In education systems throughout the world, reading and writing are usually regarded as central in the curriculum. In developed and developing countries, literacy is often associated with progress, civilization, social mobility and economic advancement. A classic, if disputed claim, is by Anderson (1966) who suggests that any society requires a 40% literacy rate for economic 'take off', a belief which is embedded in many literacy programs. But, as this chapter will show, what precisely is meant by literacy is neither simple nor uncontroversial.

In today's highly literate or less literate multilingual and multicultural societies, the ability to read and write is often regarded as essential for personal survival, security and status. Literacy impacts on people's daily lives in innumerable ways. Where language minority members are relatively powerless and underprivileged, literacy is often regarded as a major key to self advancement as well as empowerment. If this is so, it is important to consider the needs or uses for literacy in students and adults in bilingual and multicultural societies.

In considering such needs and uses, it is important to note that literacy education for language minority students is often in a majority language (e.g. English language literacy in the United Kingdom and the United States; English in parts of Africa as an 'official' or international language). However, where language minorities have access to bilingual education, literacy may be introduced in the home/minority language. In that case, literacy in the majority language (and hence biliteracy) will be developed later in the elementary school. This issue is considered in the next chapter. For the moment, the consideration of uses of literacy refers to literacy introduced in either the minority or majority language (or both languages developed in parallel).
THE USES OF LITERACY IN BILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES

Literacy is Needed for Survival
There are basic day to day uses of literacy. For example, a motorist needs to read road signs, a shopper needs to read instructions and labels on food packaging, the traveler needs to understand signs at bus stations, train stations and airports.

Literacy is Needed for Learning
Students need to be able to read text books, story books, laboratory manuals, examination sheets and tests for learning to take place.

Literacy is Needed for Citizenship and Political Empowerment
To complete bureaucratic forms, participate in local or regional government, read local and national newspapers, read information that comes through the post or is on billboards, citizens need basic reading skills. To respond, react, complain and assert democratic rights, reading and writing are often valuable allies to speaking skills.

Literacy is Needed for Personal Relationships
Writing letters to friends and relatives who are no longer local, and sending seasonal greeting cards, are each aided by literacy.

Literacy is Needed for Personal Pleasure and Creativity
Being able to read gives students and adults access to magazines, novels, comics, story books and non-fiction to be enjoyed in leisure time. Literacy enables the imagination to be stimulated, and creative instincts to be expressed.

Literacy is Needed for Employment
Many higher status and higher paid jobs require reading and writing skills.

Literacy is Needed to Empower the Mind
Wells & Chang-Wells (1992) suggest that literate thinking is ‘the building up, metaphorically speaking, of a set of mental muscles that enable one effectively to tackle intellectual tasks that would otherwise be beyond one’s powers’ (p. 122). Literacy is seen as a mode of thinking, as a means of reasoning, reflecting and interacting with oneself. This links with the idea of the empowerment of individuals, and having a public voice.

The importance and usefulness of literacy for language minorities is revealed in public perceptions of those who are illiterate. Being unable to read and write is often regarded as shameful, embarrassing, a symbol of low or marginal status, and in need of remediation in school or in adult classes. Reducing illiteracy is regarded as a key priority in UNESCO’s aims, irrespective of country, continent, culture or caste.

Whether language minority children should first become literate in the majority language or in their minority language will be discussed later in this chapter. Also considered later will be whether majority language monoliteracy or biliteracy should be attempted. Before engaging such discussions, it is important to explore the kind of literacy
that language minority students and adults require. We start by considering three contrasting definitions of literacy. This provides an instant flavor of the keen debate about the nature and value of different kinds of literacy. The debate has important implications for bilingual students, as will be revealed.

DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY

The list of needs for literacy given above has already hinted that literacy plays different roles for different people. Compare two definitions of literacy. The first is a functional definition of, and skills approach to, literacy by UNESCO dating from 1962.

A literate person is someone who ‘has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills towards his own and the community’s developments’ (cited in Oxenham, 1980: 87).

In comparison, Hudelson (1994: 130) defines reading as ‘a language process in which an individual constructs meaning through a transaction with written text that has been created by symbols that represent language. The transaction involves the reader’s acting upon or interpreting the text, and the interpretation is influenced by the reader’s past experiences, language background, and cultural framework, as well as the reader’s purpose for reading’. This is a definition that concentrates on reading as the construction of meaning, rather than on the skills of reading. While this definition only refers to reading, the idea extends to literacy in general.

The third definition derives from Wells & Chang-Wells (1992) who argue that ‘To be literate is to have the disposition to engage appropriately with texts of different types in order to empower action, thinking, and feeling in the context of purposeful social activity’ (p. 147). This definition deliberately allows for the possibility that different language minority communities attach a different value to different types of literacy.

Cultures differ from each other in their uses and purposes for literacy. For some cultures literacy is about promoting abstract thought, rationality, critical thinking, balanced and detached awareness, empathy and sensitivity. For other cultures literacy is about memorization, transmission of life stories revealing their heritage, values and morality, and centrally in certain religions, for the transmission of rules of religious and moral behavior. A Moslem for example, will be expected to read aloud from the Qu’ran. Many Moslems are not expected to understand what they read, this being provided in their mother tongue. In some cultures, the mother is expected to read to her children and help them develop literacy skills, but is not expected to read national newspapers or complete bureaucratic forms herself. The concept of literacy is therefore not single but plural, relative to a culture and not universal.

These three definitions (skills, the construction of meaning, and sociocultural) will now be extended and explored by examining different educational approaches to literacy. These approaches, like the above definitions, are not necessarily discrete but overlap and
can be combined in literacy learning. However, their emphases are different in ways that they impact on students.

APPROACHES TO LITERACY

The Skills Approach

The concept of functional literacy, as in the UNESCO definition, appears to assume that literacy is the simple act of reading and writing. ‘Acquiring essential knowledge and skills’ refers to the ability to decode symbols on a page into sounds, followed by making meaning from those sounds. Reading is about saying the words on the page and writing about being able to spell correctly, and write in correct grammatical sentences. In both reading and writing, a literate person is able to understand and comprehend the printed word.

The assumption of this approach is that literacy is primarily a technical skill, neutral in its aims and universal across languages. The skills of reading and writing can be decomposed into vocabulary, grammar and composition. Teaching sounds and letters, phonics and standard language may be the important focus. Errors in reading and writing will also incur keen attention, alongside a concern with achieving scores on tests of reading and writing. Such tests tend to assess decomposed and decontextualized language skills, eliciting superficial comprehension rather than deeper language thinking and understanding. These reliable but ‘inauthentic’ tests tend to be used as templates for instruction. Measurement-led instruction promotes ‘teaching to the test’ and possibly drives out opportunities for developing higher order language skills.

Underneath the skills approach to literacy tends to be a belief that children need functional or ‘useful’ literacy only. Effective functioning implies that the student or adult will contribute in a collaborative, constructive and non-critical manner to the smooth running of the local community. Functional literacy is perceived as recognizing the status quo, understanding and accepting one’s place in society, and being a ‘good citizen’. This view is extended later in the book when the relationship between bilingualism and politics is considered.

While there are various types of literacy, it is important not to forget the amount of illiteracy and low levels of literacy in many countries. Functional literacy does not mean reading print in ‘quality’ newspapers and books. Functional literacy is at a lower level: being able to read labels on tins and road signs, finding a number in a telephone directory. Among those who seem to be functionally literate, there will be those who are literate (who can read but don’t), and those who manage to hide their illiteracy, as it is socially undesirable to be illiterate. Functional literacy may not be enough in advanced, technological societies. The populace constantly faces bureaucratic forms and written instructions which demand more advanced literacy skills. Functional literacy is unlikely to be enough to cope with such complex tasks.

The Whole Language Approach

The Whole Language Approach to literacy is diametrically opposed to reading and writing as decoding and a series of separate skills. The whole language approach emphasizes
learning to read and write naturally, for a **purpose**, for meaningful communication and for inherent pleasure (Whitmore & Crowell, 1994).

Generally, the Whole Language Approach supports an holistic and integrated learning of reading, writing, spelling and oracy. The language used must have relevance and meaning to the child. The use of language for communication is stressed; the operation rather than the form of language. The Whole Language Approach is against basal readers and phonics in learning to read. Basal readers are reading books that use simplified vocabulary. There is often a set order in reading these books, moving from simple to more complex text in a gradually increasing gradient of difficulty. (This is considered in more detail later in this section). In a whole language approach, writing must be for real **purposes**. A child writes for somebody in a particular situation and for a defined reason. Writing means reflecting on one’s ideas and sharing meaning with others. Writing can be in partnership with others, involving drafting and redrafting.

A child learns to write when they are writing for somebody with a meaning and a message. Efficient writing means making it comprehensible for an audience. Constantly highlighting grammatical and spelling errors is soul destroying for the child. Corrections concentrate on form and not function, on the medium and not the message. Conveying meaning is important in learning to write well. Learning to read is also learning to write. A child learns to spell when learning to read. The more children read, the more their writing improves.

Reading and writing need to be fun experiences in the Whole Language Approach. This occurs when reading and writing involve real and natural events, not artificial stories, artificial sequences, rules of grammar and spelling, or stories that are not relevant to the child’s experience. Reading and writing need to be interesting, relevant to the child, belonging to the child’s experience, allowing choice by the learner, giving children power and understanding of their world. Reading taught for its own sake is not fun. Going through a book of writing exercises following reading is not usually interesting or relevant to the child.

Children learn to read and write when there is a need to understand the **meaning** of a story, to chant a rhyme, to share the humor of a book. Writing is fun when it is **communication**. Part of a Whole Language Approach is to stimulate the **creative imagination** and sheer enjoyment in reading. Much of what children and adults read is for leisure and pleasure, and while not politically neutral or morally objective, novels, magazines, comics and some poetry are designed to satisfy and stir the imagination. Literacy in the Whole Language Approach is thus to develop aesthetic appreciation and interpersonal sensitivity.

When reading and writing are contrived, when the form of words is put before their function, neither reading nor writing are encouraged. Reading and writing need to provide opportunities for shared language and shared meaning. A series of books that is based on how often words occur in a language, that tries very exactly to grade difficulty, moving from one level to another level slowly, might seem logical and sensible. Yet such books
tend to have artificial stories, artificial language constructions and do not match nor cultivate the child’s experience.

Children need imaginative, vivid, interesting books that both relate to, and increase their experience, which make them laugh and stir their imagination. They need to feel that books are interesting, unstuffy, relevant to their world and their way of thinking. Children don’t just need books on the shelf. Magazines and newspapers, directories and posters, signs in the street, packages and labels are all reading material. Children writing to each other or to their grandparents in another country is each a form of reading and writing centered round an authentic task. The rules of reading and writing are latently being taught.

Reading books, sometimes called basal readers, or graded reading books, are written primarily to teach reading. They aim to provide instruction in the skills of reading and writing, being tightly sequenced and written so that vocabulary and grammar is tightly controlled in a theoretically ever increasing incline of difficulty. The learning of technical skills of reading are the prime aim of these books. Such graded series of readers fit the transmission model, entailing a movement of smaller to larger skill elements, and a carefully controlled sequence of learning. The skills in a basal reading series exist not because this is how children learn to read, but partly because of the logistics of developing a series of lessons that can be taught sequentially, day after day, week after week, year after year. Students are typically tested for their ability to master each small component of the reading scheme, often before they are allowed to move on to the next component.

Such basal reading books tend to promote the ability to recognize rather than to comprehend. The child may be able to read out loud to the teacher yet not understand the meaning and inner meanings of the stories. Basal reading series typically tell teachers exactly what they should do and say while giving a lesson, seemingly giving a technology of teaching reading that is easily implemented in classrooms.

One alternative is the reading of ‘real books’. ‘Real books’ is a term used to describe books that entertain, sometimes inform, often have a point and an aim that is much more than purely ‘reading skills improvement’ in children. While reading books are written primarily to teach reading, ‘real books’ will be written by people who describe themselves as authors. While too often these books in secondary and high schools are subverted for purposes similar to those that typify the use of basal readers, emphasizing comprehension and the drawing of inferences, such books are originally intended for recreation, enjoyment and to stir the imagination.

One important function of ‘real books’ is that they attempt to avoid the overwhelming white, middle class, male perspectives that are manifestly and latently present in so much of children’s literature. Boys are often given the leading roles, with girls the more passive supporting roles.

‘Robert climbed the tree and looked down the valley. “Let’s go down the valley and search for gold” said Robert, while Ruth stood in the shade of the tree and agreed. Robert bravely led the way and Ruth followed in his tracks’.
Books need to challenge stereotyped gender roles, challenge traditional roles ascribed to mums and dads, and challenge the subservient portrayal of linguistic and cultural minorities. While reality has to be portrayed, understood and criticized by children, children also need informing about alternatives. Reading needs to reflect and challenge contemporary reality, and pose different life styles and values. Ethnic minorities need to be presented, not in a restricted stereotyped social context, but outside their stereotype so as to challenge the status quo.

A Whole Language Approach and attention to the skills of literacy are combined eclectically by many practicing teachers. There is an analogy with a musician. It is the overall musical performance that is important. Sometimes there is a need to practice scales (octaves), arpeggios, or trills as separate skills to improve the overall standard of musicianship. Accurately playing scales is not a musical performance. More important is the overall combination of accurate playing, interpretation of a musical score, creating an ambience with a piece of music and communicating with the listener. Similarly with reading and writing. Sometimes a teacher will concentrate on specific skills (e.g. irregular words, punctuation, spelling, grammar). Specific skills are not reading or writing. The overall activity needs to be the central focus.

The Whole Language Approach also has features that overlap with functional literacy. The child can be viewed by the Whole Language Approach as a relatively non-critical, monocultural, assimilated being. Literacy can be about socialization into customary, normative values and beliefs. In such an approach to literacy, the meaning of text can be decoded because it has a definite, autonomous meaning. Reading therefore is detecting the meaning of the author; writing is conveying meaning to readers. Thus, the Whole Language Approach can still result in an uncritical, accepting attitude by the child. For language minority children, in stigmatized, racist and prejudiced contexts, this may not be empowering.

**The Construction of Meaning Approach**

A recent consideration of literacy (partly connected to the Whole Language Approach) emphasizes that readers bring their own meanings to text, that reading and writing is essentially a construction and reconstruction of meaning. Part of this consideration is that the meaning individuals give to a text depends on their culture, personal experiences and histories, personal understandings of the themes and tone of text, and the particular social context where reading occurs. As will be revealed later, this idea has implications for language minority children and adults.

Readers bring meaning with them to texts. They make sense of a text from previously acquired knowledge. Without relevant background knowledge, readers may fail to construct any meaning at all. To help construct meaning, we need to know what kind of text it is, is it a folk story or a real event, is it an advertisement that seeks to persuade, or a balanced report. It helps to know who has written the text, what is their background and persuasion. A reader's current knowledge, family background, social and economic lifestyle, and political orientation will all affect how the reader constructs meaning from the text.
Different students of varying backgrounds will make different meaning from the text. When there is a mismatch between the reader’s knowledge and that which is assumed by the writer, the construction of meaning will be difficult. This is the ‘vicious circle’ situation faced by many illiterate adults. They are denied access to certain kinds of knowledge and understanding of the world because they cannot read. Because they do not understand what is being taken for granted by writers of adult material, becoming literate as an adult is made difficult. Language minority groups in particular can be caught in this ‘vicious circle’ situation. Trying to make sense out of texts from a different culture, with different cultural assumptions, makes predicting the storyline and understanding the text more difficult.

One role for teachers therefore is to mediate in the construction of meaning by learners who are becoming literate, helping them to construct meaning from text. A central idea in constructing meaning derives from the Russian psychologist, Vygotsky (1962). During the decade 1924–1934, he outlined the ways that teachers can intervene and arrange effective learning, by challenging and extending the child’s current state of development. Meaning is constructed by the teacher moving from the present level of understanding of a child to a further level that is within the child’s capability. This ‘stretching’ of the child is by locating the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1962) saw the zone of proximal development as the distance between a student’s level of development as revealed when problem solving without adult help, and the level of potential development as determined by a student problem solving in collaboration with peers or teachers. The zone of proximal development is where new understandings are possible through collaborative interaction and inquiry.

To help children construct meaning from text, teachers need to be aware that literacy in classrooms exists in a social context, guided by culturally-bound ways of thinking. Bloom (1985) suggested that:

‘when students are asked to read a story, they must do so in socially appropriate ways: silently or orally, individually, competitively, or co-operatively with other students, in a round-robin manner, etc. Students who read orally without error or who appropriately answer teacher questions may gain social status within the classroom. Students who read with error, give inappropriate answers, or who sit quietly, may be viewed as outcasts or non-participants.’ (p. 135)

In classrooms, there are adult and educational criteria of relevant and appropriate ways of responding, reading and writing. Students have to learn about the rules of behavior for the different literacy events that teachers create. A typical teacher–student interaction is an initiation by the teacher, response by the student, followed by evaluation by the teacher. This signals expectancies and rules not only of classroom behavior, but also of literacy. There are rights and wrongs, authoritative knowledge and culturally inappropriate responses. The power relationships of the classroom shape language and literacy use. The social roles of students and teachers are taught and embedded in literacy events of the classroom. As will be argued later in the chapter, to promote literacy, teachers need to expand rather than limit
students’ roles so that literacy needs can be fully met. Children need to be empowered through celebrating the different uses of literacy, including critical literacy.

Reading and writing (and speaking and listening) are not mutual, independent activities. Reading and writing occur in a particular context that considerably influences the process of learning to be literate. Reading and writing is often for someone or to someone. Even when reading silently to oneself there is an inner, reflective conversation where meaning is being created. The words that readers know, and the experience related to the words being read combine to form a context. This context allows students to guess the meaning of words they do not know, and meanings that may be partly hidden.

The further reading and writing develops, the more text becomes socially and culturally embedded. The reading process within is shaped by the social forces from without. Dyson (1989) and Graves (1983) have shown how young writers develop and change in the midst of social influences from peers, teachers and influences from outside school such as the local community, political movements and ideological forces.

Similarly, writing is not just a technical process of putting words down on paper with correct spellings and correct grammatical structure. Writing is sharing meaning. When students and adults write, they have an interpersonal purpose. They write in order to be read by an audience, to inform, persuade, influence or purely delight readers. In writing, there is an anticipation of a response or reaction from the audience. We write with some kind of understanding of the background, knowledge and culture of our readers. We use language in different ways to meet particular purposes. Newspaper editorials sometimes try to persuade. Cookery books try to inform and explain. Poets try to give deeper and fresh meanings. The effectiveness of writing depends on the writer being familiar with the conventions expected by readers. This all suggests that literacy is a social event and not a private, personal event. We often discuss our reading and writing with other people, making the social dimension of literacy even more prominent.

This leads to an argument that literacy is not just about information gathering and giving. It is also about developing thinking that is appropriate within a culture. Thus Wells & Chang-Wells (1992) conceive of literacy as ‘a mode of thinking that deliberately makes use of language, whether spoken or written, as an instrument for its own development’ (p. 123).

The Socio-Cultural Literacy Approach
A related and overlapping approach to the Construction of Meaning approach spotlights the enculturation aspect of literacy. For example, a language minority literacy program may be enthusiastic to ensure the child is fully socialized and enlightened in the heritage culture.

Socio-cultural literacy is the ability to construct appropriate cultural meaning when reading. In theory, a person can be functionally literate but culturally illiterate (e.g. reading without meaning). In reading and writing, we bring not only previous experience, but also our values and beliefs enabling us to create meaning from what we read and insert understanding into what we write. Reading and writing is an act of construction by the individual. The cultural heritage is discovered and internalized in reading. While reading
and writing have certain overt, testable skills, there is also a more hidden information processing activity ensuring enculturation. Beyond the observable skills of reading and writing is cultural literacy. For some people, such cultural literacy may lead to assimilation and integration (e.g. accepting the values embedded in English classics). Assimilationists may argue for a common literacy, transmitting the majority language culture to ensure assimilation of minority groups within the wider society.

A well known example of a majority assimilationist approach to cultural literacy is Hirsch’s book (1988) *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. In the Appendix to the book, Hirsch (1988) provides a list of 5000 items of what ‘literate Americans know’, or should know by the end of High School. The text box below lists the letter ‘j’ entries to provide a flavor of the entries. Such a list is intended as a ‘reliable index of American literate culture’ for ‘effective national communication’ and to ‘insure domestic tranquility’ (pp. xi and xii). Yet, it mainly reflects North American, white, middle class, Christian and classical culture. It is the culture of those in power and fails to represent adequately Latino, Asian or native Indian culture.

Jack and Jill (rhyme), Jack and the Beanstalk (title), Jack be Nimble (text), Jack Frost, jack-of-all-trades – master of none, Andrew Jackson, Jesse Jackson, Stonewall Jackson, Jacksonian democracy, Jacksonville, Jack Sprat (text), Jacob and Esau, Jacobin, Jacob’s Ladder (song) Jakarta, Jamaica, Henry James, Jesse James, William James, Jamestown settlement, Janus, jargon, Jason and the Golden Fleece, Java, jazz, Thomas Jefferson, Jehovah, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (title), je ne sais quoi, Jeremiah, Battle of Jericho, Jersey City, Jerusalem, Jesuits, Jesus Christ, jet stream, Jew, Jezebel, jihad, Jim Crow, jingoism, Joan of Arc, The Book of Job, Johannesburg, Gospel according to Saint John, John Birch Society, John Brown’s Body (song), John Bull, John Doe, John Henry (song), Pope John Paul II, Andrew Johnson, Lyndon B. Johnson, Samuel Johnson, John the Baptist, Pope John XXIII, joie de vivre, Joint Chiefs of Staff, joint resolution, Jolly Roger, Jonah and the whale, John Paul Jones, Scott Joplin, Jordan, River Jordan, Joseph and his brothers, Chief Joseph, Saint Joseph, Joshua, Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho (song) journeyman, James Joyce, Judaism, Judas Iscariot, Judge not that ye be not judged, Judgment Day, Judgment of Paris, judicial branch, judicial review, Julius Caesar (title), Carl Jung, Juno (Hera), junta, Jupiter (planet), Jupiter (Zeus), justification by faith, justify the ways of God to men, juvenilia.

Adapted from Hirsch (1988: 180–182)

In contrast, a cultural pluralist viewpoint will argue that national unity is not sacrificed by cultural literacy in the minority language or multicultural literacy. Multicultural literacy is likely to give a wider view of the world, a more colorful view of human history and custom, and a less narrow view of science and society.

Discussion of the social and cultural context of literacy raises the importance of literacy in the mother tongue. While the educational feasibility of this is discussed later, for the moment the educational argument is that literacy is most easily and most
effectively learnt in the home language. The cultural argument is that mother tongue literacy gives access to the wealth of local and ethnic heritage contained in the literature. However, mother tongue literacy, while often culturally advantageous, is sometimes not without practical problems and objections. Some native languages lack a grammar or an alphabet, have few educational materials for teaching purposes, a shortage of teachers and teacher training. Political objections include native language literacy being an impediment to national unity and in-migrant assimilation and the cost of maintaining a variety of indigenous and ‘in-migrant’ languages in a region. Preservationists may wish to preserve literacy in the mother tongue to resist change, leaving that literacy to fossilize as if in a zoo.

Where there is much variety of language cultures within a region, support for local literacies may be found. Street (1984, 1994) regards local literacies as literacy practices identified with local and regional cultures (as different from national culture). Such local literacies may be forgotten by international and national literacy campaigns (Hornberger, 1994) or there may be tensions between local and national/international literacy practice (Street, 1994). Local literacies (for example, see Street, 1994), avoid the impoverishment of uniformity in literacy that is created by the dominance of English. They make literacy relevant to people’s lives, their local culture and community relationships.

The social and cultural context of literacy importantly includes the relationship between an ethnic community and literacy acquisition. What counts as reading differs between cultures, sub-cultures and ethnic groups. As Gregory (1993, 1994) demonstrates in a study of British Bangladeshi and Chinese families, the purposes of reading, the resources provided by the home and the process of parents helping their children to read may vary with the purposes, resources and processes for literacy in the school. Indeed, the varying expectations of home and school may produce a mismatch or a conflict that leads to uncertainty in the child, low achievement and even failure. She contrasts the school and language minority parents’ differing viewpoints and practices. The school teaches reading for recreation and enjoyment; the family wants literacy for utilitarian purposes (e.g. avoiding unemployment and poverty, for trading and business transactions). The school literacy policy aims for a child-centered, individualized approach, with teacher as facilitator, partner and guide, allowing a wide choice of colorful attractive books. An ethnic group may, in contrast, provide literacy classes in Saturday schools, at the Mosque or Temple, sometimes with large numbers being tutored in the same class. The teacher may act as an authority and director. Learning the will of Allah, for example, may be the valued outcome. A treasured Bible, the Qu’ran or other holy or highly valued book may be the focus of reading.

Gregory (1993, 1994) further compares the style of literacy teaching. In school, the child is socialized gently into the ‘literary club’ via ‘playing’ with books in a relaxed atmosphere with little correction of mistakes. In ethnic Saturday schools, for example, children learn by rote, repeating letters, syllables and phrases until perfect. There is continuous practice, testing and correction of mistakes in a fairly strict and disciplined regime. Children may be given books only after they have proved their reading skills are
worthy of such esteemed treasures. "To have immediate access to books devalues both the book and the principle of hard work. Children must work their way towards knowledge slowly and the book is a reward for a child's conscious achievements. A love of books therefore, comes after reading is learned and not as a necessary prerequisite for it (Gregory, 1993: 57).

The mismatch of school and ethnic group literacy expectations and practices may be tragic for the child. The child is caught between two literacy worlds, two versions of appropriate literacy behavior, and in the middle of a clash between home and school concepts of literacy. Despondency, learning paralysis, low motivation and disaffection with school may result for the child.

Research from the United States from Shirley Brice Heath (1986) showed how Chinese-United States families, for example, tend towards parent controlled conversations that closely mirror the type of language behavior expected in many traditional classrooms. The parents asked children factual questions, evaluated their language, gave verbal correction, and elaboration. Thus a certain form of literacy behavior and literacy use was established. Chinese-United States families saw their role as complementing that of the school in literacy. Such parents saw themselves as active agents in their children's literacy development.

In contrast, Mexican-United States parents often expected the extended family to share some of the responsibility for child-rearing. Such parents seldom expected conversations with their children while the parents were working. They relatively rarely asked questions of the children to assess their knowledge, understanding or attitudes. Older children within such families were expected to entertain the younger children. Younger children rarely interacted with just one adult, often being surrounded by a larger number of adults and children. However, young children grew up in a rich language environment, and although little conversation was directed specifically to them, they experienced the constant flow of language between adults, and between adults and other children. Children were taught to be respectful of adults, and usually not to initiate social conversations with adults. This cultural behavior is directly related to literacy expectations and uses. That is, literacy is not a separate cultural event, but mirrors in its form and function general socialization practices.

This tends to vary from the expectations of school language use where interaction with the teacher in traditional classrooms is expected. In such traditional classrooms, it is not expected that children should interact only with other children. Thus a mismatch may occur between patterns of language and literacy in the home and that expected in schools. For different cultural and ethnic groups, this may make school a more frightening, difficult and strange experience. The transition from the language and literacy of home to school may be more difficult for some language communities than for others. The differences between language minorities, as well as between such minorities and the language majority may affect the acquisition of literacy in school.
Heath (1986) identifies six genres of language use that are typically important for success in school.

1. Adults engage in language activities with children that require children to label items, or adults frequently give the names of objects and ideas.
2. Adults interpret what children have been saying, ask for explanations of what the child means or intends, and interpret classroom behavior.
3. Children are expected to re-tell experiences or provide information that is known to adults. The listener may question the child so as to structure and 'scaffold' that information in particular ways.
4. Children are expected to give performances to adults and their peers. The performance involves providing information or experiences that are new to the listener, or providing new interpretations of information that the listener already knows.
5. Children provide a running narrative of events that are currently taking place or forecast what will occur in the future.
6. Children recount stories that are familiar to them, that involve their imagination, some animation and a sequence of events towards a goal.

Heath (1986) refers to these six events as: label quests, meaning quests, recounts, accounts, event casts and stories.

While most of these patterns occur in the homes of children from all social classes and all ethnolinguistic groups, there are differences between homes in the frequency with which these dimensions occur. The effect is that children come to school with different degrees of familiarity with literacy linked behaviors. Some children are more literacy-ready than others and therefore have a greater potential for achievement.

In Shirley Brice Heath’s (1982) research, certain preschool children gained experience of books with their parents in a manner which paralleled that of interaction with teachers in elementary schools. The initiation–reply–evaluation sequence so often used by teachers was used by a particular group of parents. Such children were therefore prepared for the literacy culture of teachers in classrooms. Such children had also learnt to build knowledge on to their own experience of the world and use it to frame and express that experience. Such children had implicitly learnt that literacy provides new dimensions of experience.

Such ‘school-prepared’ children had also been taught by their parents to ‘listen and wait’. They had grown accustomed to listening to adults reading stories and waiting to the end before asking questions. Thus such children became used to using books in a way that they would experience for most of their schooling.

Shirley Brice Heath (1982, 1983) also described two communities in the United States who had different literacy practices, important in themselves, but which did not match school-oriented literacy practices. Roadville children were members of working class, committed Christian parents who used literacy for Biblical and moral instruction. Fictional writing was rejected in favor of reading about real events that contained a moral message. The reading of a book in this community was a performance, rather than an
interactive event. Books were used to inform and instruct a passive audience. ‘Roadville adults do not extend either the context or the habits of literacy events beyond book reading. They do not, upon seeing an item or event in the real world, remind children of a similar event in a book and launch a running commentary on similarities and differences’ (Shirley Brice Heath, 1982: 61).

Thus Roadville children regarded a story as a real event containing accurate facts and read or told as a lesson about being a good Christian. Fictional accounts of real events were regarded as lying. Reality and the truth was needed, not fiction. Thus Roadville children were socialized into a particular world view, a particular series of norms and beliefs, and specific beliefs about the uses (and ‘to be avoided’ uses) of literacy. Roadville children were encouraged and rewarded for telling stories that derived a moral message from real experience. While some may see such family training as failing to prepare the children for the literacy events of the school, another view is that the school fails to respond to the preferred literacy style of this type of community. A third view is that all children need to be exposed to the widest variety of ‘cultures of literacy’ and know what alternative functions exist for literacy.

Shirley Brice Heath (1982) concludes that literacy can only be understood and interpreted ‘in relation to the larger sociocultural patterns which they may exemplify or reflect. For example, ethnography must describe literacy events in their sociocultural context, so we may come to understand how such patterns as time and space usage, care giving roles, and age and sex segregation are interdependent with the types and features of literacy events a community develops’ (p. 74).

The Critical Literacy Approach

Literacy can work to maintain the status quo, to ensure that those with power and dominance in society influence, even control what the masses read and think. Propaganda, political pamphlets and newspapers and books can all be used to attempt to control the thinking and minds of the masses. Literacy can be conceived as an attempt through schooling and other formal and informal means of education to produce hegemony in society. Thus, those in power maintain control over those who could be subversive to social order, or democratically challenge their power base. Literacy can be used to instill certain preferred attitudes, beliefs and thoughts. Similarly, some religious traditions deliberately use literacy to ensure that their members are, at the least, influenced by writings, at the worst, brainwashed. Careful selection by religious leaders and parents over what their children read, is an attempt to use literacy to control and contain the mind.

Graff (1979) has shown that in nineteenth century Canada, literacy was used for normative, controlling purposes. Illiterates were conceived as dangerous to the social stability, as alien to the dominant culture, representing a threat to the established order. Thus, an effort to increase literacy was a political move to maintain and further the position of the ruling elite. Since the elite realized that literacy could also lead to radical beliefs and ideas antagonistic to those in power, the teaching of literacy was carefully controlled.
Graff (1979) also attempted to show that literacy did not necessarily improve a person’s chances of acquiring employment, wealth or power. Certain ethnic groups were disadvantaged, whatever their literacy rates, while others disproportionately obtained employment despite their relatively high illiteracy rates. For example, Irish Catholics in Canada did badly irrespective of being literate or illiterate. In comparison, English Protestants fared relatively better. Similarly, literate black people did relatively less well than other literate people. Whether literacy was an advantage or disadvantage depended on ethnicity. Being unemployed or in the worst paid jobs was a function more of ethnic background than of illiteracy.

The style of literacy education that aims to control and contain tends to put emphasis on reading skills rather than comprehension, on being able to say the words and copy down words from a blackboard, with less emphasis on meaning and understanding. Students are not allowed to ask questions. Rather they are expected to read aloud large chunks of text that are subsequently corrected for pronunciation, stress and fluency.

Those with power and dominance in society also maintain their position by their view of what is ‘correct language’. Ethnic minorities with little political and economic power are often taught that their very patterns of speech and writing are inferior, and are connected with their economic social and cultural deprivation. Such groups are expected to adopt standard majority language use (e.g. to speak ‘proper’ or ‘correct’ English).

This restricted form of literacy is still present in many schools in all continents of the world. The functional view of literacy, as evidenced in the UNESCO definition given earlier, often involves a kind of restricted literacy that, at its worst, can maintain oppression, a distance between elites and the subservient, and not focus on the empowering and ‘critical consciousness’ possibilities of literacy.

Some forms of literacy education in schools and adult classes pose literacy as a technical skill. This reveals that literacy education always has ideological roots (Street, 1984). Literacy can be used to maintain the status quo, a stable political structure, to avert subversion or activism among the masses. National literacy may promote integration of the masses and different ethnic groups. National literacy may attempt to promote unification and standardization of both language and culture.

In colonization and ‘missionary’ movements, a different kind of cultural standardization was sometimes attempted. For example, when literacy was brought by the missionaries to non-Christian areas of the world in the nineteenth century, the aim was to spread the Christian gospel, control the thinking, and affect the moral behavior of those who were assumed to be primitive and heathen. In literacy projects in developing countries in the twentieth century, literacy has often been promoted for economic development. A literate workforce was considered essential for economic growth. Yet such programs were also used, consciously or subconsciously, to shore up the established order in a social system founded on injustice and inequality. Literacy in such programs has sometimes been used to condition the masses, to consolidate existing divisions of labor.
There is an alternative to using literacy as a way of showing people how to work co-operatively within a system from the perspective of people in power. Literacy can be a tool of oppression; it can also be a liberator (Hornberger, 1994). It can be bar to opportunity; or a means of opening a door to empowerment. One way of attempting to empower people is through critical literacy. Freire (1970, 1973, 1985) and Freire & Macedo (1987) have argued for a literacy that makes oppressed communities socially and politically conscious about their subservient role and lowly status in society. The argument is that literacy must go well beyond the skills of reading and writing. It must make people aware of their sociocultural context and their political environment. This may occur through mother tongue literacy, multilingual literacy (and local/national/international ‘multiple’ literacies of value in differing contexts) and local literacies (Street, 1984).

For language minority speakers, literacy for empowerment can be about literacy stimulating language activism, the demand for language rights, self determination and an equitable share of power. Freire’s literacy education in Brazil’s peasant communities and with other oppressed groups around the world first teaches such people that they must become conscious about their subordinate role and inferior position in their community and society. People afterwards become empowered to change their own lives, situations and communities.

Through literacy, one can understand political power and activity, leading to collectively working together to change society, operating appropriately, able to challenge and complain, to assert natural rights, and to demand equality of access, opportunity and treatment. Through critical reflection on texts, information and propaganda, people will have a growing consciousness, an influence over their own lives and the institutions which serve them, and strive for more equal status in society.

Freire argued that people acquiring literacy must have their consciousness raised, enabling them to analyze the historical and social conditions which gave rise to their particular status, position and low power-base in society. Thus literacy teaching can become a direct political challenge to the hegemony of ruling capitalist states. Many adult literacy programs have been influenced by this ‘critical literacy’ ideology (Street, 1984).

In radical adult literacy programs, students create their own learning material rather than passively reading information and books that propagate a centralist, dominant perspective. Through creating their own books, (and the binding and distributing of them — for example poetry books), what it is to be literate is radically changed. Rather than reading becoming a passive exercise, literacy is seen as a production of ideas that need to be spread into the community. Students who had previously believed themselves a failure in learning to read and write may come to recognize that it was the system that had failed them. Their illiteracy is then seen not as a personal problem but as a condition imposed or allowed by those in power.

Such a radical viewpoint about literacy needs to be seen in contrast to the celebrated modern idea of the whole language approach in literacy development. Delpit (1988) argues that books within the whole language approach can be an uncritical celebration of
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stories and a transmission of accepted information. As such, the whole language movement may neglect issues of power and social justice, and maintain the status quo. What alternative is posed by the critical literacy movement?

At school level, the critical literacy approach is that learners should not just be invited to retell a story. They should be encouraged to offer their own interpretation of text. From the beginning, children should be encouraged to interpret and evaluate: Who is the writer? What is their perspective and bias? What kind of moral interpretation is made? What alternative interpretations and viewpoints are possible? Children will be encouraged not just to find the right answer to such questions, but to look critically at multiple viewpoints. Multicultural and multilingual children may be given diverse pieces of writing that reflect different cultural knowledge and attitudes. Differences in interpretation, and differences in experience and knowledge children bring to the text can be contrasted and compared.

This involves a change in teacher and student roles in the classroom. Teachers become facilitators rather than transmitters of authoritative knowledge. Literacy development becomes a joint developmental and co-operative event rather than duplicating the dominant–subservient relationship that often occurs in classrooms and which mirrors political domination and subservience.

For example, rather than children being solely taught that Columbus discovered America and that Columbus was a hero whose arrival brought civilization and salvation to the indigenous population, teachers may broaden out and invite students to search out other views about Columbus. Having read that Columbus initiated the slave trade, cut off the hands of any indigenous people who failed to bring him gold, and that the indigenous population suffered when Spanish rule was established, students would be asked to write their own critical versions of not only the life and contribution of Columbus, but also the way that Columbus is treated in many historical texts. Students will be encouraged by discovery methods to find that historical facts about Columbus have been selectively treated and interpreted by historians. More than one viewpoint is possible. One single viewpoint is both dangerous and biased, even if it is politically desirable and comfortable.

Flor Ada (1988a, 1988b) presents a critical literacy approach for classrooms based on Paulo Freire. She distinguishes four phases in the creative reading act.

The Descriptive Phase
In the descriptive phase, teachers will ask questions about text such as: What happened in a story? Who did what and why? This kind of phase exists in many classrooms, but in critical literacy, it must be extended beyond this stage. If reading stays at this phase, it tends to be passive, receptive and domesticating.

The Personal Interpretive Phase
Children will be asked if they have ever seen or experienced something like that portrayed in the story. What did you feel when you read the story? Did you like it? What kinds of emotion did you have? Does your family and community have similar experiences or
stories? Ada points out that this process of personalization of stories may raise children’s self esteem. They are made to feel that their experiences and feelings are valued by the teacher and other students. It also enables children to learn that ‘true learning occurs only when the information received is analyzed in the light of one’s own experiences and emotions’ (Ada 1988a: 104).

The Critical Analysis Phase
The text is used to bring out broader social issues and generalizations. Students are asked is the text valid? What kind of experience or person is promoted by the story? Are there other ways in which the story could have been constructed? How and why would people of different cultures, social classes and gender have acted differently in the story? Students are invited to analyze, reflect and expand on the experiences of the story. Social implications are engaged and analyzed.

Creative Action Phase
Students are then challenged as to how their learning can be used to improve their lives or resolve issues and problems they face. Here the critical approach is transformed into constructive action. For example, students may decide to write letters to political figures, to those in their locality who have power status and authority, or create a poster to try to persuade. Students may compile a class newsletter or booklet that is given to other students in their school, or other schools, to sensitize people to the issues. They may write and circulate a petition in a neighborhood, write a play, or create poetry that tries to both analyze, and inform others, leading ultimately to empowerment and raised consciousness among language minorities.

Finally, in this consideration of critical literacy, it is valuable to contrast in more depth two relatively opposite approaches to highlight the classroom style of a critical literacy approach. The functional and critical approaches will now be compared for their representation in the classroom and the different ideology of each approach.

The functional view of literacy compared with the critical view of literacy is paralleled by two stereotypes of literacy classrooms. In one style, there is a lot of teacher talk, much student listening, closed and factual questions rather than open and stimulating questions, with silence and control very evident. The hidden curriculum is that teachers are implicitly teaching dependence upon authority, correct and convergent thinking, social control, passive involvement, neutral thinking and passive learning. Knowledge is posed as static, correct and inert, to be internalized and reproduced when necessary. The critical literacy concept is that children should learn to search out differing authorities often with differing viewpoints, to depend on their own judgement, to think divergently and creatively, to work co-operatively and sociably, to avoid accepting knowledge and to question its source and motive, to be actively involved in learning, and, if necessary, to be critical of social, economic and political issues in their own and their community’s lives. Knowledge is seen as dynamic, ever changing, always relative, a catalyst for further inquiry and a catalyst for action. Cummins (1994) sums this up as follows: