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ABSTRACT
        This paper details a research project in Brunei Darussalam
that explored vocational education teacher trainees' and their future
students' views about the function of reading in vocational education and
about reading in English. Part A, a review of current theoretical
perspectives in literacy as a socially constructed phenomenon, is organized
by these main premises: literacy is an everyday social practice that
individuals participate in; literacy is not a neutral practice but relates to
how individuals read the world; literacy is a political enterprise; and the
pedagogy of literacy empowers particular social groups. Part B describes the
questionnaire and its theoretical underpinnings. These findings from 117
student questionnaires are reported: they were most likely to consider
aspects of code breaker and text participant roles of readers and less likely
to consider aspects of text user and text analyst; and gender and work
experience analyses indicated no significant differences. These findings from
21 teacher questionnaires are reported: they conceived of reading in the
traditional manner--as a code breaking activity, with some reflection on the
text participant role--and teachers usually or always think about aspects of
meaning while reading. Part C suggests that teachers of English for
vocational purposes work from a model where reading is seen as an individual
skill that can be taught in isolation in the classroom. (Contains 32
references.) (YLB)

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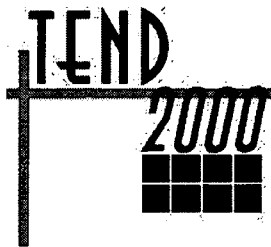
Crossroads of the New Millennium

Reading At The Crossroads: English For Workplace Purposes

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Workshop 1

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Abstract

This paper will detail a research project conducted in Brunei Darussalam, a small sultanate in South East Asia. The project involves the collection of questionnaire data from vocational education teacher trainees and a representative group of their future students. The purpose of the questionnaire is to have respondents think about the function of reading in vocational education and compare teacher views of reading in English with student views of reading in English. Data was collected from 150 students in University, Nursing College and Vocational College.

The paper will describe the design of the project and particularly the theoretical underpinnings of the questionnaire (Freebody and Luke, 1990, 1993). Finally, the paper will present the findings of the study and reflect on the potential of critical literacy perspectives in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) especially in vocational education.

Reading at the Crossroads: English for Workplace Purposes

INTRODUCTION

Few would now argue that literacy in any language is simply the ability to read and write without taking into consideration aspects of the social purpose for which these skills are utilised. Cook-Gumperz (1986) initially identified this perspective when they wrote,

> Literacy is not just the simple ability to read and write: but by possessing and performing these skills we exercise socially approved and approvable talents; in other words literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon. (Cook-Gumperz 1986:1)

Augmenting this view of literacy in the social sphere is the recent discussion by Luke (1995) which records historically the construction of reading as behaviour, Luke says,

> In its short 100-year history ... reading has been redesigned substantially: from a means of communication with divinity and a means for moral development, to reading as behavioural skills, to reading as deep linguistic processing and a 'pycholinguistic guessing game,' to reading as a vocation. (Luke 1995:96)

This impression of reading as a vocation is a compelling one - Luke (1995) critiques a model of reading that assumes that what one reads in a non-fiction workplace text is clear and unambiguous where readers and writers go about their daily work doing what the workplace texts tell them. Given that literacy is a social process and that the meaning of what is written is mediated through the individual's social world consequently reading can never be seen as a foregone conclusion. An investigation of how student readers report that they read workplace texts and the way they find the meanings inherent in these texts may prove an informative exercise for a teacher of reading to vocational education students.

This paper seeks to: (a) reflect further on the social construction of literacy and the place of reading in the 'new times' workplace (b) describe the design of the project and particularly the theoretical underpinnings of the questionnaire (Freebody and Luke, 1990, 1993, 1999) and (c) reflect on the potential of critical literacy perspectives in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) especially in vocational education.

Hence the paper will be divided into three sections.

Part A: Literacy studies and 'new times'.

Part B: The questionnaire and results.

Part C: English for vocational purposes into the new millennium.

PART A: LITERACY STUDIES

This section will review and present some of the current theoretical perspectives in literacy as a socially constructed phenomenon, and; to argue that like literacy's social context - all classroom practice comes from a social position fixed in both a theoretical framework and a practice milieu. Teachers or university lecturers therefore cannot overlook these broader aspects of the teaching of English or English as a foreign language curriculum.

There has been an extensive range of theoretical discussions of what has been termed as 'literacy studies' in recent times. Literacy studies encompasses research and practice which focuses on reading, writing, listening and speaking for making meaning rather than as mechanical skills - with meaning being part of the social world rather than an individual cognitive state. There are, of course, differing versions of literacy studies - functional literacy, cultural literacy and critical literacy and other versions have been written about (Street, 184, 1992; Cook-Gumperz 1986; Heath 1986; Kress, 1985; Gee 1990; Green and Harker 1988; Fairclough 1992; Halliday 1992.)

The following main premises (after Anstey & Bull 1996:153) serve to organise this review: (i) literacy is an everyday social practice which individuals participate in; (ii) literacy is not a neutral practice but relates to how individuals read the world; (iii) literacy is a political enterprise; and, (iv) that the pedagogy of literacy empowers and disempowers particular social groups.

Literacy is an everyday social practice which individuals participate in

Literacy is not something that happens only at school but is an on-going social process that all language users are involved in. Moreover, there are different sorts of literacies and languages - not just literacy and language as single entities.

When we use language we participate in social events and this participation is coordinated by our specific identities. What is important is not the words but the larger and more specific coordinations of which they are part. Gee (1990, 1992) calls these coordinations Discourses (as opposed to discourse which he refers to as being connected stretches of language). Gee (1996:6) uses the following to further explain this notion of Discourses - imagine the identity kit used to play the role of Sherlock Holmes. It would contain certain clothes, certain ways of

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speaking and writing, certain attitudes and beliefs and certain ways of interacting with others. When all these factors are together they become the 'Sherlock Holmes Discourse'. Others could be male factory worker, female academic in a South East Asian University, a member of a nature society etc.

Using Gee's (1990) concept, each individual may move through and participate in a number of Discourses everyday, each of which has a way of talking, dressing, reading, writing etc. This view sees literacy as ways of behaving and using literacy, that is literacy practices. Furthermore, in answering the question of how does one acquire a Discourse, Gee (1990) claims that the process is similar to second language acquisition. Discourses are mastered not by overt instruction but by 'apprenticeship' in social practices with people who have already mastered the Discourse (see Rogoff 1990 for further discussion).

In what ways is literacy acquired inside and outside school? is a question worthy of investigation. Scribner and Cole's (1981) important study with the West African Vai examined the relationship, which is held paramount in the west that; schooling and literacy are associated processes. Scribner and Cole (1981), after making observations using ethnographic techniques, documented the uses of literacy by the Vai people in three languages. Following analysis of this vast data they found that the types of literacy, with their attendant social consequences, were mediated by where the literacy was used. For example: English literacy is associated with government and education; Vai literacy is used primarily for keeping records and for letters - often pursuing commercial matters; and Arabic literacy is used for reading, writing and memorising the Koran.

The study also aimed to answer the question: "Is it literacy or formal schooling that affects mental functioning?" Scribner and Cole based on what they found put forward an account of ' a practice account of literacy' - a type of literacy that enhances the cognitive skills that are practiced in carrying out those skills. So they argue that literacy in any language promotes mental functioning.

Literacy is not a neutral practice but relates to how individuals read the world.

Freire (1987), a well known Brazilian educator is noted for his work in using education and literacy to assist members of subordinate groups to achieve freedom. He states:

> It is impossible to carry out my literacy work or to understand literacy by divorcing the reading of the world from the reading of the world. Reading the word and learning how to write the word so one can later read it are preceded by learning how to write the world, that is, having the experience of changing the world and touching the world. (Freire & Macedo 1987)

Thus, having students read English texts purely for the purpose of looking at the language of the text is naive - are we not asking students to bring their world views to the text and thus further their own reading of the world.

Literacy is a political enterprise.

All educational practice implies a theoretical stance on the educator's part. This stance in turn implies - sometimes more, sometimes less explicitly - an interpretation of man (sic) and his world. (Freire 1970:205).

Curriculum always involves making selections from the culture and from the myriad of possible literacies - whether conceived of in terms of psychological skills and behaviour, or individual growth and self-development. The literature we select, the methods and strategies that we use to teach and assess, and the knowledge and competencies we teach selectively to different groups of students, are selections from the plurality of cultures extant in English speaking countries.

Let us look again a Gee's (1990) Discourses discussed earlier - he argues that Discourses are intimately linked to 'the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society' (Gee 1990:4-5). So having control of certain Discourses can bring material wealth or political power. Being literate in these Discourses can provide cultural capital and thereby access to power (Luke 1996) so we should simply be able to teach our students the linguist elements of the Discourse and they will have access to power. Street (1996) argues that this is still not all language learners need to have to have access to powerful institutions. Literacy on its own when acquired by the poor or unempowered may have cultural capital but they still lack the power to turn their learning into real value in that society.

The pedagogy of literacy empowers and disempowers particular sociocultural groups.

The study conducted by Heath (1982) suggests that for the children of Trackton and Roadville there was a mismatch between literacy practices of those at home and at school. This mismatch was due in part to the differences in the way in which each community addressed language to children at home. Further the types of questions asked during school time were different from those asked at home for the students of Trackton.

Michaels' study of sharing time (1986) took place in a Year 1 classroom where half the students were African American and half were non-African American. Michaels identifies this sharing time as a gatekeeping encounter in the classroom and identifies that the two different groups of students have very different ways of sharing information. Michaels shows that the teacher had difficulty collaborating with Deena, a student from African American background. Michaels' study suggests that teachers may benefit from learning more about the discourse and interactional structures from students' homes and communities.

A recently reported study by this author outlines one community's understanding of literacy pedagogy in one primary school as being rules of classroom interaction. This is reflected in more recent studies in classrooms that focus on school literacy practices (Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn 1996, Ludwig & Herschell 1998). The parent actually comments that:

> Dark Kids are overlooked when a response to the teacher is required in class, the kids
> are disadvantaged in class - they need more practice at responding so they'll get better
> and then praised for their efforts - this is a form of literacy. (Cox & Webb 1999)

There is no doubt to researchers and practitioners alike that literacy pedagogy, which is currently in practice in schools, empowers and disempowers certain groups.

I would like to conclude this section by referring to Gee's (I 994:190) words:

> English teachers can co-operate in their own marginalisation by seeing themselves as
> 'language teachers' with no connection to the social and political issues. Or they can
> accept the paradox of literacy as a form of interethnic communication... and accept their
> role as persons who must socialize students into a world-view that must be looked at
> critically, comparatively, and with a constant sense of the possibilities for change.

PART B: THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND ITS THEORETICAL BASE

Gee's statement that student's must have a world view that can be looked at critically, comparatively and with a constant sense of the possibilities for change particularly in the context of vocational education begs further exploration. In terms of reading this exploration is possible by referring to the recent work by Freebody and Luke, (1990, 1993) Luke and Freebody, (1999), Luke (1995) and Freebody, (1990). These works all refer to four roles that a successful reader needs to develop and sustain to play out these four related roles.

Code-breaker

A successful reader must be able to break the code to engage with the text. Breaking the code refers to successfully matching the sound-symbol relationship and the linking of that relationship to meaning. Much has been written about these two systems and their role in reading. Some advocate that breaking the code is enough for reading, but it is clear that there are further elements necessary for successful interaction with a written text.

Text-participant

This refers to the ability of the reader to engage with the meaning and structure of the text. Much of the recent work on reading comprehension, schema theory and guided reading are working in the area of text-participant. Having student readers bring their own basic understandings and experiences to the text that they are reading together with an understanding of the genre enables readers to predict what might be coming next in the story or factual text.

Text-user

This role refers to the readers' ability to take the meaning of the text and use it to work within their social or vocational world. It is the skill of knowing how to read the set reading of a chapter of the textbook for the University lecturer - of knowing what is in the chapter and how that content relates to the lecture topic and assessment piece. Furthermore, the reader should be able to discuss this in a tutorial situation and bring other world-knowledge to bear on the discussion.

Text-analyst

It is in the explication of this role that Freebody and Luke, (1990, 1993) Luke and Freebody, (1999), Luke (1995) and Freebody, (1990) significantly expand familiar interpretations of critical reading. Readers utilising this role must be aware that texts are crafted objects, written by persons with particular orientations to the information. Freebody (1993) says that there are particular ways that texts operate and make the reader into operator, often covertly.

The development of these questionnaires to assess the nature of students' thoughts about their own reading derived from an assumption by the researcher, that EFL teachers in the vocational education field are resourcing learners for each of the roles outlined. However, these teachers are not as aware as they might be about the power inherent in resourcing their future workforce with such reading abilities. Hence, the title of this paper which identifies reading at the cross-roads - where practitioners are at a point in the development of theory

about the teaching of reading that allows more complex interrogations of text once the fundamental aspects of reading are complete. This study is no more than exploratory in nature and that any findings that the researcher makes will serve to illuminate this complex area of EFL teaching.

TRIAL INVESTIGATION

Prior to the development of the instrument the researcher had two very experienced secondary English teachers in Brunei Darussalam prepared EFL lessons with reading activities which focussed on the four roles of the reader. This series of lessons were conducted by the teachers and the students participated well in the planned and unplanned question and answer sessions. The finding of this simple trial investigation was that the teachers reported that the student body did not have enough English language to utilise the roles of text-user and text-analyst. It is the current research's intention to further investigate this claim and to elucidate the interrelated factors of English as a second language and reading.

THE STUDY

The questionnaires are completed by either, (i) students in vocational education programmes or (ii) their teachers and a number of student vocational education teachers.

Below in Figure 1 and Figure 2 are the questionnaires. A cover sheet is also included to elucidate further information about the participants in the study (some examples of questions are: age, gender, vocational training area, length of course, institution etc.)

Student questionnaire

When you read English workplace texts (instructions, overviews, manuals, etc) in your job or during your vocational training do you:

Student Questionnaire	1	2	3	4	5
1. Think about what you already know about this topic.					
2. Work out the contents of this text (e.g., words, illustrations etc).					
3. Read the text.					
4. Think about the meaning of the text.					
5. Think how this text can help you do my job.					
6. Think about how you can use the information in the text.					
7. Decide if this text gives you options to improve your practice.					
8. Think about if you can find this information in any other place.					

9. Think about what can change the meaning of the text.					
10. Ask is the text trying to change my ideas about my work.					
11. Ask is it encouraging me to buy something or change the products that I use.					
12. Ask is this text serving the interests of one type of worker more than others					

<div align="center">1= never   5= always</div>

Figure 1.   Student questionnaire

Teacher questionnaire

When you ask your students to read English workplace texts (instructions, overviews, manuals, etc) in teaching do you expect them to ask themselves the following questions.

Teacher questionnaire	1	2	3	4	5
13. What do I you already know about this topic?					
14. What are the contents of this text (e.g., words, illustrations etc)?					
15. Can I read the text?					
16. What is the meaning of the text?					
17. How this text can help me do my job?					
18. How can I use the information in the text?					
19. Does this text give me options to improve my practice?					
20. Can I find this information in any other place?					
21. What could change the meaning of the text?					
22. Is the text trying to change my ideas about my work?					
23. Is it encouraging me to buy something or change the products that I use?					
24. Is this text serving the interests of one type of worker more than others? e.g. male or female, boss or worker etc.					

<div align="center">1= never   5= always</div>

Figure 2.   Teacher questionnaire

Results

Student questionnaire

The data was analysed using the SPSS statistical package in order to identify trends and patterns in the responses of the students to the 12 questions in the questionnaire. The data set

consisted of 117 completed questionnaires, with 39 male respondents and 78 female respondents. Table 1 below outlines the fields of study of the 117 respondents.

Table 1   *Field of study of student respondents*

Field of study	Frequency	Percentage
Automotive	4	3.4
Computer	3	2.6
Electrical Engineering	1	0.9
Nursing	97	82.9
Plant Operator	7	6
Engineering	1	0.9
Manufacturing Engineer	1	0.9
Refrigeration & Air conditioning	3	2.6
Total	117	100

It is clear that Table 1 identifies Nursing students as the highest category of respondents (82%) - this is in part due to the process of data collection. First access was made to the Nursing College and the data was collected from one large class at one time. The range of other fields of study offers a promising overview of other vocational areas for the purpose of the data analysis.

The questionnaire employs a Likert scale with 5 categories of response - *always, usually, sometimes, rarely,* and *never.* High scores indicate that students always or usually think about this role of the reader. For the purposes of further analysis the questionnaire results were divided into four groups of items: Code breaker; Text participant; Text user; and, Text analyst.

Table 2 below identifies the mean response and standard deviation of the sample of students to the four sub-scales. Clearly the students are most likely to give thought to aspects of the code breaker and text participant roles of readers. They are less likely to give thought to aspects of the text user and text analyst. There is a reasonably consistent level of agreement across the first two roles. The means reflect an agreement level of around three - or *sometimes.*

Table 2   Student response according to four sub-scales across sample

N = 117

Sub scale	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation
Code breaker	3-15	10.12	2.32
Text participant	4-15	10.19	2.23
Text user	3-14	8.91	2.21
Text analyst	3-14	8.14	2.42

Further insight may be possible by looking at an analysis by gender may allow further insight. Table 3 shows that there are no significant differences within the gender analysis - the types of thinking while reading vocational education materials is similar for both genders.

Table 3   Analysis by Gender

N= 117   Male = 39   Female = 78

	Male		Female	
Sub scale	Mean	Std Deviation	Mean	Std Deviation
Code breaker	10.33	2.57	10.01	2.18
Text participant	10.53	2.61	10.02	2.11
Text user	8.61	2.08	9.06	2.26
Text analyst	8.48	2.39	7.96	2.43

Similarly, further insight may be possible by looking at a further analysis by work experience. Yet, Table 4 indicates that there are also no significant differences between responses by those who have been in the workforce and those who have not. Of some interest here is the indication that those with work experience indicates that they usually think about how what they are reading in the text can help them do their job (text participant). This focus on text participant is repeated in the analysed data from the teacher questionnaire and will be discussed in the final section of the paper.

Table 4   Analysis of student's questionnaires by work experience

N = 117   Have work experience =   38   No work experience = 79

	Work	Experience	No work	experience
Sub scale	Mean	Std Deviation	Mean	Std Deviation

Code breaker	9.92	2.13	10.21	2.41
Text participant	10.31	2.56	10.14	2.17
Text user	9.84	2.13	8.47	2.11
Text analyst	8.58	2.45	7.92	2.38

Teacher Questionnaire

The data was analysed using the SPSS statistical package in order to identify trends and patterns in the responses of the students to the 12 questions in the questionnaire. The data set consisted of 21 completed teacher questionnaires. Table 5 below outlines the location of teaching of each of the 21 respondents.

Table 5   Teaching location

N=21

Vocational College	Frequency	Percent
Jefri Bolkiah College of Engineering	9	42.9
Sultan Saiful Rijal Technical College	7	33.3
Sultan Bolkiah Vocational School	3	14.3
PAPRSB Nursing College	2	9.5
Total	21	100.0

Table 6 reflects the data collection sample - a number of vocational teacher education students at University Brunei Darussalam were approached to complete the questionnaire. The sample contains a number of early career teachers who have had little teaching experience or time in industry.

Table 6   Teaching and industry experience of teacher respondents

	Teaching Experience	Industry Experience
1-5 years	16	16
5-10 years	0	0
10-15 years	1	1
More than 15 years	4	1
	-	3

Furthermore, Table 7 indicates that the teachers conceive of reading in the traditional manner - as a code breaking activity, with some reflection on the meaning of the text (text participant). Again, the relative importance of the reader as a text participant is highlighted here and is further accentuated when the analysis in Table 8 is perused.

Table 7   Response according to four sub-scales across the sample

N=21

	Mean	Std Deviation
Code breaker	10.62	1.65
Text participant	11.42	1.94
Text user	9.28	2.02
Text analyst	8.47	2.31

Table 8 outlines again the significance placed on the questions in the sub scale of text participant by the teachers in the sample. The questions ask the reader if they: think about the text; think about how this text can help the reader do their job; think about how the information can be used.

Table 8   Mean response to sub-scales across industry and teaching experience

	Industry Experience			Teaching Experience		
	1-5yrs	*10-15yr*	*15+yrs*	*1-5yrs*	*10-15yr*	*15+yrs*
Code breaker	10.81	9.0	11.0	10.14	9.0	9.75
Text participant	**11.56**	**10.0**	**12.0**	**11.44**	**9.0**	**12**
Text user	9.31	9.0	10.0	9.25	8.0	9.75
Text analyst	8.50	9.0	9.0	8.44	8.0	8.75

By looking more closely at the questions and the frequency of responses across both groups of respondents it is clear that these questions are answered favourably by respondents.

Table 9   Percentage of students answers to text participant questions

	Q4. Think about the meaning of the text	Q5. Think about how this text can help me do my job	Q6. Think about how I can use the information in the text.
4. Usually	38%	57%	47%
5. Always	24%	14%	23%

Table 10   Percentage of teachers answers to text participant questions

	Q4. Think about the meaning of the text	Q5. Think about how this text can help me do my job	Q6. Think about how I can use the information in the text.
3. Sometimes	35%	34.2%	9.4%
4. Usually	28.2%	27.4%	28.2%
5. Always	20.5%	13.7%	14.5%

Clearly the text participant questions produced answers that indicate that both students and teachers usually or always think about aspects of meaning while reading. A reader as a text participant refers to the ability of the reader to engage with the meaning and structure of the text. Much of the recent work on reading comprehension, schema theory and guided reading are working in the area of text-participant. Having student readers bring their own basic understandings and experiences to the text that they are reading is an essential process for the exact meaning to be gained from the text. Yet, this finding is disappointing for the researcher as it indicates that most instruction in reading must therefore remains steadily in this area of reading in vocational education within this context.

Clearly after the code breaker role the role of text participant is the most important - but the seemingly decrease of engagement with the other roles is disquieting. Table 11 illustrates this trend.

Table 11   Evidence of declining engagement in reader roles of text user and text analyst
by students

Question number	Mean response by students	Std deviation of response
Q7	3.5897	1.0517
Q8	2.9316	1.1121
Q9	2.3761	1.0232
Q10	2.7350	1.0779
Q11	2.7436	1.2117
Q12	2.6581	1.0518

This study sought to examine aspects of reading by vocational students and their teachers in Brunei Darussalam. This paper reports some of the exploration possible through the data and its analysis. Further refinement of the instrument and a wider data collection process may enable more significant results to be attained. Yet, as such the data and analysis indicates that students are competent in the roles of text code breaker and text participant - even that teachers in the sample value text participant responses highly. Yet rarely (less than 30% of

student responses) do they indicate that they engaged in more sophisticated and more socially orientated reading behaviour.

PART C: ENGLISH FOR VOCATIONAL PURPOSES INTO THE NEW MILLENNIUM

In summary, this paper seeks to conclude by reflecting on the implications of teachers who continue to conform to the traditional, skills-based, psychological, and progressivist models of reading. I would like to suggest, that these teachers work from a model where reading is seen as an individual skill that can be taught in isolation in the classroom. Rather than a social skill that allows the reader to unlock the sociopolitical contexts and issues continually surrounding the reader in the workplace and in their daily lives.

Luke (1995) suggests that,

> *Reading instruction constructs a relationship between text and reader.* This relationship is not one that is "reflexive" or "interactional" as described in cognitive and psycholinguistic theory, but it is a social relationship in which the relative authority/agency of text and reader is shaped up - it is, in sum, the relationship of knowledge and power.

So what of this aspect of knowledge and power in the area of EFL in vocational education, is it an important area when students are struggling just to break the code? Many view looking at reading from a social perspective as a luxury add-on, or as just too hard, or as the teachers in the trial investigation for this paper reported that the student body did not have enough English language to utilise the roles of text-user and text-analyst. Should we just leave it - and have the students worry about developing a critical perspective when they graduate or after they become competent in the work place procedures.

We refer again to Luke's earlier work (1992) where he summarises 'new times' thus,

> Many analyses point to a twenty-first century employment market characterized by diminishing life-long employment guarantees; firms that change products, services, technologies on short notice to compete in multinational markets and to accommodate corporate take-overs, buy outs and consolidation; work increasingly accommodated by part-time or subcontracted employees. (Clark, 1990) cited in Luke (1992:9)

Is it not then, our role, as English literacy teachers to have our students competent in the four roles of the reader - most particularly that of the text-analyst?

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