CHAPTER 1

From 'Reading' to 'New' Literacies

Introduction

Literacy is now centre stage in education policy, curriculum development, and everyday thinking about educational practice. It is hard to credit that just two or three decades ago the term 'literacy' hardly featured in formal educational discourse. Instead, there was a long-established field known as 'Reading'. This was mainly grounded in psycholinguistics and associated with time-honoured methods of instruction for teaching new entrants into school how to decode printed text and, secondarily, how to encode text.

Prior to the 1970s, 'literacy' was used generally in relation to non-formal educational settings, and, in particular, in relation to adults who were deemed to be *illiterate*. 'Literacy' was the name given to programmes of non-formal instruction – not associated with formal educational institutions like schools – that were offered to illiterate adults to help them acquire basic abilities to read and write. At this time within Britain, North America, Australasia and similar countries, official statistics obtained for census measures and the like indicated almost zero levels of adult illiteracy. Such adult literacy initiatives as existed in these countries were small-scale,

largely voluntary endeavours involving adult literacy tutors working with individuals or small groups of learners. Indeed, within First World English-speaking societies, 'literacy teaching' was the name of marginal spaces of non-formal education work intended to provide a 'second chance' for those whose illiteracy was often seen as directly associated with other debilitating or dysfunctional conditions and circumstances. These included 'conditions' like unemployment, imprisonment, drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, inferior physical and psychic health, and so on.

The situation was different in the Third World of so-called 'developing countries'. In these countries, relatively few people received formal education. Often as many as 80 per cent or more of the adult population was illiterate relative to popular measures of the day – such as lacking reading abilities roughly equivalent to second or third grade levels of primary school. During the 1950s, and again in the 1990s, it became fashionable among development theorists to associate a country's 'readiness' for 'economic take-off' with attainment of a certain level of adult literacy across the nation. For example, during the 1960s it was widely argued by development theorists that having at least a large minority of the male population achieve literacy was a precondition for underdeveloped nations to 'take off' economically (Anderson 1966). A figure of at least 40 per cent of adults (especially males) deemed literate in a population was seen as the threshold for economic development. This became a rationale for promoting adult literacy campaigns throughout many Third World countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as a strategic component of economic and social development policies. Illiteracy was seen as a major impediment to economic development, and literacy campaigns were prescribed as cost-effective measures for developing the minimal levels of 'manpower' needed to give a country a chance for economic take-off. These campaigns were usually undertaken as non-formal programmes aimed at adults – although children often participated – conducted outside the education *system* as such.

Prior to the 1970s, then, neither in the First World nor in the Third World was 'literacy' identified as a formal educational *ideal*. Within formal educational settings, reading and writing were seen as essential tools for learning, and as vehicles for accessing and communicating meanings via printed texts. They were a *means* for learning, not an end – let alone *the* end. Functional mastery of reading and writing was effectively taken for granted as bottom line outcomes of classroom learning for all students other than those designated as intellectually impaired or as having severe learning disabilities. And in any event, so far as curriculum and pedagogy within formal education were concerned, what was talked about, researched, debated and so on was not *literacy* but, rather, *reading* and, to a lesser extent, *writing*.

This changed considerably during the 1970s in the US and, to varying degrees, in other Anglophone countries. All of a sudden, 'literacy' was pushed to the forefront of educational focus and effort. A number of reasons have been linked to this change, three of which seem to us especially interesting.

One was the rise to prominence of Paulo Freire's work within the larger context of the radical education movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s (see Freire 1972, 1973; Freire and Macedo 1987). Freire's work with peasant groups in Brazil and Chile provided an example of how literacy work could be central to radical approaches to education aimed at building critical social praxis. His concept of literacy as 'reading the word and the world' involved much more than merely the ideas of decoding and encoding print. Far from being the sole objective of literacy education, learning how to encode and decode alphabetic print was integrated into an expansive pedagogy in which groups of learners collaboratively pursued critical consciousness of their world via a reflexive or 'cyclical' process of reflection and action. Through their efforts to act on the world, and to analyse and understand the results of their action, people can come to know the world better: more 'deeply' and 'critically'.

From this perspective, 'illiteracy' is seen as a consequence of unjust social processes and relations that have been created historically and become 'woven' (or, as we might say today, 'hard wired') into the social structure. Yet, insofar as these unjust social arrangements have been created and are sustained through human activity, they can equally be *changed* through human action. Before such 'transformative cultural action' can occur, however, it is necessary to understand the nature and origins of social oppression.

In Freire's pedagogy, learning to write and read *words* became a focus for adults in pursuing critical awareness of how oppressive practices and relations operated in everyday life. Words that were highly charged with meaning for them – words that expressed their fears, hopes, troubles and their dreams for a better life – provided the vocabulary by which they learned to write and read. These words were discussed intensively in order to explore how the world 'worked'. In the context of this oral discussion the *written* forms of these words, as well as of other words that could be built out of their syllables and phonemes, were introduced. In the context of discussing and thinking about these words, participants learned what they 'looked like' as text, and how to write and read them.

Within Freire's approach to promoting literacy, then, the process of learning literally to read and write words was an integral part of learning to understand how the world operates socially and culturally in ways that

produce unequal opportunities and outcomes for different groups of people. Ultimately, this analysis was to provide a starting point for participants to take action on the world in an attempt to change it in ways that would create social processes and relations that were more just. Groups would undertake cultural action for change in the world in the light of their analysis of their circumstances. They would then analyse and evaluate the results of their action in order to take the next step in cultural action. This *praxis* of reflection and action was the means for knowing the world more deeply and accurately, since it involved 'testing' it to see how it works in the light of concepts and theories developed collaboratively in discussion of experiences and beliefs. Freirean literacy education was, then, an integral component of a radical, politicized pedagogy purposefully designed to stimulate action for change. As a matter of fact, it captured the imagination, respect, and support of many academics and political activists in First World countries – particularly, in North America – as well as being adopted as the philosophical basis for national and regional adult literacy programmes in a number of Third World countries.

A second factor in the development of 'literacy' as a widely used concept in education was the dramatic discovery – although many called it an *invention* – of widespread illiteracy among adults in the US during the early 1970s. This alleged literacy *crisis* coincided with early awareness of profound structural change in the economy, as the US moved toward becoming a post-industrial society. Post-industrialism entailed far-reaching restructuring of the labour market and employment as well as deep changes in major organizations and institutions of daily life. Large numbers of people were seen as poorly prepared for these changes. The 'literacy crisis' quickly spread to other emerging postindustrial societies. Whether it was in Britain, the US, Canada, Australia or New Zealand, much the same storyline emerged: schools were failing to ensure that all learners became literate to the extent required to live 'effectively' under contemporary conditions. Research and reports commissioned by governments claimed relentlessly that standards were falling, that far-reaching educational reform was needed, and that curriculum and pedagogy had to be overhauled in order to ensure that all students would acquire at the very least a *functional* level of literacy. 'Literacy' emerged as the key word here.

A third factor was the increasing development and popularity of a *sociocultural* perspective within studies of language and the social sciences (Gee 1996: Ch. 3; Gee *et al.* 1996: Ch. 1). During the 1980s and 1990s this impacted strongly on conceptual and theoretical understandings of practices involving texts. Early influential works drew on theory and research from different but broadly compatible fields. Gee (1996: Ch. 1) documents

these very nicely. For example, Harvey Graff's 1979 book, *The Literacy Myth*, drew on revisionist history. Silvia Scribner and Michael Cole's *The Psychology of Literacy* (1981) drew on concepts and instrumentation that reflected pioneering work in social cognition by Vygotsky and Luria and developed a concept of 'practice' that has evolved into a key construct within sociocultural approaches to literacy. Ron and Suzanne Scollon's *Narrative, Literacy and Face in Interethnic Communication* (1981) worked at complex interfaces between linguistics, anthropology and epistemology to explore relationships among social practices, worldviews, orality and literacy. Shirley Brice Heath (1983) explored the ways literacy is embedded in cultural contexts over an extended period using an ethnographic design and research methods in her major study, *Ways with Words*. Brian Street's *Literacy in Theory and in Practice* (1984) was strongly grounded in anthropology. Together with even earlier work done by scholars in history and cultural studies in Britain, like Robert K. Webb's *The British Working Class Reader* (1955) and Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* (1957), among many others (see Lankshear 1999), these studies provided a strong base informed by research from which to challenge established approaches to teaching reading and writing in schools and the growing emphasis on 'literacy basics' and 'functional literacy' fuelled by the alleged literacy crisis.

Reflection and discussion

- Why do you think literacy levels are presumed by many people to be directly related to national economic health and growth? Do you think that they are? If so, what kind of relationship is involved? If not, why do you think there is no direct relationship?
- Consider the results of international literacy tests and cross-comparisons of test results for school students like the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA; see nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa). How and in what ways might these results be used to inform policy or to shape sanctions applied to schools?
- Why do you think some politicians, policy-makers and business interests take international literacy rankings so seriously?

Within this broad historical context, 'literacy' emerged quickly and decisively as a key focus of formal education, and for many politicians, policy-makers and administrators it came to comprise *the* key focus. Legislation like the *No Child Left Behind Act* passed in 2001 in the US enshrined

literacy as the new 'bottom line' and the new 'centre of gravity' for school education. With hindsight, this dramatic emergence of literacy as an educational focus can be viewed from several angles: (1) 'literacy' replaced 'reading' and 'writing' in educational language; (2) literacy became a considerable industry; (3) literacy assumed a loftier status in the eyes of educationists; (4) 'literacy' came to apply to an ever increasing variety of practices; and (5) literacy is now being defined with the word 'new'.

First, the *educational language* associated with the development of competence with text changed, as we have already noted, from the language of 'reading' and 'writing' to the language of 'literacy'. The term began to figure prominently in school timetables and programme descriptions. The names of professional journals changed. For example, the *Australian Journal of Reading* became the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, the *Journal of Reading* became the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, and the *Journal of Reading Behavior* became the *Journal of Literacy Research*. Likewise, areas of focus for professional and resource development were renamed. For example, 'emergent literacy' subsumed the conventional coverall term, 'reading readiness', and the then new label, 'writing readiness'; 'literacy development' was used in place of reading or writing development; 'literacy studies' instead of 'language arts research' and the like.

The name change did not always count for much, since in many cases people continued doing in the name of 'literacy' much the same as they had always done as 'reading' teachers or researchers. The point is, however, that whereas 'reading' has traditionally been conceived in *psychological* terms, 'literacy' has always been much more a *sociological* concept. For example, 'illiteracy' and 'illiterate' usually carried social class or social group connotations. Being illiterate tended to be associated with being poor, being of marginal status, and so on. In addition, the sociocultural approach to literacy overtly rejects the idea that textual practices are even largely, let alone solely, a matter of processes that 'go on in the head', or that essentially involve heads communicating with each other by means of graphic signs. From a sociocultural perspective, literacy is a matter of social practices. Literacies are bound up with social, institutional and cultural relationships, and can only be understood when they are situated within their social, cultural and historical contexts (Gee *et al.* 1996: xii). Moreover, they are always connected to social identities – to being particular kinds of people. Literacies are always embedded in Discourses (Gee 2000). From around 1992 Gee has distinguished between Discourse (with a big D) and discourse. The former is the notion of ways of being in the world that integrate identities, and the latter refers to the language bits, or

language uses, of Discourses – see the discussion of 'powerful literacy' on pp. 17–18.) Texts are integral parts of innumerable everyday '*lived, talked, enacted, value-and-belief-laden* practices' that are 'carried out in specific places and at specific times' (Gee *et al.* 1996: 3; emphasis in original). Reading and writing are not the same things in a youth zine (pronounced 'zeen') culture, an online chat space, a school classroom, a feminist reading group, or in different kinds of religious ceremonies. People read and write differently out of different social practices, and these different ways with words are part of different ways of being persons and different ways and facets of doing life.

This has important implications. From a sociocultural perspective, it is impossible to separate out from text-mediated social practices the 'bits' concerned with reading or writing (or any other sense of 'literacy') and to treat them independently of all the 'non-print' bits, like values and gestures, context and meaning, actions and objects, talk and interaction, tools and spaces. They are all non-subtractable parts of integrated wholes. 'Literacy bits' do not exist apart from the social practices in which they are embedded and within which they are acquired. If, in some trivial sense they *can* be said to exist (e.g., as code), they do not *mean* anything. Hence, they cannot meaningfully be taught and learned as separate from the rest of the practice (Gee 1996).

By adopting and developing 'literacy' as their key word, socioculturally oriented theorists, researchers, and educators sought, among other things, to bypass the psychological reductionism inscribed on more than a century of educational activity associated with 'reading'. They wanted to keep *the social* to the forefront, and to keep the 'embeddedness' of literacy within larger social practices in clear view. This was often subverted, however, when reading specialists and experts simply adopted the term 'literacy' without taking up its substance.

Second, the scope and amount of *formal* educational activity in the name of literacy that was funded and sanctioned by official government policy, guidelines and directives reached impressive levels. Literacy quickly became a considerable *industry*, involving public and private providers of diverse goods and services at different rungs on the education ladder. Adult and workplace literacy programmes received formal recognition, funding, and credentialling in a manner previously unknown. Funding to providers was usually pegged to achievement outcomes and accountability procedures. In countries like Australia, national and state level policies actually factored workplace literacy competencies into the awards and remuneration system, providing incentives for workers to participate in work-related and work-based literacy programmes, many of which were conducted during

company time. Adults and workers whose language backgrounds were not in the dominant/official language of the country were often specially targeted.

Resource and professional development activities mushroomed. Literacy educators and literacy programme providers sought curriculum resources, pedagogical approaches, and specialized training for their work. Armies of literacy consultants, resource developers, and professional development experts quickly emerged to meet the market for literacy goods and services. In keeping with the tradition of formal education, the belief that such work should be grounded in research was also officially recognized and, to a greater or lesser extent, funded. Literacy soon emerged as a major focus within educational research. Once again, the Australian case ranks among the most complex and carefully staged responses to the belief that high levels of functional and work-related literacy on the part of all members of a nation's population is a precondition of successful transition to becoming a post-industrial economy and a knowledge society. At the end of the 1980s, the Australian Language and Literacy Policy legislated for competitive research funding to support a national level research programme in the area of Child Literacy. During the 1990s, the National Children's Literacy Projects programme allocated on a highly competitive basis millions of research dollars for targeted projects addressing diverse aspects of school-age children's literacy. These funds counted toward the research quantum of individual universities, which in turn determined the level of government funding they received for general research activity. Research Centres and Schools or Departments specializing in (language and) literacy education became key planks in Education Faculty structures, and often emerged among the top research income earners within their faculties.

Third, at the same time as literacy assumed a larger and larger focal presence within the recognized role and scope of formal education, it also began to assume *loftier* status in terms of how it was defined and understood by many educationists. It was as if educationists who believed that education should involve much more and count for much more than was generally associated with the term 'literacy' responded to its new pride of place by building more into their conceptions of literacy in order to defend and preserve more expansive educational purposes and standards.

This trend is apparent in a variety of areas and initiatives. These include, among others, concepts and ideals of 'cultural literacy', 'critical literacy', 'technoliteracy', 'higher order literacies', 'three-dimensional literacy', 'powerful literacy', 'multiliteracies', and the like.

For example, the urgent interest shown, especially in the US, in relation to cultural literacy in the late 1980s and early 1990s was concerned with

the kind of knowledge young people were thought to need in order to participate effectively in social life as active and informed citizens. Advocates of cultural literacy addressed the kinds of approaches and programmes schools should provide to this end. The association of cultural knowledge with literacy was, perhaps, made most clearly by E. D. Hirsch, Jr in his highly influential book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987). Hirsch argued that students need to be familiar with a cultural canon in order to be able to negotiate their social context effectively. This canon comprises relevant cultural information that has high status in the public sphere. It is assumed that all members of society share this knowledge as part of their cultural heritage. Hirsch discerned cultural *illiteracy* among growing numbers of students who could not contextualize information or communicate with their fellows within the context of a larger national culture because they lacked the common cultural stock presumed to make such communication and meaning making possible. Hirsch regards 'literate Americans' as those who possess a particular body of cultural knowledge, which he itemized in his book.

Reflection and discussion

- To what extent do you think it is possible to itemize definitively the most important elements of cultural knowledge to be known within societies like your own?
- If you had to compile a list of the top ten cultural knowledge items you think all people in your country should know, what would they be? Compare your list with those compiled by two other people. Discuss these three lists in terms of what is included and what is excluded and the implications of both.

An interesting account that builds on a sociocultural perspective to develop a robust conception of literacy can be found in a 'three-dimensional' model (Green 1988, 1997). This view argues that literacy should be seen as having three interlocking dimensions of learning and practice: the operational, the cultural and the critical. These dimensions bring together language, meaning and context (Green 1988), and no one dimension has any priority over the others. In an integrated view of literate practice and literacy pedagogy, all dimensions need to be taken into account simultaneously. The *operational* dimension focuses on the language aspect of literacy. It includes but also goes beyond competence with the tools, procedures and techniques involved in being able to handle the written language system

proficiently. It includes being able to read and write/key in a range of contexts in an appropriate and adequate manner. The *cultural* dimension involves competence with the meaning system of a social practice; knowing how to make and grasp meanings appropriately within the practice – in short, it focuses on understanding texts in relation to contexts. This means knowing what it is about given contexts of practice that makes for appropriateness or inappropriateness of particular ways of reading and writing. The *critical* dimension involves awareness that all social practices, and thus all literacies, are socially constructed and 'selective': they include some representations and classifications – values, purposes, rules, standards, and perspectives – and exclude others. To participate effectively and productively in any literate practice, people must be socialized into it. But if individuals are socialized into a social practice without realizing that it is socially constructed and selective, and that it can be acted on and transformed, they cannot play an active role in changing it. The critical dimension of literacy is the basis for ensuring that individuals are not merely able to participate in some existing literacy and make meanings within it, but also that, in various ways, they are able to transform and actively produce it (Green 1988; Gee *et al.* 1996). Hence, rather than focusing on the 'how to' knowledge of literacy, the 3D model of literacy complements and supplements operational or technical competence by contextualizing literacy with due regard for matters of culture, history and power.

During the past two decades various accounts have been provided of concepts like 'powerful literacies', 'higher order literacies' and, more recently, 'multiliteracies'. The pedagogy of multiliteracies focuses strongly on how cultural and linguistic diversity and the burgeoning impact of new communications technologies are changing demands on learners in terms of what we have identified here as the operational and cultural dimensions of literacies. Learners need new operational and cultural 'knowledges' in order to acquire new languages that provide access to new forms of work, civic, and private practices in their everyday lives. At the same time, as the proponents of multiliteracies argue, learners need to develop strengths in the critical dimension of literacy as well. Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope (1997) make this very clear with respect to literacy demands in relation to work. They note that with a new work life comes a new language, with much of it attributable to new technologies like 'iconographic, text and screen-based modes of interacting with automated machinery' and to changes in the social relations of work (Kalantzis and Cope 1997: 5). This new work life can be even more highly exploitative and unjust than its predecessor. Accordingly, Kalantzis and Cope claim that when responding to radical

contemporary changes in working life literacy educators need to walk a fine line. On one side, learners must

> have the opportunity to develop skills for access to new forms of work through learning the new language of work. But at the same time, as teachers, our role is not simply to be technocrats. Our job is not to produce docile, compliant workers. Students need to develop the skills to speak up, to negotiate and to be able to engage critically with the conditions of their working lives.
>
> (ibid.: 6)

Second, it is very clear that literacies, conceived from a sociocultural perspective generally and a multiliteracies perspective specifically, entail a vast amount of knowledge. Being literate involves much more than simply knowing *how* to operate the language system. The cultural and critical facets of knowledge integral to being literate are considerable. Indeed, much of what the proponents of multiliteracies have explicated are the new and changing knowledge components of literacies under contemporary social, economic, cultural, political and civic conditions. In other words, being literate in any of the myriad forms literacies take presupposes complex amalgams of propositional, procedural and 'performative' forms of knowledge. Making meaning is knowledge intensive, and much of the knowledge that school-based learning is required to develop and mobilize is knowledge involved in meaning making.

The idea that literacies can be more or less 'powerful' was developed on a number of rather different fronts during the late 1980s and the 1990s. We will briefly mention two examples here. The first is the account provided by James Gee. The second is a view associated with a group of linguists in Australia whose work was very influential there during the 1990s.

For Gee (1990), a powerful literacy is not a specific literacy *per se* but, rather, a way of using a literacy. He defines being literate as having control, or fluent mastery, of language uses within what he calls secondary Discourses. Gee defines Discourses as 'ways of being in the world', which integrate words, acts, gestures, attitudes, beliefs, purposes, clothes, bodily movements and positions, and so on. Discourses also integrate *identities*, in the sense that through their participation in Discourses individuals are identified and identifiable as members of socially meaningful groups or networks and players of socially meaningful roles (ibid.: 142–3). Language is integral to Discourses, but Discourses are always much more than language alone. Language uses – or what Gee calls the 'language bits' of Discourses – are 'connected stretches of language that make sense', that are

meaningful within a Discourse (ibid.: 143). Language uses vary from Discourse to Discourse, but well-known examples include 'conversations, stories, reports, arguments, essays', as well as explanations, commands, interviews, ways of eliciting information, and so on (ibid.: 143).

Gee distinguishes between a person's primary Discourse and its distinctive language use (which he mostly refers to as 'discourse' with a small 'd'), and their secondary Discourses and their respective language uses. Our primary Discourse involves 'face to face communication with intimates', and is the Discourse of our immediate group (ibid.: 143). Primary Discourses differ from social group to social group (e.g., by social class, ethnicity, etc.). We each belong to just one primary Discourse, which shapes who and what we initially are as persons. Members of all social groups that extend beyond immediate, face-to-face encounters also encounter secondary Discourses through their participation in secondary institutions, such as schools, churches, sports clubs, community groups, workplaces, and so on. These secondary Discourses have their own more or less distinctive language uses and they shape our identities in particular ways – as we take on their beliefs, purposes, ways of speaking and acting, moving, dressing, and so on. According to Gee, then, since there are multiple secondary Discourses, and since literacy and being literate are defined in terms of controlling secondary language uses, there are multiple – indeed, *many* – literacies and ways of being literate. In all cases, however, being literate means being able to use the 'right' language in the 'right' ways within a Discourse. This corresponds roughly to command of the 'operational' and 'cultural' dimensions of literacy previously mentioned.

On the basis of these ideas, Gee defines *powerful* literacy in terms of employing a secondary language use as a 'metalanguage' for understanding, analysing and critiquing other Discourses and the way they constitute us as persons and situate us within society (ibid.: 153; see also Gee 1991: 8–9). By a metalanguage, he means, 'a set of meta-words, meta-values [and] meta-beliefs' (Gee 1990: 153). Practising a powerful literacy, so defined, can provide the basis for reconstituting our selves/identities and resituating ourselves within society.

To understand and critique a particular Discourse using a powerful literacy derived from some other Discourse requires understanding both Discourses *as Discourses*: what they are, how they operate, what values and ways of being in the world they promote, how their 'language bits' reflect and enable this. This is metalevel knowledge. In powerful literacy we draw on such knowledge to provide us with a reason, a basis, and an alternative in terms of which we can decide to opt out of another Discourse or work to change it.

Reflection and discussion

Identify and discuss the first time you recall thinking that your home language and social practices (or, your primary Discourse) was not like someone else's. Describe the context in which the thought occurred to you. If you cannot recall a first time, describe any occasion in which you have been strongly conscious of such a difference.

Drawing on resources like those below describe some ways in which a student's primary Discourse might differ significantly from the secondary Discourse they experience in school:

- Heath (1983)
- Hicks (2001)
- Hull and Schultz (2001)
- Knobel (1999)

A rather different account of powerful language was developed in Australia by a school of systemic functional linguists who became known among educators as 'genre theorists'. They adapted Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistic theory and work in ways intended to invest it with socially transforming possibilities. Their underlying premise was that certain social groups and their characteristic genres enjoy more power than other groups and their genres. They associated social power with mastery of genres which, they believed, could be taught and learned under classroom conditions. They argued that powerful genres and their social purposes can – and *should* – be identified and taught explicitly to students and, particularly, to students from marginalized and/or non-English-speaking backgrounds. From this perspective, genre mastery and successful use of powerful genres depend on one's ability to make the 'right' linguistic choices according to immediate contexts and social purposes. The genre theorists argued that meanings – and the social effects of language use – depend directly on language choices, which in turn, depend on one's purposes. They maintained that language and literacy mastery is properly evaluated according to the repertoire of possible linguistic choices the language user is able to draw on appropriately and that a broad linguistic repertoire can be taught and refined explicitly in classrooms (cf. Christie 1987; Martin 1993; Martin and Rothery 1993).

From the standpoint of these and similar perspectives, it was seen as highly important to ensure that literacy agendas be expansive, because of

the way literacy was being prioritized within education policy and the potential that existed for economic and political interests to 'steer' literacy along narrow and minimalist lines.

Fourth, since the 1980s and 1990s the term 'literacy' has been applied to an ever increasing variety of practices. It has reached the point today where it seems that almost any knowledge and learning deemed educationally valuable can somehow or other be conceived as a literacy.

Sometimes this involves 'literacy' becoming a metaphor for 'competence', 'proficiency' or 'being functional'. Concepts like 'being computer literate' or being 'technologically literate' are sometimes used simply to mean that someone is more or less proficient with a computer or some other device like a video recorder: they can 'make sense of' and 'use' computers, or can program their video player or mobile phone. In this sense, talk of being computer literate or technologically literate has become everyday terminology. This is actually an index for just how focal literacy has become as a social issue and an educational ideal during the past two or three decades.

Getting closer to more literal associations with language *per se*, we nowadays hear frequent references to 'oral literacy', 'visual literacy', 'information literacy', 'media literacy', 'science literacy' and even 'emotional literacy'. These uses foreground the notion of being able to communicate or make meaning – as a producer or receiver – using signs, signals, codes, graphic images. In cases like 'science literacy', the concept implies being able to read and write meaningfully the language and literature of science. It is close to the idea advanced in the 1970s by philosophers like Paul Hirst (1974) with respect to knowledge and the academic disciplines. Hirst spoke of 'forms and fields of knowledge' – systematic ways of understanding the world, epitomized by academic disciplines – as having their own discrete 'languages and literatures'. To 'be on the inside' of a form or field of knowledge meant being able to 'speak' its language and 'read and write its literature'. The language comprised the procedures, techniques, standards, methods used by expert practitioners. The literature comprised the products generated by faithful and competent practitioners who spoke the language in question.

In the case of ideas like 'media literacy' or 'information literacy', we sometimes find implications that we need to learn to 'read' media or information sources in specialized ways in order to 'get what is really there' and/or to avoid being 'taken in'. This is the idea that there are ways of deciphering media and information more or less *wittingly* or *critically* as an 'insider' or, at least, as an effective receiver or producer within the media spaces in question. To some extent this implies the ability to identify

strategies and techniques being used to produce particular kinds of effects on what we think, believe, or desire.

An example here is provided by David Sholle and Stan Denski's (1993) account of television within their treatment of critical media literacy. They observe that television can be seen as 'a *pedagogical machine*' that operates to construct discourses 'that function primarily in the locus of a mode of transmission where "culture becomes defined solely by markets for culture" ' (1993: 309; original emphasis; the quotation is from Wexler 1988: 98). Sholle and Denski argue that if teachers are to educate learners to become media literate,

> we must attend to the multiple references and codes that position them [the learners]. This means paying attention to the manner in which popular culture texts are constructed by and construct various discursive codes, but also how such texts express various contradictory ideological interests and how these texts might be taken up in a way that creates possibilities for different constructions of cultural and political life.
>
> (1993: 309)

At present, one of the hottest 'literacies' going around in this sense is 'digital literacy'. It is emerging in many education policy documents as a core educational goal. This trend is often associated with fears about the emergence of a 'digital divide' – between those who are digitally literate and those who are not. It is feared that a digital divide will create a deep social and economic inequality, in which those who are not digitally literate will be seriously disadvantaged. Those who push a digital literacy agenda to pre-empt inequalities resulting from a digital divide believe we need to capture the essence of what it is to be digitally literate and pass the necessary skills and knowledge on to all who are involved in education and the workforce so that they will not be disadvantaged in learning or at work. Furthermore, those who are not in education or working but who may want to participate in cultural activities using new technologies should also have the opportunity to become digitally literate.

Definitions of digital literacy are of two main kinds: conceptual definitions and standardized sets of operations intended to provide national and international *normalizations* of digital literacy. Two of the best-known conceptual definitions of digital literacy are those provided by Richard Lanham (1995) and Paul Gilster (1997; in Pool 1997).

Lanham (1995: 198) claims that 'literacy' has extended its semantic reach from meaning 'the ability to read and write' to now meaning 'the ability to understand information however presented'. He emphasizes the

multimediated nature of digital information, and argues that to be digitally literate involves 'being skilled at deciphering complex images and sounds as well as the syntactical subtleties of words' (ibid.: 200). Digitally literate people are 'quick on [their] feet in moving from one kind of medium to another . . . know what kinds of expression fit what kinds of knowledge and become skilled at presenting [their] information in the medium that [their] audience will find easiest to understand' (ibid.). Digital literacy enables us to match the medium we use to the kind of information we are presenting and to the audience to whom we are presenting it.

Gilster defines digital literacy as 'the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide variety of sources when it is presented via computers' and, particularly, through the medium of the internet (Gilster, in Pool 1997: 6). He emphasizes what he sees as inherent differences between *digital* information media and conventional print media. Digital literacy involves 'adapting our skills to an evocative new medium, [and] our experience of the Internet will be determined by how we master its core competencies' (ibid.). These competencies are not merely 'operational' or 'technical' competencies, however. Digital literacy involves 'mastering ideas, not keystrokes' (ibid.). Gilster identifies four key competencies of digital literacy: knowledge assembly, evaluating information content, searching the internet, and navigating hypertext. He describes each at length in his book, *Digital Literacy* (Gilster 1997). Gilster claims we need to teach and learn 'how to use the Web properly and how to be critical' and that 'we all need to learn that skill' (Gilster, in Pool 1997: 8). Citing the familiar image of students using the internet to find information that they simply cut and paste into a 'cobbled-together collection of quotes or multimedia items', Gilster argues that we need to teach students 'how to assimilate the information, evaluate it, and then reintegrate it' (in Pool 1997: 9).

'Standardised operationalisations' refer to attempts to operationalize what is involved in being 'digitally literate' in terms of certain tasks, performances, demonstrations of skills, etc., and to render these as a standard set for general adoption. Some are little more than codifications of sets of specific operations at the level Gilster refers to as 'keystrokes'. Others are closer to Gilster's idea of 'concern with meanings'.

Toward the 'keystroke' end of the spectrum is the approach of the Global Digital Literacy Council (GDLC). One of the Council's core objectives is to 'review and update the Digital Literacy Standards based on input from subject matter experts worldwide' (gdlc.org). Current GDLC standards are reflected in the Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC^3) program provided by Certiport (certiport.com). This covers Computing

Fundamentals, Key Applications, and Living Online. The Computing Fundamentals test items involve tasks like asking learners to click on all the 'output devices' from a list containing items like joystick, monitor, speakers, keyboard, etc.; to choose among four items (one thousand, one million, one billion, one trillion) for the number of bytes in a megabyte; to create a new folder on the C drive within a simulated file manager; and to match 'operating system', 'application' and 'utility program' to three provided definitions. The items testing Key Applications use a range of simulations and ask learners to insert content from the clipboard at the designated insertion point, and exit Word without using the close box. Items assessing knowledge and skills related to Living Online use simulations to have respondents enter a subject in an email message and send the message, go to a specified address on a webpage, and locate the history of sites visited in a web browser.

Toward the 'concern with meaning' end of a spectrum is an operationalization developed by the US Educational Testing Service (ETS) for higher education environments. From the ETS perspective, digital literacy can be seen as 'the ability to use digital technology, communication tools and/or networks appropriately to solve information problems in order to function in an information society' (ets.org). It comprises 'the ability to use technology as a tool to research, organize, evaluate, and communicate information, and the possession of a fundamental understanding of the ethical/legal issues surrounding the access and use of information'.

The ETS operationalization comprises 12–15 real-time tasks that are 'scenario-based' (for examples of tasks, see ets.org/Media/Tests/ICT_Literacy/pdf/ict_literacy_task_matrix.pdf). Tasks include subject matter from the areas of humanities, natural sciences, social studies, and popular culture and practical affairs, and use a generic version of one or more of 12 named ICT tools (e.g., a word processor, presentation software, a web browser, an email client). Test takers perform a range of 'information management tasks', including 'extracting information from a database, developing a spreadsheet, or composing an e-mail based on research findings'. The seven competencies are: Define, Access, Manage, Integrate, Evaluate, Create and Communicate.

Finally, recently, literacy scholars and researchers have begun using the word 'new' in association with 'literacy' and 'literacies'. This has occurred in two main ways, which we call *paradigmatic* and *ontological* respectively.

The *paradigmatic* sense of 'new' occurs in talk of the 'New Literacy Studies' (Gee 1996, 2000; Street 1993). This refers to a particular sociocultural approach to understanding and researching literacy. The 'New Literacy Studies' can be seen as a new theoretical and research *paradigm* for

looking at literacy: a new alternative to the previously established paradigm that was based on psycholinguistics. The use of 'new' here parallels that which is involved in names for initiatives or movements such as the New School of Social Research, the New Science, the New Criticism (and New Critics). In all such cases, the proponents think of their project as comprising a new and different paradigm relative to an existing orthodoxy or dominant approach.

This paradigmatic sense of 'new' in relation to literacy is not concerned with new literacies as such but, rather, with a new approach to thinking about literacy as a social phenomenon. As it happens, numerous scholars who are associated with the New Literacy Studies paradigm are researching and writing about the kinds of practices we are calling new literacies. But that is simply a contingency. The 'New' of New Literacy Studies and the 'new' of new literacies in the sense we are discussing here are quite distinct ideas. By the same token, and for reasons we hope become apparent in this book, we think that new literacies in the way we understand and describe them here can really only be researched effectively from a sociocultural perspective, of which the New Literacy Studies is an example.

Our idea of the *ontological* sense of 'new' is intended to relate directly to new literacies of the kinds under discussion here. The terms 'ontological' and 'ontology' are being used in multiple ways in the context of talk about new technologies and new social practices involving new technologies, so it is necessary that we spell out what we mean by our use of 'ontological'. In simple language, we are using 'ontological' here to refer to the 'nature' or 'stuff' of new literacies. To say that 'new' literacies are ontologically new is to say that they consist of a different kind of 'stuff' from conventional literacies we have known in the past. It is the idea that changes have occurred in the character and substance of literacies that are associated with larger changes in technology, institutions, media and the economy, and with the rapid movement toward global scale in manufacture, finance, communications, and so on. As we see things, this idea can be broken down into two parts.

The first part has to do with the rise of digital-electronic technologies and, with this, the emergence of 'post-typographic' forms of texts and text production. It is the idea that 'new' literacies are different kinds of phenomena – are made of different stuff, or are significantly different in their nature – from 'conventional' print-based literacies. The argument is that contemporary changes have impacted on social practices in all the main areas of everyday life within modern societies: in work, at leisure, in the home, in education, in the community, and in the public sphere. Established social practices have been transformed, and new forms of social practice

have emerged and continue to emerge at a rapid rate. Many of these new and changing social practices involve new and changing ways of producing, distributing, exchanging and receiving texts by *electronic* means. These include the production and exchange of multimodal forms of texts that can arrive via digital code – what Richard Lanham (1994) calls 'the rich signal' – as sound, text, images, video, animations, and any combination of these.

In the ontological sense of 'new', the category of 'new literacies' refers to practices that are mediated by 'post-typographic' forms of texts. 'Ontologically new' literacies involve things like using and constructing hyperlinks between documents and/or images, sounds, movies, etc.; text messaging on a mobile phone; using digital semiotic languages (such as those used by the characters in the online episodic game *Banja*, or emoticons used in email, online chat space or in instant messaging); manipulating a mouse to move around within a text; reading file extensions and identifying what software will 'read' each file; navigating three-dimensional worlds online; uploading images from a camera or digital phone to a computer or to the Internet; inserting text into a digital image or animation, attaching sound to an image, or inserting sound into an image; building multimedia role play universes online; choosing, building or customizing a weblog template.

The second part of the idea of new literacies as ontologically new is a little more complex, and will be discussed at length in Chapter 2. Let's think of the points made in the previous paragraph as having mainly to do with ontologically new literacies involving a different kind of '*technical* stuff' from conventional literacies: for example, screens and pixels rather than paper and type, digital code rather than material print (whether printed by hand, typewriter or press), seamlessly multimodal rather than distinct process for distinct modes (text, image, sound), etc. What we want to say here is that in addition to being made of different 'technical' stuff from conventional literacies, new literacies are also made of what we might call different '*ethos* stuff' from what we typically associate with conventional literacies. For example, they are often more 'participatory', more 'collaborative', and more 'distributed', as well as less 'published', less 'individuated' and less 'author-centric' than conventional literacies. When we spell this out in the following chapter we will be saying that the 'stuff' of what we think of as new literacies reflects a different *mindset* from the stuff of which conventional literacies are largely composed. They involve different kinds of social and cultural *relations*, they flow out of different kinds of priorities and values, and so on. At least, they do so up to an extent that makes it plausible to distinguish between conventional and new literacies in a broad way. The different 'ethos' of new literacies seems to us to be linked to the different 'technical' character of new literacies in complex ways, but

it is useful to separate these aspects out as two dimensions of what we see as *ontologically* new about new literacies.

The following chapters focus overwhelmingly on literacies that are associated with the massive growth of electronic information and communications technologies and their increasing role and place within our everyday lives. To a large extent it is literacies in this post-typographic sense that schools have identified as their main challenge as far as incorporating 'new literacies' into their programmes and as media for learning are concerned.

At the same time, as our earlier reference to the 'multiliteracies' project suggests, the relationship between 'new literacies' and new digital electronic technologies does not seem to us to be a one-to-one relationship. In other words, we want to argue here for the view that it is possible to think of some literacies being 'new' *without them necessarily involving the use of new digital electronic technologies*. The 'multiliteracies' project reminds us that there are any number of recently-emerged literacy practices associated with contemporary changes in our institutions and economy that do not necessarily involve using new technologies, or at the very least where we can say that using new technologies in these literacies is optional or, at any rate, not an especially important aspect of them. This is especially true of some important work-related literacies. It is also true of the massive uptake in many Western countries of print format manga comics, of the popular use of scenario building activities by businesses, political organizations, governments, non-government organizations, and educational institutions, and of the still large-scale involvement of mainly young people in a range of highly sophisticated card games like *Pokémon, DragonBall Z* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!*.

In arguing for this position we do not in any way underestimate the huge significance of post-typographic, electronically-mediated literacies within everyday life, and their leading place within any useful conception of 'new literacies'. By the same token, we think it would unjustifiably marginalize the status of many 'new' literacy practices as social phenomena were the link between 'new' literacies and digital electronic technologies to be made necessary by fiat. Consequently, we want to leave some space for a *chronological* dimension in our account of new literacies, such that it is possible for some literacies to qualify as 'new' even if they are not ontologically new with respect to their 'technical stuff'. Examples of new literacies of this kind include scenario building, paper zines, and print-based fan fiction and manga.

The significance of this third idea of the new was underscored, by utter coincidence, within an hour of the two previous paragraphs being composed, when *Yahoo News* ran an online version of a story from *USA Today*

(see Memmott, 29 December 2005: n.p.). The story reports that beginning 8 January 2006 the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Seattle Intelligencer* would be running a manga strip called *Peach Fuzz*. According to the report, other US newspapers were expected to start running manga strips during 2006. Personnel from both newspapers referred to the wish to attract new readers, and 'especially younger ones who might otherwise turn to online news and entertainment' as a key reason for the decision to run the manga strips. The report also cited manga as currently being among 'the fastest growing genres in US publishing' (Memmott, 29 December 2005: n.p.).

There is one final important point to be made here, which we think is interesting and which we will develop further in Chapter 3. When we look at literacies that are chronologically recent, that we want to call 'new' literacies but that are not made of new 'technical stuff', what we find is that they *are* made of new 'ethos stuff'. So, if we take examples like scenario building and paper-based fanfiction and printed zines, we find that they reflect key features of the mindset we associate with new literacies. They emphasize relations of collaboration, participation, dispersion, distributed expertise. In other words, even though such new literacies are not new in the 'technical stuff' aspect of their ontology, they *are* ontologically new in terms of their 'ethos stuff'. This will allow us in Chapter 3 to distinguish between paradigm cases of new literacies – ones that are new in *all* their ontology – and peripheral cases of new literacies.

In Chapter 2 we continue our discussion of what counts as 'new' in terms of literacies by addressing the theme of mindsets that relates to what we have called the 'ethos stuff' of new literacies.

Reflection and discussion

Using the discussion in this chapter as a basis for deciding, which of the following would not be considered 'new' literacies, and why?

- Reading any or all of Shakespeare's plays online.
- Contributing to a wiki, such as Wikipedia.org.
- Accessing a portable document file (pdf) of a student assignment archived online.
- Watching digitized versions of old television shows online (e.g., use video.google.com to search for shows like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* or *Lost in Space*).

- Playing a massively multi-player online game, like Kingdomof loathing.com.
- Using an educational CD-ROM package like the *Reader Rabbit* series to practise reading and spelling skills.
- Creating fan-based animations that remix clips from a range of animation shows and movies.
- Blogging (see Technorati.com).
- Scanning a handwritten and self-illustrated story and posting it online.
- Using image manipulation software like *Photoshop* to alter, enhance, or spoof an image as part of contributing to a set of images similarly altered around a given theme or message.

Repeat this activity after you have read Chapters 2 and 3 and compare your responses and reasons with those provided here.