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A socio-cultural approach: resourcing four roles as a literacy learner

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Introduction

In this chapter I provide a sketch of some issues that form the background to discussions about reading success and failure, and about the strategies that are and could be engaged in by parents and teachers. Some of the issues and ideas I describe here are outlined more fully in Freebody and Luke (1990), Freebody, Luke and Gilbert (1991) and Freebody and Welch (1992).

First, it is important to retain a broad perception of literacy instruction as it is currently practised in our society. Historically, the goal of providing mass literacy at a sophisticated level is a comparatively recent one (Graff 1978). It has only been in some countries since the early part of this century that education systems have seriously taken upon themselves the task of providing literacy instruction, beyond the levels required by civil participation, to the entire populace. The recency of these efforts means that our theories about literacy are both comparatively piecemeal and usually in hot competition with one another. We are only beginning to understand the important ways in which literacy is an emergent technology Î that is, a technology that changes the environment in which it is used.

The first aspect of the emergent features of literacy is its effect on the social organisation and the supporting belief systems of the culture in which it develops. It is hard for us to imagine how we could have organised our most central institutions (educational, legal, political, industrial) without the written word. Perhaps less obvious are the ways in which literacy also shapes individual consciousness: making some capabilities and dispositions less important for daily functions and in stating others as crucial; enabling some ways of understanding our culture's characteristics – its place and time in history – and disabling others (Ong 1982, and Illich and Sanders 1988, provide introductions to these ideas).

It is in light of the recency of the appearance of these issues and our partial grasp of them that the levels of success of current literacy education efforts need to be regarded. For instance, in a recent study of the literacy performance of Year 5 and Year 9 students in Victoria, McGaw, Long, Morgan and Rosier (1989) addressed the issue of whether standards had been maintained over the period from 1975 to 1988. Their conclusion with regard to reading performance was as follows:

> *Compared with 1975, there are indications of improvement in the reading ability of 14-year old female students. The males at that level, and for 10-year-old males and females, levels of achievement in reading remain at the same levels as they were in 1975 and 1980. This is despite an increase in the number of students from non-English speaking backgrounds (p 60).*

Such a conclusion is compatible with research conducted in other states (see Freebody and Welch, 1992, for a summary of these findings). While there are problems with a number of these research programs (see Freebody 1990), the overall findings nonetheless suggest that the success rate of reading instruction in developed industrial countries is, while not perfect, at least adequate, and may even be regarded as impressive given the demographic changes that have occurred in some of those countries over the last 15 years. Thus we cannot conclude that there is a 'literacy crisis' in any ordinary meaning of that term, unless we examine the performance of those groups that are traditionally ill-served by our school systems, such as the poor and certain ethnic minorities.

Our notions of adequacy however need to be regarded as historically and culturally specific. It is not possible to determine any definitive benchmark for adequacy or for functional literacy (see Resnick and Resnick 1977). We can describe success in reading only in terms of the civil, socio-cultural, and job-credential demands and expectations that any particular culture places on its members in terms of the degree to which and the ways in which they deal with written texts.

There are currently many theories of reading and reading pedagogy that attempt to describe the conditions that are both necessary and sufficient for successful reading performance. The line I will take in this chapter is that only the necessary components of reading success can be documented. Everything that a member of our culture can take from a written text can never be pre-specified, any more than can everything that a culture demands or expects from its members in their dealings with written text. Here, therefore, I will argue for the necessary status of four components of successful reading, based on my perceptions of what our culture expects, here and now, from people in their management of text. I will adopt the metaphor of a 'role', rather than describing skills or abilities, partly because these latter terms have unfortunate connotations concerning fixity of psychological characteristics, whereas my intent here is to draw attention to the ready learnability of certain ways of participating in one's social role as a reader.

I will present these ideas in terms of four headings, arguing that a successful reader needs to develop and sustain the resources to play four related roles: code-breaker, text- participant, test-user, and text-analyst. In the remainder of this chapter I will develop my notions of these four roles and briefly summarise the implications of such a view.

Learning your role as code-breaker

To be a successful reader, an individual needs to successfully engage the technology of the written

script. There are two aspects to this technology: the nature of the relationship between spoken sounds and written symbols, and the contents of that relationship. With respect to the nature of sound-symbol relationships in English, the degree of consonant clustering and the diversity of English vocabulary together are associated with the necessity for an alphabetic or at least semi-alphabetic script. It is noteworthy as Havelock (1976) has pointed out, that the alphabetic script was invented only once in history and that all its current manifestations are a result of that single invention by the Greeks, who were forced to distinguish between air-flow sounds (vowels) and opening and closing sounds (consonants mainly to make more efficient their communications with one of their major trading partners, the Phoenicians.

The actual content of current English sound-symbol relationships is, of course, arbitrary. A particular letter representing a particular sound simply does not need to look that way in any meaningful sense of the term. Furthermore, while English is largely alphabetic, the fact that the spoken language changes more rapidly than does the written and the fact that there are 44 sounds in English and 26 letters, together amount to a slippery set of conventions at work in current English script (DeFrancis 1989, provides an account of the relevant processes).

The significance of alphabetic awareness for reading acquisition is now well established by research (see the volume edited by Rieben and Perfeti 1991, for summaries). In Stanovich's (1986) overview of research relating to reading acquisitions, for example, he concluded that if there is one consistently identified source of early reading failure in school then it is the failure of the student to acquire proficiency with the alphabetic script, and that, given the ways in which early schooling is organised, this failure can quickly lead to a cascade of avoidance strategies and other motivational problems beyond the first year or two of schooling. Such a conclusion is compatible with Johnston's (1985) study of adult illiterates, all of whom reported feeling successful as readers in their very early schooling, since they could remember stories and use pictorial aids with which to read aloud. However, their lack of resources in engaging the technology of the script rapidly becomes a source of withdrawal from a range of school activities, resulting finally in their status as adult illiterates.

So we are warranted in believing that successful engagement with the technology of the written script is a necessary component of successful reading. Some theoreticians, however, would have us believe that, given adequate listening comprehension, decoding competence is a sufficient condition for successful reading. For example, Juel (1988, and see Juel, Griffith and Gough 1986) has advocated what is termed a 'simple model' of reading, arguing that reading entails simply decoding and listening comprehension. This model is predicated on the belief that non-literate managers of conversation can simply transfer those management skills to the decoded written text. Unfortunately for the simple model, it has now been established that written texts call upon additional understandings over and above those derived from conversational usage. Written texts are typically different from face-to-face talk in a number of ways (see Rubin 1980; Horowitz and Samuels 1987). The fact that written texts cannot be interrogated in the direct way that a conversationalist can interrogate an interlocutor would lead us to the strong suspicion that the business of being a reader is in certain substantial ways different from that of being a conversationalist (see, eg Hammond 1990).

Learning your roles as text-participant

By this term I mean developing the resources to engage the technology of the text itself – its meaning and structure. Much recent research on comprehension (see Anderson and Pearson 1984; Schallert 1982) has drawn our attention to the necessary interplay of topical and textual knowledge in the management of written texts in common genres. That is to say, the processes of comprehension implicate the reader in the role of inferrer of connections between textual elements and of additional material required to fill out the unexplicated aspects of text. Such an orientation is summarised in Anderson's (1977) comment that 'the meaning is not in the message. The message is a cryptic recipe that can guide a person in constructing a representation' (p. 422).

Researchers working within the framework of, for example, schema theory, have drawn attention to the centrality of the reader's role in bringing to bear appropriate knowledge sources – knowledge not only of the topic of the text but also of the generic structures commonly found in written texts, whether they be narrative or expository. This engagement of the reader as a meaning maker and as a participant in the meaning systems of the text can be found in adult-child interactions in reading sessions. It is one of the set of resources that parents know and pass on even to children so young they cannot decode. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from a reading session between William (aged 2 years 9 months), and his mother:

M ONE SUNDAY MORNING THE WARM SUN CAME UP AND [POP] OUT OF THE EGG CAME A TINY AND VERY HUNGRY … CATERPILLAR.
W Yeah.
M He came out of the egg.
W Yeah.
M Isn't that interesting?
W Yeah.
M HE STARTED TO LOOK FOR SOME FOOD … he sounds like you ... you like food don't you?
W Yeah.
M ON MONDAY HE ATE THROUGH ONE APPLE…

(Text source: *The very hungry caterpillar* by Eric Carle.)

In this session William's mum is drawing attention to the necessity for William's engagement of the meaning of the story and relation to his own interests and feelings ('Isn't that interesting … he sounds like you … you like food don't you?'). Similarly, we find examples of this in early schooling, in which one of the tasks for teachers of early literacy is to display the appropriateness of personal reference and personal estimations of the characters' feelings and of what might happen next. Consider the following teacher-made tape for a kindergarten classroom (from Baker and Freebody 1989), in which the speaker works through the book with the children and gives a running commentary on what she takes to be the necessary forms for the engagement of the reader:

Carefully turn the page from the outside edge.
Here is Mrs Wishy Washy. She doesn't really look very happy, does she?
You can tell because her hands are on her hips. And she isn't smiling.
Let's read page number 8.
Point to the number 8.
That's right.
The first word is ALONG. Point to it. Read it with me now.
ALONG CAME MRS WISHY WASHY. Dear she's has a funny look on her face now.

JUST LOOK AT YOU, SHE SCREAMED.
She is definitely not very happy. But I wonder what she's going to do about it?
Let's find out. Turn over the page.

We see here again, in a more elaborated form, how the teacher presents to the students a display or model of selected 'comprehension' processes, indicating that the pictures can be read to infer the emotional state of the characters, and that the reader's personal responses to these states and to the information of the text generally, as well as the reader's estimates about what might happen next are relevant and necessary parts of understanding the text. The argument here is that these displays to the student are in fact a form of teaching not only about how to read the text but also about what counts as comprehension and what processes are entailed in it.

The significance of the reader's access to and use of knowledge resources in reading a text successfully has been well established in recent research, particularly within the context of researchers using schema theoretic accounts of reading comprehension. For example, Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey and Anderson (1981) investigated the relationship between cultural knowledge and reading comprehension. Students from US black inner-city and white suburban schools in Year 8 read a passage that dealt with an instance of 'sounding' or 'playing the dozens', a form of verbal ritual insult predominantly found in the US black teenage community. These researchers found that the black subjects tended to interpret the passage (correctly) as being about verbal play, whereas the white students tended to read the passage as being about physical aggression, importing notions of a race riot and a large-scale fight. The evidence here, in particular when it is taken into account that the black inner-city students would have received substantially lower scores on most standardised tests of reading, indicates that the interpretation of text, the ability to use appropriate inferences to connect parts of the text and fill in the gaps of meaning, are necessary components of reading success. As Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey and Anderson concluded:

> The reaction that many white middle-class teachers and students have to inner-city black students trying to work their way through culturally loaded material was mirrored by one of our black male students. Upon being told that white children understood the letter to be about a fight instead of about sounding, he looked surprised and said, 'What's the matter? Can't they read?' (p.30).

That question is relevant. In a real sense the white students in this experiment could not read the material, in that they could not construct a meaning which in any sense reciprocated the intentions of the writer, in spite of the fact that their decoding skills were as good if not better than those students who could successfully construct the meaning of the passage.

With respect to the reading of simple stories, Goldman (1985) has drawn the useful distinction between internal and external inferences. Internal inferences she defined as those that arise within the framework of the narrative or the exposition, for example, inferences about characters' motivations and feelings, about what might happen next, and so on. External interferences she described as those inferences that are more concerned with the purpose of the story in transmitting rules of social conduct or moral conventions and values of society – in general those inferences that relate to why the story was written and how it was crafted in particular ways. Goldman found that children and adults showed no differences in their ability to construct internal inferences about stories, leading her to argue that these inferences seemed to be acquired 'through exposure to everyday events and to stories … [and] seem to require little in the way of formal instruction' (p.269).

In contrast, the external inferences, those inferences that are based on a more abstract perception of the crafting and function of the story, varied significantly with age. Almost all of the middle and upper primary school children in Goldman's studies gave responses reflecting generalisations from the text to the social and moral purposes of the writer (as did the adults), while only one-quarter of the younger children (kindergarten to year 2) produced such responses. Further, Goldman reported that about 60 per cent of these younger students appeared not to find questions about the abstract crafting or purposes of the story to be meaningful ones, leading her to conclude that text external inferences require more than simple exposure to narrative form, and seem to call for more explicit and guided instructional effort. This leads us, then, beyond the necessity to participate in the meaning systems of the text itself to further components of reading success: the ability to use the text in ways appropriate to the social or material task at hand.

Learning your role as a text-user

Since reading and writing are nothing if not social, then being a successful reader is being able to participate in those social activities in which written text plays a central part. Not only do people learn about the technology of script and about how to work out the meaning or possible meanings of written texts, but they also learn through social experiences what our culture counts to be adequate reading for school, work, leisure, or civil purposes. Being a successful text-user, then, entails developing and maintaining resources for participating in 'what this text is for, here and now'. These resources are transmitted and developed in our society largely in instructional contexts, some of which may bear comparatively little direct relevance to the ways in which texts need to be used in out-of-school contexts, in particular in the case of job literacy (see Mikulecky 1981; Heap 1987). As Snow and Ninio (1986) have demonstrated, parents of very young children engage in certain basic instruction in the function of books and the reader's role in interacting with the book. It is through social interactions around literacy events that we learn our position as reader and our notion of what, for us, the texts are for. Here are William and Mum again from the beginning of their book reading session:

> 1 M This one? What is this one? (points to word) Say it.
> 2 W Colour … one (starts leafing through book).
> 3 M Coloured one … but what is it? … Caterpillar?
> 4 W Ca/h/pilluh!
> 5 M Ye:es it 'tis too. What does it say?
> 6 W A/h/pool.
> 7 M It's an apple … but what does it say? … ONE DAY Ù
> 8 W (sotto) nn day.
> 9 M What does it say?
> 10 W I don't know.
> 11 M Would you like Mummy to read you the words?
> 12 W They don't need words … (pointing) There's only words!
> 13 M Yes, those are words, but I think we start at the front cover, don't we?
> (pointing) Start here … turn the page … hmmm … turn another page … (sotto) That

just tells us the name of the book. It's called THE VERY HUNGRY CATERPILLAR
… (pointing) What's that?
14 W Don't know.
15 M It's a su:un … sun … now we read the words on this page … see? IN THE
LIGHT OF THE MOON LITTLE EGG LAY ON THE LEAF … look at it … little egg
on the lea fÙ (sotto) Do you want to put it on the table or not? (W is holding book).
Now what do the other words say? ONE SUNDAY MORNING …

In this example the first 15 turns of talk serve to establish the relative roles that William and Mum are to play in the book reading session and in particular William's position as a participant in this activity. Through her use of the word 'say' (turns 1, 5, 7, 9 and 15) the mother positions William such that he finally acknowledges his inability to 'read' the book and Mum's rightful position as the reader. William briefly contests this relative positioning in turn 12, where he points out that the words only take up a very tiny proportion of the page space in this particular book and that, by inference, the management of decoding is not pertinent to what they might be able to do with this book. The mother effectively ignores that challenge and continues to demonstrate to William where the book is to be begun. In her final question to William in turn 15 about what the words say, she leaves no space for William to answer but instead proceeds herself to read the words. Thus, in a very real sense, William is learning how to participate in a book reading session, as well as learning what it is that books afford by way of experiences. The most obvious site for learning what texts are for and what one's role is as a manager of texts is of course the classroom. Again, it is important to take the view that classroom instruction in reading is not just a matter of transmitting the skills of decoding or the processes of comprehension, but is as well a display to the students of what counts as reading in the here and now of the classroom and what reading more generally is thus about.

What counts as having been successfully read (or written) for a classroom is displayed and authorised in teacher-student discussions and in teachers' feedback on written work. Even for questions which apparently call upon personal or subjective responses to material that has been read, the student needs to provide an answer in the form that is appropriate to the teacher's goals in discussion (Baker and Freebody 1989, give examples of this). It is this specification or justification of an answer that is one of the defining features of what teachers take to be appropriate answers in classroom discussions. Below is an example from a lesson in which students are reading their 'book reports' taken from research by Anstey (1991). Note that the teacher had directed the students to include, by her own definitions, the components of plot, theme ('the plot all scrunched up' in a few words), characters, setting, personal response:

244. *s [reading] Cinderella and her family lived happily. When her mother died and her father remarried it was a disaster. After she married the prince her sisters asked her to forgive them. Of course Cinderella had such a lovely heart that she forgave them.*
245. *t Good girl. Right … seeÙit tells you step by step. Now the theme.*
246. *s [reading] She started off happy and then when her stepmother came it was sad and at the end it was happy ever after.*
247. *t All scrunched up. Good girl. The characters Ù?*
248. *s [reading] Cinderella, the sisters, the stepmother, father, mother, and the prince and the fairy godmother.*
249. *t Good girl. The setting Ù?*
250. *s [reading] At home, at school, at the palace, and outside.*
251. *t OK … err … now, err, Natalie's personal response?*
252. *s [reading] It was a good happy story even though she had a hard life and ended up happy. The pictures were good and I think the writer is a good happy writer.*
253. *t+s's (applause).*

In this case, the teacher has demonstrated to the student what counts as an appropriate 'reading' of the book and, most importantly, what counts as an appropriate 'personal' response. As has been argued and illustrated elsewhere (e.g. Freebody, Luke and Gilbert 1991), even apparently subjective reactions need to follow a format endorsed and modelled by the teacher. In these ways, classroom discussion about the texts can been seen as retrospective displays of how students ought to have read a particular text. The kinds of reading that the students provide are made available in classroom discussions, in which the teacher either confirms, disconfirms, or calls for more or different kinds of answers as a guided jointly constructed monologue about what was read and how it was read. Students well-versed in ways of classroom discussion will pick up quickly on the generic expectations of the teacher. They have, in a sense, learned to participate in reading-related events, being aware of their own role in the classroom as answerers of questions of certain sorts rather than, say, askers of questions, and of the teacher's necessary role of eliciting from them particular forms of summarising, recalling and 'personally responding' to texts.

Learning your role as text-analyst

Under the heading of text analyst I wish to include an expanded notion of what has traditionally been called critical reading. Here I am referring to an awareness of the fact that all texts are crafted objects, written by persons with particular dispositions or orientations to the information, regardless of how factual or neutral the products may attempt to appear. I am arguing, therefore, for the necessary status of a role for the reader that entails conscious awareness of the language and idea systems that are brought into play when a text is constructed and that makes the text operate and thus that makes the reader, usually covertly, into its operator. The general line here is based on the notion that all discourse entails a particular construction or version of its readership with respect not only to the degree of topic knowledge assumed, but also to more dispositional resources such as the ideological position of the reader (Freebody, Luke and Gilbert 1991). We can interrogate a text by asking, just for starters, 'What are the beliefs about the topic of a person who could utter this text?' and 'What kind of person could unproblematically and acceptingly understand such a text?' This second question is critical: it is not the case of a reader who does not share the ideological position of the text's writer. I can discuss these notions best through the use of some examples. Consider first the following excerpt (discussed in Freebody 1991) from a school textbook in social studies used in the secondary grades:

The destruction of a culture

Prior to the arrival of Europeans in Australia, the Aborigines lived orderly and socially stable lives based on values of cooperation and sharing. They had adapted and survived for at least 30 000 years in a continent with a diverse and harsh climate. This lifestyle changed with the arrival of the Europeans. When different

cultural groups who have different values and beliefs interact or meet, the smaller group often suffers from 'culture shock'. Its members become confused and bewildered about what is expected of them. This is what happened with the Aborigines. The European culture demanded certain things such as land-ownership, keeping domestic animals and private ownership which were in conflict with traditional Aboriginal beliefs. The Europeans had the military might and strength of numbers to support their viewpoint (Hardie, Rutherford and Walsh 1987:58).

To read this text critically we would need to explore the positions that are open to us as readers. Of the many ways of characterising the relationship of the early European settlers of Australia to the inhabitants, this text both assumes and itself constructs one. We can ask 'What is that position that is offered to the reader so implicitly that, without critical awareness of the process, the textual features can become knowledge"?'. This passage represents that curious but common mixture of romanticisation and naive dismissiveness that characterises the ideological posture of many European Îmigrî societies towards dispossessed indigenous cultures. It makes unproblematic and even benevolent the new regime of expectations that the Europeans, again unproblematically, install Î the Aborigines' predicament is described as confusion and bewilderment 'about what is expected of them'. Calling on this discourse the text is thus allowed to arrive at a conclusion – which would be most extraordinary to Aborigines Î that Australian Aborigines were dispossessed of their own land precisely because they did not comply with the European 'demand' to own their own land. If this interpretation were correct it would augur well for white reaction to the current Aboriginal push towards land-rights, but some Aborigines may prove difficult to convince on this point. In fact, the argument may well 'confuse and bewilder' them. As is argued in Freebody, Luke and Gilbert (1991), perhaps the most powerful way of reading this text critically is to contrast it with other textual accounts of the same phenomenon. Many of these will not be as benign as the one quoted above, but the process will highlight the notion of textual positioning.

The important point here is that even if you, as reader, can successfully decode this text, can successfully comprehend it, relating it to your social knowledge, and can successfully take part in literacy activities that may be based on such a text, a fully successful reading of this text calls for nothing less than an analysis of the ways in which the text constructs a version of you, the reader. It is this degree of control that I suggest is required to read successfully in all the forms required by contemporary society.

Consider further the following text from a secondary resource book. Note how the factual material, dealing with a description of the features of 'third world' countries, is presented in a neutral way and that, at first reading at least, such a text appears to be an authoritative and fairly comprehensible description of the topic:

The bulk of Third World lands have in the past been European colonies. During the 20 years after World War II, when most of them obtained their independence, the ex-colonial powers generally tried to encourage democratic, parliamentary forms of government in them. But western-style parliamentary government has often failed to take root and flourish in countries where there is widespread illiteracy; where there is no real national feeling, but a collection of tribes or religious groups who owe their common nationality to the mere accident that they were once ruled over by the same colonial power; where there are enormous social and economic problems to be faced. Small wonder, then, that many more or less authoritarian regimes have come into power, or that there is a temptation to experiment with communism as a way of providing a better life for the masses (Raufer, Thompson, Srurty and Brown 1985:5).

This passage does not provide any documentation of its source or of the ideological position of the writer, thus inviting its characterisation as authoritative statements of truth. That is, the passage proceeds simply as a documentation of a covert ideological position through an anonymous but totally authoritative source. The point here is that it is crucial to an understanding of successful reading, as our culture currently requires it, that we view the particular options exercised by the writer of such a text as covertly positioning us as readers into ordering our sense-making procedures within an ideological perspective. A reader can make sense of, for example, the highlighted section of this passage only by positioning themselves within a 'first-world' ideology. The passage simply will not 'go' unless the reader, however transiently, adopts the only position in which the words can make sense – the position of a firstÎworld reader. That is, the underlying ideology that European colonial powers were the cohering forces in their colonies and that their role is best characterised, not as fragmenting colonies' subgroupings or constraining the economic and cultural development of the colonies, but as encouraging democratic forms of governance. In this way the text itself becomes a covert agent in the building of such a perspective.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to provide a broad backdrop to issues arising in literacy education, arguing for the necessary status of four roles in any characterisation of successful reading as it is currently demanded and expected in our society: the roles of code-breaker ('How do I crack this?'), textÎparticipant ('What does this mean?'), textÎ user ('What do I do with this, here and now?'), and text-analyst ('What does this do to me?'). We are no more 'successful' readers if we are prey to manipulative texts than we are if we cannot decode. With these roles in mind, I have cautioned against mistaking the resources necessary for successful literacy for those that are both necessary and sufficient.

Many teachers and researchers in the area of literacy would agree with much of what I have said so far. Our profession, however, is divided on two crucial points: (a) the sequencing of instruction in these four roles; and (b) the necessary degree of explication in instruction of these roles. It is on these points that our theories of reading are intertwined with our theories of childhood (see Jenks 1982). Do we begin with the basics of script and meaning engagement and later 'filigree' students with functional and critical reading resources? Do we regard certain aspects of our engagement with text as coming 'naturally'? Are some ways of thinking simply too hard for young children? Might we in fact disrupt and disturb children by the presentation of an orientation that conflicts with that of the text? The most parsimonious line, which I put here for heuristic purposes, is that all of these roles form part of successful reading as our culture currently demands it and that therefore any program of instruction in literacy, whether it be at kindergarten, in adult ESL classes, in university courses or at any points in between, needs to confront these roles systematically, explicitly, and at all developmental points. Literacy is simply a technology; but using it successfully calls upon a set of resources Î crafts; fully reading a text entails a full understanding of the crafting that has been deployed in its writing-crafting that orchestrates graphic, semantic, structural, pragmatic, and ideological codes.

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First, it is important to retain a broad perception of literacy instruction as it is currently practised in our society. Historically, the goal of providing mass literacy at a sophisticated level is a comparatively recent one (Graff 1978). Â We can describe success in reading only in terms of the civil, socio-cultural, and job-credential demands and expectations that any particular culture places on its members in terms of the degree to which and the ways in which they deal with written texts. Â Learning your role as a text-user. Since reading and writing are nothing if not social, then being a successful reader is being able to participate in those social activities in which written text plays a central part.

As text-users, students understand the purposes of using texts in different ways for different cultural and social functions. The text-analysing aspect focuses on the ideas within the literacies.' Woolley (2008). . A socio-cultural approach: resourcing four roles as a literacy learner. Literacy, poverty and schooling: working against deficit. equations, English in Australia, no. 119/120, pp.22-34.

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