Introduction

Reconceptualizing Literacy and Literacy Teaching

Over the years our definitions of literacy have changed. Although historical accounts and outlines chronicling these changes have appeared in print (Myers, 1996; Smith & Lambert Stock, 2003; Rosenblatt, 2003; Squire, 2003), there is no end to the process of change and so we continue to learn and add to this history. As we understand more about language and literacy, our conception of literacy changes and with it, ideally, our instructional practices. For example, we used to think about literacy as a commodity: a set of useful skills that you either had or didn’t have and for which different teaching pedagogies and materials were developed, bought, and sold. During the mid-1990s, for instance, “The differences among factions in the reading field resulted in fragmentation, disarray and division” (Dole & Osborn, 2003). The field was polarized along a number of dimensions; for example, phonics versus whole language, explicit versus implicit instruction, skills versus strategies, textbooks versus trade books, predictable versus decodable books, and reading groups versus literature circles (Graves, 1998).

More recently we have begun to think of literacy as sets of social practices. Social practices are particular ways of doing and being as well as particular ways of acting and talking that are rooted in life experiences. Since different people have different life experiences it follows that social practices are differentially available to various individuals and groups of people. This differential availability means that not everyone has equitable or equal access to literacy. Conceptualizing literacy as social practices further implies that different cultures value and have access to different literacies or malleable sets of cultural practices, that is, a community’s ways of being and doing. Luke and Freebody (1999) note that often these practices are shaped and reshaped by competing and contending social institutions such as school, church, and government. This is why for years teaching and learning literacy has been a topic of debate. These debates have resulted in such actions as the contestation of curricula by educators as well as the manufacture of literacy crises by governments.

Recently another “reshaping” of literacy instruction has hit the airwaves in what media and the current government refer to as “scientifically based balanced literacy” programs. The result can be seen in “district after district where the call for balance is too often read as a mandate to drop whatever you have been doing and add a half hour of systematic phonics to the already packed reading and
writing program” (Egawa & Harste, 2001). According to Luke and Freebody, determining how to teach literacy cannot be simply “scientific,” but rather has to involve moral, political, and cultural decisions about the kind of literate practices needed to enhance both peoples’ agency over their own life trajectories or pathways and communities’ intellectual, cultural, and semiotic or meaning-making resources in multimediated economies. Multimediated refers to the multiple modes of economic exchange now available around the globe, including the vast use of technology and media. This means that literacy instruction should ultimately be about the kind of literate citizenry and the kind of literate being that can and should be constructed to participate in our complex world.

For different teachers this means being able to set up different classroom environments that support a variety of literate practices. This point is exactly what the sections in this volume are about. They are demonstrations of ways in which some classroom teachers and educators have “practiced” and imagined teaching literacy. These recollections from the classroom were gathered from the corpus of Primary Voices journal articles published from 1993 to 2002.

It is important to note, however, that our ongoing reconceptualization of what makes up literacy and literacy teaching pushes us to realize that the practices we see reported here represent only the beginning of what is possible. As such we have included throughout the book discussions of what the future might look like: that is, how particular sets of social practices, such as practices that support access or practices that support meaning making, might mature and evolve.

Rather than walk away from what we have learned through years of literacy research because of various institutional mandates, it is important that we use what we have learned to evaluate and assess our current teaching practices in spite of these mandates. This evaluation calls for revisiting our teaching practices to consider how literacy has been constructed in different settings. We need to ask questions like, Who has access to our curriculum? In other words,

Does the curriculum support diverse learners?
Does the curriculum make use of learners’ past experiences and their ways of talking about the world?
Does the curriculum make use of learners’ past experiences and their ways of acting in and on the world?
Does the curriculum take into consideration topics and issues about which children are passionate?
We also need to find out what repertoires of literacy skills are made available to students through the work we do in our classrooms. We need to ask questions like,

Are my literacy lessons focused primarily on phonics or spelling tests?
Do my kids copy existing texts or do they imagine their own storylines?
Do my kids read and write for real purposes?
Do my kids have opportunities to create texts that have real-life functions and purposes and that make a difference in the real world?
Do my kids engage in literacy work that repositions them in the world and in so doing lets them create alternate life trajectories for themselves?
Do I take into consideration my students’ understanding of technology and multiple media?
Do I create spaces in my classroom for the everyday literacies and texts that my students bring to the classroom?

Further, we need to consider in what ways the curriculum advantages some students over other students. More specifically, we need to ask questions like,

Do all my students have access to the resources needed to participate in the work we do in class?
Are all my students able to participate equally?
Do I take stock of the linguistic and cultural differences my students bring with them to the classroom?
What literacies do I value?
What literacies do I ignore or marginalize?

Asking these kinds of questions could be a way for teachers to be strategic in their teaching and consider what difference the practices they adopt in their classrooms has on students’ acquisition of particular kinds of literacy. “If curriculum is a metaphor for the lives we want to live and the people we want to be, then we and our children need a framework that allows us to develop rich experiences and see the big picture when planning and living curriculum” (Egawa & Harste, 2001). A theoretical and pedagogical framework can create space for us to step back and consider the implications of the work we do from both a micro and a macro level. To this end, while considering theoretical and pedagogical frameworks for this book we decided to draw from the work of Luke and Freebody (1999), Janks (2002), and Egawa and Harste (2001).
Luke and Freebody’s (1999) four resources model was the first tool we considered using as part of our conceptual framework for this book. The four resources model offered an opportunity for us to consider our teaching as a repertoire of practices that produce particular kinds of learners. For instance, one of the repertoires of practices Luke and Freebody discuss is helping children to analyze texts critically. By engaging in textual analysis in the classroom we shape our students to become critical readers of the world. The four resources model also helped us to look closely at our teaching practices to consider both theoretical and pedagogical gaps in the work we do with students.

The second model that informed our thinking while organizing this book was Hilary Janks’s Synthesis Model for Critical Literacy (2002). Her model helped us to consider the relationship between language and power, particularly how our discursive practices (our ways of talking, doing, and being) privilege some of our students while disadvantaging others. Janks’s model also reminded us that critical analysis is not enough. We also need to contribute to the shaping and design of our own futures.

The third model that we drew from while organizing this book was Egawa and Harste’s “Halliday Plus” model for literacy learning (2001). Their model helped ground our work in the rich history of the language arts by outlining the elements they deem necessary in a good language arts program, namely: meaning making, language study, inquiry-based learning, and critical literacy.

In combination these frameworks and theoretical tools can assist teachers to “evaluate the scope and potential” (Wilson, 2002, p. 11) of their literacy program. We chose these tools in particular because they closely match our conceptualization of literacy as noted earlier in this chapter.

The “Four Resources” Model

One of the strengths of the “four resources model” is that it attempts to recognise and incorporate many of the current and well-developed techniques for training students in becoming literate. It shifts the focus from trying to find the right method to whether the range of practices emphasised in one’s reading program are indeed covering and integrating a broad repertoire of textual practices. (Luke & Freebody, 1999; authors’ emphasis)

While developing their model Luke and Freebody examined existing and proposed literacy curricula and pedagogical strategies. They state that effective literacy draws on a repertoire of practices that allow learners, as they engage in reading and writing activities, to participate in various “families of literate practices.” They use the term “practices” to denote work done by literate beings in classrooms and beyond in everyday social contexts. In the Four Re-
sources Model four dynamic and fluid families of social practices are described as necessary for literacy development.

**Practices That Support Code Breaking**

These practices refer to the skills required to break the code of language. For example, to break the code or understand the interplay between the complex bits and pieces that make up written texts requires recognizing and using the basic features and architecture of language, including the alphabet, sounds in words, spelling, and structural conventions and patterns. The more complex codes that we need to make sense of are broader cultural codes or discourses, that is, a community’s ways of doing, talking, and acting.

**Practices That Support Meaning Making**

These practices involve participating in understanding and composing meaningful written, visual, and spoken texts, taking into account an individual’s available knowledge and his or her experiences of other cultural discourses.

**Practices That Support Using Texts**

These practices involve using texts by knowing about and acting on the different cultural and social functions that various texts perform inside and outside school. Practices that support using texts also include understanding that the functions of texts shape the way they are structured, their tones, their degrees of formality, and their sequences of components.

**Practices That Create Space for Critical Analysis**

These practices involve the critical analysis and transformation of texts, based on the understanding that texts are ideologically charged and as such they represent particular points of view where some perspectives are silenced while other perspectives are privileged. These practices also operate on the belief that texts are socially constructed and therefore can be reconstructed. (From Further Notes on the Four Resources Model at www.readingonline.org/research/lukefreebody.html.)

Each family of practices is needed for literacy learning. Each of the four is inclusive, with each being integral to the achievement of the others.

**Reflection Point**

This is the first of a series of Reflection Points included throughout the book. They are meant to provide you with thoughtful questions and activities to help you make connections between ideas presented in this book and your own teaching practice.

Use the chart here, or re-create it in a journal, to jot down the different literate practices you make available in your classroom. In other words, what are the various engagements and activities that you use to support your students’ growth in literacy?
Luke and Freebody’s Four
Resources Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices that support code breaking</th>
<th>Practices that support meaning making</th>
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<tr>
<td>Practices that support using texts</td>
<td>Practices that create space for critical analysis</td>
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</table>
Reflect on the following questions after filling out the Four Resources Model chart.

Were you able to come up with teaching practices for each of the four families of practice?

Which ones did you find challenging to fill in?

Do some practices dominate the literacy work you do?

What could you do to further develop strategies for engaging with the less frequently addressed families of practice?

A Synthesis Model for Critical Literacy

Critical literacy education is based on a socio-cultural theory of language and is particularly concerned with teaching learners to understand and manage the relationship between language and power. However, different realizations of critical literacy operate with different conceptions of this relationship by foregrounding domination, access, diversity or design. (Janks, 2002)

In her synthesis model for critical literacy, Janks argues that domination, access, diversity, and design are four orientations in critical literacy education that are crucially interdependent. She developed the model after realizing that there are different versions of critical literacy unfolding in different places and that each version has the tendency to highlight or foreground one of these orientations. This tendency, she notes, is problematic, as it limits our opportunities to understand how language works in powerful ways and therefore limits our opportunities to manage the relationship between language and power. Being unable to manage this relationship could result in, for example, privileging some students over others or privileging certain kinds or forms of knowledge over others.

Domination

According to Janks, theorists working from a view of power as domination see language, other symbolic forms, and discourse, more broadly, as a powerful means of maintaining and reproducing relations of domination. What this means is that there exist dominant ways of being, saying, and doing that are represented through multimodal texts that intersect our lives on a daily basis. These texts are never neutral. They are constructed and as such can be deconstructed in order to help us to understand “how language works to position readers in the interests of power” (Janks, 1993, p. iii).

One way of doing this deconstruction is through Critical Language Awareness (CLA). Janks refers to CLA as pedagogy for engaging in critical discourse analysis (analyzing the relationship between language and power) by looking closely at and analyzing units of language (Janks, 2002, p. 4):
Critical Language Awareness emphasizes that anything that has been constructed can be de-constructed. This unmaking or unpicking of the text increases our awareness of the choices that the writer or speaker has made. Every choice foregrounds what was selected and hides, silences or backgrounds what was not selected. Awareness of this prepares the reader to ask critical questions: why did the writer or speaker make these choices? Whose interests do they serve? Who is empowered or disempowered by the language used? (Janks, 1993, p. iii)

**Access**

Access refers to making available dominant ways of doing, saying, and being while simultaneously valuing the linguistic and cultural diversity and the literacies of our students. Janks states, “If we provide students with access to dominant forms, this contributes to maintaining their dominance. If, on the other hand, we deny students access, we perpetuate their marginalization in a society that continues to recognize the value and importance of these forms” (2002, p. 5). The question then becomes how to make these dominant ways visible so that they are accessible to all students while at the same time valuing students’ home literacies.

**Diversity**

According to Janks (2002), when a diverse group of students brings to the classroom different ways of reading and writing the world in a range of sign systems (music, art, writing), they bring with them a central resource for changing consciousness (the way we think about and operate in the world).

The challenge for us is to find ways to make education more inclusive of our students’ diverse languages and literacies. Providing space in the classroom for these differences, according to Janks, “increases the creative resources that students can draw on” (p. 6).

**Design**

The design orientation deals with the notion of human creativity and the ability to generate new meanings using different semiotic systems across diverse cultural locations. In doing so the intent is to challenge and change dominant discourses or dominant ways of doing, acting, and speaking. (Janks, 2002)

For teachers this means we need to make different semiotic resources and sign systems available for our students so that they can construct meaning in transformative ways. Janks argues for the interdependence of domination, access, diversity, and design, arguing that “all of these orientations to literacy education are important and, moreover, that they are crucially interdependent. They should not be seen as separate enterprises.” She continues by saying that “any one of domination, diversity, access or design without the others, creates a problematic imbalance” (2002, p. 6).
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For more on the Synthesis Model for Critical Literacy refer to Janks (in press).

Reflection Point

Reflect on your teaching practice. Use the web in the chart on page xx to jot down how you see each of Janks’s orientations—domination, access, diversity, and design—playing out in your classroom. Then draw arrows connecting each of the orientations that you feel work co-dependently.

Which orientations work independently in your classroom?
Which orientations work co-dependently?
How might you reconsider your practice to make sure that each of these orientations works interdependently?

Halliday Plus Model

Carolyn Burke says that the function of curriculum is to “give perspective,” by which she means provide teachers and students with a bigger picture. Unfortunately, the current call for “balance” in the curriculum, regardless of its initial intent, fails to invite teachers to see the big picture. . . . Rather than walk away from what we know about language and learning, it is important that we incorporate such mandates into a bigger picture of what it means to be literate. (Egawa & Harste, 2001, p. 2)

To help us develop a bigger picture, Egawa and Harste (2001) suggest a framework for thinking about the effects our teaching practices have on our students. Their framework, which we have dubbed the “Halliday Plus” Model, consists of four components, which build on what we know from past research and experience about language learning. The Halliday Plus Model works from the belief that literacy is socially constructed. Said differently, the model builds on the idea that different teaching practices and different life experiences construct particular kinds of literate beings. As a result, different groups of people have different literacies that they use to negotiate their world. The difference between school literacy and outside-of-school literacies is simply that as educators we don’t value the latter. Egawa and Harste argue that this attitude toward out-of-school literacy has to change. Rather than privilege one kind of literacy at the expense of other forms, we need to encourage critical as well as multiple literacies. A good language arts program for the twenty-first century therefore should comprise the following components: meaning making, language study, inquiry-based learning, and critical literacy, which they define as “learning to use language to critique” (see Figure 1).

Egawa and Harste’s framework for thinking about the language arts curriculum is built upon Michael Halliday’s insights on
Synthesis Model for Critical Literacy Web

Domination

Access

Diversity

Design
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Figure 1. Harste and Egawa’s Halliday Plus Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Language or Meaning Making</th>
<th>Learning about Language or Language Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using language and other sign systems as a meaning-making process, as during regularly scheduled read-aloud, partner reading with big books, readers’ theater, or independent reading and writing engagements. Students might also keep journals, say something to a classmate about what they read, or symbolize in art what they think the story means.</td>
<td>Understanding how texts operate and how they are coded. This includes the teaching of letter-sound relationships and understanding how language works, as when introducing strategies that students might use in comprehending books, demonstrating how texts include some people while excluding others, or conducting a minilesson on how authors get texts to serve their purposes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Examples:**  
  - Read-aloud  
  - Shared reading  
  - Partner reading  
  - Readers’ theater  
  - Independent reading and writing  
  - Writer’s notebook  
  - Big books  
  - Journals  
  - Reading log | **Examples:**  
  - Strategy instruction  
  - Demonstrations  
  - Focused lessons  
  - Minilessons  
  - Class charts |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning through Language or Inquiry-Based Learning</th>
<th>Learning to Use Language to Critique or Critical Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using reading and writing as tools and toys for learning about our world, as when teachers put together text sets that allow children to explore topics of personal interest, ask them to keep reflective journals, or support them in conducting focused studies centered on their own inquiry questions.</td>
<td>Using language to question what seems normal and natural, as well as to redesign and create alternate social worlds, as when teachers create spaces in their classrooms for conversations about social issues or invite children to interrogate the Internet, media, advertisements, and other everyday texts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Examples:**  
  - Literature study  
  - Inquiry or focus studies  
  - Reflective journals  
  - Sketch to Stretch  
  - Say Something  
  - Process drama | **Examples:**  
  - Books that support critical conversations  
  - Community-action projects  
  - Interrogating everyday texts  
  - Audit Trail or Learning Wall showing important social issues addressed over time |

One of Halliday’s major insights into language learning was that children “learn language,” “learn about language,” and “learn through language” simultaneously. Every encounter with language therefore provides the learner with an opportunity to...
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learn how to use language to make sense or to mean (what we call “meaning making” and Halliday called “learning language”); learn about language as a linguistic object, e.g., that it is composed of letter-sound relationships or that word order makes a difference (what we call “language study” and what Halliday called “learning about language”); and

learn more about their world, that is, get smarter (what we refer to as “inquiry-based learning” and what Halliday called “learning through language”).

Egawa and Harste cast Halliday’s thinking as a framework for rethinking the language arts curriculum by elaborating on the kinds of curricular invitations and engagements teachers might provide their students. Their intent is to encourage teachers to consider how they might organize their language arts classroom for purposes of creating a critically literate human being for the twenty-first century.

Using a highlighter pen and the chart in Figure 1, which explains the Halliday Plus Model, highlight all of the curricular engagements you already have in place in your classroom. Select one of the things not highlighted to implement. Think through what social practices you will need to engage in and what social practices you hope to see in your students. To keep your focus on “the big picture,” think through what implementing that engagement on a regular basis would mean in terms of the kinds of literate being you are creating.

Each of the models previously described—Luke and Freebody’s Four Resources Model, Janks’s Synthesis Model for Critical Literacy, and Egawa and Harste’s Halliday Plus Model—informed our thinking about the kinds of teaching practices we ought to encourage in classrooms. While looking across the three as frameworks we came up with four sets of classroom practices that we decided to use for organizing this book. They are practices that support access, practices that support meaning making, practices that support inquiry, and practices that support transformation.

Access should be about exploring with children how language is coded well beyond the word. For most educators today “breaking the code” means teaching children about phonics or the study of graphophonemic patterns (“rhyme and theme” if you want to be really hip). For some teachers, “breaking the code” might include comprehension and more specifically strategy instruction, by which
they usually mean the systematic introduction of things proficient readers do to make sense of text. Rarely, however, does “breaking the code” go beyond strategy instruction in comprehension. The articles included in this section were chosen as examples of the kinds of work done by teachers in the area of code breaking. Further, they are included to create space for you to think about ways of reimagining what it means to break broader sociocultural codes through unpacking not only the “word” but also the “world” (Freire, 1970), that is, to consider the ways in which we make sense of the world around us where discourses (ways of doing, talking, and being) are at times conflicting and at other times complementary.

Practices That Support Meaning Making

We have learned a good deal about the role that language plays in meaning making, and in some cases even created powerful new instructional strategies based on these understandings. We have also learned that new literacies are not only print literacies. More than likely they are multimodal (taking different forms such as books and newspaper articles) and multimedial (combining different means of communication such as the Internet, DVDs, and music) literacies (Sefton-Greene, 2001). In some ways the future should be about opening up the canon in order to expand our definition of literacy and include all of the ways we have at our disposal to mean (art, music, drama, movement, language). However, new forms of literacy will need to be studied in terms of the social practices they encourage, including information and communication technologies such as cell phones, the Internet, music videos, and video billboards. In this section we included articles that create space for discussing ways that educators might experiment with alternate literacies and alternate social practices to propel new learning.

Practices That Support Inquiry

In our experience most reading and language arts programs in the United States highlight meaning making and code breaking. For most people, these two components make up a language arts program. Over the years we have continued to argue that in addition to meaning making and code breaking, children need lots of opportunities to use reading and writing to learn. Children in the twenty-first century have few guarantees. The only thing we can be sure of is that they will face problems of some magnitude, including resource shortages, pollution, homelessness, and poverty, and the list goes on. Given this likelihood, it follows that to prepare children for the twenty-first century we need to make them problem solvers. Further, since no single person is going to be able to solve problems of this magnitude, children are going to have to know how to inquire together. This, in a nutshell, is what education as inquiry is all about. The articles included in this section were included to set up a discussion on practices that support social and collaborative inquiry.
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A female colleague once said to Harste that it was not enough that he “understood” women’s liberation, he now had to “act differently,” too. Too often in schools we study subjects, ticking them off (chemistry, physics, earth science, etcetera) as if somehow we are done with them the day we walk out of class. Instead of perpetuating such social practices, it is important to aim higher. Social action ought to be one outcome of learning. The key question we need to help our children ask themselves is, How am I going to reposition myself in the world? For instance, how am I going to act differently? Or how am I going to talk differently?

Together teachers and children need to explore how making social statements and taking social action can become part of everyday life in twenty-first-century classrooms. The articles included in this section provide demonstrations of work done by classroom teachers engaged in this work.

Throughout the book you will find “reflection points” and “resource boxes.” The use of reflection points was discussed earlier in this chapter. We see reflection and action as an integral part of being a teacher, that is, using what we have learned from observing what our teaching practices have produced to consider other ways of teaching. Therefore, in each section of the book you will find reflection points to create spaces for you to interact with this text and/or to begin discussions about literacy teaching and learning with colleagues. These points for reflection will take a variety of forms, including questions to spark your thinking about a certain theme, concept, strategy, or topic. Other points for reflection include looking closely and analyzing children’s talk or artifacts of children’s learning such as writing samples. Reflection points could also take the form of suggesting strategies to try in the classroom followed by writing a journal entry. You will also find various resource boxes throughout the book. These boxes are meant to provide you with additional resources for exploring particular topics, ideas, or constructs.

The final part of the book is a forward-looking section that sets up a conversation regarding possible educational futures as seen from the perspective of literacy as social practice.

As a way of beginning to read this book we invite you to use the social practices chart to list the social practices you already have going on in your classroom that support access, meaning making, inquiry, and transformation. Then reflect on what new social practices you wish to engage in with your students.
## Social Practices Chart

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social practices I currently engage in with my students that support access</th>
<th>Social practices I currently engage in with my students that support meaning making</th>
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References


