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SAGE BENCHMARKS IN LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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VOLUME I

Great Divides and Situated Literacies

Edited by

Mastin Prinsloo and Mike Baynham



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Editors' Introduction: Literacy Studies

Mastin Prinsloo and Mike Baynham

The last few decades have seen growth in the quantities and uses for reading and writing of many kinds that are being carried out by people on-line, on computers and mobile phones, on paper, at home, at work and at leisure, and that are changing rapidly in their uses and purposes. While some scholars, teachers and parents might be concerned that some activities on electronic devices are not practices that they necessarily approve of (scholars such as Snyder (1997) have written of utopian and dystopian takes on digital literacies), few would say today that reading and writing are not important and don't affect us all. But the *what* and *how* of literacy continue to challenge and absorb researchers, theorists and educators. The five volumes in this collection trace a detailed path through the now extensive Literacy Studies literature, as captured in the selection of research articles that include some of the most influential research on literacy over five decades. In this introduction, we trace the fault lines of the key arguments that have produced and shaped Literacy Studies over these years, leading in to the selection of articles, which exemplify these debates and have relevance to our concerns today.

One thing worth noticing early on is that the early formative research and arguments about literacy take place mostly outside but also including research in schools. The attention to reading and writing outside of schooling arose in part because of the concern that schooling debates on literacy were typically focused on concerns with teaching and on literacy as a limited set of skills and knowledge and narrow in their focus. Earlier educational studies and educational psychologists, in particular, tended to work with notions that reading and writing are abilities and skills that exist independently of any context and that individuals acquire literacy as something internal to them, a set of cognitive tools. In contrast to this view Literacy Studies from the 1980s takes a 'social turn', taking the study of literacy out of the mind

as a matter for psychology alone, and out of schooling as simply a matter of instruction. Literacy Studies researchers often start beyond pedagogy and step outside the classroom to study literacy as a social phenomenon as well as a psychological phenomenon that is socially distributed, but they also return to study literacy in school, in adult education and in out-of-school education, contributing to debates around learning and teaching of children, youths and adults. They turn, as well, to a variety of institutional as well as informal contexts, in different parts of the world and amongst different sorts of people, to examine what counts as reading and writing in those settings and what can be learnt more generally about literacy from research in these distinctive places.

Divides and Practices

We start this introduction to the collection by looking at the influential turns in less recent and more recent research and debates as to what literacy is and what its consequences are in social development and in persisting social inequalities. We describe claims that there is a great divide, socially and cognitively between literates and illiterates, people on opposite sides of the literacy line, however, it is drawn, and how reaction to claims about literacy/illiteracy lead in to an argument that literacy is a social practice and that literacy practices vary: that what is meant by the terms literacy, reading and writing differs across various kinds of social groupings and networks; that these differences are not just cross-cultural, but also across different contexts in the same society, such as the home and the workplace; and even within the same activity.

'Great Divide' Views of Literacy

Literacy Studies grew into a field of research in the early second half of the 20th century out of conflicting views on what literacy is, including claims and counter-claims about the role and importance of reading and writing in social development, industrialisation and the rise of the West. These debates started at a time when Western industrialisation appeared to some scholars to be an unqualified success and a model for everybody else, as seen in modernisation studies of the time. One of the most important theoretical questions related to literacy was whether there exists a *literacy divide*. Literacy is closely correlated in quantitative research with income, wealth and health at both an individual and a societal level – that is, richer and healthier regions of the world, nation states and individuals are often seen to have higher levels of literacy (e.g. in UNESCO reports on literacy rates) than less prosperous or healthy regions and individuals. From this correlation, it was concluded (and sometimes still is concluded) that literacy itself is the technology that

makes the difference. The source for such views on literacy can be traced to 'great divide' theories of societies, including, in anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1962) *The Savage Mind*; in historical studies, Eric Havelock's (1963) *Preface to Plato*; in anthropology, Jack Goody's (1969) *Literacy in Traditional Societies*; in cultural studies, Walter Ong's (1982) *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*; as well as in psychology and economics research. According to Havelock, the Greeks of around 650 to 550 BC took the writing systems that had been under development from around 3,000 BC on the part of the Egyptians, Phoenicians and Sumerians and transformed them into the alphabetical system of writing, adding letters for vowels to the consonant and syllable signs of earlier script forms, allowing written symbols to at last closely represent the meaningful sounds (phonemes) of the (Greek) language. This move, he claimed, at last allowed language to be written down clearly and unambiguously. In addition, he claimed, the alphabet is easy to learn and doesn't require specialist skills or materials for writing. Scholars such as Goody in anthropology and Olson in psychology drew on and elaborated on these claims that this development of alphabetic literacy transformed what literacy was and what effects it had. They claimed that this literacy 'breakthrough', by changing what language was and what it could do, was the event and the technology that made possible philosophy, historical study and scientific thought. While speech is transient and evanescent – no sooner is something said than its sounds fade away – alphabetic writing, they claimed, provided a clear record that can be thought about and returned to, without it having changed in the interim. In this view, the resource to write down speech exactly and without ambiguity produced a literate tradition and a developmental transition. Analytical and logical procedures and resources such as syllogistic reasoning and identifying contradictions were in this view a function of writing, since writing permits expression of ideas to be ordered, manipulated and compared. From a psychological perspective, Olson (1977) similarly argued that alphabetical literacy changes language from 'utterance' to 'text', where the uncertainties of speech are supplanted by the precision of writing, with language increasingly able to stand as an unambiguous or autonomous representation of meaning. This intellectual revolution was seen to happen at both an individual and a societal level, changing how societies organised themselves and producing a decisive and universal divide between oral and literate societies. Such a division paralleled earlier but fading and discredited divisions that had been made between 'modern' and 'primitive' societies, again placing western societies on the side of progress and other societies in the camp of backwardness and restriction. In summary, various 'great divide' arguments have included the claim that the advent of literacy marks the move from prehistory to history; from primitive or traditional societies to civilised or modern societies; from pre-logical thinking to logical and analytical thinking; from aggregative, redundant and 'copious' spoken

forms to abstract, concise and decontextualised uses of language (see Gee, 1996 and Reder and Davila, 2005 for a listing, elaboration and discussion of these claims).

Collapsing the Great Divide

By the early 1980s, these Great Divide theories were under attack for being simplistic and biased, for exaggerating differences and creating false dichotomies between literacy and orality, between uses of language, types of societies and modes of thought. Poststructuralists such as Derrida, Barthes and Foucault provided powerful critiques of the structuralist positions underlying the work of Levi-Strauss, Havelock, Ong, Olson, Goody and other 'great divide' scholars. In particular, they were criticised for their portrayals of literacy's consequences as typically the same across different settings and circumstances. Their bias towards explaining that literacy was a core element in the development of the industrialised West turned out to be hard to prove and was then shown to be wrong. Literacy historian Harvey Graff's (1979, 1987) research showed, for example, that literacy's effects on societal development and individual prosperity were limited and contradictory. He pointed out that industrialisation started in the United Kingdom before, not after, the arrival of mass schooling and higher literacy rates. Indeed, industrialisation often reduced opportunities for literacy and school-learning initially, as factories absorbed large numbers of people as workers. The spread of 'mass literacy' once believed to drive economic development turned out to be as much a result as the cause of economic growth in particular cases.

Graff found that prosperity in 18th and 19th century Canadian towns was more strongly linked to class background, ethnicity and religion than to measures of individual literacy or schooling attainment. Elsewhere, in 17th century Sweden through the joint efforts of the church and the state, literacy learning was near universal and required by law but there was little expansion or development of formal schooling and literacy did not fuel economic or cultural activity, not even a proliferation of writing, because of the emphasis on religious reading as the core purpose for mass literacy instruction. Historical studies of literacy in medieval England (Clanchy, 1979; Howe, 1992) as well as in 18th and 19th century England (Vincent, 1989) traced the slow and contested spread of literacy into particular social activities, such as the use of written land ownership documents, making the point that reading was usually a collective and often interactive activity with a reader and a group of listeners, not the silent, private activity we now commonly identify as reading. Many of the typographical details we take for granted today, such as blank spaces to separate words in a text, did not exist, or appeared inconsistently, making the task of reading a demanding and specialised one. Political and religious leaders had documents read to them by their clerics, who also did

their writing for them. A further telling criticism of the literacy thesis of 'great divide' theorists is that they failed to take account of the full diversity of the world's literate cultures, focusing instead on a Western-centric approach (Street, 1984; Cook-Gumperz, 2006).

Literacy Effects and Schooling Effects

'Great divide' studies were criticised for not distinguishing between literacy and learning of particular kinds, simply correlating 'learnedness' with literacy. In particular, they had trouble distinguishing the effects of literacy from the effects of schooling, because people who were considered to be literate, successful and intelligent were almost always people who had been to school. Thus, when they made claims for literacy's effects, researchers were not able to exclude school influences, independent of literacy, on people's skills and attainments. Nor could they exclude other factors such as social class, family income levels or the kind of work people engaged in, as these factors closely correlated with levels of schooling. The question was whether literacy enables development, progress and prosperity or whether literacy learning, measured by proxy as 'years spent in school' was an outcome of increased economic growth and personal income levels, rather than a cause of these things.

Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole's (1978, 1981) research in Liberia made a telling and influential contribution to this debate because they were able to distinguish between school effects and literacy effects, as regards their consequences for aspects of cognition, reasoning and memory. Their research team studied in detail the cognitive consequences of literacy in a setting (Liberia in Africa) where three different scripts and literacy traditions were present, including school literacy in English, a religious literacy in Arabic script and, thirdly, an indigenous script used by individuals for letter writing and record keeping in the local language. They found that cognitive skills associated with literacy varied dramatically depending on whether people's literacy experiences were school, religious or community activities. They challenged 'great divide' claims that literacy acquisition produced certain cognitive changes, regardless of the context of learning. They made the important argument that literacy is not a general technology that is the same thing with the same consequences regardless of what the contexts of its acquisition might be. Instead, they claimed that literacy was always constituted within socially organised practices. The nature of these practices, including the scripts, languages and media used, would determine the balance of skills learnt and the ensuing consequences that could be associated with literacy.

Around the same time as Scribner and Cole's work, Shirley Heath (1982, 1983) carried out ethnographic research into the literacy, language and learning in south-eastern communities in the USA, informed by a socio-linguistic orientation to language, and by Dell Hymes' approach to researching

language and communication through the ethnographic study of specific speech communities. Heath contrasted the language and literacy socialisation in local community settings of children from three different groups in the same town: two communities of mill workers as well as middle-class children in the same town. She found that what counted in effective communication was not a generalised competence (e.g. being able to 'speak English' or 'code and decode letters') but a situated, communicative competence embedded in acquired, 'deep' cultural knowledge and learnt models of using situated language in specific ways, drawing on varying histories and different rules for socially interacting, sharing knowledge and opinions and for reading and writing. Heath's work made the case that there are multiple ways of taking and making meaning in reading and writing practices, and the selection of one of those ways as the standard, or as normative in school and in formal institutions, meant that, for people whose ways were different to the norm, there was an ongoing struggle to accommodate to those of the standard. She criticised the 'great divide' distinction between literacy and orality because it placed undue importance on the medium of communication at the expense of its social purpose.

In his widely read study *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984) Brian Street engaged in detail with 'great divide' theories of literacy, starting from his own research on literacy in an Iranian village. Street argued that many of the characteristics which Goody and other 'great divide' scholars attributed to 'literate societies' alone were either part of the intellectual framework of any society or were the outcomes of complex social processes rather than simply the effects of literacy in itself. He questioned the validity of the claim that Greece was the transitional 'literate society', as claimed, pointing out that literacy was not developed in Greece, that it was not so transparent and democratised a practice as was claimed, and that the Greek histories and philosophies were as ideological and driven by sectional political interest as non-written communications.

Street drew an influential distinction between what he called the autonomous model of literacy, associated with 'great divide' theories and an ideological model of literacy. He argued that the ostensibly 'politically neutral' autonomous model of literacy relied upon a rhetoric of individual and social developmentalism that celebrated certain, mainstream western literacy practices as universally normative. Street's ideological model joined a social analysis of power relations as well as language and literacy ideologies to an orientation to the cultural production of meaning and values in particular settings. The consequences that ensue from literacy from this perspective are therefore neither 'neutral' nor effects of literacy on its own but are variable, depending on the nature of the myriad literacy activities that play out in social life and that are integral components of larger social practices. The 'literacy bits' cannot be studied as if they have effects of their own, separate from the larger social 'goings-on' in which they are embedded. He again argued that

there were no empirical grounds for assuming an automatic, causal or universal relationship between literacy and social development of various kinds, rather that different histories of exposure to certain ways of communicating, valuing, reading and writing yielded different forms of reading and writing as practice. Such conceptions and practices of reading and writing evolve and are enacted in contexts involving particular relations and structures of power, values and beliefs. Street's ideological model of literacy thus sees 'literacy' as a shorthand term for literacy practices which are rooted in social, cultural and political contexts and which can be studied ethnographically.

The views of these early shaping studies, in the criticisms of great divide theories and in their development of an alternative focus on literacy as variable social practice, was supported by detailed research studies that accompanied them and followed them, from around the world, in the USA, UK, South America, Australia, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, a South Pacific atoll and elsewhere. As one influential example, Ron and Suzanne Scollon's research amongst the Athabaskan people of Canada and Alaska made a further strong argument in support of the Literacy Studies approach associated with Street and colleagues that schooling as a special practice is not a neutral site. In order to take on the 'essayist literacy' of Western schooling, Athabascans are faced with challenges to their sense of identity and being, for example, requiring them to take on different ways to those they had grown up with of relating to intimates, on the one hand, and to non-intimates, on the other. In contributing to this debate James Gee, in *Social Linguistics and Literacies* (1996, 2nd edition) drew an influential distinction between the 'primary Discourse' and 'secondary Discourses', to distinguish between the ways of being, knowing, valuing, acting, speaking and attitudes to writing that children inherited in their home environments and the secondary discourses of social institutions, such as schools. These secondary Discourses might be in accord or at variance with different groups of children's primary Discourses. Learning to read and write as part of secondary Discourses required new forms of socialisation for socially marginal children to those they brought with them to school.

Following on these foundational studies, work from around the 1990s and from around the world constituted what has been described as a 'second generation' of Literacy Studies (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009), mostly focusing through empirical studies on a careful consideration of concrete, local uses of literacy.

Second-Generation Studies

One influential direction of this second generation of studies was that of ethnographic research in non-Western settings, in direct debate with 'great divide' claims about the consequences of literacy upon non-Western people. In two important studies, Nico Besnier on a south-Pacific atoll and Don Kulick and

Chris Stroud's study in Papua-New Guinea village, showed situated groups of people 'taking hold' of literacy in ways that made sense to them and did not involve an absorption of 'western ways' by some kind of undiluted osmosis. Besnier, for example, described how letter writing amongst the south-Pacific islanders was used to communicate intense feeling and emotion, whereas such displays were not appropriate in face-to-face spoken communication; Kulick and Stroud describe how engagements with literacy in the Papua New Guinea village that they studied were shaped by the high value given to 'indirectness' in communication over explicitness, with various kinds of novel uses for literacy because of these societal values.

In the United Kingdom, David Barton and Mary Hamilton's landmark ethnographic research (in particular, *Local Literacies*, 1998) drew a distinction between dominant (institutionalised) and vernacular (self-generated, everyday) literacies. Vernacular knowledge was seen to be local, procedural and minutely detailed. Literacy was not an explicit focus of everyday activities, but literacy elements were an implicit part of most activities and were used to get things done, including learning a martial art, paying the bills, organising a musical event or finding out about local news. When questioned about them, people did not always regard their vernacular literacies as real reading or real writing as they were embedded in other activities, like shopping, writing to a relative, paying an invoice or applying for something or other, and did not carry the same status as more conventionally recognised literacy activities such as the reading of literature or 'school literacy'. Indeed, some vernacular literacies were deliberately hidden, because they were private or oppositional, including secret notes and letters of love, comics and fanzines. Noting that various texts, including notes, newspapers, books, schedules, documents, diagrams, images and standardised forms, permeate daily activities, Barton, Hamilton and colleagues argued that large parts of social interactions are literacy practices, influenced by literacy texts and practices. The researchers concluded that much talk in everyday life that they studied was in fact talk about texts or shaped by documents or textual practices. They pointed to the extent to which texts change social interaction in ways that had not formerly been widely noticed, in sociolinguistics or in sociological research but that writing and writing artefacts were very much part of the 'glue' of social life. The way into understanding these practices, as they saw it, was through the study of particular events, as part of situated practices.

The Social Life of Writing: Events and Practices

The key terms for doing Literacy Studies research since the shaping influences of Street, Heath and Scribner and Cole have been *literacy events* and *literacy practices*, these terms appearing repeatedly in the literature as key conceptual and methodological concepts for Literacy Studies research. Heath, drawing

on an earlier definition by Anderson, Teale and Estrada (1980) described literacy events as ‘the occasions in which written language was “integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies”’ (Heath, 1982: 50). Literacy events are often characterised by blends of text, talk, distribution of action and turn-taking in communication and interaction but also include moments of solitary reading and writing. For example, this research has emphasised the socially distributed nature of literacy activity, including the accomplishment of literacy purposes in a mediated way, through enlisting the assistance of a literacy mediator, broker or sponsor (Maddox and Esposito, 2012; Brandt, 1998. Both reprinted here in Volume 2). The importance of the concept of literacy events is that it encourages the empirical study of reading and writing as they are used, responded to and valued at particular moments of identifiable social activity, drawing attention to the social and variable nature of particular acts or uses of reading and writing. The view of literacy that is invoked is not as a single entity but a complex of communicative practices and historically influenced attitudes to these practices (Cook-Gumperz, 2006: 17). In Heath’s study such observed differences in literacy events across local communities related to ‘space and time orderings, problem-solving techniques, group loyalties, and preferred patterns of recreation’ (Heath, 1983: 344). Street (1994, 2006) suggested that while the focus on literacy events provided the unit of analysis for ethnographic studies of literacy in multiple settings, the concept of literacy practices was also required, enabling the description and analysis of such events at ‘a higher level of abstraction’: ‘we bring to a literacy event concepts, social models regarding what the nature of the event is and that make it work and give it meaning’ (Street, 2006: 5).

Practices have broadly been understood in Literacy Studies research along the lines of regular and sustained socio-cultural activities, involving elements of knowledge, identity and being, that vary across social settings, resulting in different kinds of engagements with writing and artefacts of literacy.

Barton and Hamilton’s (1998) work in Lancaster focused in ethnographic detail on practices as primarily ‘everyday practices’, which starts out from what people do in their lives.

Literacy practices are the general cultural ways which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense, literacy practices are what people do with literacy. [. . .] Literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relationships between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals (Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 6–7).

Social practices, in this sense, are understood as those habits and dispositions which are acquired and not explicitly learnt or taught and which characterise our everyday interactions with things and people. The microskills of writing or conversational competence are often referred to as examples of

how much 'background knowledge' of particular and socially variable kinds makes up practices, including the 'feel for' occasion, style, register, tone, strategies of turn-taking, affirming, politeness and silence that are involved in 'bringing off' a conversation or exchange in speech or writing. These ideas on literacy practices relate to wider 'practices theory' in philosophy, sociology and anthropology (variously associated in its foundations with Wittgenstein, Bourdieu, Foucault and others). Practices refer to such pivotal but taken-as-given and implicit resources of background knowhow and commitments. They are not based on or explicitly communicated as beliefs or rules, and they are passed on through interaction and activity. Practices are thus historical, situated and include elements that are profound and trivial, stated and implicit. In this view, it is within practices that knowledge is constituted and social life is produced, maintained and changed. However, while 'practices', viewed as habits, dispositions, routines, customs and traditions provide an account for how the social order is constrained, reproduced and modified, 'practices' approaches sometimes have trouble accounting for the more fluid dynamics demanded in contemporary settings where actors are encouraged to shift from one pragmatic orientation to another, depending on arrangements specific to the situation. In Literacy Studies, the study of social practices has often worked with smaller groups of people and it has not always been clear how their literacy goings-on relate to wider social dimensions outside the current context or situation. The challenge of making sense of ranges and levels of authority and performances that refer to both local and wider dynamics, of a regional, national and global dimension are sometimes not easily available to researchers who study literacy events and analyse these with reference to local practices.

Tusting, Ivanic and Wilson (2000: 213) described how practice is used in at least two distinct ways in Literacy Studies – firstly, to refer to 'observable, collectable and/or documentable specific ethnographic detail of situated literacy events, involving real people, relationships, purposes, actions, places, times, circumstances, feelings, tools, resources'. In this first, and common usage, practices serve the function of contrasting with and complementing 'texts' to give weight to all the other aspects of literacy activities that are not simply about texts. The second use, refers to 'culturally recognisable patterns of behaviour', for example, 'textual practices' as 'culturally recognisable patterns for constructing texts', and similarly with related terms such as institutional literacy practices, disciplinary practices, discursive practices and so on. The first could be seen as referring to microsocial behaviours and the second to macrosocial structures, but the link between them is not clear.

Recent reviews and critiques are reaching towards new theoretical ground to address emerging concerns about the adequacy of current literacy theories framed in terms of locally situated events and social practices (Brandt and Clinton, 2002; Collins and Blot, 2003; Reder and Davila, 2005; Street, 2006; Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009; Wortham, 2012).

Brandt and Clinton (2002: 338), for example, raised concerns over the validity of the theoretical divide between global and local contexts, a characteristic of first- and second-generation literacy studies. They suggested that such studies veered

too far in a reactive direction, exaggerating the power of local contexts to set or reveal the forms and meanings that literacy take. [] Literacy in use more often than not serves multiple interests, incorporating individual agents and their locales into larger enterprises that play out away from the immediate scene.

Looking at literacies from a translocal rather than local perspective raises questions of the processes by which texts are produced and consumed across contexts and localities. They contend that by privileging the local context as the *only* relevant context, literacy studies create a new 'great divide', between local and global contexts that is not only unnecessary, but also hinders our understanding of the forces at play in everyday literacy events.

Collins and Blot (2003) note the need for an approach that addresses the reality of literacy as a locally produced social practice while at the same time accounting for the strong and particular place that literacy inhabits in contemporary Western society and thought. Such an analysis is needed to shed light on how literacy, inequality and educational access continue to have effect in the contemporary world. What Collins and Blot find missing in ethnographic accounts of literacy is an 'account of why literacy matters in the way that it does in the modern West.' (2003: 65).

Third-Generation Literacy Studies

More recent Literacy Studies research demonstrates a significant diversification of the range of topics and issues addressed. For example, there has been added attention to the media and modes of literacy, media referring to the materiality or 'stuff' of literacy engagements, the artefacts and paraphernalia such as books, notices, walls, mobile phones, blackboards and 'smartboards'; modes referring to the various means of presentation, which besides writing, include speech, image, gesture, sound, posture, combinations of these and, also, silence. Such research attention is very timely with the proliferation of multimedia writing that has accompanied the dramatic explosion of digital, electronic communication by way of computers, phones, tablets and other devices linked to the Internet and using email, websites, Skype, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other communication and writing resources. As is well known, the technological developments associated with electronic media include the linking up of huge numbers of electronic devices across continents, allowing their users to communicate without substantial time-lags, or in 'real time'. This dramatic increase in global interactivity has also led to an increase

in the study of translocal and transcontextual literacy activities and practices. It is apparent that literacy is not just placed, the way, for example, that Barton et al write of 'situated literacies' but is also mobile, moving electronically as well as along with people, across borders and locales. The ways that children and youths are encountering digital writing, design and meaning-making in non-school contexts, as well as what this means for classroom engagements, is another major theme in recent Literacy Studies research.

Attention to social diversity is also an increasing research focus, reflecting the dramatic increase in global interactivity in recent decades and changing the idea of local communities as homogeneous sites for language, literacy and discourse. Migrants and mobile persons are a striking feature of the globalised world and raise particular questions for static constructions of literacy, language and education. While school-based standardised testing often labels youths from minority backgrounds as failing or at risk, Literacy Studies researchers examine the multilingual resources and transnational or cross-border practices that such youths as well as adults engage in, involving both print and digital literacies. While classrooms have mostly stuck to maintaining clear borders between the languages and learnings of school and the out-of-school languages and literacy practices of bilingual youths, researchers such as Ofelia Garcia and Suresh Canagarajah have called for 'translanguaging' and situated literacies in the classroom, based on the argument that all literacy pedagogical approaches should be contextualised and start with the language and literacy resources that children bring to school.

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Introduction: Great Divides and Situated Literacies

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Volume 1 presents a selection of the most important articles in the later decades of the 20th century that constructed the field of Literacy Studies through the debate about what the consequences of literacy are. As we described it in the Introduction to this five-volume collection, this debate was about how literacy is to be understood – as a single thing, a technology which has the same kinds of effects on individuals and societies, or as something more complex and varied; as a breakthrough cognitive resource, which changed the nature of language and was the catalyst for the flowering of Western philosophy, science and liberal democracy; or as a situated and varying social practice, sometimes part of discriminatory practices and sometimes part of resistance to these, but never as a neutral, autonomous technology that independently or autonomously has effects of a general sort.

The opening articles by David Olson and by Jack Goody and Ian Watt present classic statements of the claim that the development of alphabetical literacy by the ancient Greeks was a pivotal turning point in human development, changing nearly everything of importance, starting in the West and having the same transformative results wherever it is has been fully distributed and applied. These two articles were very influential statements of what we described as the ‘great divide’ thesis in the Introduction to this five-volume collection.

The articles that follow show leading researchers engaging critically with these arguments and developing alternative approaches to the study of literacy and its consequences, including the key contributions of Shirley Scribner and Michael Cole, Niyi Akinisso, Harvey Graff, Shirley Heath, Jenny Cook-Gumpez, Brian Street, James Gee and Ron and Suzanne Scollon. We discussed some of this work in the Introduction to this five-volume collection, and the influence of these shaping studies are seen here in the other articles appearing at this

time, including Niyi Akinassó's article. He presents a detailed and closely read summary of the debate as it was balanced at that point. Drawing on the wide interdisciplinary literature, he makes the point that the general claims made about literacy in the 'great divide' literature have to be contrasted with the literature that shows literacy varying from culture to culture and from generation to generation. However, he finds value in the distinctions drawn between oral and literate culture and in Goody's idea of 'restricted literacy' as characterising particular environments. At the same time, he draws on an alternative literature to show more complexity and variability, drawing in particular on Scriber and Cole and their uses of Vygotsky's approach to the study of cognition and learning. His conclusion is certainly interesting, claiming a more subdued version of the 'great divide' claim as to literacy's consequences. He presents a moderated version, which sees literacy not as having revolutionary and transformative effects on cognition, but rather changing the deployment of what is already present and making better use of it.

Harvey Graff presents a more critical and combative engagement with 'great divide' claims and we can see a sharpening of attitude and argument in this regard in the articles that follow in this first volume. The development of an alternative perspective quickly gains momentum with the articles by Heath, Street and Scollon and Scollon, each of them making crucial contributions and setting an interdisciplinary frame for research into literacy as historical, situated and having complicated and localised effects in particular settings.

Jenny Cook-Gumperz draws on the earlier work in Literacy Studies and sociolinguistics to produce an influential account about how to think about literacy in school. She describes how 'schooled literacy' is produced by the practices of the classroom, providing not just technical skills but also a set of prescriptions about what knowledge is and how to display its use. These classroom practices include particular kinds of interaction amongst teacher and students, and literacy is produced through group activity, informally communicated judgements, as well as standardised tests and all the other evaluative apparatuses of schooling. In seeing literacy as a sociocultural phenomenon she regards literacy and orality as co-existing, not as opposites, but as particular resources within the communicative framework of school.

James Paul Gee provides one of the early paradigm statements about what he identifies as the new field of study of literacy studies and identifies the focus of such work as not being on language or literacy, in isolation, but on *social practices*. He presents a number of influential ideas and concepts, which have proved productive. These include his attention to Discourses as particular, situated ways of thinking, feeling, valuing, acting, reading and writing. His views of literacy as constituting mastery and control of a 'secondary Discourse' draws attention to the domain-specific forms and functions that literacy takes, as well as drawing attention to the indirectly acquired practices that go along

with the more openly learnt aspects that produce fluent readers and writers in particular social-semiotic domains.

A somewhat different tradition in Literacy Studies can be traced back to Paulo Freire's well-known writings around the same time as the opening articles in this volume. Freire was concerned with the political dimensions of literacy work, arguing that literacy could be associated both with passivity and with political action that resists the effects of oppressive political power, particularly in South American and African settings. Unlike 'great divide' theorists, he did not see literacy as automatically leading to progress and enlightenment. Only when it is 'on the side of the people', as 'cultural action for freedom' does it do so. However, he also associated literacy with 'critical consciousness' and there is a question around his work as to whether his views on literacy incorporate aspects of 'great divide' thinking about literacy, in his association of literacy with raised consciousness and critical capacity. There is an interesting contrast to consider between his argument and that presented by Walter Mignola in this volume. Mignola shows a more complex response in South American settings than Freire to the introduction of alphabetical literacy and the displacement of indigenous writing practices and writing artefacts. Mignola describes processes that involved the suppression of Amerindian writing systems and artefacts in colonial times. He identifies the 'civilising' agenda of the Spanish occupiers as an oppressive strategy, along with the spread of alphabetical literacy together with books and paper as the appropriate media for writing.

Patrick Harries' article offers a view of literacy in late colonial times in south-east Africa that makes a case that is in agreement with Mignola's South American study. Harries sees that European missionaries and colonial officials took with them their own historically shaped constructs of language, literacy and culture and asserted these as if they were directly applicable in African contexts. Their assumptions that literacy instruction would produce Africans who thought like Europeans were confounded, however, by the complex and varied responses and uses to which literacy was put in these settings. Nico Besnier from a south-pacific atoll and Kulick and Stroud, from Papua New Guinea provide an elaboration and thickening of these arguments about how literacy is taken hold of in distinctive ways in non-Western settings, in contrast to the original claims and expectations of the 'great divide' theorists of literacy.

