NOTIONS OF LITERACY IN THE K–12 SCHOOL SYSTEM

IN BRITISH COLUMBIA EDUCATION SINCE 2002:

A CONTESTED TERRAIN

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Developing literacy competencies has become a central component of educational policy in British Columbia (BC), with policies calling for province-wide assessment and school accountability. Based on the critical policy analysis (Blaikie & Soussan, 2000) of provincial and school district documents, complemented by semi-structured interviews of senior government officials, district-based administrators, and literacy coordinators, this article discusses how the synergistic effect of the policy discourses of accountability and assessment framed the ways of thinking, conceptually and practically, about literacy mainly in terms of its instrumental value in holding public schools accountable to performance indicators. The article concludes by discussing the necessity of redefining literacy to challenge the view of literacy as a mere set of technical and human skills for economic growth to shift the dialogue toward policy alternatives that view literacy as set of capabilities for sociocultural and political change.

Introduction

Across Canada, literacy has become a social and political focus. It is now a central

component of provincial government educational policy. Canadian initiatives connect on a

national level with the Pan Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP), and on an international level

with the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). British Columbia's Literacy for

the 21st Century (ReadNow BC, 2011) reflects the recent spate of provincial initiatives to

develop literacy competencies. In addition, literacy initiatives connect with an overarching

framework of assessment and accountability. The results of these large-scale assessments in

reading and writing are used to compare achievement at the provincial, national, and

international levels and to determine how well individual schools are meeting the objectives set

in their accountability plans.

Yet literacy is a complex and contested concept that is not always fully acknowledged

in policy documents. Street (1984, 1993, 1995) identified two competing models of literacy:

autonomous and ideological. The autonomous model conceptualizes "literacy in technical terms,

treating it as independent of social context" (Street, 1993, p. 5). Seen from this perspective,

reading and writing become a set of neutral skills for decoding and encoding printed text. The

ideological model of literacy acknowledges the complexity of the social context of literacy, and

is "inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society" (p. 7), including political and

economic influences. However, all models of literacy are basically ideological, and are attributed

different societal purposes in policy discourses. For this reason, various interpretations of literacy

have been integrated into policy discourses: "viewing literacy as a simple process of acquiring

basic cognitive skills, to using these skills in ways that contribute to socio-economic

development, to developing the capacity for social awareness and critical reflection as a basis for

personal and social change" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 147).

As researchers, we wish to gain a comprehensive understanding of how and for what

purposes literacy issues came to be at the forefront of the provincial policy agenda in British

Columbia, and how these issues reflect the wider agenda to hold public schools accountable to

performance indicators. This policy study is warranted because educators must investigate these

questions: Does a credible argument for public school systems to shift to policy alternatives

include a vision of the purposes of literacy to reduce literacy solely to its instrumental dimensions, focusing mainly on basic skills and job preparation? Are there other perspectives of literacy that offer wider social advantages to students and society?

Drawing on critical policy analysis theory (Blaikie & Soussan, 2000), we have examined BC government written material and policy documents in relation to (a) policy origins and history, and (b) definitions and purposes ascribed to literacy in policy discourses.

To answer our research questions, we completed a thorough document analysis of ministry and school district publications. In addition we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with government policy makers and school-district educational leaders involved in literacy and accountability policy decisions at the local and provincial levels. These interviews allowed voices from the field to articulate their perspectives on purposes and practices of literacy. In our findings segment, we apply critical policy analysis theory to our document and interview data, concluding with implications for ministry officials and educators.

Methodology

The research we report in this article is part of a larger literacy project to look at the educational policies connected to literacy in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. The central goal of our inquiry was to develop a comprehensive understanding of policy discourses and how they have shaped an understanding of the nature and purposes of literacy held by senior officials from the ministries of education, district-based administrators, and literacy coordinators.

For the British Columbia component of the research project, we used two main sources of data. First, we collected written material and policy documents from the Ministry of Education and from participating school districts. We developed codes (categories), both deductively and

inductively, to divide our data into units of analysis, and then coded each unit (Yin, 1993). We used a preliminary coding scheme for the data-analysis phase based on the conceptual and practical dimensions of literacy from the perspective of the field and the BC government. We engaged in continuous comparison to identify similar events and to group them into the same conceptual categories. To facilitate management of the large quantity of our data, we used the NVivo software program, a qualitative computer software analysis program, to assist with coding and retrieving data. Also, this software allowed us to "connect" selected passages, memos, and codes into diagrams to graphically outline complex relations. We also used this program to display the data by generating visual maps and diagrams of developing categories and their relationships.

Second, we gathered data through semi-structured in-depth interviews. We contacted all BC school districts to participate voluntarily in the project. Of the 60 school districts in British Columbia, nine responded. For this research project, we interviewed 12 participants, mostly superintendents, assistant superintendents, or directors of instruction from nine school districts, and two senior government officials from the BC Ministry of Education. One of the central questions asked during the extensively detailed interviews was to have them define literacy. With this question, the contested notions of literacy became apparent.

We interviewed each participant, either in person or over the phone, for 60 to 90 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. We forwarded the transcriptions to each participant for verification and clarification of details. After the interviews were corrected and validated, we entered the transcripts into NVivo for thematic coding. For the first round of data analysis, we coded each interview using predetermined thematic codes that we identified as significant areas of study for our research project, such as notions, perspectives, and

functions of literacy. The transcripts then went through a second round of data analysis to address emergent themes that we identified during the first coding session, like focus, practices, and forms of literacy. NVivo allowed us to compile related quotations, which were printed out for further analysis by hand, using colour coding to allow for a visual analysis.

To comply with the ethical and anonymous identity needs of the study, we gave each individual a pseudonym, and, for the schools, we replaced their district name and number with a letter identity—for instance, hypothetically, the Mountain View School District 99, might be identified in the study as BC "Z."

Contested Notions of Literacy: Policy Context

Literacy is a key component of educational policy and accountability frameworks. Governments around the world are addressing the significance of literacy, especially in global and national assessments (e.g., UNESCO, PISA). Despite its prevalence and implied significance both in education and society, literacy is difficult to clearly define. Originally individuals were considered literate if they could mark their name with an X; later this "skill" was extended to reading one's own name, and to legibly writing it as a signature. Even at this rudimentary level, the marking or signing of one's name had legal and political consequences, because the mark was used to authenticate legal documents and consign the right to vote. Therefore, the concept of literacy was tied to legal and political processes, and a designation of power and agency. An extreme example of this was the use of literacy tests in southern states of the United States to delineate those who were eligible to vote and to partake in the democratic process.

The concept of literacy was later expanded to include the ability to read and write text. Most denotative definitions of literacy refer to the ability to read and to write as the main traits of

literacy. Yet even this common-sense definition is contested because it fails to address what level of reading and writing is appropriate for a person to be considered literate. UNESCO's General Conference in 1958 addressed literacy (pairing it with the concept of illiteracy) when it stated that "'a person is literate/illiterate who can/cannot with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his [or her] everyday life.' This definition became a guidepost for national censuses and contributed to the generation of more comparable literacy statistics" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 162).

Functional literacy became a term to define the level of literacy needed for an individual to be a productive member of society. Because the relationship of an individual to society is complex, the functional level changes according to the specific needs of a society. Christenbury, Bomer, and Smagorinsky (2009) noted that,

> given that researchers cannot agree on which evidence suggests that a person can read, which research approaches most usefully identify this ability, and which instruction is most likely to produce it, even the most conservative definition of literacy—the ability to read and/or produce letters—does not provide consensus among those whose careers are devoted to understanding the process people go through in learning to be fluent with written expression. (p. 6)

Whose interests are to be valued? To consider this question, Ramdas (1989) stated that

> the concept of functional literacy was further refined to fit more precisely into the framework of linking literacy with economic growth and returns. The contents of literacy programmes were, therefore, centered around the requirements of each economic project to be undertaken. (p. 633)

Linking literacy to economic development or the specific needs of a society is somewhat ironic, considering that the skills themselves are often thought to be cognitive, developmental abilities independent of social and cultural contexts.

The meaning and definition of literacy has been further expanded in many provincial

curriculum documents to include speaking and listening (categorized as oracy by some theorists), and decoding and manipulating various semiotic codes, including map reading, sign systems, and media including movies, television, advertising, computers, and music notation. At the extreme end, literacy is simply another word for competency, and we now hear about scientific literacy, design literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, musical literacy, mathematical literacy, digital literacy, and even emotional literacy. Obviously the understanding of literacy has become diverse and complex, leading to various theoretical models designed to understand it.

Previously in this article, we noted that Street (1984, 1995, 2011) identified two competing models of literacy in terms of theoretical understanding: autonomous and ideological. In his discussion of the autonomous versus the ideological model of literacy, he noted that literacy is not a technical and neutral act, but rather, a social practice constructed and embedded within a social context. Street summarized autonomous literacy as a set of discrete skills for reading and writing text that are universal and neutral, and act independent of society and culture (Street, 2011). In contrast to an autonomous understanding of literacy, many language theorists (including Street) conceptualize literacy as a social and cultural process (Scribner & Cole, 1981). Although Street originally called this perspective ideological, it might be more accurate to call this perspective socio-cultural in nature, because all perspectives of literacy could be ideological.

Perry's (2012) "What is Literacy?" provides a critical overview of socio-cultural literacy perspectives. Theorists who conceptualize literacy from a sociocultural perspective do not consider literacy simply as a set of cognitive skills that are autonomous and based on a psychological model of development. Instead, they acknowledge the profound effect of society and culture upon literacy and language use. Perry states, "Sociocultural perspectives on literacy include various theories focused on the myriad ways in which people use literacy in context,

which include a strong emphasis on power relations" (p. 1). Broadly, she groups the vast work done in sociocultural literacy into three major perspectives: (a) literacy as social practice, (b) multiliteracies, and (c) critical literacies.

Theorists of literacy as social practice "would say that literacy is what people do with reading, writing, and texts in real world contexts and why they do it" (Perry, 2012, p. 54). From this perspective, literacy is not just a set of cognitive and linguistic skills residing in individuals, but literacy involves practices that are more usefully understood as existing in the relationships between people, within groups and communities (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). Literacy, therefore, cannot be understood or explained simply as a set of skills used by individuals in isolation. Instead the social context is always significant and needs to be considered. Gee (1990) defines literacy as much more than reading and writing, and manipulating words in text. Literacy encompasses the full set of attributes and attitudes that one brings to a social interaction. Literacy is ideological because it represents a stance in relation to the world. (Christenbury et al., 2009, p. 7).

Multiliteracy theory is also concerned with social and cultural contexts, but with an emphasis on new forms of media and technology that extend what constitutes a text and how one engages with these forms. "Multiliteracies scholars do not reject print literacy, but they view it as only one form of representation and meaning-making among many—one that has been, and continues to be, privileged above other forms in schooling" (Perry, 2012, p. 59). The main difference between multiliteracy theory and literacy as seen as social practice "is how text is defined: multiliteracies theorists do not limit their definition of text to print only and instead include a variety of forms and semiotic systems" (p. 59).

Critical theory arises from the seminal work of Paulo Freire (2013), who understood

literacy as much more than cognitive skills. As Freire explains, "I can see validity only in a literacy program in which men understand words in their true significance: as a force to transform the world" (p. 106). Perry (2012) notes that Freire saw literacy "as a process of conscientização, or consciousness, which means taking the printed word, connecting it to the world, and then using that for purposes of empowerment" (p. 60). Critical literacy's main focus is on what people do with language and how it actualizes real change, both in an individual and in society. It is almost diametrically opposed to the autonomous concept of literacy as a set of discrete skills seen as independent of social and cultural influences. Freire (2013) saw the need for practical skills, but always with an awareness of the profound social implications. As Perry (2012) notes,

> conceptualizing literacy as something one does, as opposed to a skill or ability one has, helps us understand the real-world ways in which real people engage with real texts, which ultimately could help educators make formal literacy instruction more meaningful and relevant for learners. (p. 62)

For our research, we note the vast difference in approaches to literacy, and how these contested notions of literacy impact educational policy and pedagogical practice. In the examination of policy documents and the narratives interviews, we found it important to reveal the notions of literacy to reach a deeper understanding of the complexity of implementing literacy policy, especially in relation to concurrent accountability frameworks being implemented by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia.

Situating Literacy Within the Policy Reform of the Campbell Government

Reforming the K–12 Public Education System

The Gordon Campbell government was first elected in 2001 in a perceived financial crisis. His Liberal Party claimed that the government spending under the previous NDP government was out of control, leading the province towards a serious economic recession caused by high personal tax rates compared with other provinces, unaffordable universal benefits, ineffective and inefficient government administration, and mounting government debt. The BC Liberals outlined the need in their election platform for *structural* changes to how the province was run: *A New Era for British Columbia: A Vision for Hope and Prosperity for the Decade and Beyond* (BC Liberals, 2001). In their platform, the BC Liberals declared that they wanted to create a world-class education system for economic competitiveness by ensuring that "young people have the skills and knowledge to compete with the world's best and win" (BC Liberals, 2001, p. 7).

After their election in 2001, the new Liberal government set up a task force, the Select Standing Committee on Education (SSCE), with the mandate to develop recommendations for policy changes needed to improve the system in terms of operational principles, goals, and objectives. The SSCE published a report, *A Future for Learners: A Vision for Renewal of Education in British Columbia* (BC Ministry of Education, 2002), which criticized the education system for being unresponsive to learners' and parents' needs, for being over-centralized, and for lacking accurate measurement of its quality. The centrepiece of the report was the promotion of a market- and consumer-driven, decentralized education system of high accountability. Bill 34, the School Amendment Act of May 30, 2002, was the government's legislative response to the

SSCE report.. Bill 34 provided for and encouraged the development of a market in the provision

of public education by introducing (a) entrepreneurial powers for school districts through an

explicit statutory framework to create for-profit school-board business companies, (b) parental

choice and parental involvement through school councils, and (c) a considerable public

accountability through school-board accountability contracts (Fallon & Paquette, 2008).

Following the enactment of Bill 34 in 2002, the BC government put forward initiatives

to promote literacy in the K–12 education system. In 2004, the government, promising a focus on

literacy through the Throne Speech, set up literacy innovation grants for school districts to

support the development of innovative teaching practices to improve literacy from kindergarten

through Grade 12 (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2004). In the Throne Speech, the

provincial government stated that it wanted British Columbia to be "recognized as the most

literate location in North America by 2010" (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2004,

p.19). The proposed timeline was later on changed to 2015. In 2005, the BC Government made

literacy one of its "Five Great Goals" and included it in the provincial Strategic Plan 2006/07–

2008/09.[1] In the same year, the government committed to actions such as:

- developing a comprehensive early years strategy to help children enter school
  ready to learn;

- ensuring British Columbians (students and adults) have high levels of literacy
  and are attaining the knowledge, skills and attitudes to compete in today's
  global economy and society; and

- closing the gap in literacy and educational attainment between Aboriginal and
  non-Aboriginal British Columbians. (Auditor General of British Columbia,
  2008, p.16)

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[1] http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2006/sp/prem/Goals,Objectives,StrategiesandResults9.htm

Also, in June 2005, the Ministry of Education was given the lead responsibility for literacy, which included coordinating provincial efforts and developing a provincial strategy for literacy. In early 2006, the Legislative Assembly created the Select Standing Committee on Education with the mandate,

> to examine, inquire, and make recommendations with respect to:
>
> - finding effective strategies to address the specific challenge of adult literacy and, in particular, to conduct consultations to consider successful strategies from other jurisdictions on the promotion of adult literacy; and
>
> - English-as-a-second-language adults and seniors. (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2006, p. ii)

The committee submitted its report to the Legislative Assembly in November 2006 with several recommendations, including the creation of a single secretariat to coordinate the activities of the ministries involved with literacy policy-making and programming. Following this report, in 2006/07, the government announced its strategic framework for literacy (Government of British Columbia, 2006). In developing this framework, the Ministry of Education had three objectives: it sought revisions to the School Act to update the planning (including that for literacy) and reporting processes at school districts, outlined British Columbia's strategy for literacy, and provided targets and an action plan for literacy. In 2007, the BC government amended the School Act making "school districts responsible for all learners, and obligated them to partner with communities to create their own district literacy plans" (Government of British Columbia, 2010, p. 1). Through this policy making process, Premier Gordon Campbell made literacy the number one goal in the government Strategic Plan of 2006/2007 and 2007/2008. He declared that he wanted to make British Columbia the best-

educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent (Government of British Columbia, 2006).

The Strategic Plan (2006) stipulated that

> education and literacy are vital to the progress of both individuals and the province as a whole. They lay the foundations for success in school, at work and throughout our lives—and foster innovations that directly benefit our economy, society and individuals' quality of life.
>
> In today's world, knowledge is the key to opportunity. It gives people confidence, improves their self-reliance and allows them to discover and achieve their full potential while improving overall economic and social wellbeing for British Columbians. That is why the government has made education and literacy a top priority. (Government of British Columbia, 2006, p. 13)

In this quotation, literacy was identified as a top priority linked with the economic fortunes of

BC. As the government reconfigured the provision of public education in market terms in the

policy reform of 2002, so too was literacy, which became concerned with student access to

educational markets and their preparation to participate in economic markets as formulated in the

preamble of the British Columbia School Act (1986):

> AND WHEREAS the purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy. (Government of British Columbia, 1986, p. C-11)

Noticeably, enhancing the strength of a democratic, healthy, and pluralistic society is

emphasized as providing learners in the public system with the tools needed to be fulfilled and to

be prepared to make significant contributions to their province's economic sustainability within a

globalizing economic system. This perspective envisioned, as an end result, a prosperous and

sustainable economy to emerge from an educational system by producing new generations of

highly skilled workers to drive an economic sector to provide high, value-added goods and

services for a global marketplace. The central vision for the BC public school system was the

belief that the on-going production of human capital (Coleman, 1988) through the enhancement of literacy levels would secure the economic competiveness and sustainability of the province in face of the changing global economy of the 21st century. Originally, under the Gordon Campbell government, the notion of literacy was not provided in the BC School Act until the departure of Premier Campbell in 2011. However, in the 2013 revision of the BC School Act (under Premier Christie Clark), the government made an addition to define literacy as "the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community" (British Columbia School Act, C-15). This definition of literacy corresponds with Street's observation of literacy as autonomous (and therefore independent of cultural and social factors), comprising a set of discrete skills for reading and writing printed text (decoding and encoding processes) required for a successful entry into the workforce (Street, 1984, 1993, 1995). Subsequently, the key features of the definition (skills for reading and writing) remained present in BC's Education Plan published by the BC Ministry of Education in 2015 (BC Ministry of Education, 2015e) which states that "a strong focus must remain on foundational skills—reading, writing, oral language and numeracy" (p. 6). However, this definition of literacy as a set of discrete skills for reading and writing is reframed within an educational aim to ensure that "young people entering the workforce have the lifelong skills and competencies that employers are increasingly looking for: creative thinking, problem solving, initiative, curiosity, and the ability to lead and work well in groups" (Ministry of Education, 2015e, p. 3). Literacy is seen here as *the learning through which all other learning takes place.* The notion of autonomous literacy has not disappeared from the policy agenda of the BC government. It has been, to an extent, de-emphasized as the central education issue in the forefront given the stakes for the future of the economy in British Columbia.

Positioning the Notion of Literacy within Policies of School-Choice and Accountability

Part of the dynamics to actualize the notion of literacy in policy discourse in BC was the development in 2002 of a choice-driven public education system (Fallon & Paquette, 2008). The government made school catchment areas permeable, meaning that parents could apply to enroll children in out-of-catchment area schools if space and facilities were available. Also, the Ministry of Education enacted a school-choice policy to enable the provision of public education to parents and students through a plurality of public educational offerings such as sports academies or eco-schools (Fallon & Poole, 2013). As in other jurisdictions promoting school choices, parents and students in BC faced numerous choices and needed a process through which to gather and interpret statistics on the academic achievement of schools (Bossetti, 2004).

This need for easily accessible information on schools' and school districts' academic performance led the government to repurpose large-scale assessments to establish a provincial accountability process based on individual student performance and school district accountability contracts (Government of British Columbia, 2015). As of July 1, 2015, Achievement Contracts are no longer mandated by the Ministry of Education. A new framework is being co-developed with education stakeholders and was supposed to be posted prior to the beginning of the 2015/2016 school year (British Columbia, 2015). At the date of submission of this article, no new accountability framework has been posted on the government website. Previously in BC, a large-scale assessment program called the Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP) was in place, created in 1976. Every year, assessment protocol included students in Grades 4, 7, and 10, focusing on language arts, mathematics, and science. The purposes of the PLAP were to inform educators and the public about the strengths and weaknesses of the education system. The data were used to support the ministry, school districts, and individual schools to make decisions

linked to curricula and allocation of resources, while monitoring student learning over time (Klinger, DeLuca, & Miller, 2008). Under the New Democratic Party (NDP) government, the ministry replaced the PLAP in the mid-1990s with the Foundations Skills Assessment (FSA). The FSA was (and still is) designed as a criterion-referenced test intended to assess skill-oriented approaches to the teaching of reading and writing (Ministry of Education, 2015d).

It was only in 2008, under the Gordon Campbell Liberal government, that the use of the Foundational Skills Assessment (FSA) was established as the baseline to report student performance for provincial, district, and school reports (BC Ministry of Education, 2015a). The FSA became an annual province-wide assessment administered between February and May of each year. This province-wide assessment provided a snapshot of how well BC students were learning foundation skills in reading comprehension, writing, and numeracy in Grades 4 and 7. Grade 10 was included until 2004 (BC Ministry of Education, 2015b). Every year, the average FSA scores in reading, writing, and numeracy per school are made publicly available on the BC Ministry of Education website (BC Ministry of Education, 2015c). Anyone can use these publicly accessible score results to analyze, compare, and rank the performance of individual schools. The Fraser Institute does this annually with the publication of a report to rank elementary and secondary schools from top to bottom in performance. In both reports, the Fraser Institute states that their reports tool is designed to "assist parents when they choose a school for their children" (Cowley & Easton, 2015, p. 3). In ranking elementary schools, the Fraser Institute uses reading and writing as two performance indicators, although they are not part of the performance indicators used in ranking secondary schools. As previously indicated, reading and writing ceased to be used directly as performance indicators for secondary schools in 2004.

Voices From the Field: Interview Data

Part One: Administrators' and District Resource Teachers' Definitions of Literacy

In this section, we consider the interviews with district administrators[2] and resource teachers[3] of the participating school districts, focusing on their definitions of literacy. We felt interviewing school board officials and consultants was important because they have responsibility for implementing the government policies regarding literacy, and integrating them into the field.

The participants' perceptions of literacy were varied, and showed the complexities of trying to clearly define literacy. We have used pseudonyms in all occasions for both participants and school districts.

Barb, an assistant superintendent from BC "G," said, "ten years ago, if you talked about literacy skills, you would have gone right to reading and writing. And now when you think of literacy skills, you think of different kinds of literacies. I think it's changing." When asked about her definition, she suggested a two-tiered definition:

> I think there's a basic definition that I wouldn't want to remove from the
> primary focus which is, of course, reading and writing. That would be, to me,
> the first definition of literacy. . . . Now of course, there are technological
> literacies, and other kinds of literacies that have emerged in the last number of
> years. But if you can't read or write, it's very difficult to talk about the other
> kinds of literacies that exist. It's essential that all students be able to read and
> write in order for them to be competent in all other forms of literacy.

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[2] The role of district administrators (superintendent, assistant-superintendent, director of instruction) is defined as agent of implementation of literacy policy at the district level, with a focus on determining and implementing the minimum conditions deemed required for the successful implementation of provincial policy directions at the district level (e.g., budget, organizational structure, staffing).

[3] The role of resource teachers/consultants is to work directly with teachers in enhancing their capacities for developing literacy within schools.

In terms of an educator's responsibility to students, Barb claimed that "all forms of literacy are important but they can all be woven into reading and writing. But the students, to be successful, have to be able to read and write." Barb has a pragmatic approach to literacy, and educators' responsibilities to students.

Donna, the superintendent from BC "A," acknowledged the complexity of literacy and the difficulty to clearly define what it is:

> . . . there are many concepts of literacy. We've obviously been focused, big time, on reading literacy. There are other literacies like technological literacy and understanding how technology can support you. There's health literacy. There's a lot of other literacies. But I guess, how I look at it is, I look at it from the basis that for kids, what I believe it means is, that they can function fully in a world of words. You can't surf the net if you're not literate because you don't know how to spell, you don't know how to write, you can't do a search. So I think, I just look at it simply as, you can function to high levels in a world of words and express yourself verbally and in writing at high levels because of the literacy levels that you've achieved.

Donna's understanding of literacy is significant in that while she acknowledged the complexity of literacy in the modern world, she still maintained that the fundamental importance focuses on the need to function at a high level in "the world of words," both verbally and in written forms.

Holly, a community literacy coordinator from BC "I", said:

> I keep thinking of reading and writing, obviously. But I think a literate human being is really someone who can function in the world, who can take care of their basic needs and then the family's needs, who certainly has the skills they need to be independent, can take care of their health and read the directions, or read and follow, in some way, the directions your doctor gives you, who can fill out forms, do your own income tax, apply for a job, write a letter, all of those things.

Holly's approach to literacy, like Barb's, is practical, and a means for a person to navigate successfully in society. The focus is on reading and writing, although Holly would include "numeracy, since they go hand in glove. . . . You have to be able to read and comprehend in order to live in a numerate world, as well." Holly noted that she would "love them all to be book

worms—I want everyone to love reading and our libraries to be bustling . . . but I have to settle for another world."

The interview session with BC "H" included three individuals: the superintendent, the director of instruction, and a literacy teacher. The group interview provided the school district's concept of literacy from several vantage points. Larry, the superintendent of BC "H," maintained that "there is a basic fundamental diversity" when thinking about literacy. "I think every person needs a fundamental literacy such that they can read a newspaper, complete a job application, and communicate around a variety of different purposes." Larry then explained "that beyond that though, there are specialized literacies that apply to interest areas, focus areas and work areas." Larry related a story about a construction teacher whose students "often excel in the construction field, but are not successful in graduating [high school] because [they] struggle with math and with reading and English courses." The teacher is now "trying to develop a program where he will take responsibility for a literacy that works for those students so they get the math skills that will complement their work in the building trade. . . . Instead of reading literature, they can read blueprints and work orders," so they can learn to "read those things really, really effectively and develop those kinds of communication."

Larry's narrative shows the importance of specific discourse and language usage in specific situations. Larry maintained that literacy goes beyond reading comprehension, and he related a very significant story about reading to show the problems of focusing solely on reading scores as a measure of understanding.

> I'll never forget a student that I worked with a number of years ago. She was a
> very, very talented student, and very clever. I could take a passage out of
> almost any available literature that we had in the school, hand it to her and she
> could sight read it beautifully. One day, just as an experiment, after she read
> something, I asked her to tell me what she had read. She answered that I
> wasn't listening. And I thought, that's really interesting because she could

absolutely speak the words without any registration of comprehension and
there was no meaning there at all.

Larry said that literacy "encompasses communication, and whether we are expressing ourselves,

or sharing other's expressions through what we read, there is a huge component around the depth

of understanding of what's being said [or read.]" Larry suggested that reading scores did not

always reflect a deep understanding of text, or how one applied what was contained in the text to

another situation or application. As Larry said, "we have to create that understanding for children

of all ages."

Linda, a literacy teacher in BC "H," said that her district is

trying to expand the definition of literacy. . . . We are trying to have kids and
families see that there are different kinds of literacy, and different ways into
literacy so that they feel that if they are a successful reader and writer they
will be open to trying other forms of reading and writing. . . . Then we can
build the skills in order for them to be a part of that democratic society in a
successful and meaningful way as they move forward in their lives.

Linda's concept of literacy includes social and cultural values that impact the entire society.

This concept portrays literacy as much more than a set of discrete skills that often define

functional literacy. Linda concluded the BC "H" group interview by saying that "literacy is a

process of making and expressing meaning and that it can come in a number of forms, both in

meaning making and expression. . . . I don't know as a society that we have a clear definition

right now."

Jennifer, assistant superintendent for BC "C," said literacy "represented

communication, some kind of communication that is represented through some form of

understanding." Furthermore,

. . . literacy is the key to participation in a democratic society because if
people don't have access to the information that they need and they don't
have a way of being included in the public conversation, then democracy is
self-defeating. I mean the whole idea of democracy is voice to the people and

> . . . if people don't have access, then we don't have the public sphere
> discussions that are needed in order to develop collective knowledge. We
> need emergence and generation of knowledge in a democratic society and, at
> this point at least, literacy seems to be our technology for creating those
> public sphere discussions.

Jennifer acknowledged that literacy maintains a key social and cultural function in the modern

world.

Randy, director of instruction for BC "D," explained the different approaches to

literacy:

> Literacy is being defined very broadly these days, to include literacy of many
> forms: technology literacy, math literacy and so on. We can agree that we
> need to build capacity in our students to be literate across the various domains
> of knowledge. So they need to be math literate, they need to be literate with
> respect to other kinds of ways in making meaning of their world.

As a former language arts and humanities teacher, Randy also saw the need to focus literacy on

the printed word:

> But then there's literacy as it relates to reading and writing. They are still very
> important in the way in which literacy is defined in terms of how reading and
> writing help us to make sense of who we are as human beings and how we
> make sense of the world. So literacy, in that sense, more narrowly defined, is
> learning how to read well. I'd say that it informs who I am and how I interact
> with the world and learning, how to write well so that I can communicate
> what I've come to understand about those things.

His goals of education and working with language went well beyond the often superficial skills

of what reading means:

> I wanted them to not just be able to read and decode and to make the right
> inferences, but I wanted them to enjoy the language, I wanted them to develop
> literary sensibilities, to be able to play with language, to be able to play with it
> as a writer and play with it as a reader, to allow language to be a source of
> pleasure for them, educational pleasure.

Randy believed that literacy has lifelong effects upon his students and leads to more meaningful

lives, with full engagement in society.

Cynthia, director of instruction for BC "E," expanded upon a fundamental concept of

literacy: "literacy *is* critical thinking. It's not a system of decoding. It's about thinking about

what you read and determining the significance of it and what one's response to it should be."

Robert, assistant superintendent BC "F," said, "literacy is having the tools to

communicate and to understand, and to take the next step in evolving as a learner—whether that

is computer literacy, numeracy, or literacy with book learning." Robert related an interesting

story about how his district is contacting Aboriginal students to make literacy more meaningful

and relevant:

> We just introduced a new Okanagan unit in grade 4 Social Studies and it's one
> of the first units of its kind in this region. It actually studies the Okanagan
> people instead of studying the Haida and the Inuit and other groups. They're
> [Aboriginal students] studying themselves and the other kids in the class are
> studying the people who lived here before they came. So it's really important
> in literacy to be meaningful and relevant to the people and I think that's going
> to help our Aboriginal population get more of a tie in with the school and be
> more engaged at school. Be more a part of it, it's not someone else's
> education, it's their education.

Robert's story demonstrates how literacy practices can connect to a local community and

validate local knowledge (Heath, 1983; Friere, 2003, 2013).

Mary, director of Aboriginal programs for BC "B," noted the multi dimensions of

literacy:

> Literacy, to me—reading and writing is a part of it. But there is also the oral
> part. There's the listening part. There's the speaking part and I think in
> today's world with technology, there is a whole other piece that is happening
> that we don't always acknowledge, and that is the literacy that happens with
> the communication systems that young people are using—Facebook, texting
> on phones, blogging, Myspace. This is an incredibly literate generation of
> children.

This quotation illustrates two important aspects of literacy often ignored in policy documents.

The first is the prevalence and significance of oral tradition, especially in speaking and writing

skills. Mary said that educators often have a "European centered places of learning" and that it

was often "hard to bridge to bridge the gap." Aboriginal populations

> have an oral tradition. I think that there's a gap there too in that we still tend
> to look at literacy as being reading and writing, but other communities and
> even in our own history as Western people, when we go back far enough, it
> always held a large oral role. All of our fairytales are originally from
> European culture and came from an oral storytelling place.

As these interviewees explain, the oral tradition has validity in all cultures, a conclusion that

educators must recognize.

Furthermore, Mary noted another significant area of literacy practice that is often

ignored, and rarely addressed in policy statements—the literacy involved in computers and

websites and on-line communication systems:

> When I go online and I look at what youth are writing and I see they're using
> poetic quotes, they're using song lyrics, they are reading and writing more
> than any other generation, but we don't acknowledge it because it doesn't
> conform to our standard practices. So, when they're using things like LOL
> and all their little short hands, they know exactly what they're saying to each
> other. We, on the other hand, are outside of that communication often because
> a number of us are from a far older generation. Our media tends to be
> transmission. The TV just blurts out at us and we just passively accept all that.
> Well, these children today, in their forms of media, it is completely interactive
> and it is not passive at all and they aren't very interested in television as the
> way to transmit information in the sense that we have been growing up.

Mary concluded with a comment, and a pointed critique, about how literacy is conceptualized in

the school practices and programs in her school district:

> It's very traditional. It's a very 18th century factory model. It's reading and
> writing and when you get into the high schools, it's "can you put your ideas
> down and organize your thoughts? Can you develop an essay with a premise
> and supports and a conclusion?" It is very traditional.

Rebecca, superintendent BC "B," addressed the definition of literacy in broad terms:

"Well I think that literacy is the broad ability to read the written word—read, and understand

what is being produced and to be able to use it I guess." Literacy is "that ability to take language, and use language in all its forms and to be able to function capably in our society would make, in my mind, someone literate." When asked about provincial literacy and accountability policies, Rebecca said it was sometimes more difficult to address literacy issues than many expect: "I think it's just difficult with literacy because it's not an easy thing to teach kids to read. We all think that if we just did these few things, kids would read. It's a very difficult process for many kids because of many complicating factors."

Angela, the director of instruction for BC "H," said that "[m]y personal understanding of literacy is it's everything that we do, whether it be reading, writing, speaking, the fundamentals from oral conversation, and language development." For Angela literacy is the key to education: "It's the fundamentals for everything that we do and if we're not supporting our children in developing their literacy skills, then we're not supporting them as learners." Angela's interview reminds educators that is best to remember the "complicating factors" when addressing literacy issues, and realizing that simplified ideas about literacy can limit education.

Part Two: Ministry Officials' Definitions/Perceptions of Literacy

In this section, we focus on two interviews we conducted with two senior officials[4] working in the Ministry of Education. Both interviews were approximately ninety minutes in duration. Both officials were forthright and open about the issues and tensions surrounding

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[4] The two government officials were involved in policy making and implementation at the provincial level. They play the role of liaison between the ministry and the senior administration of school districts. More specifically, they provide the vision for how the ministry and its partners address and transform the development of literacy within the K–12 public school system. Also, they act as the major interface between the political and administrative function of government.

recent literacy and achievement policies. Our intention here is to allow the voices and narratives to be fully heard; the quotations are relatively long, and will be dealt with one at a time. The interviews covered a vast range of topics and ideas, but for this article we will focus on the interviewees' understandings of literacy, and how they see literacy policy being somewhat problematic in its implementation.

Judith, a senior official in the Ministry of Education, was forthright about the difficulties facing educators in today's political climate. She outlined the mechanism that is currently in place to ensure that literacy goals set by the provincial government are met by the various school districts:

> As a [government official] I'm aware of legislation that points towards districts' responsibilities to ensure that they have targeted goals that focus specifically on literacy. We have a regulation that requires districts to have that particular focus in their achievement contracts. In my work, I do follow up on that and work with districts to ensure that they have, that the progress they're making is what they had hoped for and, if not, then to help them find the supports that might be required to ensure that it's in place. We also have district literacy plans. We have a policy around the need to be working broadly with the community around issues that affect literacy. As professionals, we define literacy, both in the field and inside the Ministry, as professional public servants, quite broadly. However, I think politically, literacy has been defined as reading. So there is a bit of tension between how we view literacy, I think both from a political and a professional lens.

We also found this tension in the preceding interviews with administrators from the school boards. The local communities often have specific needs that they must address and these needs often go beyond the reading focus of the government. But the voting public, from their perspective, also constrains the government itself, including the Ministry of Education:

> The public typically sees literacy as reading. So depending on the context, literacy has different meaning for different people. But we do have specific policies and regulations. They stem from legislation around the requirement to have literacy plans and to be coordinating and working with communities. As a district-based superintendent, I was responsible, of course, for the

development of that plan and coordinating, connecting with, with community based literacy coordinators.

Judith, a former district superintendent, noted that balancing public perception with the students' educational needs is not simple:

> What I've come to understand, since working in government, is that you need to be able to talk to your public. If we talked about literacy as your ability, you know, in financial literacy, or your ability to be creative, or to engage in parts of democratic life, or the nurturing of food, as a particular literacy, that would not resonate with Joe or Josephine Public. I think that politically things [problems or challenges] are reduced so that they can be consumed by the public. There's always a bit of an effort to simplify very complex and organic processes so that politicians and government officials can talk about it with the public.

Out of necessity, literacy, therefore, has become a simplified term in government policy statements because of government officials' perceived need to communicate as simply as possible to the general voting public.

Carmen, senior government official in the British Columbia Ministry of Education, explained the complexity of how the government arrived at its definition of literacy through working with a large committee of stakeholders:

> This was a lengthy conversation and this was before my time on the file. However, I was here and peripherally involved [in this conversation]. There was a real concerted effort to try to get to a definition of literacy that would meet the needs of the community of literacy practitioners, the education system, [and] all of the big players, if you will. It might sound like it wasn't that difficult, but it was very challenging because the more players you try to involve in the conversation, the higher level, the more generic, or the more expansive your definition becomes so that people can see themselves in it. So we ended up with a paragraph outlining a definition of literacy. [This definition] was the result of a great deal of discussion and good faith consultation and good work. But when that comprehensive definition was then brought forward for additional direction from Cabinet, it was, yes, but no, that's not what we meant. I mean nice to do guys, but no, what we meant was reading.

For the government, the cabinet realized that having a complex working definition for literacy would be problematic for easy communication to the general public. In conclusion, literacy became reading:

> Because the cabinet is a group of people from vastly different kinds of backgrounds. They're a group of folks, right, who happen to be elected so they're not experts in literacy, nor should they be. So they're coming at it from a pretty commonsense perspective and they're also in the business of trying to explain complex things in ways that the general population can understand. So they're looking for shorthand ways to get complex ways together forward.
>
> So taking that focus meant that what we're talking about is reading and that's up to the branding around *ReadNow BC*. That was a bit of a dance too because you obviously take that direction, that's what we're here for, to implement that direction. However we needed to build bridges back with our stakeholders and the partners in this work and we needed to say *ReadNow* BC.

The senior administrators at the ministry recognized that literacy is far more complex than just measuring reading scores. Local needs dictate different methodologies and pedagogies in specific situations that go beyond reading scores. The ministry officials knew of this tension, and were trying to implement a much more complex understanding of literacy:

> However, we really do understand that literacy is much more complex than that and there are many more things that we're trying to accomplish here together, so bear with us and give us the benefit of the doubt as we try to push forward. The way I would try to describe it when I was talking with folks, partners, was that the reading piece is the pointy end of literacy. That's the point that people get [understand] and that would help us leverage that political will to move this agenda forward. But at the same time recognizing that reading is just that pointy end and we are in fact bringing a vast system, if you will, in behind that.

The ministry's approach is admirable. They are using reading as a shorthand for literacy, and using reading scores to communicate to the public the importance of literacy, while working with individual school districts to introduce more difficult aspects of literacy practice. The problem is that with an accountability model the reading scores become a shorthand way to evaluate the districts' and individual school's ability to address the publicized literacy goals. And in doing so

the reading scores become a quick way to address school effectiveness without addressing the complexities of local needs and issues.

Conclusion and Implications

Contested Nature of the Notion of Literacy

In describing the key historical features of the BC educational policy landscape and presenting the multiple voices from the field defining and theorizing about literacy in BC, we found a wide diversity of conceptual and practical understandings of literacy. Literacy is a complex, dynamic, and multifaceted concept. Several research participants in our study acknowledged the difficulty of defining literacy that captures its complexity in an ever-changing, modern world. In our study, we discovered that the term literacy is used in policy documents and in the narratives of our research participants to describe not only the autonomous skills characterised as forming an integral part of literacy, such as writing, reading, and numeracy, but also the application of these skills in the lived experiences of individuals, and in their economic, social, cultural, and political levels of participation in society. Yet the way the concept of literacy is understood by the stakeholders creates a dichotomous situation that results in a tension between policy directions and actual experience in the schools.

Within the context of on-going economic, political, cultural, and social transformations and the advancement of information and communication technologies, research participants and policy makers within the ministry knew of the many practices of literacy embedded in different personal circumstances and collective social, political, economic, and cultural structures and contexts. However, as indicated by officials from the BC Ministry of Education, such diversity and complexities linked to literacy are absent in the government's official narrative designed for

public consumption. In the interviews, senior ministry officials alluded to the existence of political imperatives at play for the elected officials of government (mainly the cabinet) about how communication about literacy was to be formulated for public consumption. Elected officials of the party in power opted for a concept of literacy linked to an individual's capacity to read and write while putting an emphasis on the instrumental value of literacy as a tool essential for the on-going enhancement of the economic competitiveness and growth of the province. Elected officials gave little attention to understanding literacy as a critical and emancipatory tool, one that could foster the critical engagement of individuals and their communities, enabling them to change and reimagine their social, political, economic, and cultural futures. The elected officials viewed literacy mainly in utilitarian terms that Paulo Freire (2004) has described, as "the transference of knowledge for industrial productivity" (p. 77). Within this perspective, literacy enables people to work within a globalized economic order because it primarily acquires and develops the skills necessary in the labour market rather than the capacity for self-fulfillment, learning, or self-development, or the facilitation of critical examination of the social, political, cultural, and economic order.

Such a position about literacy raises a serious question about literacy opportunities that might be opened to people in BC. Why promote such a limited public understanding of literacy? Perhaps the government's intent to promote literacy as a central feature of its educational reform since 2001–2002 was to foster a level of literacy that relativizes the importance of an individual as a person and a critical citizen evolving in a democracy whilst maximizing his or her importance as a future worker or entrepreneur. Within this perspective, literacy might imply mainly an ability to derive or create meaning that facilitates the transmission of knowledge, ways of thinking, and cognitive structures deemed mostly necessary for enhanced economic

competitiveness and growth. These findings led us to raise these questions: Why, despite such a diversity of understandings of literacy among educators and policy makers, do reading and writing remain central in the government's definition of literacy? For instance, is there a way to communicate to the general public about the complexities of literacy, while assuaging the politicians that feel that honesty would jeopardize their chances for re-election? In addressing this question in what follows, we discuss how accountability and school choice policy directions in BC have limited discourse about literacy to reading and writing scores and instrumental economic value.

Defining Literacy Through Policy Discourses of Accountability and Choice

The synergistic effect of the powerful policy discourses of accountability and school choice framed the ways of thinking conceptually and practically about notions of literacy in British Columbia, especially at the elementary level. We argue that the ascendency and legitimization of reading and writing scores as synonymous with literacy have been partly influenced by the implementation by the BC government of an external accountability process based on an assessment regime (FSA) in grade four and seven emphasizing mainly a decontextualized measurement of print based literacy reading and writing skills. Within the accountability discourse, literacy is framed and defined as acquiring a body of standardized reading and writing skills that external organizations like the Fraser Institute can formally assess and use to rate and rank public and independent elementary schools (Gutstein, 2010). The Ministry mainly defined literacy as reading and writing -- a definition which turned out to be an intricate part of a contractual, compliance-oriented external accountability model (see Taylor et al., 2005; Witte, 1990) through implementing accountability contracts based on school and

district literacy plans and tables rating and ranking individual elementary schools produced by the Fraser Institute (Gutstein, 2010).

There is a serious need to expand the discussion about the meaning and purpose ascribed to literacy in relation to an accountability framework by situating it within the wider policy direction of school choice. In our analysis of policy documents, we found that the accountability mechanism plays the role of quality control within a market-driven provision of public education in BC. As mentioned in our interviews with senior ministry officials, the government adopted policies to focus on running schools according to a business model, applying market principles to the provision of public schooling by promoting consumer choice and competition among providers (Fallon & Paquette, 2008). The government enacted policies to enable parents to choose schools while enabling schools to diversify their educational program offerings to compete with others to attract students (Poole & Fallon, 2013. Choice and competition policy directions created the need to develop and implement an outcomes-based form of accountability designed to provide parent-consumers with information about the quality of the product (education programs addressing reading and writing with numeracy) of various service-providers (competing schools). The BC Ministry of Education used reading and writing as a short hand for literacy. The Fraser Institute then used the reading and writing scores as a means to rate and rank schools, and to communicate to the public the perceived quality of various schools competing for student enrollment. Economic principles of efficiency and competitiveness have become part of educational policy discourses that have constructed a rationale to define literacy as reading and writing and promote it as a quality indicator for ranking schools in competition with each other.

In this article we have argued that literacy as a concept proved both complex and dynamic, continuing to be defined in a multiplicity of ways by policy makers, elected government officials, ministry officials, and educators in the field. Our analysis of policy documents and interviews highlighted a complex interplay of discourses and interests of differently positioned actors in literacy in public education. This interplay and configuration of actors and discourses led to the emergence of many ways to understand the concept of literacy. Understandings of literacy in BC have been extremely divergent. The BC cabinet focused on an understanding of literacy as the acquiring of autonomous skills in writing and reading in order for students to use those skills to contribute to the socio-economic, cultural, and political development of the province. Many of those in the field, however, focused on literacy as a means to enhance the capacity of individuals and communities in order to develop social awareness and critical reflection for personal satisfaction, as well as community change. However, in the 2013 revision of the BC School Act, literacy was defined as "the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community" (British Columbia School Act, p. C-15). In the same act, the purpose of becoming literate was formulated as, "to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy." The BC cabinet's interpretation of literacy has been reduced solely to its instrumental dimensions, focusing mainly on basic skills and job preparation and corresponds. with Street's observation of literacy as autonomous (and therefore independent of cultural and social factors) and comprises a set of discrete skills for reading and writing printed text (Street, 1984, 1995). This way of thinking about the nature and function literacy has gained ascendency in the BC policy landscape and becomes a point of tension between the BC cabinet's understanding of literacy—and their need to connect to the public—and the educators and

ministry officials who recognized the complexity of literacy in an ever-changing modern world. The cabinet's particular view of literacy, mainly described by reading scores, came to determine the frame through which literacy is defined (what counts as literacy), measured, and tackled in the public arena. The position of the cabinet bound off the possibilities for policy alternatives to emerge regarding the definition and functions of literacy, rendering it comfortable and oversimplified for the wider public. This view and function of literacy has been reiterated within the accountability policy discourse. Again, literacy has been framed and defined as acquiring a body of standardized reading and writing skills that can be formally assessed through criterion-referenced tests. These assessment results can be used by external organizations (like the Fraser Institute) as part of performance indicators to rate and rank public and independent elementary schools. As we previously mentioned, using reading and writing scores as performance indicators in ranking schools (external accountability) facilitates operation of a market-driven provision of education within which parents and students can exercise choice by acting as consumers.

As researchers, we provided in this article a critical account of how and for what purposes literacy issues came to be at the forefront of the provincial policy agenda in British Columbia. Also, we have established how dominant ways of thinking about literacy reflect the wider agenda to hold public schools accountable to performance indicators. However, a fundamental question remains to be investigated in future studies on literacy in BC public school system: Is there a credible argument for public school systems to shift to policy alternatives to include a definition and vision of the purposes of literacy from being a discrete set of technical and human skills for economic growth, to capabilities for socio-cultural and political change?

Future research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of British Columbia literacy policies and their ramifications and significance. One suggestion is to investigate how government literacy policies are being implemented in the field. What are local school districts and individual teachers doing pedagogically to improve literacy competencies with their students? The localized needs of the community could be ignored focusing on discrete skills. A district with a high population of First Nation students may have a literacy goal to focus on the oral components of literacy, which are central to the local traditions of that culture. Yet, if the government sees literacy progress only as a measured improvement in reading scores that may undermine the local school district's valid attempts to address specific issues in writing and oral language components, such as speaking and listening. Isolating reading as a discrete skill, usually focused on comprehension, could limit a student's educational diversity, and ironically limit future options, both socially and economically, due to a lack of knowledge in computer literacies and in semiotic skills such as critical and creative skills in representing and viewing, which are perhaps necessary in a digital age.

There is a contested terrain in the education sector concerning a working definition of literacy and this has resulted in a tension between government officials creating educational policy, and the ministry and educational practitioners who implement this policy in their schools and classrooms. More clear and open communication within the educational sector could help alleviate this tension. In addition, there is a need to improve communication between those working in the educational field, including government policy makers, and the general public to gain a better understanding of what it means to be literate in the modern world.

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