the last. They will now make agreements directly with management. The only salve is that shared responsibility is the norm in union culture.

Along with the changing role has come a new relationship with management. A steward, speaking to a gathering of management and union personnel described the change:

> We used to have a go at each other—use a big hammer and come to blows, but now we are taking a different approach. We have made considerable progress, but changes have only come about because of cooperation between the union and the management. We are living in a changing world. We are competing in a world market where we used to be protected. We have had a high standard of living. We could afford to go on strike, but now things are different. Management have found there are better ways to do business with the people on the floor. For our part, we don't just go in and do battle for members regardless. Now there are procedures and a right way of doing things. We are both learning to work jointly together. We need to understand industry's requirements and they need to understand us ...

A culture in transition

Inga Clendennin, a Melbourne writer and intellectual, talking at the Melbourne Writers' Festival in September 1992, made a distinction between 'cultural encounters' and 'cultural conflict'. With reference to her work on the Aztecs and their experience with the Spanish colonists, she explained that when cultures conflict, they remain intact. Each culture creates mythologies about the other amplifying and dramatising their perceptions of their opponent. They are free to magnify and diminish features, all the time fortifying their own cultural identity. On the other hand, when cultures come together and, willingly or

unwillingly, seek a cooperative relationship, they get somewhat damaged in the process. They take on features of the other and become adulterated. In particular, the less dominant culture takes on the features of the more dominant.

The same is true of the union movement. The union movement has developed a rich culture built on a tradition of conflict. Conflict has nourished the literature and identity of unionists. Now, however, in the consultative framework, the culture of unionism is becoming blurred as it mellows to find a point of convergence with management cultures. Or is that a negative perception? Should we rather say that enterprise bargaining and cooperative management are bringing about a new cultural identity?

What is happening in the following example?

It is a Communication Meeting. The whole shift from one section has been brought together in the canteen. The intention is to introduce a new way of organising work. In this section there has been a distinction between operators and mechanics. Mechanics get paid a little more than operators. Their work is also more varied and interesting and carries more status than that of operators. The new work organisation will collapse the distinction between the two groups.

The new system has been jointly developed between the union and management so now it is being jointly presented. The senior steward and the supervisor sit side-by-side behind the table in front of the workers. The steward explains the new proposal. A few mechanics are quick to raise objections. The senior steward is equally quick to defend the proposal:

S/Steward: To keep the minority, because that's what the mechanics are, the smallest group in the place ... to keep them happy, we'll keep the operators on the lowest rate of pay?

Mechanic: Can't they just do something else like be trained to do QC work or something like that?

S/Steward: Yeah and then the QC people will come in to us and say, "What about our job?"

Mechanic: Now they're threatening us.

S/Steward: Yeah well.

Mechanic: Well we're copping it now.

S/Steward: Why?

Mechanic: Well I ...

S/Steward: You're not gunna deal with this one. You'll just have to get down and operate.

Supervisor: You'll get time to ... to ... There'll be one day in three when you'll actually be feeding ... [feeding is part of the mechanic's job]

Mechanic: [interrupting] One day and the rest of the days we'll be operating, right?

Supervisor: [reprimanding] Hang on! Wait till I'm finished ... You're feeding now, five or six days every week and every second day, twelve hours, alright? In the new system, maybe once every third day or every fourth day, you get a break. The concept is that you only feed ...

Mechanic: Sigh

Mechanic: Well I ...

Supervisor: [Speaking over] The other person has to fix the line when it goes down. He will fix it or she will fix it. We may have some women who may be a mechanic.

Workers: [General comments and banter]

Supervisor: [continuing regardless] You may laugh but there may be some women here who think they can do it.

S/Steward: As an example, in Section 2 ... in Section 2 ... when it was suggested that women be mechanics, all the blokes in there laughed and said "no way, they couldn't do it" ... One of the last mechanics in there now is a woman.

Workers: [Interjection and rowdiness]

S/Steward: She's doing the job. She welds the belts, she fe is the hob, she does everything a mechanic does.

Mechanic: One of the reasons why an operator becomes a mechanic is to get out of operating and now you're saying that three days out of the four, we have to operate.

Supervisor: What's the problem with the mechanics having to operate? Now come on, you've been to the first aid with shoulder problems. You can get shoulder and arm problems. Now in this system, it gives you a break.

Mechanic: If you ... If you ... If you are rotated from machine to machine, you won't get these problems. If you work on the line like this ... I mean ... this day another guy does it, you'll never have it.

Supervisor: I disagree.

Mechanic: Uhh?

Supervisor: I disagree. If you work out the ratio when yous are put there five or six days a week, you ... you still gunna have lots of problems.

Mechanic: I disagree.

S/Steward: Well it still comes down to ... right. At the moment it's all one big theory. Will it work or won't it work and until it's tried we don't know whether it works or not. We've just gotta sit down and say the only reason we're not gunna try it is because certain people don't wanna do it. Well, every time we try and do something different we're gunna run into the same problem. There'll always be somebody who won't like to try something new. Right? And the spin off in Section 2 is, technically, they don't have any operators. Right? They've still got a mechanic there, but they're close, from our point of view anyway, to being able to say that they don't need a mechanic watching everybody work, because the operators that are there now can do that job, and they'll get the mechanics rate of pay when they can do it so they have an avenue to higher rates of pay.

During this meeting, the shop steward presents and sells the idea. He confronts uncooperative workers taking the high moral ground and attempting to shame them into submission. He speaks in a manner that might cause industrial rumblings if the same words were spoken by the supervisor.

The supervisor only placates. At one point he asserts his authority calling upon the conventions of meeting procedures to silence the interrupter. At one point he attempts to deflect the discussion away from the conflict by introducing a new topic. Generally, however, he becomes almost the 'nice guy' pointing out that it is in the interests of the mechanics' health to accept the new arrangements. Notice that the supervisor and the shop steward almost complete each other's sentences when talking about the female mechanics. It seems that they are in league in confrontation with the members.

In this case the steward's role is to present the unwelcome news and contain the criticism. The supervisor's role is to support the steward, pointing out the advantages of the new system.

Colonised power

Fairclough would say that the shop steward has been *colonised*. Management's cultural boundaries have stretched to assimilate the shop steward into its network. The dominant discourse had added new resources to its control mechanisms by colonising the union, though not without costs. The move from cultural conflict to shared endeavour has had an impact on the styles of both cultures.

Within the current economic and social climate, managers cannot afford to make overt statements of power. Strutting managers dressed in suits are now an unusual sight on the shop floor. Fast disappearing also is the abusive and demeaning relationship between supervisor and worker as described by Lever-Tracy (1987) in her exploration of the industrial relations at Ford from the 1960s into the 1980s. There are now agreements that specify what is the acceptable code of behaviour for both management and workers.

Does this mean that managers have surrendered their power? That conclusion would be naive. For the sake of industrial viability, managers have agreed to a larger share of power with unions, but on whose terms? This is the point of the ongoing struggle.

With this new power sharing has come a new language for expressing power. We see managers using more coercive expressions of power. An example follows.

> This manager is speaking at a meeting of the shift. He is trying to convince the workers not to crib time away from their machines.
>
> I think, just ultimately, in all these things here ... you've got to play it as a team. But if you don't play it as a team, you're gunna start getting personal aggravation. It shouldn't be like that. If you need to go for your leaks, just be quick about it. You're just putting pressure on other areas of your department. Quality will suffer straight away. You've made such inroads already. We don't want to have guys taking excess time ... doing that sort of thing because it just isn't fair. If everybody does that, the whole thing will run smoothly. Amongst yourselves you wanna say, 'Listen, you're not playing the game. You're taking too long'. So let's keep it up and then it will go a lot easier.

Gone is any overt reference to punitive sanctions. There are other disciplinary agreements that make it unnecessary. The manager tells us it is all a matter of fair play and team responsibility. Note that the manager even tries, with some awkwardness and inaccuracy, to use the workers' language code.

A new tension between shop stewards and managers

Managements have said that they want stewards to become co-managers. They have come to understand the invaluable role they perform in bridging the cultural gap. True to Bernstein's theory, managers cannot break through the cultural bounds. Stewards, however, are obviously concerned about cultural betrayal. Added to their deep distrust of management ideology is their fear of being a pawn in the management's game.

The new culture of cooperation and consultation threatens to be just a foil for manipulation in the eyes of some unionists. Managements have been accused of giving an appearance of consultation which is in fact only a facade. One unionist saw it like this:

> How much do they want you to know? That's the real issue. They engineer us to come to the conclusion they want. At the same time, they try to convince us that it was our idea. They try to make out it was us coming to this. Every time we went off the tracks, they forced us back. They weren't communicating, just manipulating us. We just got stomped on. There was nothing we could do about it, but they made out we were in there to work it out.

This unionist was convinced that all consultation was manipulation and when asked to give an opinion or to consider a question he would say:

> We're in the same situation again. It's all drawn up isn't it. I just don't know what you are up to.

Shop stewards have complained constantly that they are the puppets of management. Many believe they have been disarmed. Confrontation and agitation are now heavily restricted weapons and in their place are agreements, procedures and consultation. These are the fighting tools of the middle class relying on a subtle interplay of words, a twist of interpretation, an interactional power play that many stewards feel at a loss to control.

New skill demands

The subtlety of language demands is demonstrated by the following.

Stewards, many of whom speak English as a second language, argued the meaning of the following clauses (Text 4). Do they mean the same thing or not? If they do not, there are implications for workers' conditions.

Text 4

Version 1

Meal allowances were inserted into Awards to provide employees with a payment to purchase a meal where insufficient notice had been given to the employee of the requirement to work overtime.

Consistent with the original intent of the Award, the parties have agreed that meal allowances for approved overtime of more than three hours will continue to be paid where the employee is advised of the requirement to work the approved overtime after the mid shift meal break on the day on which the overtime is to be worked.

Version 2

Currently members are required to be notified the day before overtime is required, otherwise they will be paid a meal allowance.

This provides that an employee may be notified up to mid-shift on the day in which overtime is to be worked and that if overtime is required in excess of three hours they will be paid meal allowance.

Full comprehension of these clauses depends not only on the mastery of the legalistic vocabulary, but on a subtle understanding of temporal markers contained in complex verb forms and prepositions.

In this case it was agreed by management and the union that both notices mean the same thing. The question we could ask is—why is the language so complex in the first place? Accessibility, particularly for shop-floor workers, is clearly not a concern. Is it written especially to alienate workers, or is that a conspiratorial view?

Stewards certainly feel alienated. They feel no match for managers whom they believe to be very clever with words. They perceive them to be very skilled and highly trained in conversational control and negotiation ploys. They believe they know how to seduce compliance, how to converge on winning points, how to diverge away from an unwanted direction and how to use time and the agenda to achieve the ends sought.

Effectiveness in argument

The reality is that negotiating forums do have a culture of their own. Meeting procedure is, in the Bernstein sense, a restricted code. The new unionist's role

is not only to defend as in the past, but to propose and convince within a meeting forum. For success, there must be some cultural convergence. 'What in one cultural tradition sounds like a reasoned argument may not appear as such in another' (Gumperz et al. 1982, p. 50).

A bizarre example of this comes from Papua New Guinea[2]. Joe Leahy, a mixed race businessman, established a joint venture coffee plantation in partnership with the Ganiga people through their chief, Popina Mai. The profit share was to be on a 60:40 basis. The tribespeople were unhappy about the unequal split and sought an explanation from their leader.

Popina Mai met with the tribespeople and launched into enthusiastic oratory. He talked about the virtues of the tribe, the strength of their warriors, the quality of their crops and the robustness of their livestock but he never answered the question of the unequal share of profits. Nonetheless, he appeased the anger of the tribespeople and they went away happy. For this group of tribespeople, reasoned argument is not an essential feature of persuasive oratory.

Less colourful examples can be found closer to home. One particular NESB shop steward always found it important to establish his credentials with a new audience. He made a point of outlining his educational qualifications and his experience. He would also go to great lengths to use complex language. In discussing problems relating to the Vehicle Industry Certificate, for instance, the steward wrote Text 5.

Text 5

The VIC was forced on employees as agreed by the Enterprise Agreement, they must accept changes to be flexible also to have pay adjust upon complete VIC. If not complete in some area, where VBU member were subject to lack of English literacy, lack of writing skill, oral disadvantage etc. It is envisage they must comply and learn in other form for them to have pay adjust and still many members were disadvantage, family problem, child care issue, transportation problem, age disadvantage, never been to school before, not interested. The VIC favours the company expectation by educating the workers and in reality, employees would not progress to a pay point unless agreed as speculated in the Agreement, rotation bases, flexibility of work, more work and value added work without adequate payment, demarcation barrier stand still.

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2 This story was told in an ABC interview with Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, film-makers, as part of a series of programs entitled 'Big Men, Broken Dreams'. The programs were first broadcast in August/September 1992 (ABC tapes).

This man clearly has difficulties expressing himself in English, but choking his English expression is his penchant for using long words. I would hypothesise that, within this man's culture, credibility and hence power is secured first of all by exhibiting educational sophistication and establishing one's status as a significant individual. Reasoned argument is a lesser priority.

In our industrial context this man comes across as pretentious with little sense of discourse salience. He was given repeated feedback that his arguments were impenetrable but his behaviour did not change. He needed to believe that the locus of power in Australian industrial culture lies in the rationality of his argument.

Or does it? Listening to parliamentary debate would not lead you to this conclusion. This however, is how Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz see it:

> It is part of the organizational character of committee talk that conventions and acceptable forms of argumentation are presented as if they were culturally and situationally uniform ... What counts in committee talk is the ability to conform to the principle of rhetoric by which effective performance is judged ... while the goal is to present reasoned arguments, the qualities of talk that make an argument appear to be reasoned are not the propositional units as such, but in large part stylistic features of the order, structure and ways that linkages are created between propositional units. (Gumperz 1982, p.149)

Gumperz explains that it is not the rationality of arguments alone that guarantees effectiveness in our culture. Factors that make for effectiveness are to do with the relevance of what is said, the inferences made and the information that is assumed. Effectiveness, however, is a very variable measure in the power play of industrial politics. Shop steward 2 may not have scored well on Gumperz's criteria in the debate over the reclassification of workers. Was he therefore ineffective? Effectiveness can also be achieved by refusing to subscribe to the rules. The question is, who is the judge? Does the power of judgment always lie with the dominant discourse? It depends on the level of gatekeeping, whether conventions are enforced and deviance tolerated. As we have seen, the cultural mix can confuse the rules, particularly when both are committed to working together.

Should workshop representatives seek to emulate the style of the dominant discourse or should they pursue a style of their own that is effective and that may include breaking the rules?

Some managers have often complained of stewards 'grand standing'. They report that they take the floor on an issue that seems to bear little relationship to the matter at hand and then continue on at length. Managements

have described this behaviour as a 'tactic to divert discussion' or a 'means of getting a topic up'. Such behaviour transgresses the dominant culture's understanding of relevance and is hence dismissed as disruptive, nuisance behaviour.

The steward, however, may well be responding to a different code of relevance, drawing cohesion from factors considered extraneous to others. If it were deemed desirable to change this behaviour it would require a cultural shift rather than an intellectual shift. Alternatively strategists may prefer to salvage it. It may in truth be a useful ploy for stewards to maintain in order to divert and get topics up. Most managers will tolerate such behaviour from stewards but will censure it amongst managers.

There are three ways to go, none of which are mutually exclusive:

- to focus on effectiveness incorporating anti-language and any strategy that works;
- to emulate the dominant culture accepting their definition of effectiveness;and
- to examine the cultural assumptions that coax either party to present their arguments in a particular way and to explore the choices they make in terms of audience response.

Skills in introducing an issue and presenting an argument are essential for workplace representatives. Unless credibility is established, the debate may quickly dismiss the issue. It can only be salvaged then by recourse to resources other than rational debate. Issues of how relevance and effectiveness are judged depends on the cultural power play. Every workplace has its own subtle interpretation of how much cultural diversion it will tolerate.

To teach or not to teach, who to teach and how to teach are issues that will be pursued when considering the training implication of this discussion.

Text 6 is an example of a steward in the process of learning the mechanics of developing arguments.

Text 6

The only thing that has been achieved by the Enterprise Agreement is the natural work area groups. Members agree that this is the way to go because the aim is to become self managed. As a result of the Agreement, things like milk allowance, skill related allowances, demarcation issues, unpaid crib breaks and no industrial action in a grievance have all been lost. Therefore the members think that very little has been achieved by the Agreement.

The members think the following issues should be included in the Agreement:

- a $50 pay rise;
- a discount on cars;
- give employees the opportunity to progress into higher positions in the company
- give employees time off during the working day to go to any appointment like the doctor, dentist, and be paid the rest of the day (i.e. be able to take half sick days)
- more time off for shop stewards;
- pay the sick days at the end of the year (at least one week's worth) for people with a good record.

These things should be granted because:

- we are asking for reasonable things and trying to be fair;
- to make it a more comfortable place to work in;
- we are committed to out work;
- there should not be any more barriers between 'us' and 'them'.

This steward has developed a sound structure and an unambiguous clarity, however the managers reading this material found it laughable and implausible. They dismissed it as naive and not to be taken seriously. Ingenuousness is not part of the value set of management. Wins on the part of workers must not be stated as demands but as gains for management. Fairness and statements of goodwill have no persuasive power. Maybe all these things will be won with the next agreement but only if they are couched within the value set of managers. They will need to demonstrate economic gains presented with apparent scientific objectivity and documented using the information technology resources.

If your response is, 'Of course, what did you expect?', then I have exemplified the transparency of the dominant discourse.

Robyn Penman (1990) talking about public discourse particularly in the political sphere, identifies three characteristics of this communication:

1 a notion that 'good communication' is 'based on selling or marketing' (Penman 1990, p.14)—a poor following reflects poor selling techniques;

2 a reliance on experts who provide scientific and technical authority; and

3 a notion that 'communication' is 'a tool to achieve affects' (Penman 1990, p.16) regardless of the means—an amoral process where winning is the only goal.

Non-specialist participants are disqualified from the debate because the experts have established the facts scientifically and beyond question. The expert presents the inevitable conclusions with such winning alacrity that the alternative perspective seems pale and lame by comparison. Open debate is deflected through clever selling techniques and communication effects. The psychology of consumerism has dictated the pathway.

These are the rules that are seen to establish excellence in communication in our society. They owe their foundations in the main to American schools of psychology.

Are these the communication criteria we are aiming for among our workplace representatives?

Training implication

Where are we going?

At this point we need to decide where we stand as industrial trainers working in the field of communication. If we have the ability to influence change at all, we must not delude ourselves into thinking that language and communication training is apolitical. Christopher Candlin in his preface interprets Fairclough as claiming that 'language is power' (Fairclough 1989, p.x). Most of us acknowledge that language is empowering, therefore we need to take responsibility for answers to the following questions:

- Should we be encouraging a challenge to the dominant culture's ownership of discourse and communication structures?
- Should workers be emulating the language of the dominant culture or should we be assisting them to explore the potential of their anti-language and their distinctive cultural styles?
- What curricula are most appropriate for workers, particularly if it is our role to facilitate effective worker participation in the communication culture of the workplace?
- What pedagogical approach is most appropriate for workers, particularly if we are to acknowledge the working-class cultural context?

- Who is our client and how much does this constrain our practice?

Some basic principles

In our work with shop stewards, team leaders and worker representatives the following features should inform the nature and direction of our practice:

1. Shopfloor representatives either share the process of consultation or are puppets within it. Their personal and their group interpretation of their role is fundamental to the way power is played out in their organisation. They are at the site of the power struggle. Their culture, skills and support systems will determine whether they struggle, acquiesce or collude in the balance of power.
2. Key workshop communicators are the bridge across the cultural divide. Their ability to be effective communicators with both management and workers will determine the success of the consultation processes within the organisation.
3. Shopfloor representatives share a responsibility for decision-making which has an impact on the social, political and economic environment of the whole community. They have considerable power to decide whether issues of social justice, ecology and industrial democracy have any prominence. It is imperative, therefore, that they are informed and they take cognisance of the implications of their decisions.

This leads me to seek in two directions: one in search of an appropriate learning system that allows the freedom of exploration, the other in search of a methodology that can unlock the questions of language and power.

In search of a training system

The industrial training culture

If this is where we are headed, what is our starting point: what is the current situation within the training environment in industry? Are current training systems open to the exploration of the nexus between power and language?

It is beyond the scope of this paper to make a comprehensive study of the industrial training environment. Industrial training is a diverse and growing

area as Karen Watkins (1991) describes. With the risk of oversimplifying, however, some broad generalisations can be made.

Training in industry has its foundations in human management theory and practice. Traditionally, training has been conducted by human resource/ personnel departments whose inheritance lies in psychology rather than education. Behaviourism has provided the guiding light. Packaged learning, presented by experts, has been the preferred option. Quality has often been measured by the slickness of the presentation and the glossiness of the materials. Carefully prepared overheads present the answers with conviction, true to the dictates of 'good communication' that Penman has outlined.

Packaged courses, many from America, have provided a comprehensive set of courses on quality improvement, leadership training, problem-solving, successful negotiation. Such training programs have taken a reductionist approach and reduced everything to bite-size pieces. They have no interest in open dialogue or personal inquiry beyond drawing trainees into a commitment to the set goals. At worst, questions of self-analysis probe the trainees' resistance to the goals of the program and may finally result in a quasi-religious pledge as in the following example:

> I (insert name) am committed to the (insert company name) operating policy which states:
>
> "We will supply defect free products and services to our internal and external customers on time all the time."
>
> "Our policy to do it right the first time will create a hassle free environment."

Programs such as these depend upon uncritical acceptance and a blind trust in the presenter. This is essential if uniformity in processes is to be achieved. They rely on conformance to a step-by-step process towards achieving almost any goal.

These programs have also served industry well by providing guided steps to achievable goals and by establishing some basic principles of uniform practice and transferability across work sites. Some examples might be the 8D problem-solving process or many Total Quality Management programs. But can these models assist workplace representatives to recognise the power structures within their workplace and assist them in making choices about their own role within it? Can it assist them to grapple with hidden agendas, to recognise political implications or to free up discussion with their constituent members?

I believe the mainstream industrial training models cannot provide the direction.

What are we looking for?

Watkins believes that changes are called for:

> As organisations make major transformations from predominantly hierarchical, bureaucratic structures, to predominantly decentralised, participative structures (which depend on an individual's initiative) centralised, formal training approaches (which emphasise behaviour alone rather than the reasoning that produces the individual's ongoing behaviour) will not be enough ... a new approach to learning in the workplace which questions and makes visible the authoritarian culture that has thus far held these workplace reforms at bay, and which teaches workers and managers how to enact a more democratic culture, may yet empower organisations to make these systemic changes.(Watkins 1991, p.16)

Over the last three or four years, educationalists have been invited into the workplace with the arrival of the national training agenda. Competency-based training has won universal appeal in training and management circles. Its process is clearly staged, its outcomes measurable and its materials presented in neat packages. Often it is accompanied by impressive technology. The emphasis on content, its reductionist tendencies and the commodity approach to learning has made it acceptable within the bounds of the human resource inheritance. But can it take us where we need to go?

We have seen some appalling examples of CBT (competency-based training) in industry but the fault is less in the concept of CBT than in bad curriculum, inappropriate learning objectives and the lack of imagination in the materials. Teachers have too often attempted to graft school models of learning and curriculum onto industry. In situations where good examples of CBT have been introduced, a real culture of learning has begun to develop in the workplace, offering a challenge to the status quo in industrial training.

Only very flexible and imaginative interpretations of CBT can cope with the task. These are programs that are based on a thorough understanding of the learner group, that are negotiated within the workplace and that use action learning principles to transfer learning to the shop floor.

If industry really believes that its regeneration lies in consultation and worker participation, then there must be genuine attempts to free workers to find their own discourse and explore their own curricula. We need a system:

- where trainees will be encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their learning: in identifying their own learning goals

and establishing a pathway to those goals and where the expert takes a facilitating role;

- where collaborative learning styles encourage networking, cross-fertilisation and pooling of resources and skills in recognition of the importance of the team in modern industry and of the solidarity of working-class cultures;
- where ideas are not censored, and diverse, even conflicting ideas are applauded and explored with open-minded acceptance;
- where issues of power and language are examined within every topic;
- where trainees are encouraged to examine their personal attitudes and where they are free to choose their stance;
- where the curriculum provides broad reference to the larger political and industrial framework of the community; and
- where action learning models recognise working-class learning styles and encourage and monitor learning-by-doing and genuine workplace practice and the transfer of skills.

Can CBT meet these needs? If not, let us not compromise our objectives. The training system must fit with industry, not vice versa.

In search of a methodology

Defining the new language goals

Having given some thought to the training model required, let us consider the methodology. If we are to give credence to the political nature of our work and give our trainees a level of choice and control, we need to come to terms with Fairclough's definition of language:

> Language is not just a tool for getting things done. It is not just a matter of performing tasks, it is also a matter of expressing and constituting and reproducing social identities and social relations, including crucial relations of power. (Fairclough 1989, p.237)

If you were to return to the very beginning of this paper, you would read that teaching methodologies are built upon beliefs about the nature of language and the way learners acquire language. If the nature of language is that it gets things done and that it also mirrors and promotes the culture, there are

implications for our pedagogy. A skilled language user must be able to comprehend and manipulate not only the dictionary meaning but also the implied meaning and innuendo within the cultural environment of the discourse.

A new methodology

The work of John Gumperz (1982), Michael Clyne (1991) and others has explored cross-cultural miscommunication and misinterpretation. Work on language and gender and language and class throw into relief a number of ethnicities with their different value schemas and perceptions of the world. Within industry, our work is to assist in the building of bridges between ethnicities. How can we, as educators, facilitate open communication between cultures? One consideration is to teach trainees the code or genre of different cultures, as Halliday's followers would recommend. A second consideration is to focus on a critical understanding of the relationship between power and language.

The problem with teaching the genre is to do with identity. If we teach trainees to become fluent in the genre, they must be willing to take up membership of the particular target group. As previously discussed, each discourse style carries with it cultural values which it both expresses and reasserts. It also provides an identity through its linguistic symbols. As seen in previous workplace examples, membership of target groups may not be open to others. It may be presumptuous for an outsider to take on the identity. On the other hand, a trainee who rejects the culture of the target group cannot take on its language. It would be abhorrent for a unionist to take on the style of a business executive. While shop stewards counsel their members on occasions, a counsellor's style may lose them the trust of their members.

When a genre involves a power shift there may be a question of cultural betrayal. A trainer who promotes the language code of the dominant group as the only road to success is requiring the trainee to abandon his or her identity for the duration of the targeted communication. The ethics of this need to be carefully examined.

Joanne Winter (1992) writing about language and gender points out that difference is usually regarded as deficit. Language teachers spend a lot of time examining the shortfalls and then establish training programs to assist the least powerful group to reflect the language patterns of the dominant group. Winter's findings suggest that differences often reflect different points of focus rather than inadequacy.

This type of argument no doubt predates Bernstein. Let us not replay it. We do not have to take one and reject the other. We just need to be judicious in

our application. We need to recognise the full range of language codes, investigate their cultural implications and provide our trainees with choices. Halliday's systemic functional grammar offers a very useful methodology, but we need to address the power issues. 'Whose genre?' is the question, and what relationship do the trainees want with it? A single stranded formulaic approach is not good enough.

I believe our role is to assist trainees to explore a range of genres and, maybe, to invent their own. And how would they do that? Jupp et al. (1982) specify a process which can provide trainees with choices. Using authentic recordings of communication situations, trainees investigate the source of misinterpretation or communication breakdown. They are given explanations about the responses of the dominant culture and given opportunities to experiment with alternative means of communication if they wish to change the response engendered. Gubbay (1980) adopts a similar approach using role-play to construct situations. Likewise she gives direct feedback to explain the dominant culture responses.

The same process can be repeated within the management culture to assist managers in interpreting responses that may seem discordant or bewildering. It is important that we stress that the responsibility for good communication is as much on the shoulders of management as of workers. As teachers of communication we need to direct some of our resources to assisting management in its analysis of itself focusing on how it serves to devalue, confuse and silence the discourse of workers.

Whatever approach we use, we need to reflect and incorporate the research offered by interethnic communication studies. Inevitably, our methodology will reflect the definition of language we choose to apply. This paper advocates a definition where language gets things done in a culture of paradox, where interethnic issues are central and where goals are achieved by struggling with new and changing power relationships.

Conclusion

The work of the sociolinguists has provided an invaluable contribution to those of us who work in the field of communication in industry. Industry is not just another venue where language and literacy learning takes place. It is a dynamic microcosm with its own cultures, pressure groups, goals and processes. Teaching systems and methodologies cannot be readily transferred from other venues. We may choose to ignore it, but in reality, our work is at the heart of the political and cultural struggle of our society.

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Appendix

Questions to consider when applying Fairclough's analysis, the 'critical language study'. Fairclough provides a fuller list in his book. The following list will get you started and requires less understanding of language analysis.

Analyse the total text (written or oral)

1 What perceptions are projected of the social roles, people, ideas, institutions, situations within the text?

2 How are the parts of the text linked together?
- What assumptions are made that relate one idea to another?
- What is the logic behind the sequence?

3 What are the implied assumptions: the commonsense understandings that are not argued?
Is the content constrained favouring particular interpretations?

4 What are the imposed assumptions/contradictions that are clearly articulated?

5 How are words used?
- what words are presented as synonymous?
- what words are presented as incompatible?

6 What is the source of the information? Who is presented as the authority?

7 How is causality treated, i.e. who is making what happen to whom, or, is the agent absent?
- Is responsibility for events deflected away from one individual, organisation etc. towards another?

8 What are the questions that the text is not asking?

9 (written text only) What is the message behind the photographs and illustrations?

10 (written text only) What is the message behind the headings and captions?

For oral texts only:

11 Who is asking the questions? Can either party ask or only one?

12 What are the discoursal rights and obligations?
- Are they adhered to fully?
- Is style of talk adapted to the occasion?

13 How is relevance controlled?

14 Is the interchange between peers or non-peers?
- How is it indicated?

15 Who controls the direction of the discourse? How?

Who has power to impose and enforce constraints upon the discourse?

16 Who is allowed to interrupt whom?

17 How does the tone of voice of the speakers influence the interaction?

18 How does the placement of furniture and the use of body space affect the power play?

'JUST LIKE FARMLAND AND GOLD-MINES'[1]: WORKPLACE LITERACIES IN AN ERA OF LONG-TERM UNEMPLOY-MENT

ROSIE WICKERT AND MIKE BAYNHAM

Introduction

Recent shifts in ways of understanding literacy have resulted in what Gee (1990) has called the 'new literacy studies'. These have moved away from understanding literacy as a neutral package of transferable skills towards richer concepts of literacy practices. The importance of context in these new approaches to literacy cannot be overestimated. This paper will argue that as a consequence we can no longer take literacy as a given but we need to develop an investigative approach to literacy. This will be illustrated through looking at ways of researching literacy in the workplace.

If literacy practices are not universal and context-free, but dependent on and sensitive to sociopolitical context, it follows that shifts and changes in the sociopolitical arena will lead to shifts and changes in literacy practice.

This paper will review the shifts and changes in the policy context of workplace literacies in the early 1990s. It will start with the 'clever country' rhetoric of the International Literacy Year of 1990 and review it through the lens of the last two years which have brought long-term unemployment onto the agenda and seen a shift in the workplace reform discourse from 'clever' to

1 *Getting the Word Out*, The Australian Language and Literacy Policy, Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1992, p.1.

'competent'. We will argue that workplace literacies can no longer be seen as a separate domain or literacy site, but must be interpreted in the broader context of the unemployment situation and as part of the reconstitution of education and language policy in human capital terms. If we persist in maintaining a focus on workplace literacies as a domain separate from the literacy practices associated with wider social trends, like the rise in unemployment, we risk buying into a situation where the clever few remain in work and the disenfranchised many lose their jobs and get restructured out of the workforce. At the start of the 1990s workplace literacies seemed to be the issue of the moment as the future of literacy programs framed by concerns of social justice seemed doomed in the onslaught of the economic rationalist push from Canberra. From this time (early 1993), the literacies associated with unemployment have captured the 'centre stage' of literacy policy and planning, although they have been framed within workplace demands, with labels such as work-related or 'workforce' literacies, where eligibility for access to literacy programs has increasingly been focused on 'job-seekers', the new euphemism for the unemployed.

This paper will argue that literacy for work has to include literacy for the workless and will illustrate a number of obvious ways in which this is so. In the course of the paper we will introduce a number of the key constructs of the 'new literacy studies', illustrating them with issues related to literacy for those in and out of work.

In the first section we will review the theoretical underpinnings of the 'new literacy studies' as well as review the context for workplace and workforce literacies in an era of long-term unemployment. In the next section we will introduce some of the key concepts of the 'new literacy studies', focusing on the shift from literacy seen as a neutral package of transferable skills to an emphasis on literacy as 'situated social practice'. In the third section we will illustrate the key concepts with case study examples and discourse analysis of literacy practices of those both in and out of work. In the final section we will draw conclusions for literacy futures in a period of both industry restructuring and large-scale unemployment.

The context for workplace literacies in New Times

A consideration of the context for workplace literacies in New Times needs to include:

- the role of language in New Times;
- the impact of relevant policies, in relation to both education and

industry, i.e. how policy is constructing work-related literacies and positioning work-related literacy programs; and

- changes in work and workplaces.

The theoretical underpinnings of the 'new literacy studies'

The role of language in New Times

'New Times' refers to post-industrial or post-Fordist society characterised by economic activity which is predominantly based on service or information industries rather than on manufacturing and primary production, which has far-reaching consequences for the structure of work and of social relations within work.

There are a number of reasons for addressing the increasing significance of language in these times. These include:

- prevalent misconceptions about language as a neutral medium, such as the view of literacy as a set of neutral transferable skills—this (widely held) view of language conceals the ideological workings of language in the construction of realities and identities;
- related misconceptions that communication is simply a transparent conduit for transmission of information and ideas (Reddy 1979);
- the importance, therefore, of understanding language as a social practice (Kress 1988);
- the importance of language and literacy acquisition as forms of socialisation into particular discourses (see the section entitled 'Investigating literacy practices in context' for an explanation of the term 'discourse');
- the increasing significance of language policy in shaping the structure of post-industrial society;
- the increasing role of language as a mechanism of control in an information-based society—for example, in the 'manufacture of consent', the exercise of power over the resources of language production and transmission to 'project one's practices as universal and "common sense"' (Fairclough 1989, p.33); and

- the increasing significance of language in relation to changes in the nature of the work and work relations.

Fairclough (1992) makes the point that the increasing salience of language as a means of social control is being matched by an increasing concern to control discourse and discourse technologies in work through training in communication skills. Here as in the USA and the UK, spoken and written communication skills are now claimed to be key workplace competencies to a level of specificity not seen before (see Mayer Report 1992, p.11). What might have been regarded recently as life or social skills are now considered to be key occupational skills.

Language as social practice

Fairclough argues that:

> Linguistic phenomena are social in the sense that whenever people speak or listen or write or read, they do so in ways which are determined socially and have social effects ... Social phenomena are linguistic, on the other hand, in the sense that the language activity which goes on in social contexts (as all language activity does) is not merely a reflection or expression of social processes and practices, it is *part* of those processes or practices. (1989, p.23)

If we understand language as a social practice then the production and consumption of language and thus of its manifestations, texts, are also social practices—they are what we describe as literacy practices. Reading a text will be a different kind of literacy practice depending on the context in which it is happening—who is reading it, for what purpose, who with and so on. These variables, those related to the 'context of use' and the 'context of situation' (Halliday & Hasan 1985) will of course also make the text a different text. Imagine the reading of a report of a football match in the offices of the winning and of the losing teams. Similarly writers will produce different texts for different audiences even though they may be ostensibly about the same topic. Or the same text may be 'editorialised' for different audiences. For example, a student at the University of Technology, Sydney recently analysed an article, originally written in the USA, about the names that women are called. It appeared in *Australian Cosmopolitan* magazine under the banner 'Babe, chick, bitch (and other names we're called)', and in *Australian Playboy* magazine under the banner 'Avoiding the "L" word', where 'L' signified lady. An analysis of the two versions of the article revealed that a number of significant editorial changes had been made (Weston-Davey 1992). Gilbert has often written about the differing constructions of cultural identity that operate through texts

ostensibly about the same topic but in publications for different audiences such as the *Bulletin* and *Dolly* magazine (e.g. Gilbert 1992).

Reading then, as Freebody and Luke have argued, requires more than the ability to apply decoding skills to marks on paper, 'reading is not a private act but a social practice, not a matter of individual choice or proclivity, but of learning the reading practices of an interpretive community' (Luke 1992b; Freebody & Luke 1990). Reading requires the reader to ask a number of analytical questions of a text about how the reader and the world are positioned by the text (Kress 1985). As McCormack has pointed out, the reader needs to ask what the text is trying to do to him or her. The reader in the workplace needs to ask of a workplace text, where is this accident form positioning me, whose interests is it serving? (McCormack 1992). The questions 'What does this say?' or 'What am I trying to say?' when asked of the reading and writing process now appear more problematic than perhaps you might have thought. This construction of reading and writing also begs the question of how to do it. What tools of analysis are there to become a critical reader and critical constructor of texts whatever the 'level' of reading and writing ability?

As we explain in the section entitled 'Investigating literacy practices in context', techniques of discourse analysis have until recently been limited to descriptive analyses (compare Fairclough 1985). Such analyses do not attempt to explain or interpret or position these texts as manifestations of language as social practice. That is the domain of critical linguistics, or critical language studies. The work of thinkers such as Foucault, Bourdieu and Habermas, in drawing attention to the constitutive function of language as a mechanism of control through the operation of discourses, are important influences on the growth of critical language studies and techniques of critical discourse analysis. Discourses, defined here as the 'systematically organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution' (Kress 1985, p.7) are what construct and position reality and readers through text. Techniques of critical discourse analysis such as those based on functional theories of grammar provide readers with critical reading tools.

We have spent some time outlining a theoretical framework as an essential aspect of considering the context of workplace literacies. The literacy practices of workplaces then are the manifestation of the operation of multiple discourses, often conflicting and competing, through which reality is constructed and people are positioned. They may be the macro-discourses of government policy or the micro-discourses of the cultures of particular workplaces. Our perspective on language provides a rationale for insisting on the ideological nature of spoken and written language and the need to surface the ideologies or 'power-knowledge' discourses (Foucault 1979) underpinning

these various discourses through critical linguistic analysis of spoken and written texts.

This perspective on the role that language plays in power relations may help teachers understand why they feel confused about what they are trying to achieve in different sites. It helps explain why there is often conflict between the stated industrial goals of workplace programs and the goals of the teachers of those programs. It reveals why the question of definition is so taxing, since arguments over definition are arguments about whose construction of literacy will win and accordingly whose related politics of literacy will prevail. Agreement on a definition and thus on a measurement of literacy will never be reached. Definitions are attempts to position the subject and the reader and as such are instantiations of the operations of particular discourses; they are examples of the literacy contest (Gee 1990, p.27) that different social groups enter to ensure that their discourse achieves dominance. The stakes are high. How literacy is defined and measured involves issues of inclusion and exclusion. Thus a view of language as social and instrumental legitimates multiple constructions of literacy. Perhaps a helpful construction is Kress's notion of literacy as cultural technology where he suggests that literacy is 'the ability to constitute our culture, to produce new meanings and in doing so, to transform (that) culture in certain ways' (Kress 1990, p.2). The sign of the literate participant in this technology then is one who has 'the capacity to use text to critically appraise one's position in changing economic, occupational and social conditions' (Christie et al. 1991, p.2).

The policy context

The 'clever country' rhetoric of the late 1980s encapsulated the human capital thesis that Australia's position in the competitive international market would only be secured by upgrading the skills of the Australian worker. This is to be achieved through the restructuring of industry and the reform of both general and vocational education (e.g. Australian Education Council 1991 and Mayer Report 1992; Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992). The place of literacy skills in this formulation is evident in the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP), which makes it clear that language policy serves the human capital thesis (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1991a, p.1). There is no explicit commitment to equity and social justice in the text of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy, although attention is drawn in the Companion Volume to the social justice dimension of increased language and literacy proficiency (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1991b, p.13). In practice the implementation of the policy has bee

most profoundly affected by the tenets of economic rationalism, of the market as the regulator of educational provision operating within interventionist and centralist public administrative 'guidelines'. Language, as indicated in the quote from which the title of this paper was taken, is conceptualised in resource terms, 'just like farmland or goldmines, we can develop and use them to help our country grow and prosper into the 21st century' (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1992).

The various policy moves of the past three years have recently been consolidated within the National Training Reform Agenda:

> The National Training Reform Agenda is a cooperative national response to economic and industry restructuring, including labour market imperatives and emerging requirements arising from workplace reform. *The overriding aim is to increase the competitiveness and productivity of Australian industry* through industry responsive reform of the vocational education and training system. *Flexibility to meet enterprise requirements within a stable and consistent national system is essential.* (National Training Board 1992, p.4) [NTB emphasis]

Ostensibly this national agenda has developed in response to the demands of new ways of working brought about largely by the influence of new technologies such as changes in the organisation of work, the need to upgrade the skill levels of the workforce, changes in industrial relations practices and workplace reform with new methods of organising work (Matheson 1992). It has also been very much in line with OECD thinking (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 1989, 1992; Marginson 1992; Rubenson 1989). A key aspect of the Training Reform Agenda is the establishment of a national system of vocational education and training (VET) 'directed at the achievement of an effective, efficient, responsive and coherent national vocational and training system' and 'leading to a convergence of work and learning, and of vocational and general educational skills and knowledge' (NTB 1992, p.7). Thus the stated aim of a national system of vocational education and training is to tie the goals of schooling more closely to the needs of industry.

What the need for workplace reform has offered is an opportunity for government to set educational and language policy even more firmly within economic rationalist discourse. The characterisation of workplace reform, generally described in terms of such features as: flatter management structures, flexibility, devolution of decision-making, autonomous work units, and multi-skilled workers, has enabled the economic rationalists of all political persuasions to coopt the tenets of progressivism, participation and equity into a

rationale for efficiency, effectiveness and competitiveness, to be achieved through the operation of corporate management.

Consequently, as the *Education Links* 44 editorial has pointed out, the Training Reform Agenda is discursively complex. It is ambiguous and double-edged in that it shows a complex mix of traditionally progressive and conservative elements (*Education Links* 1992). Inevitably then the Training Reform Agenda developments have met with a mixed response from both left and right protagonists. The right, as expressed through agencies such as the Industry Education Forum, see this as movement toward the implementation of its Declaration of Goals for Australian Schools through such measures as the establishment of nationally agreed competencies and standards for the achievement of those competencies. The right, as expressed through agencies such as the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) sees this as a threat to the traditional role of liberal education in the production of an academic elite. The left, as expressed through the ACTU sees these developments as an opportunity for all to complete their compulsory schooling with a mechanism to document what they can do and thus with credentialled skills as an entitlement to access the demands of the new workplace. For them, the attempt to link the curriculum with the practical requirements of work has much to commend it. The left, as expressed through the humanist tradition for example, sees these developments as the consolidation of a two-class society through the continued operation of the traditional academic knowledge-based curriculum alongside the Mayer competency performance based curriculum, as a loss of teacher control and the de-skilling of teaching through the rigid implementation of standardised curriculum and assessment measures, which in themselves are derived from a monocultural and monolingual and already outdated view of work. It is the tension of the human capital thesis writ large. What is the purpose or are the purposes of the Training Reform Agenda? What kind of assumptions is it built on? What evidence is there to support it? This question is picked up in the next section.

Workplace, workforce, work-related literacies

The workplace has long been a site for continuing education, though not always on site and not always in work time. English in the workplace (EWP) programs in Australia have been offered by the Adult Migrant Education (now English) Program since the early 1970s and workplace literacy and basic education programs were pioneered by the Victorian Council of Education in the mid 1980s. Until recently these programs occupied fairly marginal status, however

now there is no question that literacy issues are high on the workplace reform agenda and with this repositioning, workplace literacy has taken on new meanings. In similar vein, we see the rapid 'vocationalising' of adult literacy and ESL programs. In this section we consider a number of issues raised by the current interest in workplace and work-related literacies. These issues relate to: terminology, the purpose of work-related literacies, and the promise of work-related literacy programs.

There are two aspects to the terminology question that need to be considered. One relates to the choice of the naming of programs that occur within workplaces. The other concerns the ever closer alignment of literacy programs outside work to the supposed demands of work.

We can see these debates about terminology as being about competing discourses. These are evident in new namings of workplace programs and in the new constructions of literacy deemed 'appropriate' for work in New Times (e.g. Matheson 1990; Rubenson 1989). Bear (1992, p.52) talks about 'workplace-based education', the Commonwealth Government funds the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program, many industrial bodies prefer the term 'communication'. The Council of Adult Education in Victoria continues to use the term Workplace Basic Education. These shifts are echoed elsewhere. In the UK, the Adult Literacy and Basic Skill's Workbase Unit has opted to call its provision Workplace Basic Skills Training. The preferred term in the USA is workplace literacy as compared to the 'broader concept of workforce education' (Askov & Aderman 1991, p.17). However, on the contents page of the publication in which their article appears, *Basic Skills for the Workplace*, the following terms appear—Basic Workplace Skills Program, Workplace Education, Workplace Communications Skills, Worker Literacy, Basic Skills Upgrading, Volunteer Industrial Tutoring, Work Force Basic Skills Training, Education in the Workplace. Attendant on the issue of naming are the issues of pedagogy and curriculum. The choice of name is a discursive choice. Literacy in the Workplace is discursively different from Workplace Basic Skills Training. Such a choice locates the program within the technical–rational discourses of managerialism and legitimates the application of the institutional practices of those discourses. For example, describing what he terms the 'functional context approach' to curriculum, Jori Philippi states:

> The documented results of the literacy task analyses (LTAs) and the task-related job materials collected during this process are the first considerations in organising a plan of instruction. Because the job tasks analysed are those *identified as critical to job performance by employers*, these should be the focal points of curriculum content. (1991, p.238)

The issue of naming is highly significant. Consider the discursive shift from Community Youth Support Scheme to SkillShare, or from unemployment benefit and dole to NewStart.

The promise of workplace and work-related literacy finds its origins in the human capital thesis, that economic benefit will accrue from increased investment in the human resources of enterprise and conversely that there are significant human and other costs associated with insufficient literacy competence. A simplistic equation has been constructed between the growing literacy demands of the 'new workplace' and increasing the provision of workplace ESL and literacy programs. These decisions have been made on the basis of pressure from educationists and unionists on the grounds of equity and social justice and in response to fears from government and employers about the adequacy of the skill base of Australia to cope with the demands of the work of the future. It can thus be seen as one of the responses to the rhetoric of the 'clever country' in spite of the lack of evidence to support it (e.g. Luke 1992a; Rubenson 1989).

However, as has now frequently been pointed out (e.g. see Luke 1992a; Lankshear 1992) skilled work in New Times imposes the demands of increasingly complex literacy practices which can only be understood within a theoretical and research paradigm of language as a social practice. This raises important questions about what views of literacy underpin current workplace literacy provision and what kind of provision is offered. One response to the dilemmas implicit in questions like this has been to tailor literacy instruction ever closer to the specific skill requirements that have been identified through various kinds of literacy task analysis techniques (e.g. Philippi 1991; Mikulecky, Ehlinger & Meenan 1987). The literacy curriculum that is intended to address the broader social justice and equity needs of employees disadvantaged by inadequate literacy is at risk within this economic rationalist approach to current management and training practice. This, in part, is the double bind of competency-based approaches, its equity potential in terms of credentialling a broader compass of educational practice but its limited potential in terms of probable future accountability requirements.

If it is the case that lack of economic productivity, unemployment and under-employment are caused by and can be solved by educational skill provision, specifically in literacy, why is there so little evidence that such measures work? Should we not be taking the somewhat more cynical view that the Training Reform Agenda is about industry manipulating the federal bureaucracy to wrest control of education as more and more young people stay on at school, as the potential cost of training and retraining a 'flexible' workforce becomes more than industry can bear and that the imposition of competency-based approaches to schooling will provide valuable screening data in the

competition for increasingly scarce jobs. A similar rationale can be presented for the current shepherding of the unemployed 'jobseekers' into labour market programs. How then does a curriculum geared to the demands of the workplace meet the literacy needs of those that are likely to spend large parts of their adult lives out of work? The current policy decisions are based on supposition and as many feminists have argued, new workplace practices are likely to privilege Anglo males. It is a superb irony that precisely those people who are currently targeted through the operation of the ALLP are those most likely to end up in jobs requiring minimal skill and less than full-time employment.

We are of course touching here on the pervasive literacy myth that the acquisition of literacy will result in economic advantage, maybe even a job or in enhanced employment potential, a myth given added currency in human capital rationales. What evidence is there to suggest that literacy competencies, whether they be work-related or not will result in employment?

Kjell Rubenson in a review of literature relating to the impact of technological change in Canada and the USA concludes that there is little consensus on the likely impact of technological change or whether the new technology will require a more skilled workforce, but that it appears that:

- there will be a rapid expansion of high technology jobs but the absolute number of these jobs is not as high as is commonly believed;
- the labour market forecasts predict that the majority of the jobs in the next ten years will be in low skill areas; and
- women may be extremely hard hit by office automation (Rubenson 1989, p.391).

Although there is disagreement about what Rubenson calls 'polarisation' between 'good' and 'bad' jobs in wage and salary sectors, there seems to be far more agreement about 'segmentation'—the increasing gap between those in and those out of work. Why then is the myth about employment outcomes of labour market programs perpetuated and why is the curriculum of both school and postcompulsory education being increasingly geared to the demands of work? Rubenson argues that part of the answer to this can be found in the view that the most important quality needed in the future workforce is flexibility and ability to cope with change. This is where the 'screening' theory and the concept of trainability come into play. In summary, screening theory (developed in the 1970s) argues that educational qualifications are a screening device and that employers consider the acquisition of educational qualification to be an indicator of a number of the attributes that go to make up a 'good' or 'trainable' worker.

The case for research

In this brief analysis of the context of workplace and work-related literacies we have shown how the workforce literacy agenda is the product of the operation of ideological commitment to the human capital thesis in the face of unprecedented changes to the nature of the Australian workforce. We have indicated that the commitment to this rationale may have as much to do with notions of employability and trainability as it has to do with productivity. What is clear is the paucity of research data to inform these policy decisions. The education system is being harnessed to the supposed needs of the workplace without any clear ideas of what these needs are. Furthermore, the imposition of economic rationalist modes of operation increase the likelihood of the imposition of decontextualised simplistic notions of literacy competence, whereas what is needed is a rich ethnographic picture of a complex web of multiple literacy practices to inform literacy curriculum. Within this complex picture and without data about actual literacy demands and practices it is very hard to identify what might count as success.

These are the contradictions and conflicts facing many literacy workers engaged in or committed to workplace literacy programs. The early programs were founded on a basis of principles philosophically aligned to social justice and equity and to a concern for the individual good. The promise of increased funding resulted in literacy workers voicing their support for initiatives framed in the competing discourses of the need to place education, particularly vocational education, in the service of industry. The potential for conflict points to the importance of establishing a sound research base on which to establish policy particularly if, as some have argued, there are good and bad things happening in both educational and training environments, and to the fact that much of the current rhetoric around concepts such as cooperative problem solving, participative decision-making and lifelong learning at the very least provides opportunities for critically aware educators 'to put the education into training' (Sefton 1992, p.25). However, as we have argued, there is virtually no data to inform and assist educators to develop workplace and work-related literacy programs which will benefit both the worker and the broader workplace reform agenda.

It is only recently that there has been the beginnings of an understanding of the need to engage with the complexities of literacy in use. The following section provides the theoretical constructs that are being developed to frame up 'useful' research (see the next section entitled 'Investigating literacy practices in context'). The section entitled 'Investigations of literacy in context' then gives two examples of research of this kind.

Investigating literacy practices in context: Setting the research agenda

The previous section of this paper has focused on the macro-discourses of public policy. In this section we will focus on the micro-discourses of particular workplaces and how we can research literacy practices within them. We present some of the important theoretical constructs of the 'new literacy studies', concepts which are central to investigating and understanding notions of literacy in the workplace as situated social practice (Street's ideological model of literacy 1984).

Social contexts

Literacy acquisition and use takes place in contexts and unless we take into account the influences of context on literacy practices, we are ignoring an important dimension for the understanding of literacy.

Situated interactions

Literacy acquisition and use takes place in situated interactions. The effect of the dominantly psychological and textual emphasis of earlier literacy studies was to neglect the importance of social interaction in context in our understanding of literacy. Writers like Cook-Gumperz (1986) and Heath (1983) have re-emphasised the importance of the social interactional aspects of literacy acquisition and use.

Readers/writers/participating others

Studies of literacy in context (e.g. Heath 1983; Wagner, Messick & Spratt 1986; Shuman 1986; Street 1993) emphasise that literacy tasks are often jointly achieved and that the social dimension of literacy practices is ignored by the textual/psychological model of the solitary writer struggling to create meanings via written text which can be recreated by the solitary reader. We need studies of readers reading and writers writing, but also we need studies of the ways that reading and writing purposes can be collaboratively achieved.

Texts

An adequate theory of literacy has to include a theory of texts, both in terms of the types of organisation of written texts, the relationship of written texts to spoken language and the embedding of texts in contexts of use. Genre theory has developed approaches to the study of written texts that promise useful outcomes in practical literacy work. Underpinning this work is the need to understand the relationship between spoken and written language and the embedding of both in an educationally useful theory of language (compare Halliday 1985 and Stubbs 1986 on this).

Media

The availability and role of different media for doing literacy work is a key issue. A classic historical moment is the invention of printing, and more currently the growth of word-processing technologies and technologies such as faxing and teleconferencing is shifting literacy practices in new directions.

Literacy need not just apply to language-based literacies. It is possible to extend the concept of literacy metaphorically and talk of visual literacy, computer literacy, even cultural literacy.

Ideologies

An ideology is a collection of ideas, beliefs and attitudes which, taken together, make up a world view or political position. An ideology can be explicit or implicit. Ideologies tend to 'naturalise' themselves: to behave as if they were the obvious, natural commonsense perspective. The term 'hegemony' is often used for ideological stances which have achieved such a position of power that they are taken for granted as the natural, obvious order of things. A number of theorists (for example Kress 1985) have written about the ways that ideologies can operate in texts. Street (1984 and elsewhere) emphasises that literacy itself can be articulated through different ideological positions. Ideologies are articulated in discourse(s).

Discourses

The term 'discourse' can have a number of meanings. We will look at two senses of the term 'discourse analysis'.

In Sense One, discourse analysis involves what Stubbs (1983) calls 'the linguistic analysis of naturally occurring connected spoken and written dis-

course'. It is an empirical investigation of the organisation of language above the level of the sentence or of a piece of text longer than a sentence.

In Sense Two, for example in the work of Foucault (1972), Kress (1985), and Gee (1990), a discourse refers to the 'systematically-organized sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of a institution' (Kress 1985, p.7), which define and determine what can or cannot be said. Discourses, in Foucault's sense, articulate ideological positions. Uses of language are not neutral, technical channels of communication, but are informed by deeply seated ideological positions, some explicit, some implicit. The relative dominance of certain genres of written language is 'naturalised' within the education system. In Sense Two we can talk of the discourses of law, medicine.

We will argue that in Sense Two discourse analysis it is particularly important to keep the analysis linguistically grounded, in other words to retain a concern for how Sense Two discourses are realised in Sense One discourse. Otherwise the concept of discourse analysis becomes a kind of free-floating cultural criticism with no regularly observable connections to the uses of language in given contexts of situation. The question here is how are discourses (medicine, law) realised in spoken and written language, in the genres of the medical consultation, the doctor's letter of referral, the solicitor's letter or the cross-questioning in a court of law? (Gee 1990 refers to Sense Two discourse as Discourses with a capital 'D'.)

Discourse communities

The idea of the discourse community crops up in a number of contexts, for example in work on academic writing (compare Swales 1990). The concept of community brings with it ideas of membership and raises the issue of how people come to be members of a given discourse community, through what processes of socialisation. Gee describes it in this way:

> ... people learn to read, write, speak and listen *in certain ways* and they do this by serving *apprenticeships* in social settings where people characteristically read, write, speak and listen in these ways. We all read, write, speak and listen in a variety of *different* ways, stemming from a variety of different social practices. Further, these social practices are never *just* language or literacy practices. They always also involve ways of acting, interacting, being, thinking, valuing, believing, gesturing, dressing, using various 'props' (books, paper, notebooks, computers, rooms and buildings, etc.), as well as ways of using language (written or spoken). I have called these integrations of ways of being-doing-thinking-valuing-speaking-listening (-writing-reading) 'Discourses'.

> Each Discourse is tied to a particular social identity within a particular social group and to certain social settings and institutions. Each is a *form of life*, a way of being in the world, a way of being a 'person like us', in terms of action, interaction, values, thought and language, whether this is people in *our* family, classroom, school, local drinking group, church, nation, ethnic group, sewing circle, business, job site, profession, gender, club, peer group, gang, and so on through a very long list. (Gee 1990, pp.174–5)

Literacy practices

The investigation of literacy as practice is investigating literacy as 'concrete human activity', involving not just the objective facts of what people do with literacy, but also what they make of what they do, how they construct its value, and the ideologies that surround it. The practice construct implies an objective and a subjective dimension: doing and knowing (conversely that knowing is a kind of doing).

Literacy events

Heath (1983) quotes a definition of the literacy event from Anderson, Teale and Estrada (1980) as 'any sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role' (p.59). Heath suggests that 'literacy events have social interactional rules which regulate the type and amount of *talk* about what is written, and define ways in which *oral language* reinforces, denies, extends, or sets aside the written material' (p.386).

Mediators of literacy

A 'mediator of literacy' can be defined as a person who makes his or her literacy skills available to others, on a formal or informal basis, for them to accomplish specific literacy purposes.

Networks

Fingeret (1983) in a study of the social networks of illiterate adults, identifies two characteristic types of relationship between illiterate adults and others on their network—*interdependent* and *dependent*. Individuals create social networks that are characterised by reciprocal exchange: networks offer access to most of the resources individuals require, so that it is unnecessary to develop every skill personally. Therefore, many illiterate adults see themselves as

interdependent; they contribute a range of skills and knowledge other than reading and writing to their networks. Some illiterate adults see themselves as having little or nothing to offer their networks. They are engaged in asymmetrical rather than reciprocal exchange relationships, and may be viewed as dependent. While their lack of literacy skills contributes to this condition, it is not the cause.

Domains of literacy

Domains of literacy map the main settings and contexts where people use literacy (home, workplace, schools, shops, bureaucracies, the street). The term is borrowed from the literature on bilingualism.

Investigations of literacy in context

One of the shifts brought about by the new approaches to studying literacy is that, instead of seeing literacy practices as something given/transparent, obvious to anyone (anyone literate that is), we need to develop an investigative approach to literacy practices, to find out what literacy does/means in specific contexts, how it is used, how it is seen to be used. This involves exploring the gaps there may be between official public positions and actual day-to-day practices, working out what ideological positions are being articulated, what institutional power bases are being asserted, maintained or challenged. Investigating literacy as situated social practice necessarily involves a critical perspective on literacy, because it uncovers the way that literacy works with and for other kinds of social practice.

So how do you start investigating literacy practices in this way? There are a range of research methods possible, all of which involve getting into the 'literacy site', spending time there finding out how literacy is done, how it is seen to be done and how it interrelates with other kinds of social organisation on the worksite.

Researching the worksite

What needs to be avoided is a quick 'raid on the date' approach, in which an outsider spends a few hours on a rapid tour of the worksite, gathering texts, making a few superficial observations about how these texts are being used, possibly speaking to a few workers and comes out with a hastily put together 'literacy skills audit' which may overemphasise official versions of literacy

practices and miss crucial ways in which literacy practices operate as part of the social organisation of work.

Time is money and there are clearly pressures against language and literacy providers endlessly cluttering up the workplace, observing literacy practices and interviewing key operators, but it is also important to hold on to good practice principles of a long lead-up time in setting up programs, where this kind of investigative work can be carried out, involving both *participation* and *observation*.

Analysing workplace language (spoken and written)

The participant observation methodology can provide important information about the roles of literacy in workplace practices, providing detailed notes are taken of the kinds of observations and issues that are noticed by the participant observer. Yet sooner or later, it is necessary to try and find out how spoken language and literacy are part of the social organisation of work. This involves gathering language data, for example written texts in the workplace, such as procedures, different kinds of forms, information on pay and conditions, occupational health and safety to name but a few.

An accident report form, for example, will have both reading and writing demands associated with it. Examples of the accident report forms will provide a valuable source of data in understanding one aspect of the spoken language and literacy demands of the worksite. Just as interesting, however, are examples of completed accident report forms which will provide information both about the language demands of completing the form and about how individual workers are dealing with the literacy task.

Written texts are relatively easy to gather and study, for obvious reasons. They can be collected, photocopied, studied at leisure. However, the role of spoken language is crucial. How does a given worker go about completing an accident report form? It may well turn out to be a jointly negotiated literacy event, involving people in different ways as mediators, facilitators, scribes, such as has been described above.

Gathering information about literacy events is more difficult than gathering the written texts that are its output. It is possible to observe and document such literacy events using participant observation, yet to be really useful the spoken language component needs to be gathered, using tape or video recording, so that careful, analytic attention can be paid to the spoken language just as it is to the written texts.

Documenting and analysing literacy events involves 'language as social process', getting things done by means of language. What the 'new literacy

studies' show us is that literacy tasks are frequently accomplished by the interaction of spoken and written modes.

In the following extract we look at some data from a workplace language and literacy class (Chang 1992). The teacher is trying to elicit from the group their understanding of the procedures involved in the case of a serious accident at work. It involves participants in talking about doing, in this case talking through the procedures involved in reporting a serious accident. The discourse is therefore procedural and bears a similar relationship to the 'real sequence of events' in the case of a serious accident, as the written work procedure of 'what to do in the case of an accident at work'. Indeed, what the teacher is doing pedagogically, is building up the field using spoken language, prior to a joint reading of part of the procedure.

Classroom discourse: Emergency procedures

Ange/	Hold on... hold on... what if Sheriff had an accident
Tran/	If Sheriff accident (Ange/ A major accident what would you do?) I must stop the machine first and after talk with Charlie fix up, Charlie fix up.
She/	No no no major injury not like little cut, can't walk maybe fell down.
Ange/	Maybe he's unconscious
She/	Maybe I can't control myself
Ange/	Maybe a heart attack
Tran/	Talk leading hand
Ange/	Talk with your leading hand!
Abdul/	If you get a really bad accident you can't talk with leading hand must go to...
She/	Straight away sister
Abdul/	Go to first aid
Ange/	Would you go to first aid or would you ring first aid?
Tran/	Go to first aid
Abdul/	If you...
Ange/	What would you do Abdul, would you ring or go?

Abdul/ No if very bad accident you can't walk only. I ring up the operator whatever somebody can uh help or ring up to first aid to come over to help us or ring up to first aid to come over to help us

Ange/ Yeah what's the telephone number for the health centre?

She/ I don't know

Abdul/ Triple 2?

Dan/ Double 0 Double 0

Ange/ Alcan Health Centre?

Dan/ Double 0 double 0 emergency

Tran/ Double 0 double 0

Ange/ Is it?

Dan/ It's on the box

She/ I was know

Ange/ Well that's good to know, I'll ring up

Abdul/ I think triple double 2 double 2

Ange/ I know we'll have a look at the book (confusion)

I'm going to ring up the Health Centre and ask them it's not clear to me

Dan/ It's on the box there, I look yesterday

Abdul/ I don't know, I never check

Ange/ What does it say on top of that Tran?

Tran/ PLANT EMERGENCY (Abdul/EMERGENCY)

EMERGENCY PRO-GENCY (Ange/PROCEDURES)

PROCEDURES (group echoes/PROCEDURES)

Ange/ "Procedures" means what Sheriff?

She/ Inside all everything have

Ange/ No "procedures" means what you must do "emergency procedures" means what you must do in an emergency. Ok the next word, can you read it?

Abdul/	EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBER
Ange/	Good Good Abdul. What's the emergency number for the Health Centre again Tran?
Tran/	29 44
Dan/	No Health Centre
Ange/	Health Centre
Tran/	Health Centre...28 42
Ange/	28 42...

If the first part of this extract involves building up the background procedural knowledge orally, the second involves a jointly constructed classroom reading event, which illustrates in the classroom context the interrelatedness of spoken and written language in literacy practices. The teacher prompts particular students to read out loud, and we hear other group members' participation by repeating and echoing what has been read. The teacher quizzes students about the meaning of words that have been read:

> "Procedures" means what Sheriff?

and questions a particular student about the emergency phone number for the Health Centre:

> What's the emergency number for the Health Centre again Tran?

When Tran fails to give the correct response, another student prompts him, the teacher prompts and he revises his first attempt.

This is a fairly commonplace example of classroom discourse, illustrating the role of spoken and written language in the construction of classroom meaning. In terms of spoken language and literacy use in the workplace it is second order data (a tape-recording of a worker making an emergency phone call to report an accident would be first order data). However, from the perspective of classroom discourse it is first order data, providing evidence of the ways that classroom activities are constructed in discourse.

Language-based data, whether collected written texts, or tape-recorded instances of work practices with literacy components are 'first order data'. They provide evidence of what people do with literacy and how literacy operates in the social organisation of work and training. The analysis of different kinds of texts is a powerful way of demonstrating how literacy practices enable and

support different kinds of social organisation and ideological positions. This critical, deconstructive work takes us into the area of 'language as social practice', finding out how literacy practices create and maintain different kinds of social organisation, in this case the social organisation of work.

As we saw above, literacy practices involve not just doing, but the ways that doing is constructed by participants. For this reason literacy practices are not discoverable by the external observation of the narrow Taylorist approach, which looks for discrete, observable skills or competencies. Some kind of deconstructive work is necessary which goes beyond what can be observed. Text analysis is a powerful way of doing this.

Participants' accounts: A secondary data source

Another, secondary, data source comes from the accounts of participants in the literacy practices in which they talk/write about their own understandings of how literacy is done. Methodologies like 'critical incident analysis' are dependent on this second order data: not doing but talking about doing.

This second order data can, of course, be analysed as text in its own right. How do participants' accounts of literacy practices provide evidence of ideological positions on literacy in particular and the social organisation of work in general? Take a narrative genre. Stories are generally told to make a point. They evaluate themselves. Unpacking the evaluation and other features of schematic structure and textual organisation can provide insight into the ways that participants are constructing literacy practices in particular and social practices more generally.

By compiling a range of sources of data, a rich, multi-level account of literacy practices can be assembled: the workplace texts, the typical interactions around the production and consumption of these texts, the ways that these literacy practices form part of the social organisation of work.

In the following examples we will look at the contribution of different kinds of spoken language data to the rich multi-level account of literacy practices.

Example one: What counts as progress in a workplace literacy course?

The following extracts, again from Chang (1992), illustrate the use of participant account as data for evaluation of progress. In the first stage of the evaluation, near the beginning of the spoken language and literacy program in which Time

participated, he is clearly at a loss to describe in detail the work processes involved in 'checking quality'.

Evaluation stage one

Ange/	In paintline how do you check the quality?
Time?	Oh sometimes we checking up...on the... uh... it's not quite... (Ange/ It's not quite what?) it's not quite good, we can... uh... I don't know how can I say it... uh that yeah you can check up where you looking up... it's not very uh...
Ange/	Do you get many, many pieces that are not so good?
Time/	Well no sometimes.
Ange/	Alright, tell me about your family, about how many children.....

Time has to appeal directly to the interviewer for assistance:

> I don't know how can I say it

and shortly afterwards the interviewer abandons the topic and switches to another.

Evaluation stage two

Ange/	Yeah great, what about safety, Time, do you think you can talk more about the hazards at work, you know the dangers, if there is any dangers?
Time/	Yeah, I think I'm understand the dangers. There's any accident happen, I'm uh understand how to explain and talk to somebody to let them know the problem
Ange/	That's really good, that's important isn't it?
Time/	But the other day I say thanks, I had a day off, sickie last week and when I come with the uh doctor's certificate I ask Steve Hobbs... this the form... I want to fill and I fill it up and Steve say "thanks" and I say "Is that right?" and he say "Oh yeah" and "Oh that's the thing I learnt from school". He's very happy. He say "Oh, very good".
Ange/	That's great Time... great.

At the second evaluation stage, as Chang points out, Time is able to report positive progress in his spoken and written language development, which he does by means of a narrative in which he dramatises an occasion when he successfully used something learnt on the course with his supervisor. The narrative provides an opportunity to embed an evaluation of his progress in the reported speech of his supervisor:

He say "Oh very good"

Time makes use of narrative to construct a 'literacy identity'.

Example two: A 'contract' with the CES

In the next extract, taken from data collected by Roy (1992), we find a participant's account of a series of dealings between a professionally qualified jobseeker and the CES, in the form of narrative and recount discourse, all highly evaluated and providing interesting evidence of the speaker's literacy practices as well as of the organisational and literacy practices of the CES.

In the first part of the extract, the speaker is describing what he perceives as the casualness of the CES in giving him travel expenses to attend an interview interstate. The most telling point for him was that the evidence he submitted to prove he was in fact going to a bona fide interview referred to him by a name other than the one under which he was listed at the CES. The speaker here uses the resources of an evaluated recount to put forward his own position on the obligations and accountability of an organisation like the CES, perhaps asserting himself as a professional person, aware of how organisations ought to function.

S/	so... what was the CES's reaction when you went to the CES about getting the money for the fare?
A/	err...
S/	OK?
A/	Incredible, I mean
S/	Was it?
A/	Yeah.
S/	What, were they difficult?
A/	Even they didn't try to make sure what I'm saying is good

S/ What they didn't even ask you for a bit of paper or anything?

A/ Nothing at all. All they have what I have it here, just the covering letter which I sent it with the ad.

S/ So you wrote your own covering letter?

A/ I wrote my own covering letter and I sent it to them.

S/ Right

A/ No, to the company the first covering letter...

S/ Ohh. The first covering letter you sent with the ad, so you didn't even have to get confirmation from the err....

A/ I tell you one more amazing thing. My name in the covering letter as you know is A.S.

S/ Yeah

A/ My official name in the CES is Abdullah Al S.

S/ Right and they didn't even worry about that?

A/ But they know this story and I told to them and I told to them before and what.

The speaker then bids for space in the conversation to tell a thematically related narrative in which the CES has sent him a pro forma to fill in asking him to show in what ways he has fulfilled his 'contract' with the CES to engage in further study or to search for work in return for his unemployment benefit.

S/ You've been in and out to that CES office quite a few times haven't you?

A/ Yes.

S/ They know you

A/ Yeah, as a matter of fact last err...

S/ They must be your good buddy now (S & A laugh)

A/ As a matter of fact what happened last ... at the beginning of this year they send me a letter

S/ Right

A/ No no no... sorry ...err what I have done to still get paid

S/ To still get

A/ To get paid the benefits

S/ Oh benefits, right, OK.

A/ Not only to write just what I have done, just to tick squares

S/ Right, right.

A/ Just have you done what we did agree? Yes or no?

S/ Right.

A/ If I said yes I still get paid. If I said no they will cut the pay.

S/ Right.

A/ I called them I said look it does not make any sense everybody would say yes I am attending to it.

S/ Yes, right.

A/ The lady who ( ) she told me just write yes and send it us—to us.

S/ We don't want to see you (laugh)

A/ Yeah, I won't do that, I need

S/ Help

A/ I need to make an interview because the contract which I did sign with you said to both of us to do something. I have done my part, you haven't done your part.

S/ Oh good on you (laugh) and what did she say?

A/ She said "OK, I err, what's your name?" "My name is Abdullah" ( ) started with A they classify the people over there with the surname. "You have to go, a certain, certain person will interview you."

S/ Yeah, right.

A/ "All your files is there."

The notion of a contract between the state and the unemployed person is an essential component of the New Times construction of unemployment. If the unemployed person does not demonstrate that he or she has made himself or

herself available for work or engaged in further study, then the individual has made himself or herself ineligible for benefit.

The pro forma in a rather perfunctory way asks the unemployed person to tick boxes to show in what ways he or she has continued to seek employment and pursue education and training. A. calls the bluff of the system and reveals the emptiness of the contract rhetoric when he phones the CES to ask for an interview. In fact, as he is informed, all the CES wants is the completed pro forma, to comply with the official, public rhetoric of the contact system. By pushing the notion of the contract further, through making use of his own literacy knowledge, A. is able to unmask the superficiality of the contract procedure, which is prepared to accept the ticked boxes of the pro forma as evidence that the unemployed person is fulfilling his or her side of the contract.

But, as A. points out, a contract is a two way affair (I've done my part, now you do yours) and he successfully bids for an interview about his jobsearch.

This narrative illustrates the gap between the official, public version of practices and their actual purpose and intent. The rhetoric of the contract system is maintained by self-report 'evidence'. As A. discovers, the CES does not want to know any more than that. By pushing his own understanding of what a contract involves he is able to demand more of the CES system and at the same time unmask the essential superficiality of the system.

A critical approach to social practices in general and literacy practices in particular does not accept the official, public version of what is being done, but pushes, as A. did, to identify the gaps and contradictions between what is said to be done and what is actually done.

In a rather similar way in a paper given at the 1992 ACAL conference, Freebody points out the difference between the 'official' literate version of learning how to use a photocopying machine by reading and following the instructions in the manual and the actual version, by which a new user might read some of the manual, kick the machine, go and get someone on the network: to show how it should be used. Freebody argues that literacy practices are not just a blend of spoken and written language but also involve other kinds of practical reasoning. We are talking about the ways that uses of literacy interact with other kinds of social practice and are used strategically to achieve social purposes.

A. successfully challenges the official version of the social practice in which he is engaged as an unemployed person proving to the CES that he has fulfilled his 'contract' with them. One of the lessons for an investigative approach to literacy practices is just this: not to take the official version as given, but to look for the gaps and contradictions between what is said to be done and what is actually done.

Take, for example, a neatly presented set of work procedures describing the work processes in a particular section of an industry. The 'official' version is that these work procedures are the means by which new workers are inducted into the section work processes. It is important, however, to go beyond the official version and ask critical questions of the official literacy practice: is this in fact how new workers are inducted into work processes, or do the written procedures gather dust on the shelf? Are oral versions of the work procedures, mediated through a more experienced worker the way that the information is transmitted? In a multilingual workforce, is the medium of communication English or some other language? Are shifts in technology influencing the ways that such information is being transmitted?

The way forward

> The obvious has a way of being overlooked. And so it is that in many discussions about communication ... language gets no mention at all. (Kress 1988, p.82)

The role and place of language and literacy education in the Training Reform Agenda has been displaced by a limited view of communication skills. The centrality of linguistic competence in the new workplace has not been understood in the major policy documents of that agenda. These documents (e.g. Mayer Report, Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992, National Training Board 1992) present a misguided view that competence in language and literacy is a basic or foundation skill onto which higher order communication skills are grafted. In this framing, literacy is seen as a problem and not as a resource. Literacy, it seems, is read as illiteracy. Language is read as English.

We have argued that literacy cannot be understood apart from the practices to which it relates. In this framing of literacy the notion of some neutral tool bag of transferable generalisable foundation skills is untenable. Literacies are produced and learnt in the contexts within which they operate. Furthermore the construction of literacy in varying contexts is not static. As Alison Lee has suggested, whatever the learning context, 'the task of learning content can be restated as "becoming literate" in the different and specific ways of particular fields of knowledge' (Lee 1991, p.170).

To liberate literacy from the limited view of school literacy remediation, however, is to wield a double-edged sword. It could suggest that the most effective way to improve literacy competence is to apply a behaviourist approach to literacy task analysis, a sort of skill and drill in an atomistic sense

which may be effective in the short term (e.g. Sticht & McDonald 1989) but this seems to be limited as a strategy as skill may quickly become obsolescent. However, it also provides the opportunity to enable employees to acquire a depth of understanding about the role of language in their workplaces alongside the skills to articulate a greater degree of control over work via the openings created through new ways of working. As is now widely understood the new workplace, with flatter structures and autonomous work groups with consultative decision-making practices, is heavily dependent on its language and literacy resources to function effectively in the competitive market place. Participative decision-making and teamwork will only be effective for all concerned if all those involved have the spoken and written language skills to contribute, to listen and be heard.

Conclusions

This paper has argued for a shift in emphasis in understanding literacy away from the neutral pack of decontextualised skills towards an understanding of literacy practices in context.

We have argued, with Street, that literacies are learnt in specific contexts, in particular ways and that the modes of learning, the social relationships of student to teacher are modes of socialisation and acculturation (Street 1992). The student in work-related literacy programs is learning cultural models of identity, not just how to read and write. Work-related literacies then, embody discourses and institutional practices that construct and position their participants in normative ways.

We have further argued that the goals and purposes of work-related literacy programs have been set within the parameters of the economic rationalist modes of operation of the Federal Government's Training Reform Agenda to which the ALLP has been grafted. There is growing insistence on the adoption of corporate managerialist principles which is resulting in the establishment of national consistency and standards through ever tightening funding guidelines, program budgeting, national curriculum frameworks, control through accreditation procedures and program tendering, and monitoring of program outcomes through performance-based measures of competency. Through the operation of progress toward the stated goals of national curriculum standards, levels and suchlike, a uniformity will emerge whether in labour market or industry programs—all without a research base and avowedly industry-driven.

We have suggested that these policy imperatives are based on ideologically motivated constructions of literacy as an autonomous, decontextualised

and static set of neutral skills (Street 1984), outdated, incorrect or inappropriate notions of work and the workforce of the future and an almost total lack of research into literacy practices in workplaces. We have tried to show how this involves developing a consciously investigative and critical approach to researching literacy, not based on taking official versions of literacy practices as given, but pushing further to try and understand literacy practices in use. If approaches such as this are not adopted, then workplace literacy programs will fail to engage with the complex ways in which literacy practices combine with other kinds of practices in the social organisation of work.

Finally we have argued that the focus on jobseekers is motivated by competing and conflicting discourses. This debate concerns the relative merits of the human capital thesis and its relevance in periods of mass unemployment with 'screening' theories which argue that education, including prevocational education is intended to provide indicators of employability and trainability to prospective employers.

We conclude with these observations. Firstly, that it is impossible to support the human capital rationale without any supporting historical evidence, in which case the appropriation of literacy funding for work-related and workplace literacy programs is profoundly unjust; secondly, that the imposition of corporate managerialist strategies on education for work cannot be supported without an empirical and/or ethnographic research base; and thirdly, that current models of examining workplace language and literacy skills are conceptually flawed and reveal little of value. Without a far greater understanding of literacy practices in the workplace and in the wider society the rhetoric linking present literacy training to future profitability cannot be sustained any more than can the mythical relationship posited between the acquisition of literacy and employment.

Mary Kalantzis has pointed out the 'terrible irony' that the less work there is the more education is focused on work, which supports our view that what is going on is perhaps a more up-to-date way of assessing employability through the discipline involved in acquiring the work-related competencies, regardless of any particular value implicit in the competencies themselves. Kalantzis (1992) argues that a broader notion of work is required so that competence is something that genuinely encompasses all forms of productive social interaction; from socially constructive activity for the unemployed to the cultural and linguistic competencies so often found sadly wanting in the professions.

In International Literacy Year, Wickert warned (1990, p.17) of the need to be cautious about the consequences of the 'success' of our campaigns for increased recognition of the need to develop the literacy skills of Australia's

adults and, to use Helen Gribble's (1990) memorable phrase, to 'resist hi-jack and seduction', through trade-offs and compromises about concepts of literacy, measurements of literacy and indicators of possession of literacy in return for funding. She warned of the possibility that we may end up locking out those who do not wish to conform to the approved ways of learning. These concerns have recently been expressed far more forcefully in Stuckey's *The Violence of Literacy* (1991). She argues that literacy has become another form of exploitation, the mythical promise of which has now also captured literacy workers as their work is defined within an increasingly bureaucratised context; who although they may describe their work in terms of social equity and empowerment, will find that they are serving the ends of control and containment. We therefore argue, with Ling and Cooper that 'policy making should be seen as the arena for the contestation of issues and ideologies. It should not be regarded necessarily as an exercise in achieving consensus' (1992, p.56). Literacy educators need to develop a critical approach to what is being said and done about literacy practices. Establishing a research agenda that contests decontextualised and static views of literacy is an essential step in this process.

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