13 Critical factors in literacy development

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In the past two decades, scholars have detailed the historical courses of literacy in the contexts of modernization and nation building in Western societies. Today's students who are curious about the foundations of the literacy habits upon which their success in higher education now depends may trace the underpinnings of these habits back to ancient Greece (e.g., Havelock, 1982) and follow their linkage with scholasticism in the Middle Ages (e. g., Parkes, 1973; Bauml, 1980). In the early modern era, print culture spread first to the elites; its subsequent gradual diffusion to the middle class through schooling (e.g., Eisenstein, 1979; Maynes, 1980) came with industrialization and urbanization in nations such as England and France, and the United States.

The relatively recent field of the history of literacy in the Western world contains numerous critical evaluations of the impact of print on the spread of knowledge, achievements in socioeconomic mobility, and links between individuals and controlling bureaucratic institutions of modern societies. Common underlying themes within studies of the social development of literacy since the 16th century are: the state as the primary unit of political identification, socioeconomic conditions bringing an increasing percentage of the population into industrial and professional work forces, and promotion of a standard/national language through institutions of formal schooling. Numerous studies examine the role of literacy in the building of nationhood as individuals and groups shifted their primary identification from ethnic or local community to the nation. Corollary to this shift is the spread of print and formal schooling, which together promote a standard linguistic norm – that is, a language form identified with the state's internal administration and communications with other nations. Linked to acquisition of literacy and use of this standard language is the possibility of improved socioeconomic standing through entry into or mobility within the industrial work force.

Yet in spite of the many common themes in these studies of literacy in modern Western nations, scholars have also demonstrated the different roles literacy has played for individuals and groups at different times and places in the Western world. Currently, historians search for new and more effective methods of describing the social, economic, and political conditions which coincided with different rates, types, and effects of reading, writing, and extending print (see Graff, this volume). Increasingly, philosophers and literacy critics suggest the need for new ways of determining the cognitive and cultural changes literacy brings to the society (see Wilson's and Solomon's chapters in this volume). Two such features previously accepted as beneficial but now appropriate for reevaluation and critical assessment are the submersion of creative approaches to problem solving and the widespread insistence upon linear thinking (Calhoun, 1973; Foucault, 1977; Illich, 1981).

This paper suggests that a foil is needed for these studies of "modern" literacy or the societal development of literacy in the contexts of modernization and nation building. With the exception of the classic collection edited by Goody (1968), scholars have given little attention to literacies among nonindustrial peoples or groups within modern nations that are marginal to the mainstream of the formally schooled work force. Goody and Watt (1968) posited a continuum of literacy, ranging from nonliterate to "fully literate" (with some groups having "restricted" literacy), and suggested the need for detailed studies of the social, cognitive, and linguistic habits of groups at points along the continuum. Such a continuum and its connotation of a single dimension of variation, with oral societies at one end and literate societies at the other, has left scholars with a dilemma: What are the "middle" groups, and how do we study them? Some scholars, such as rural sociologists and teachers of literacy or standard language, have written about the middle groups in the context of their success or failure in acquiring literacy and using it as a tool for obtaining goals often established by agents external to the group.

The modernization paradigm, or the view of the "modern" person as the "literate" person, underlies much of this work, and the majority of such studies examine these groups' reception of primers, literacy programs, and adult education brought in by outsiders. Numerous aspects of modern literacy, ranging from the use of illustrations in printed texts to modes of instruction, come with this externally imposed literacy, and agents of literacy measure the abilities of new literates along a scale of cognitive skills established for use with formally schooled populations. Thus, many such studies seem to accept the continuum and describe these groups in terms of an implicit value judgment of where they are on the path toward "full" literacy, and to what extent they are following the patterns often implied as universal for modern literate groups.

An increasing number of social scientists wish, however, to study these middle groups without value judgments or implicit denunciations of their failure to become modern literates. There are few guidelines for such work. If these middle groups are described within their own societal contexts, to what extent are the findings generalizable? If such groups are not measured by standards used for groups formally schooled in literacy, what descriptions can be used?

The study of the indigenous literacy of the Vai of Liberia by Scribner and Cole (1981) represents a major breakthrough with respect to the dilemma of studying the middle groups of Goody's continuum. These psychologists, by detailed descriptions of the contexts of uses of literacy and adaptations of standard tests of cognitive abilities, demonstrated the importance of situations for uses of literacy and the institutional and social networks for which literacy served critical purposes. Moreover, they demonstrated that the purposes, effects, and types of literacy among this group were distinct from those previously described for schooled populations, and their research methods enabled them to separate literacy effects from schooling effects. The case study of the Vai suggests the value of detailed individual case studies of literacies within the middle groups – that is, among those who have literacy, but not in terms of the forms, situations, or functions of modern literates.

The accumulation of studies that detail the sociocultural settings in which different forms of literacy emerge and develop promises to give us contrasts that may enable us to recognize some of the previously submerged or unnoticed aspects of modern literacy and to identify a wider range of social and psychological principles for framing concepts and transmitting knowledge. Two of these precursors or concomitants of literacy discussed here are the ability of a group (a) to take language apart for analysis and (b) to create institutional settings in which knowledge gained from written materials can be repeatedly talked about, interpreted, and extended. A question that is as yet unanswerable is: Did these features or the potential for their development previously exist in groups that adopted modern literacy, or did the adoption and spread of literacy bring these features? We need much more cross-societal data before we can know if these features are prior conditions or consequences of literacy.

Other precursors or concomitant conditions of the literacy of these middle groups are sometimes noted in studies of these groups. For example, it seems that in all of these communities the usual channel of communication is a language or dialect that is not standard; and if formal institutions of schooling exist for community members, pedagogues do not value the nonstandard language form for reading, writing, or speaking. Moreover, members of these communities do not have a primary identification with a group beyond their own locale, and though existence as part of a state may be acknowledged, self-identification is through primary, face-to-face interactions. Within these communities, members do not link literacy skills to work habits or opportunities for shifts in subsistence patterns. For the majority of such groups, some members are tied in some way to either agricultural production or other forms of labor that are not dependent on complex modern technology. Thus, though some members of these groups may depend upon work in industrial settings as a major means of livelihood, other group members maintain some involvement in agricultural, handicraft, or medicinal practices that are not dependent upon access to modern technology.

Taking language apart

Underlying all studies of modern literacy are implicit notions about how one can talk about language by identifying its parts and talking about how they work in systematic relationships in speaking, reading, and writing. Language arts classes and "grammar" courses in formal schooling depend upon the analysis of language into letters and sounds, parts of words and their interrelationships, and sentences and their combinations. Moreover, an early emphasis in reading and language arts classes is interpretation of two-dimensional representations of three dimensional objects. Through the artwork of early reading materials, the child learns to respond to illustrations in the text "by assigning a privileged, autonomous status to pictures as visual objects" (Ninio and Bruner, 1978). This same type of autonomous status is assigned to language, when students learn to name and describe letters, to recognize consonants, vowels, nouns, and verbs, and to analyze the structure of sentences apart from their communicative messages. These underlying notions about forms of art and language in printed texts carry over into primers and other materials for literacy teaching and reflect the following basic expectations.

1. Printed materials symbolize meaning through both their illustrations and uses of language.
2. Fundamental to comprehension and composition in writing is the ability to analyze language as a system of bits and pieces in patterns. This

analysis requires the use of a metalanguage used to dissect language as an artifact (Olson, 1984).

Critical to these basic tenets is segmenting, isolation, labeling, and describing bits of language apart from their communicative context. To become literate is to be able not only to recognize patterns in print and link these patterns in oral language, but also to talk about how one knows vowels, consonants, words, sentences, etc. (See Herriman's and Tuinman's chapters in this volume.) Yet some cultures do not appear to conceptualize either their art forms or their language by abstracting their parts or features and developing a terminology for talking about these.

Anthropologists and psychologists report on groups that have intricate and detailed forms of pictorial art, carrying complex and symbolic meanings. Many members of these groups can recognize "good" and "bad" art and instruct the young on the production of art forms in which almost imperceptible differences carry serious meaning. Yet it is not necessarily the case that these teachers or masters of art forms can identify specific parts or name the features characterizing such differences (e.g., Childs and Greenfield, 1980). Moreover, individuals who excel in such artistic production may not transfer the skills of visual perception used in their indigenous art forms to seeing letters or words in written texts. Discriminating among shapes of letters or words requires recognition of whole shapes and also parts of shapes, and ways of distinguishing these (e.g., right – left or up – down orientation, or by the initial and final letters of words). However, these means of taking apart either illustrations or print in written texts may not be at all compatible with the ways in which some groups distinguish aspects of the design of their own art forms.

Gudschinsky (1969, reprinted 1979) pointed out that even in communities where there are elaborately developed art forms, teaching people to recognize simple illustrations as portrayed in primers could take more effort than that required to teach them to read. She reported that a group of European children from 6 to 12 years of age recognized geometric forms fastest, words next most rapidly, nonsense syllables more slowly, and pictures of familiar objects most slowly. Recent research on mainstream school-children in the United States indicates that pictures do not necessarily aid them in comprehending text, and that the interpretation of pictorial illustrations is as rule-bound and in many ways as complex as decoding and comprehending printed texts (Samuels, 1970; Concannon, 1975; Schallert, 1980).

Olson (1984) has pointed out that "highly literate parents may teach their children a distinctive orientation to language in the very process of teaching them to talk" (p. 186). He has pointed out that parents who "preschool" their young children in literacy skills have the view that language is an artifact that can be examined in bits and pieces and named and analyzed apart from the representational or expressive meaning it carries. Ways in which this view is expressed by mainstream parents have been described in detail by Ninio and Bruner (1978), Scollon and Scollon (1981), Cochran-Smith (1984), and Heath (1982, 1983a). All of these studies illustrate the ways in which adults "model" language for their preliterates and teach them to talk about language by using a metalanguage that refers to the structure and properties of language. These children learn to name and recognize parts and wholes in language and to describe the features of letters, words, stories, titles, and so on. They learn that the written text is autonomous, capable of standing alone without belonging to a specific individual or situation.

Thus, there is increasing psychological and cultural evidence that the view of language "as such" is basic to the literate or literacy development of individuals, and that this view underlies materials, methods, and motivations for teaching literacy in societies around the world. Though reports about other views of language are rare in the scholarly literature, there are some descriptions that indicate the ways in which these views affect the degree of readiness with which certain groups accept literacy.

Hollenbach (1979), reporting on the Copala Trique in Mexico, observed that this group considered language "as a vehicle of communication . . . not . . . as an object to be dissected, nor a toy to be played with." Within this group, speakers do not simplify their speech in the ways some linguists have discussed as universal processes of simplification (Ferguson, 1978, 1982). They neither slow down their speech nor break it into small chunks; they "usually cannot answer any question that focuses on the linguistic form of an utterance, as opposed to its content" (Hollenbach, 1979). They do not engage in language play. Single Trique words do not constitute utterances; a two-word sequence is the smallest natural utterance. Moreover, the structure of Trique is such that any one clause-level constituent may permute to a position in front of the predicate. However, any permutations that do not follow the normal order of predicate first have a special focus that is determined partly on the basis of the preceding sentence. It is not difficult to imagine the consequences of these features of language use for the teaching of literacy. The usual initial reading materials depend on pulling apart language into letters, syllables, and words, in order to enable the new reader to understand how combinations of units provide meaning. In this group, such techniques could not be used and had to be abandoned in favor of using short connected narratives based on Trique daily life. Moreover, the usual habit of using permutations to give practice in using new words in different contexts created problems, since such permutations in oral language were used only to give special focus in context. Thus, isolated permuted sentences led the Trique to question the larger context in which such sentences would naturally fit if they were to make sense. An advantage of their approach to language was that they did not have to be taught that written materials are supposed to communicate meaning; they transferred their view of oral language as a vehicle of communication to written language, and in the early stages of reading, they searched for meaning.

Such reports of oral language uses that seem inconceivable in modern literate societies occur with surprising frequency in the research literature that describes functional literacy programs or the initial school experiences of children in developing countries. Some communities, for example, do not, except under very special circumstances, repeat verbatim something that has been said either by them or by another speaker (Haviland, 1980). It should go without saying that children in these communities grow up acquiring not only the structures of these languages, but also their uses. Thus, when these children enter a formal schooling setting, such commonplace approaches to teaching as examining discrete features of written language in isolation, rearranging combinations of words, and repeating sentences or isolated words for practice in both decoding and explaining what one comprehends from the printed word are unexpected requirements that may be diametrically opposed to customary habits. Moreover, though detailed and extensive ethnographic evidence on ways in which adults talk to children in their communities is not available, it is reasonably safe to assume that if processes such as simplification and verbatim repetition of language segments are not exhibited among adults, these processes have not been employed by adults interacting with children learning their mother tongue. Schieffelin's work (1979) among the Kaluli of Papua, New Guinea, and Ochs's work (1982) in Samoan communities suggest that the labeling and sentence-extending practices portrayed as universally common in a majority of child language-acquisition research do not occur in these communities. These groups also do not use the simplifying and attention-focusing strategies (such as the use of "teaching questions") upon which early reading instruction in formal schooling for both children and adults usually depends (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1984). Summarized elsewhere is research (Heath, 1983b) in a black working-class community of the Southeastern United States in which adults neither simplify their language to children nor read to them following the labeling and attention-focusing strategies Ninio and Bruner (1978) have suggested are universal.

As yet, there is relatively little research that gives us detailed insights on ways in which speakers in different communities talk about their language and how their views relate to their acquisition and retention of literacy skills. In particular, we need studies of what happens to basic literacy skills once a formerly nonliterate group attains such skills: How are they extended and interrelated with social needs and functions so that they can be retained? It is particularly important that scholars of what we have termed here "middle groups" attend to the question of whether features of talk about language implicit in formal-schooling approaches to language were indigenous – that is, existed prior to the introduction of literacy – or whether they developed with literacy skills. With such information, we can then begin to judge the influence of these features on whether or not members of these groups (a) learn to read and write only with excessive effort; (b) come to see written uses of language as unrelated to oral uses and consequently give literacy an unnecessarily marginal cultural position; or (c) reject literacy as having no relevance to the ways in which one makes sense of the world.

Institutional reinforcements for literacy

Institutional reinforcements represent a second important factor for examining literacy in nonindustrialized communities or in communities marginal to the mainstream of a highly formally schooled work force. Is it necessary to have social and technical supports for literacy beyond the family or others in a primary, face-to-face network? Does the retention of literacy depend on the decontextualizing and depersonalizing of the content of written materials? To what extent does oral debate on the possibilities of turning literacy information into new values and behaviors facilitate the retention of literacy habits? Paulo Freire and liberation theologists in Latin America strongly suggest that literacy planners establish institutional contexts that foster talk among new literates about the meaning of written materials for new ways of thinking and acting in their own lives (Freire, 1970). Are there indigenous developments with respect to such uses of literacy, and do these make the retention and extension of literacy possible in communities that are not centrally engaged with formal schooling and do not constitute an urban industrial work force?

Studies of a modern peasant-organized literacy movement in the village of Ayou in Southern Benin (formerly Dahomey) illustrate what can happen when a grassroots self-help movement links literacy to an institution that provides extended opportunities for talk about written technical and sociopolitical information (Elwert, 1979; Giesecke and Elwert, 1982; Tchitchi, 1982). Among an adult population with a literacy rate of less than 1%, a self-help group decided to produce their own literacy materials to exist side by side with oral and graphic forms indigenous to the society. For centuries the people of Ayou had handed down elements of knowledge in proverbs, songs, and stories, summarized in a proverbial sentence, the *loo*. This sentence could also be symbolized through a drawing that represented its essence in symbols, forming a *loo-wema*. The self-help literacy group produced leaflets containing the proverbs in both drawn and written forms. All members of the group had copies, thus making the leaflets "public." Traditionally, certain types of information had been controlled through a hierarchical organization, such as the religious vodun groups, and most recently through formal schools. Talk in a nonhierarchical institutional setting enabled new learners to overcome their earlier fears that learning from books brought power for doing harm to others.

Extended oral discussion about written knowledge became an integral part of a web of supports that the peasants created to maintain their literacy. In Ayou, some of the materials for reading were leaflets and posters on herbalist medicine, an area of knowledge previously limited to a small group of specialists. The self-help group chose to distribute copies of the leaflets to 11 members, and to make public their information both through this distribution and through open discussion of their contents as well as of plans for producing more literacy materials. The self-help group thus made a conscious decision to use "collective sociopolitical discussion" (Giesecke and Elwert, 1982) among equals as an integral part of their literacy program. Talk surrounded the production of texts (leaflets with proverbs and tables of words for study), and in this talk, group members linked the written proverbs to traditional knowledge and to new, extended sociopolitical meanings.

The pattern of development of this indigenous out-of-school literacy movement was such that institutional membership and group support of literacy became necessary to provide a stable and ordered or somewhat predictable background of experience for the interpretation of written materials. The opportunities for talk about written materials that such institutional membership provided increased the amount of shared background brought to the interpretation of autonomous texts and thus made a common basis of comprehension possible. Giesecke and Elwert (1982) suggest that institutions provide "an ordered space" and "define rules and meanings and guarantee their transmission to the new learners" (p. 31). These authors further note that often these institutions use control and sanctions as part of the learning and ordering process. These characteristics are similar to those of such powerful institutions as the state, the church, the school, and the industrial workplace; the key differences in the Ayou project were its indigenous initiation and the cooperative nature of the interpretive group of literates. Their grassroots organization provided opportunity for repetitive, overlapping, and multiply reinforcing talk about reading and writing.

The need for a network of such stabilizing and ordering institutions is perhaps most obvious when new literates come from different dialects to texts that reflect some standardization of several dialects. In these cases, the institution's resources include some form of codification of the language or an expert in the codification principle behind the production of written materials. Moreover, the coming together in the network of institutions provides opportunities for talk about the text which helps new learners understand the meanings of words and develop "rules of correspondence between the established standard text and the new realms of life" (Giesecke and Elwert, 1982, p. 31).

Is there evidence that the kinds of institutions that support literacy make a difference? Does it matter whether these institutions are indigenous or imposed by outside change agents? Though sparse, some evidence from both historical sources and modern economic and social change programs suggests that not only does the source of institutions matter, but the extent of interdependence of literacy-supporting institutions and economic and political conditions will vary markedly from one community to the next and across cultural and national boundaries.

Examining the methods of reading and writing propagated by Valentin Ickelsamer in southern Germany in the early 16th century, Giesecke (1975) provides a case study of literacy program initiated before formal schooling. Ickelsamer based his grassroots movement on the then revolutionary notion that to "judge for oneself" requires literacy; thus the common people had to learn to read in order to be able to learn about and judge technical innovations. The spread of literacy within this movement was accomplished without schools, although it was dependent on the use of Ickelsamer's literacy manuals and the help of a literate person. However, literacy learning by Ickelsamer's methods was banned after 1545, and subsequently adult literacy was linked with formal schooling. The rate of illiteracy increased following this shift from deschooled methods to formal schooling (Giesecke and Elwert, 1982, p. 27). A similar decrease in literacy retention and in the spread of literacy to new learners accompanied the shift from the peasant-initiated literacy movement in Benin to formal schooling (Tchitchi, 1982). Thomas (1974) suggests also that in terms of both individual retention of literacy and cost-benefit ratios in adult programs, providing some literates with materials and institutional settings for information exchange and group membership may do more to spread literacy and technical information than extensive formal schooling efforts.

Other studies suggest that neither formal schooling nor externally imposed adult literacy programs ensure the spread of technical information and the adoption by individuals of changed behaviors which planners argue could lead to improved socioeconomic status. For example, Fliegel (1966) examined the relationships between literacy and exposure to information about agriculture among farmers in Southern Brazil and demonstrated that literacy did not enhance receptivity to information about technical development among these farmers. Moreover, contact with agricultural technicians was not influenced by either literacy or level of education, and exposure to other nonprint sources of agricultural information was only moderately influenced by these factors. His study suggests that the failure of agricultural demonstration, discussion, and extension of knowledge from print and nonprint sources left the farmers without the necessary forum through which they could build and expand upon their new common base of knowledge regarding technical development.

Detailed studies of variations in institutional networks at the community level are rare. Missing are detailed ethnographic studies that would provide community-level evidence to help answer critical questions raised in studies of continental and national groupings. For example, Schramm and Ruggels (1967) divided 82 developing countries into Latin American, Middle Eastern, and Asian areas and correlated literacy with GNP, mass media consumption, and urbanization. There were vast differences: the correlation of literacy with urbanization was .04 for Latin American nations and .64 for Asian countries. Why is urbanization apparently a prime mover in some situations, GNP and mass media consumption in others? Why does literacy develop ahead of urbanization and income in some places, behind them in others? There is growing evidence to suggest that institutions that can develop and sustain a role for literacy at the local level may make a considerable difference in how new information enters nonindustrialized communities or those communities in developed nations that are marginal to the mainstream schooled population. The development and maintenance of such institutions seems to depend, however, on cultural factors that operate at the community level – factors such as the previous role of hierarchical control of knowledge, the availability of leisure time in which to debate information gained from literacy, and the motivation to carry new information into action.

A comparative case study

Illustration of the powerful role that different types of institutional networks and varying perceptions of language play in the acquisition and retention of literacy can be gained only by comparison of carefully detailed studies of communities. I summarize here data from a longitudinal study of two working-class communities in the Southeastern United States (Heath, 1983b). Both were marginal to the mainstream schooled communities that surrounded them, though members of both communities depended upon work in textile mills as their major source of income. Within both communities, some members of families kept gardens or worked cooperatively on a part-time basis with relatives who still owned farms. Roadville is a white working-class community of families steeped for four generations in the life of the textile mill; earlier generations had lived in the Southern Appalachian mountains and had come to the Piedmont Carolinas in the 1920s to find work in the rapidly developing textile industry. Trackton is a black working-class community whose older generations have been brought up on the land or working for other landowners; only since the 1960s have they found work in the textile mills. Children of both communities are judged unsuccessful in school, and school authorities have traditionally blamed the failure of these students on the fact that the school-related skills of reading and writing are not reinforced or promoted in their homes by their parents. The data reported here are based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the two communities (and in the adults' workplaces and children's schools) from 1969 to 1977 (Heath, 1983b).

Both Trackton and Roadville are literate communities, in the sense that the residents of each are able to read printed and written materials encountered in their daily lives and can on occasion produce written messages as part of the total pattern of communication in the community. In both communities, children go to school with certain expectancies of print, and in Trackton especially, children have a keen sense that reading is something one does to learn something one needs to know (see Heath, this volume). In both groups, residents turn from spoken to written uses of language and vice versa as the occasion demands, and the two modes of language expression seem to supplement and reinforce each other. Yet there are vast differences between the two communities – located only a few miles apart, and both speaking a nonstandard communicative norm – in the ways in which children and adults interact in the preschool years (Heath, 1982). Trackton and Roadville view children's learning of lan-

Instrumental	Reading to gain information for practical needs of daily life (telephone dials, clocks, bills and checks, labels on products, reminder notes, school messages, patterns for dressmaking).
News-related	Reading to gain information about third parties or distant events (newspaper items, church denominational magazines, memos from the mill on the union, health and safety, etc.).
Confirmational	Reading to check, confirm, or learn facts or beliefs (the Bible, Sunday School materials, camper or sports magazines, newspaper stories, appliance warranties and directions).
Social/interactional (primarily women and children)	Reading to gain information pertinent to social linkages and forthcoming activities (church newsletters; greeting cards; letters; newspaper features, especially on sports page).
Recreational/educational	Reading for temporary entertainment or for planning a recreational event; (comics in newspapers; brochures on campgrounds; advertisements for movies or musical programs; ball game schedules, scores, and line-ups; bedtime stories to preschoolers).

Figure 13–1. Types of uses of reading in Roadville (listed in relative order of frequency of occasions when time on these types of tasks exceeded five minutes per day).

guage from radically different perspectives: In Trackton children "learn to talk," whereas in Roadville, adults "teach them how to talk."

Figures 13–1 through 13–4 illustrate the differences in the ways in which reading and writing are used in Trackton and Roadville homes. In Roadville, reading is viewed as "a useful habit and a good one besides." People often talk positively about the importance of reading, but they do little actual reading. Thus, in Figure 13–1, one should note that some of the uses of reading occurred only rarely for most individuals, though the reading materials and the belief in their value existed in every Roadville home. I classify the uses of reading as instrumental, news-related, confirmational, social/interactional, and recreational/educational.

There are relatively few links between Roadville's reading materials and outside institutions. The external links to the instrumental uses of reading are primarily numeracy based and come from local businesses and schools; news-related uses come from the church and the mill; and confirmational and recreational from the mill, the church, and community recreation workers. Social/interactional links come from the church and secondary, television-reinforced sports events. In a sample of 72 days

Memory aids	Writing to serve as a memory aid for both the writer and others (grocery lists, labels in baby books, outlines of the sequence and content of circle meetings, frequently called telephone numbers jotted in front of phone book).
Substitutes for or reaffirmations of oral messages	Writing used when direct oral communication was not possible or to follow up on oral exchanges (notes for tardiness or absence from school, assignments following class discussions, messages left by adults for children coming home before parent arrived home).
Financial	Writing to record numerals and to write out amounts and purposes of expenditures and signatures (writing checks; signing forms; filling out church, school, and mail-order forms).
Social/interactional	Writing to give information and extend courtesies and greetings pertinent to maintaining social linkages (letters, notes on commercial greeting cards, thank-you notes).

Figure 13–2. Types of uses of writing in Roadville (listed in relative order of frequency of occasions when time on these types of tasks exceeded five minutes per day).

selected over eight years, Roadville adults did not average more than sixteen minutes of reading per day. On the sample days, they exchanged or solicited information from others in institutional settings outside the home on the average of eight minutes per day. The method for determining the amount of time during which Roadville adults exchanged or solicited information that was either directly or indirectly related to topics read was to identify topics from reading material and relate these to conversations individuals held during their daily activities outside the home. The only topic excluded from this analysis was the weather, since the topic material usually read on the weather was the "report," a brief blurb that averaged only 33 words at the top corner of the morning paper. However, if individuals discussed materials gathered from a newspaper feature story on a football game (which included information not covered in the television broadcast), this topic and these minutes were counted. In essence, reading for Roadville residents did not serve the purpose of introducing new information and that created the desire for information exchange with others.

Writing followed a similar pattern, in that, as Figure 13–2 indicates, most writing was done strictly for individual purposes and was highly restricted in scope. I classify the uses of writing as memory aids, substitutes for or reaffirmations of oral messages, financial, and social/interactional. Roadville parents did not like to write notes to the school, for example;

Memory aids (primarily used by women)	Writing to serve as a reminder for the writer and, only occasionally, for others (telephone numbers, notes on calendars).
Substitutes for oral messages (primarily used by women)	Writing used when direct oral communication was not possible or would prove embarrassing (notes for tardiness or absence from school, greeting cards, letters).
Financial	Writing to record numerals and to write out amounts and accompanying notes (signatures on checks and public forms, figures and notes for income tax preparation).
Public records (church only)	Writing to announce the order of the church services and forthcoming events and to record financial and policy decisions (church bulletins, reports of the church building fund committee).

Figure 13–3. Types and uses of writing in Trackton (listed in relative order of frequency of occasions when time on these types of tasks exceeded five minutes per day).

Instrumental	Reading to accomplish practical tasks of daily life (telephone dials, clocks, bills and checks, price tags, street signs, house numbers).
Social/interactional/ recreational	Reading to maintain social relationships, make plans, and introduce topics for discussion and storytelling (greeting cards, cartoons, letters, newspaper features, political flyers, announcements of community meetings).
News-related	Reading to learn about third parties or distant events (local news items, circulars from the community center or school). school).
Confirmational	Reading to gain support for attitudes or beliefs already held (Bible, brochures on cars, loan notes, bills).

Figure 13–4. Types of uses of reading in Trackton (listed in relative order of frequency of occasions when time on these types of tasks exceeded five minutes per day).

they preferred to send oral messages with their children. With the exception of church materials, there were few materials they wrote that were subsequently expanded in oral form. The program outline for a circle meeting at church or the tentative agenda of a meeting were the usual limits of the writing Roadville adults engaged in that was followed up in any way by oral communication. In Roadville churches, the pastor kept the church records with the help of the superintendent of the Sunday School; thus it was not customary for a millworker to be called on to record minutes or prepare, say, building fund reports.

In Trackton churches, on the other hand, laymen carried most of the responsibility for recording and reporting orally the business of the church. Thus, many of the members were called upon for help in these tasks, and many members in a group association carried them out. Figure 13–3 indicates the writing for the public record done in Trackton. This type of writing followed business meetings and building fund sessions and preceded preaching Sundays, which came only twice a month in the churches attended by Trackton residents. There was also considerable group reading (see Figure 13–4) on the open porches of the community, in which individuals shared letters received and discussions of newspaper features and brochures on political office-seekers. The pattern for these oral reading-aloud sessions was for one individual to read the piece and then for members of the group to contribute related experiences. For example, the reading of an obituary would call forth recollections of the individual's life, assessments of the merits of past deeds, and the future of the remaining family. Following this discussion of the written text, which could take an hour or more, group members would usually give a summary-type series of statements about the individual or the larger relevance of either the course of the individual's life or the fate of the family (cf. the *loo-wema* used by the Ayou self-help group).

In Trackton churches, both sermons and hymns are written and are extended orally from the written text. Once again, the extension is joint, in that numerous members share in its creation. The same is true of discussions of materials provided by the mill or by politicians who visit the community. One person reads, and others join in the negotiation of the meaning of the text according to the contextual experiences of Trackton residents. New games at Christmas, new gadgets for automobiles, and directions for repairing broken wiring produce about the same type of shared negotiation of the meaning of written materials. In short, written material in Trackton never stands alone. Members write little and almost never read alone unless they wish to be designated social misfits. Reading is a group activity. Women shop together, discussing advertisements and prices; men discuss the brochures on new cars. Adults expect very young children to be aware of price differences and to recognize different brand names, but these expectations of reading are functionally related to daily living.

There are few occasions in Trackton for the reading or writing of extended texts by an individual. Thus, individuals have limited opportunities to practice decoding; reading aloud is usually a public performance and the weaker readers need not expose themselves, since they can pass the letter or newspaper feature on to someone who reads and performs better than they. Moreover, everyone is equally eligible to contribute to the interpretation of the text at the level of shared experiences, and to debate the meaning and relevance of the words for the individuals or groups he or she knows. Yet almost all texts read aloud are synthesized and assessed in some way unless there are several intervening events. Thus, the Trackton residents as a group manage to retain their literacy habits, on the average, for a much higher percentage of their time than do Roadville residents. In a selection of 72 days made over eight years, Trackton residents spent an average of 46 minutes per day in oral interactions as follow-ups from reading or writing. Their primary institutional link for reading and writing was the church, but this institution followed the same patterns of group composition and interpretation of written materials as those followed elsewhere in the community. Detailed historical analysis of church records by Bethel (1979) indicate that this is a long-established practice, and written church records strongly reflect community familiarity both with the format and formulaic expressions of written materials and with the group negotiation process of the church meetings that surround building funds, worship committees, and the like.

In both Trackton and Roadville, the patterns of uses of literacy and the presumed benefits of literacy do not match those predicted from the general literature. The children of both Roadville and Trackton do not fare well in formal schooling, and neither group has the receptive and productive skills and values surrounding reading and writing that fit those described for "modern" communities. Written materials are not a major source of new information for either community, and neither group writes to distribute ideas beyond their own primary group. In neither community does literacy bear any direct relationship to job status or chances for upward mobility. The members of these communities make an income greater than that of beginning school teachers in their region. Though work may be seasonal, wages compare favorably with those of many other occupations in their regions.

Of the two critical factors for literacy discussed in this chapter, each of these communities has only one. In Roadville, adults regard language as an artifact and introduce their children to talk about talk at an early age; however, Roadville residents do not carry their knowledge from written sources into debate in institutions beyond their family. In Trackton, adults do not assign an autonomous status to language by taking it apart, identifying its parts, and asking children to name and describe letters, words, two-dimensional drawings, or passages of text. Trackton children, unlike Roadville youngsters, are not "preschooled" to know language as an artifact that can be examined in bits and pieces and analyzed outside its representational or expressive meaning. However, Trackton adults do debate knowledge from written sources which originate outside the community, and the church and its related social groups demand oral negotiation of written materials. Trackton adults add new information to their repertoire of knowledge by drawing from written sources and debating this information orally to determine its relevance for their actions.

Children in Trackton come to school knowing how to read many of the instrumental pieces of information around them, because they have been given roles of responsibility that depend on such reading (see Heath, this volume). Yet they cannot respond appropriately to the ways in which primary grade-level teachers expect them to analyze and talk about language as such (see de Castell & Luke and Herriman, this volume). Thus Trackton children fail in language arts classes in the early years of school, unable to acquire the school's reading and writing habits. By the upper elementary grades, when teachers expect students to read to learn, the students have a record of failure that many cannot overcome by reinstating for school use their "preschooled" success in reading information for instrumental purposes. Neither do they see the possibility of transforming their community's ways of public negotiation of the meaning of texts to the school's demands that meaning be private and reading and writing a task for individuals working alone.

Roadville children come to school well versed in the decontextualization of reading and in school-approved approaches to written texts as artifacts. They have had extensive experiences with bedtime stories, workbooks, and Sunday School activities related in form and function to school practices. They are successful in their early language arts experiences, but their skills fail them by the end of the primary grades, when they are asked to move beyond the text to interpretation based on their own experiences and generalizable evidence (Heath, 1983). In their communities, literacy has not served them or their parents beyond the routines of practicing literacy skills. They have not seen their parents incorporate information from written materials into their value or behavioral systems; they have not known their parents' literacy skills to affect their participation in institutions beyond their primary group.

Conclusions

We are left with questions about the importance of both institutional supports for literacy and talk about language as prerequisites or consequences of literacy. In Trackton and Roadville, examples of Goody's "middle groups," different ways of talking about language and linking literacy to institutions coincided with very different patterns of using reading and writing. In addition, the research of Giesecke on an indigenous 16th-century literacy movement, and of Elwert and Tchitchi on a modern-day self-help movement, gives further evidence that in very different cultures, places, and times, views of language and the establishment of institutions in which talk about written sources takes place are important for retaining and expanding literacy. From the literacy teaching and rural sociology literature, scattered reports also suggest the importance of viewing language as an artifact and of providing institutional settings for oral exchange of knowledge gained from literate sources. Formal schooling and adult literacy programs based on assumptions drawn from traditional language arts curricula carry little influence on the transmission and adoption of new information in communities that do not have institutions that can sustain both oral debate and new sources of written materials.

Community studies that detail practices of using and producing written materials are needed to provide data on the range of types of social and cultural environments that facilitate or restrict the development of factors such as talk about language and institutional supports for literacy. However, we suggest that such detailed studies will demonstrate that in any society the following two factors play critical roles in the acquisition, retention, and extension of reading and writing habits.

1. Fundamental to comprehension in reading and composition in writing is the ability to analyze language as a system of bits and pieces in patterns. This analysis requires the learning of a metalanguage used to dissect language as an artifact by segmenting, isolating, labeling, and describing bits of language apart from their communicative contexts. To become literate is to be able not only to recognize patterns in print and to link these patterns in oral language but also to talk about how one knows vowels, words, sentences, etc. Some language groups may carry within their habits of talking about language the precursors of the development of a metalanguage; other groups may have to acquire, along with literacy, new ways of viewing language and new occasions for interpreting what it is that written language signifies.
2. Where there are written texts, there must be voluntary groups to study

them if literacy is to be retained. Textual communities must be developed to allow opportunities for talk about knowledge gained through reading and transmitted in writing. The process of learning from written materials includes reflecting on the meaning of such knowledge for changed values and behaviors. For literacy as a habit to be sustained, interaction must take place around the ultimate goal of determining an agreed-upon meaning for the text. Thus the maintenance and extension of functions and types of literacy within a society depend upon opportunities for participation in multiple and reinforcing occasions for oral construction of the shared background needed to interpret written materials.

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