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Multiliteracies as a Core of New Basics

or

How to Educate Students for Critical Entry to Contemporary Culture and Society?

(Interview with Allan Luke)

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Allan Luke is among the most influential Australian educational researchers and curriculum thinkers of the last two decades. His extensive published work is among the most cited in Australia. With his research work he has continuously shaped curricular and systemic change and pedagogical practices both in Australia and internationally. His last position was dean of the biggest research centre in the Asia-Pacific, where he led a new educational reform initiative in Singapore. Luke has led major international paradigm shifts in the teaching of literacy, his work influencing the shift internationally from traditional psychological models of reading to what has been termed 'the new literacy studies'. Two decades ago, he was among the first researchers to use sociological models to analyse and influence how children develop literacy in schools and classrooms and how literacy is conceptualized in curriculum. He is coauthor of the breakthrough work on literacy and new information economies, 'A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies', in *Harvard Educational Review* (1996). Together with Peter Freebody, Allan Luke developed the 'four resources reading' model, which is used in state curricula in all Australian states, New York, New Zealand,

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Hong Kong, Singapore, British Columbia, Alberta and the UK. Most of these countries have high achievement scores on the PISA assessment survey.

In the last decade you designed and orchestrated educational reforms in Queensland and in Singapore that are internationally interesting since they do not follow directions of major western educational reforms. How do you explain the shifts in educational systems and what kind of conditions do they address?

The schooling systems of the advanced and post-industrial countries know that they need to change. At the highest levels of governments much talk is about the demands of the new economy and the post 9/11 issues around intercultural relations, new social identities and definitely new technologies. The principal tools and architecture of the schools' curriculum systems and evaluation system have been around for 50, 70 years, even a hundred years and in effect do a pretty adequate job of preparing people for an old economy, for a mono-culture, pre-digital systems of print and for the kind of secure pathways through stable economies that these countries enjoyed for some periods of time. School systems are geared up to prepare people for an economy and the culture that is rapidly fading or in transition.

The demographics show that the 'normal student body' of the 1950s actually doesn't exist anymore, we see linguistic minorities in increasing numbers, very poor kids, children with special needs, Attention Deficit Disorder, etc. We have a very diverse student body whose childhood and whose youth are being fundamentally reshaped by the rapid advent of large scale consumer culture like in the case of Slovenia. Popular and mass media are their principal engagement, digital and on-line environments, with new forms of play and different forms of parenting. Adolescents face an environment where the idea of becoming a plumber or becoming a doctor and staying a plumber or a doctor for thirty or forty years without retraining is under a great deal of structural change and stress. So we're seeing change in everyday life and everyday cultures, with new technologies and new economies.

In the face of such radical change at multiple levels we find two reactions. One is almost that of the proverbial Dutch child with a leaky dyke, to put a finger in this hole and in that hole, adjust the curriculum one year, add another test here, than you have more kids who need second language support, or in your case a Romany population, you just add a special program for them. The response of many teachers is to just shut down and begin to say, well I just can't deal with this, so I'm going to keep doing what I've always done, which also becomes a real problem both for the system administration and the senior bureaucrats but also for the kids and for the teachers themselves. The second

The interview with Allan Luke was held in September 2006 in Brisbane at the Queensland University of Technology. The recurring themes of discussion were the issues of recent challenges of social and economic conditions for education. Furthermore, alternative ways to approach changes in education were addressed, with an emphasis on the key importance of literacy and its ethical dimension. The interview ends with critical reflection upon the PISA survey and its influence on the international educational field.

response is what I think we can term an 'educational fundamentalism', a tendency to want to go back to a few simple truths and teaching kids things that will more or less reproduce what we were certain about in the 1950s, 60s or 80s. Each generation tends to do this, but now in the face of globalization the search for very simple answers, for moral anchors, ways to navigate these very difficult and new waters, is pretty much a logical and a sensible reaction by a lot of people. I think part of our job at this historical moment in curriculum debates is to re-envision what schooling for 2010, 2015 or 2020 might be like, and that begins to re-define the debates.

How have your reform projects approached those issues differently and what they envisioned?

The first thing that we tried to do with the reform project New Basics in Queensland, and some of the work that was being done in Singapore, was to create a curriculum debate that focused on futures: social futures, life futures, economic futures, cultural futures, technological futures - what kinds of skills, knowledge, competencies and values would be needed for this next generation - as opposed to a debate that was principally mired in a nostalgia for the past. The second principle for change was based on the knowledge that curriculum reform was but one of the 3 message systems: that we had to try to move pedagogy, curriculum and assessment all at once, if we wanted to get better outcomes from schools and to reorient to new knowledge, values and technologies. The other principle that we used was taken from Theodore Sizer in the United States, that 'less is more'. It means that instead of schools doing more things in response to all these changes they should be doing fewer things with more depth, more clarity, more intellectual rigor. The focus on intellectual, critical work was a distinctively Australian element. The world has been around the block with models of higher order thinking, critical thinking etc. Our approach to it was to run an open model that ranged from critical literacy that involved text analysis and critical analysis, new multiliteracies that involve the new technologies, to fairly traditional debates around values and literature.

The foundational bases for the curriculum reforms were old and new. And the old things we drew on were Dewey's focus on problem-solving and project work, which has been around for a hundred years, Freire's focus on critical education, that's about identifying problems in the world, critically analysing them and solving them, and Vygotsky's concepts of zones of proximal development which give a vocabulary for changing the social relations of the schools to generate different kinds of thinking, and different kinds of cultural practice. So we were really working from 3 good early-century models, Vygotsky, Freire and Dewey, but we were doing this with a strong eye on educational and social futures.

Can you briefly describe the structure of your alternative curriculum model?

The alternative curriculum was based upon the performance in its original sense and it was implemented in 52 schools in Queensland (from year 1 to 11). We have tried to sort the curriculum and simplify it by giving teachers projects or rich tasks, a battery of 8 or 9 rich tasks for every 3 years, around which they could organize for this period. At the same time these projects and their accomplishment became our assessment devices, replacing tests in years 4 and again in years 7 and 9/10. So the curriculum would be built at the school and cluster level (with schools gathering in local groups) to enable them to solve these problems. The tasks ranged from organizing panels of bio-ethics experts, to developing their own web pages, community health plans, itineraries for people who might be visiting from other countries, to designing buildings.

We organized the tasks under four broad curriculum categories which were new: multi-literacies and communications technologies, life pathways and social futures, active citizenship, and environments and technologies. Part of the problem we had was the schools were always fighting about traditional subject areas - Science, English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Physical Education, Arts and Music - and which of these would get the most time. So we came up with these four umbrella categories as a deliberate way to try to get the teachers out of their boxes, because teachers were tending to cling to their disciplines, defend them to the death, teach them separately.

Before New Basics, high schools typically featured an extremely bounded curriculum, that was broken into different territories with the territorial warlords not talking to each other. We wanted the children to have a more integrated, seamless educational experience and part of our job was to get the Maths and the Physics and the English teachers all sitting at the table talking about what bits they could contribute to the projects. We also made a strong push to give teachers a vocabulary for talking about the different kinds of planning and teaching approaches that they would take to achieve these tasks. We called this 'Productive Pedagogies'.

You have mentioned that your curriculum was based upon performance, how do you understand that? This is an interesting issue, since one of the important current dilemmas in the European educational field is the revision of the concept of knowledge, which is shifting away from a classical ideal of humanistic education towards knowledge better connected with the modern world. The concern in these debates is whether this shift is possible without slipping to the narrow functional expectations of the neoliberal imperative. How does the New Basics Project address this dilemma?

First of all we developed a holistic, situated and contextual approach to performance. For conceptualising rich tasks we went all the way back to Dewey and looked very closely at his notion of enterprise or project as a way of requiring that students actually assemble skills in a demonstrable way to generate not

test scores but artefacts, performances, webpages, presentations, speeches, and essays that were of demonstrable quality.

When we set out to shift some of the high stakes assessment in our system, from standardised tests and exams, which are cheap and easy to administer but only cover part of a broader canvas of real world performance, this raises a whole set of technical, cultural and political questions. The technical questions pivot around validity and reliability. There are those who would argue that the most reliable indicators are the simplest indicators, like standardised achievement tests, which is the case with most competence driven models. I see fundamental problems with the competency model, since the push for it comes from a behaviourist educational psychology paradigm and from a model of neo-liberal policy on the other, that wants cost benefit analysis in production of human capital. Its tendency to identify generic skills and competences tends to ride over the significance of context and can often lead to a focus less upon what students know, their cultural background and their linguistic competences and more on acquisition of measurable skills.

Another important issue regarding the competence model is that they only represent one indicator of one's overall, in Bourdieu's terms, 'cultural capital' and human capital. It tends to move away from questions about values and ethics. It moves away from the very things that the new rhetoric of the EU, OECD around new economies tend to emphasize, such as group work, critical thinking, independent problem solving, entrepreneurship. So we have several contradictions around the competency-based agenda: (1) it's driven by political, economic and policy reasons, as much as it is for genuine educational reasons; (2) it's only part of the educational picture - skills and competencies, psychologically measured, observable, are only part of what you learn, and what you want people to learn; and (3) it will not give us, or drive the system in the direction of the broader, holistic, and contextual learning that we require for the new economies.

In New Basics we assumed that rich tasks are extremely valid, because they capture a wide range of student behaviours, performances, knowledges, actions and practices – the transfer of training and assembly of skills. Yet the assessment and evaluation of them needs to be put within a technical system that won't decrease its reliability. In Queensland we have got quite a bit of experience with that because we haven't had examinations since 1973. We assemble panels of teachers to look at portfolios of students' work. We engage them in a process of showing their own students' work, evaluating them at school level and then coming together in regional district and state wide panels to actually set standards and to make claims about what they think is good work, mediocre work and so forth. We have also put standardized core skills testing program underneath. But it is not used to evaluate individual students, instead it allows us to spot ranking or marking any anomalies in the teacher judgement moderation process. We check on interrater reliability and between school variance.

Where the students may score very poorly on the standardised test, but

may have very highly rated projects, we can go back end check the moderation process to see whether there are any glitches. So we use standardised tests here to moderate and to review and scale teacher judgement.

This brings me to the cultural issues around teacher moderated judgements. First of all, it marks out for us a very positive shift in teacher culture in Queensland. If teachers feel that the tests, competencies, scales or exams are being designed and imposed upon them by testing authorities, by universities, by educational researchers, external of the school, they will simply comply to the test or resist the test, but they won't see the assessment practices as being of their own making or having immediate diagnostic, formative use. So while they have control over pedagogies, and they have control to an extent over an enacted curriculum, they will very much become slaves to an external examination or testing system that they don't necessarily buy into. By enfranchising teachers into the moderation process we get local ownership of the standards and criteria. The professional development benefits are huge.

When you sit teachers around students' work and have them bring their own students' work, compare and moderate it, teachers inevitably turn this process into the richest professional development experience. This is the most powerful way of de-privatising teacher culture, of building communities of practice and collegiality and of getting teacher ownership of the standards setting and accountability processes. They start saying: 'I did not know that you can get that out of a 15 year old. How did you go about doing that?' or 'Maybe I need to look at some different approaches?' So it marries teacher conceptions with execution, it brings back the alignment between pedagogy and assessment that is being destroyed in a neoliberal policy environment that just tests for the sake of external accountability. The third element in the cultural political aspect of it is external accountability to parents, media, politicians and communities. The approach of the world bank, OECD, EU, and the approach driven by PISA is that single shot, single day test scores are the best way of assuring legislatures, and communities and parents in that their children are doing well.

We have taken a different approach based upon the work of TheodoreSizer of Brown University. What we tried to do was bring accountability back to school halls, back to communities, and back to parents in demonstrable ways. A very powerful component of the rich task agenda in New Basics was the engagement of parents in public demonstrations of the project work, where parents and community members are invited into the school. Kids show the parents their writing or give examples of their debating and their oration skills. Schools have nights when Aboriginal parents would come in and see their kids' web pages. In some cases, parents were directly involved in times even in judging and the assessment of the task.

Literacy has an important position in constructing curriculum and knowledge in your projects, you have also mentioned critical literacy as focal for developing higher intellectual engagement. How do you understand literacy and in what significant ways does it differ from the traditional concept of functional literacy?

The discourses around functional literacy tend to be very reductionist, instrumentalist, focusing on use. They tend to omit the values and ethical issues about use: use in which social fields of exchange, to what ends, with which meaning structures, for whom. An ethic of functional literacy is often learning about how to be an industrial participant or learning to be a good corporate worker as against having an analysis of the structures that are running your life. Critical literacy encourages students to develop an analysis of their relations with the means of production and the new modes of information. People have to have agentic ways of engaging with their labour, so there has to be a functional ethic, but if it forecloses or closes down a critical analysis of fields, we've educated for compliance, not critical citizenship.

We have redefined literacy in the west, I think, generally, and in Australia particularly, again to deal with what we think are the emergent issues around changing economies and cultures. I define literacy as a set of social practices with the communications technologies of print and other media. But we're not just talking about reading and writing – decoding and encoding – we're talking about the array of texts - written, oral, traditional, emergent - and how we actually use them in family life, in work life, in religious life. So first of all we have to expand reading and writing from narrow skill and competence definitions to encompass the broad array of practices in traditional contexts and in emergent economies.

Yet dominant technologies and modes of information are in transition. People working in the finance area or even in retail sales, may be dealing with traditional print literacy in some instances, but as well will be dealing with lots of technological interfaces, with text messaging. We are as likely to engage with mass media and the internet and to read on-line as we are to read a book. Kids are developing competencies at video gaming, and dealing with complex scenarios and multiple representation systems on Xboxes or in web surfing, even before or as they're learning how to read traditional children's tales. We are living in a historical juncture that is probably as significant as Gutenberg's moment of the printing press, or the rise of mass radio and television in the post-war period, or when the manuscripts moved out of the Catholic monasteries and into the public domain via Luther's first Protestant literacy campaigns.

So literacy itself is in transition and what we have developed in Queensland and elsewhere, was based upon our 1996 paper 'A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies' in *Harvard Educational Review*. We thought the school should begin to shift to engage with new forms of representation as well as some traditional ones, music, dance, aesthetic modes which had become the new culture industries, on-line communications, new forms of digital communications and even oral and speech communication patterns; and not be solely preoccupied with print. When we pushed this agenda we found out right away that the teachers are more resistant than the students. The students take to these new technologies like fish to water, at home, in the video arcades and elsewhere in popular cultures. But the teachers actually are defending print, partly because the kids know more about the technologies than they do. So we've got an unprecedented historical

moment, when the next generation of teachers and learners and workers knows a great deal more about the technologies than the current generation that has power in the classrooms. This is a similar moment as when Plato decried writing, and argued that it was the end of education, the end of dialogue, the end of poetics and the end of oral memory. Even the medieval Catholic monastery was terrified by Luther and the printing press, because they were going to take control of the mode of information out of the church's hands and lay it into people's hands, shifting it to teachers and schools in the German state system. So these new technologies have destabilised the monopoly of print. At the same time we live in a risk-filled society – it's a post-Marxist age – in which modes of information have replaced modes of production, so your command of the modes of information will partly determine your relationship to them. What that means is that in a multi-mediated, multi-semiotic universe, everybody is trying to position you, sell to you, spam you, phish you, virus you, ideologically push you in this direction or not, try to get you to vote for this person, buy that thing. Corporations want us to do everything from conduct political relations to sexual relations through these new modes of information. And there is a sheer volume and redundancy of information that the school child today might have to deal with. The imperatives in this environment for critical literacy are undeniable.

The old argument, the fundamentalist argument, that is 'well you've got to go back to the basics; everyone has to be able to deal with print'. Well that's true, but basic print skill is necessary but not sufficient. And just because you can functionally decode written text, doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to be prepared for a corporate workplace or a civic life where you've got to deal with multimodal texts.

If students do not have the capacity to navigate, weigh, judge, reject, critique, analyse the purposes and the consequences of this universe of texts, they're going to be in trouble. So the point that we make is that the new basics, the new things that are required are not proper spelling and handwriting, as attractive as these may seem as fundamentalist goals. We are dealing with the riches and the crap on the internet, we are wading our way through complex financial forms and taxation returns, we are reading newspapers and watching media reports in which the news is all biased and slanted. These require critical multimodalities and multiliteracies. So the whole notion of literacy opens out. Basic literacy, reading comprehension, decoding, critical literacy are all necessary but they are not sufficient in itself. You have to have the whole package. On top of that you've got to be able to work in oral culture, in print culture and in multimodal digital culture and to be able to skirt and mix and match those different modalities to be effective, to be self-interested but also to be interested in the common good.

So you want to run literacy as an open church. You want to have it as a nodal point around which the key core questions of access to text and discourse, dealing with information, weighing up information, producing information and not just consuming it are focal.

Would you explain how you understand ethical and social responsibility of literacy education in new times?

We can carve up the ethical and political questions about literacy education on two different axes. One axis traditionally has historically been about simple access, since educational systems produce stratified access to different kinds of literacy, different accesses to different textual corpi, different genres of textual practice, different forms of the literate person. The selective production of different literates and illiteracies has served, as Bourdieu has pointed out in Europe, purposes of class stratification, from traditional high literary knowledge for the elite to new functional literacy for the working classes and whatever barebones code literacy you might want for under-classes and marginalised populations. Historically part of the equation is giving people rudimentary access to the code. It's been replicated in relationship to the digital divide with particular populations of students having high levels of digital engagement, access to the new information archive and the capacity to capitalise on this, and other parts of the population relatively cut off from the new economies and the new civic spheres, blogs and new forms of consumptions and leisure. So we are seeing the old inequalities transformed into new stratifications of access, as it was during the post war print period. This is one way of seeing ethics in literacy education. It's about equality, about people getting access to a range of information that they need to be critical, active citizens, to take care of themselves, their families and communities, to identify and look after their interests.

The second question is about the critical, the kind of analytic purchase on the world. This entails the comprehension and the capacity to second guess texts, to critically engage with new systems of information. So we have got one axis of access and one axis of the critical. The model of critical education comes initially from Freire, but could be traced right back to elements of the Socratic tradition, and enlightenment notions that the purpose of the word is to understand the world. You have got this history of the critical, that predates the 60s, predates Marxism and the critique of industrialism. It is about critical analysis of the world, taking the word apart, seeing how it operates, what it does to people in whose interest and to what ends. In Queensland and elsewhere we addressed the complexity of literacy in new times by foregrounding a model that talks about coding and meaning making, pragmatic use and critique and understands literacy as a multifaceted and multipurpose cultural toolkit for dealing with new cultures and new economies. What we have argued for is that the first level of access has to be about people learning the code, the lingua franca of dominant systems, of media, of registers, but also they have got to learn a language, a writing system or system of inscription, whether that's digital or visual language. Simultaneously people need to have the access to archive of meaning and the cultural scripts that are around them. So we argue that there is a place for traditional classicism, for traditional debates around values as many would argue for. We can think of comprehension and engagement as learning the cultural scripts and genres available in your culture. This may

mean studying classical drama, Socratic dialogue or poetry or it may mean dealing with the webpage as new textual form. The learning of those cultural scripts unlocks meaning-making histories and potentials. We also have talked a lot about use, about engaging with social fields of exchange, all of the sites in everyday life, consumption, media participation, civic and governmental, legislative processes, learning the scripts of everyday life where literacy is used. The critical we think of not just as political analysis and ethical analysis, but having a normative evaluation of the social fields where literacy is used. In Freire's terms it's about being able to read a world around you, read patterns and make normative judgements. In this way, it necessarily is an ethical/moral activity, about rectitude and rightness, its consequences for people's lives. Discourse is something in the world that has material effects on people. Some people would read this approach as a political agenda around literacy. But it is ultimately about making sense of the world around you. The problem is that there is a validity in all of the different elements of literacy. The question facing governments is how and whether they choose to balance that approach and the richness of their definitions of literacy. It is a little more complex than saying: 'Out with the old literacy, bring in the new!' Raymond Williams talks about it in terms always of the clash of residual and emergent cultures. And literacy education and its definitions and discontents are the very sites where cultures emerge, recede, clash and struggle.

There are controversial debates and critique over PISA assignments in Europe, as being too pragmatic, which could as such influence the reduction of literacy in education. What is your opinion on PISA assignments?

PISA has real value if you understand its limitations. It gives you comparative data not just on achievement per se, but the real value is the degree to which the PISA team attempted to explore key issues of policy and school reform variables, and the impacts of social class on achievement. They also addressed class reproduction and social inequality, showing which systems were making trade-offs between overall achievement quality and equity of results. Simply, some policy and curriculum/assessment approaches seem to generate larger gaps in top and bottom achievement, and others, notably the Nordic countries and Canada, appear to attain both quality and a flatter distribution spread, that is, more equitable outcomes across the population. What has to be said about PISA right at the onset, is that it is a set of normative, standardised achievement tests in a pencil and paper format done on a large scale, with all the inherent limits in this. The test developers were reasonably imaginative in their specification of domains and their item development and analysis. They were able to open up their assessment models, as well as they could, to deal with, for instance, writing in a more holistic rather than technical orientation. The problem with it is that single day tests do not tell you about many things that are of educational importance; for instance, they tell you little about pedagogical practices, social outcomes and effects, about student social capital, about the quality of artefact

production, about student live performance and aesthetics, about creativity and critical literacy, about new technological engagement, about language development per se, about entrepreneurship. They do not tell you about ethical and moral judgement. Recall, these are amongst our key educational policy goals in the OECD, EU and most nations' »knowledge economy« statements. But simply – they're not in the high stakes evaluation systems that we're using to make efficacy claims. This is a real historical contradiction and policy anomaly: we aren't using our own policy aims and educational goals as a yardstick against which to measure the systems. The interesting PISA findings that we are trying to bring into debate in Australia are the elements that show that some systems appear to be creating conditions for inequality or exacerbating conditions of social inequality. In some countries and their educational systems, certain combinations of socioeconomic policies exacerbate the reproductive effects of schooling and of stratifying the population. We know that one of the effects of globalisation and of the coming of corporate governments and the recession of the state and its services is the increase in the disparity between rich and poor. And a critique of corporatization or globalisation should be a part of educational studies and educational policy making. Education has to prepare people for not just accepting this new world order but critiquing it and picking it apart and seeing their interest. That is my view of political ethics in education. If we are making education for an egalitarian democratic society, we need to understand what educational policies, what definitions of literacy, what forms of pedagogy, what approaches to assessment, what modes of curriculum actually tend to, on standardised testing like PISA, exacerbate the performance gradients between the best and the least well off.

On the other hand we have a crisis in assessment. Present testing and examination systems were geared up to produce a different kind of human subject, they were geared up to assess, define, classify, stream and reproduce a person of another historical and economic era. We have examination systems that are about testing curricular content, about assessing a reproductive engagement with an archive of a particular kind of disciplinary knowledge. We have standardised norm reference achievement tests that had their genesis in the testing of functional literacy, basic skills. The models were developed in the US in 1910 and were meant to reproduce an industrial worker that is able to show replicable skills; and PISA is a species of this model. That is interesting, because new governments are talking of higher order thinking, flexibility, social capital, entrepreneurship - so we have a real problem here whether we agree with or critique the new corporate educational model, since it is obvious that these tests cannot test those goals.

Are we looking at a new global test that teachers will teach up to?

I hope not, because one of the things we do know from socio-cultural psychology theory, is that learning occurs in situ and that it is about tool manipulation and artefact production: learning is contextualised performance.

And as I said, these traditional psychometrics cannot in their present state of the art, evaluate competence, knowledge, values in situ. Trying to pull up test scores by teaching to the test could be a very silly policy because you might be mortgaging a cultural and economic future that you're trying to save. Schools have to do more things than to achieve high standardised achievement scores. You do not want to simply adjust everything to PISA or any other test results. Though they provide useful diagnostic information and formative information on policy and practice - there is a real danger of narrowing pedagogy and curriculum to meet international standards.

We need to understand that there are social and cultural outcomes of education that are being lost in these discussions. Our task as educators and teachers is to come up with alternative types of evidence on whether our system is working or not. For instance, we can look at indicators like attendance, classroom engagement levels, we can longitudinally track life trajectories. There are also happiness, mental health, and belief studies that can tell us a lot about the kind of human subject who moves through educational systems. The questions about social cohesion, social harmony, class mobility, intercultural communication are all the things that are discarded in test driven agenda. It is not in the interest of any nation or educational system to slavishly follow an international testing agenda. If you focus on the basic and functional you lose traditional canonical and critical transformative capacities, or worse yet, those things actually get stratified, so that only certain classes and the elites have them.

How do you see the influence of critical literacy in Queensland reflecting in high PISA scores?

Elements of critical literacy have been in Australian schools for the better part of 10 to 15 years. There has been a recent attack of conservatives and the prime minister, saying that critical is postmodern, Marxist, Maoist (they clearly haven't studied their history or philosophy). These critiques are politically and ideologically motivated. We have introduced critical literacy in two moves. First we worked with teachers in preservice education, way in advance of the gradual curricular change; this set the intellectual sensibility and threshold knowledge of the teachers over a long period of time. The second strategy was to give them no simple formula or script but rather an open space around reading comprehension, composition, to work on critical concepts, to really develop and explore them and play with them. We never said: 'we have this new approach called critical literacy and you just need to do these three steps'. This kind of reform approach - the selling of a magic method - has an effect of polarizing workforces, rising and then fading away, partly because there is little substantive intellectual engagement by teachers with the concepts and ideas. Teachers stubbornly resist curriculum change - sometimes with great justification. We have spent almost a decade in teacher education institutions across the nation teaching different ways of working with text and discourse,

with multimodal texts, and giving teachers curricular space to work on them, as against turning it into reform movement. So it was not named in curriculum until the mid-1990s. When it came in everybody thought that that gives us some licence for the reform, and, best yet, others just thought: 'this is what I've been doing for years'.

Critical literacy is literacy with an attitude, it is a disposition towards text, it is an attitude towards the world, it is an understanding of the things you have to read and write, the tricky, fickle and multi-layered textual world around you, the things you have to decide about. Once teachers grasp the concept, it begins to fly. In terms of test scores, first of all Queensland does not have exams, it has had portfolio based assessment for almost 30 years. We have the assessment space for students to do critical work. What that means is that the students in senior years ensemble different text genres, demonstration of their work, some of them are traditional like poems or essays, some are multimodal, analysing advertising text; and they go to moderation boards. What we had to do was introduce the criteria and the lived experience in a mind-set for teachers who would moderate and judge these texts.

On state reading tests - prior to the reforms, around 20% of Queensland children were struggling with reading at the end of year 3. In 1999 we introduced a multi-code model of literacy, the four resources model: this argued for basics (e.g. phonemic awareness, decoding, spelling, cultural scripts and meaning and how to use them) but also how to read and use texts with critical attitude and disposition. We introduced this model and gave each school two years for them to develop a plan of how they were going to come up with a different approach – and how they were going to link this new digital multiliteracies. But we never told them what to do: we provided a shared vocabulary, asked them to analyse their student and staff resources, come up with a plan and set some targets, and tell us about it. The Queensland approach has worked because we have built the professional expertise and dialogue with teachers. Five years later, on test scores Queensland went from second from the bottom to third from the top; the total number of struggling readers was halved to around 10%. We have got better standardised achievement scores in year three by working with teachers and building from the grassroots up. This is the most powerful lesson here. I believe teaching is intellectual work and the teachers are intellectual activists. Despite policy makers' best efforts, ultimately these systems change in significant ways only because and through the power of the educational ideas. These have to be debated, discussed, embodied by some, critiqued by others. Teaching is still the core business of these systems. And teachers count. And educational ideas can move them in sustainable and profound ways that curriculum changes and policy fixes cannot.

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