

# Schooled literacies? The use of vernacular literacy practices in Papua New Guinean communities

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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes an epistemological journey that explores taken-for-granted assumptions about literacy, empowerment, and the literate/illiterate dichotomy. I draw on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) descriptions of knowledge systems as rhizomatic to explore the connections between these assumptions and the implementation of vernacular education in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Specifically, the paper deals with the relationship between literacy and empowerment, the symbiotic attachments of L1 and L2 literacy learning, and the Vgotskyian connections between literacy and sociocultural practices. I draw on my work with primary school teachers in PNG to provide illustrations and examples of the practical implications of the unquestioned acceptance of these assumptions by educational policy makers, academics and literacy researchers.

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## Introduction

This paper is part of an epistemological journey I began while working for two years in Papua New Guinea for the National Department of Education (NDOE). This journey is undertaken within a context of understanding the construction of new epistemologies through the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), in particular their descriptions of knowledge systems as rhizomatic. Rhizomes are complex interconnected systems wherein seemingly 'disparate phenomena' (Alvermann 2000: 118) are linked:

Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be ...  
A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, social sciences, and social struggles.  
(Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7)

Rhizomes do not have clearly identifiable beginnings and ends; it is impossible, then, to provide a linear description of the journey taken through and across a rhizome. Describing a rhizome, and writing rhizomatically, involves disrupting linear narratives. This also means disrupting the taken-for-granted 'embeddedness' of certain metaphors that describe such linear

journeys (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). For example, the word 'path', could be used to describe the ways in which I map my journey. For most urban dwellers, a path is a concrete structure that takes one from one fixed point to another, with an identifiable beginning and end, but in Papua New Guinea paths are created through bush, up and down mountains, and across streams and rivers. The paths may exist for some period of time, but are never permanent. There are connections between different tracks, and sometimes the trails diverge because of landslides or flooding, or disappear completely for reasons not visible through Western eyes.

I hope this journey will take me to a place where new understandings of the relationships between literacy practices and social practices inform the development of vernacular education programs in Pacific nations and in other parts of the world where vernacular languages are being introduced into schools as mediums for instruction. But this place will not be an end space, a final outcome of the journey taken. This place will necessarily become part of the rhizomatic system that forms a new epistemological space where taken-for-granted assumptions about literacy, empowerment, and the literate/illiterate dichotomy are disrupted.

Foucault said that:

Every time I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements of my own experience: always in connection with processes I saw unfolding around me. It was always because I thought I identified cracks, silent tremors, and dysfunctions in things I saw, institutions I was dealing with, or my relations with others, that I set out to do a piece of work, and each time was partly a fragment of autobiography. (Foucault 2000: 458)

The journey that I undertake into explorations of vernacular literacy practices began because I, too, began to identify 'cracks, silent tremors, and dysfunctions in things I saw'. In this paper, I will describe three of these disruptions, cracks in the assumptions made by many academics and literacy educators about the relationship between literacy and empowerment, the symbiotic attachments of L1 and L2 literacy learning, and the Vgotskyian connections between literacy and sociocultural practices. First, though, I will describe the site of my journey.

### **The Papua New Guinean context**

During 1999 and 2000, I worked at the Papua New Guinea Education Institute (PNGEI). During that time I became involved in a systemic effort to provide in-service training for primary school 'bridging teachers' who were teaching Grade 3 children who had graduated from elementary schools. I taught primary school teachers who came to Port Moresby to undertake a

16-week residential program, and I also conducted two-week in-service workshops for teachers in provincial centres across the country. I worked with Papua New Guinean members of various divisions of NDOE as they helped me make sense of the contexts for learning language and literacy in this complex and intriguing country. Those women and men I worked with challenged my assumptions about literacy teaching and learning, about the place of English as a global language in the 21st century, and about educational programs driven by funding from aid organisations. Many of the questions that I raise in this paper were first discussed with teachers, academic colleagues, and education officials. I don't have answers to these questions, and I didn't find many answers in my discussions with these women and men, but I think asking these questions must necessarily become part of the 'education reform' in PNG and in other Pacific nations.

For many industrialised nations, reform and changes in education policies and programs are taken for granted. In Papua New Guinea, the recent changes to the education system have been so unusual and significant that the proper noun Education Reform is commonly used in NDOE documents. While the impetus for the reform began in 1974, it has only been in the last four to five years that the impact of the structural reform has been felt by individual schools and their communities (see NDOE 2000, for a detailed explanation of the reform process).

One significant aspect of the education reform in PNG is the focus on the use of vernacular languages in elementary and primary schools.

Papua New Guinea may be the only country in the world that has declared vernacular language as the means of not only reading and writing but also as the major factor for cultural bonding. This is a unique starting point in our re-engineering of education.

Professor John Waiko, Education Minister, PNG (Vulum 2000).

This 're-engineering of education' is illustrated in Table 1, which provides an overview of the nine years of basic education in PNG. The structural reform was based on the understanding that all students will undertake this basic education, with a limited number selected to participate in further education in secondary schools and universities.

The complexity of the implementation of this vernacular education program is highlighted in this brief outline of issues related to language use in 21st Century PNG. There are over 850 languages used in contemporary Papua New Guinea (these local languages are known as 'Tok Ples'). In addition, there are three official languages, Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu, and English, used in a variety of contexts from the National Parliament to newspapers and radio broadcasts.

**Table 1: Nine years of basic education in PNG**

School	Grade levels	Language of instruction	Description
Elementary	Preparatory Grade 1 (E1) Grade 2 (E2)	Vernacular	Located in small communities. Teachers selected by communities. Must be Grade 10 graduates, have knowledge of local language and community's culture
Primary schools: Lower Primary	Grade 3 Grade 4 Grade 5	Vernacular and English	Grade 3 teachers known as 'bridging' teachers who must use both languages in their classrooms.
Primary schools: Upper Primary	Grade 6 Grade 7 Grade 8	English	While use of vernacular is still encouraged, the emphasis is on English as the language of instruction.

Source: Honan (2002)

Marriages between members of different cultural and linguistic groups are now common, employment transfers to different parts of the country by government departments and commercial companies are taken for granted, and movement between previously isolated cultural groups is made easier through the availability of industrialised forms of transport (aeroplanes, buses, trucks, outboard motor powered canoes and boats). It is quite common, therefore, for school children to live in homes where three or four languages are frequently used. For example, consider a home where the parents come from two different parts of PNG. The parents use their own Tok Ples to communicate with family members and friends (wontoks). They speak to each other using Tok Pisin. Both parents work in organisations that require the use of written and spoken English. Their children grow up in a household where there is a fluidity in language choices and use, not only between different languages but also in the areas of language 'borrowing, interference and transfer' (Romaine 1995: 77).

These children are appearing more and more frequently in classrooms across the country and have a significant impact on the delivery of vernacular education programs. I have been in classrooms, for example, where children from Buka, in Bougainville, are learning to read and write the Tok Ples of Pari, a village on the outskirts of Port Moresby. I have worked with teachers who come from the highlands of PNG and are teaching in one of the island provinces in Grade 3 classes where they are supposed to be using the Tok Ples of the local area. The vernacular education program in PNG ignores this complexity of problems associated with the selection of the language to be used as the medium for instruction in elementary and lower primary classrooms.

One of the reasons for this disregard of the reality of language use is that the drive and impetus for vernacular education programs comes not only from within the nation but also from external forces.

The reform of the education system in PNG is connected to the educational aims of global organisations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and UNESCO through the design of this structural reform as well as the discourses used to discuss these structural changes. For example, the terms ‘basic education’, ‘education reform’, and ‘education for all’ are used by both internal Papua New Guinean documents that describe the structural reform (such as NDOE 2000), and policy documents, position papers, and websites that describe the role of UNESCO, the World Bank, and the IMF in aiding educational development (see, for example, UNESCO 2000; Hillman and Jenkner 2002; *Education Reform and Management*, World Bank 2003).

The ‘Global education reform website’, maintained and operated by the World Bank, aims to ‘gather and share knowledge on worldwide experiences with education reform’ (*Education Reform and Management*, World Bank 2003). The Dakar Framework for Action, adopted by the World Education Forum in Senegal, calls on countries to provide ‘basic education of good quality that focuses on the “whole” person, including health, nutrition and cognitive and psychosocial development’ (UNESCO 2000: 58). A working paper published by the IMF discusses how the introduction of user payments ‘affects the basic education of children in low-income countries’ (Hillman and Jenkner 2002: 4). The use of terms such as ‘basic education’, ‘education for all’, and ‘education reform’, signifies the relationship of these organisations, their policy imperatives, and their funding directions, to the internal educational policy and curriculum developments in PNG. The path that I take in understanding the education of Papua New Guineans in the 21st century therefore must traverse these global documents and the agendas therein.

The statement made by Professor Waiko, referred to earlier, makes two points about the use of vernacular education. The first refers to the use of vernacular as the language of instruction in schools. The second refers to the ‘cultural bonding’ that will take place when vernacular languages are used in this way. I will take these two points as separate, though connected, entrance-ways into the rhizome of thought associated with vernacular education. Understanding literacies as social practices provides one of the connections between these two points.

## **Literacies and sociocultural practices**

As the number of local L1 literates increases, and also their proportion of the local community, a ‘critical mass’ may be achieved which permits easy everyday

use of literacy within the community. If this happens, village children will grow up within a community of literacy and as a matter of course will first learn to read through themselves acquiring these skills.

(Goody and Bennett 2001: 197)

This claim is embedded within discourses that link literacy practices with the sociocultural contexts in which they occur. This understanding of the relationship between literacy practices and contexts is drawn from Vgotsky's work and can be described as a 'sociocultural approach to literacy' (see Cook-Gumperz 1986; Gee 1990). In this approach, literacy is necessarily seen as part of the social activities of a particular cultural group. Academics and researchers who understand literacy as a sociocultural practice argue that the types of literacy practices engaged in by different groups are determined by the social and cultural characteristics of that group. There is, therefore, a need to talk about a plurality of literacies to demonstrate the diverse range of literate practices necessarily involved. In relation to the teaching of reading and writing then, educators must pay attention to the many different ways of reading and writing needed to engage with the many different types of texts available.

I have no problem with this view of literacy. However, what I am concerned with here could be termed a 'chicken and egg' question. Which comes first: the literacy practices or the sociocultural practices within which those literacy practices occur? I refer back now to the quote from Goody and Bennett. Does this 'community of literacy' develop because children have learnt the literacy or does the community of literacy develop because there are some social and cultural contexts in which literacy is deemed to be useful? To explain my question further, I have invented a hypothetical Papua New Guinean community, 'Guno', drawing on my knowledge of a variety of communities across the country.

Guno is in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. There are 350 people living in this village. The elementary school has an enrolment of 80 children, 20 in Prep, 30 in E1 and 30 in E2. All of the members of Guno speak their Tok Ples, which is only used by this particular village. Most of the adults aged 18–50 also speak Tok Pisin and they use this language to communicate with people from other villages and the 'outside' world. The village has a Seventh Day Adventist church and pastor, and most members of the community follow the doctrines of this religion. Church activities are conducted in Tok Pisin. Reading materials found in this community (and the languages used in these materials) include: religious pamphlets and tracts (Tok Pisin, English); newspapers (English, Tok Pisin); consumer goods packaging such as tinned fish, rice bags, Coke cans, snack packets (English); government department

'awareness' materials advising on matters such as production of cash crops or the health of women and children (Tok Pisin, English); letters from 'wontoks' who are absent from the village because of schooling, employment or marriage (English). (This list is an amalgam of lists drawn up by teachers during workshops when asked to list reading materials found in their own communities.)

The elementary school in Guno is successful and is actively supported by the community. They have worked to build classrooms and provide accommodation for the teachers. The elders of the community took the job of developing an orthography for their Tok Ples very seriously, and worked tirelessly to produce an outcome that was acceptable to all the community.

And so, we are now transported to the future where, in Goody and Barnett's terms, a 'critical mass' of the community have learned the literacy of the Guno language. They have completed their nine years of basic education, and in line with the government's policies to achieve 'cultural bonding', have now returned to their village to become useful and participative members. So what do these useful members of the community use their Tok Ples literacy skills for? What reading materials are available? When do they need to write in their Tok Ples?

Some research has been undertaken in Papua New Guinea that attempts to answer these questions in contemporary contexts. For example, Glenys Waters collected substantial data on the nature of local literacy practices observed in one community (see Grant and Waters 1999). In a recent issue of *Meanjin*, an Australian literary journal, Eamonn McKeown (2003) reports on data he collected during doctoral research in a community in the highlands of PNG. In both cases, the data collected reflect the particular social contexts for using literacy that are quite different from those that underpin normative assumptions about sociocultural purposes and contexts for literacy use.

Doronila argues that studies on links between cognition and literacy in the Philippines have found that:

Communities with a relatively higher degree of literacy integration demonstrated different cognitive approaches to a variety of tasks but only for those strategies and skills that were associated with the community practices incorporated in those literacy skills. (Doronila 2001: 256)

These findings support previous ground-breaking work by Scribner and Cole (1981) and Street (1984) and others who found that the links between literacy learning and cognitive skills development were inextricably tied to the social and cultural practices 'into which people are apprenticed as part of a social group' (Gee 1990: 59). Such studies raise another question about the use of Tok Ples literacy skills in communities such as Guno: that is, does the development of Tok Ples literacy practices result in the 'better' education

of the community, where education is expressed in terms of school performance results or where education is understood in terms of equipping the community with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for survival in the 21st century?

This last question provides a connection between the 'cultural bonding' argument – that vernacular education somehow provides Papua New Guineans with the impetus for making stronger connections within their own communities – and the arguments associated with using L1 literacy practices in schools – that L1 use will aid in the development of L2 use.

### **L1 and L2 literacy learning**

It is said that the importance of first learning to read in the child's own language – L1 initial literacy – for effective L2 literacy is widely recognised among scholars; indeed that further research to demonstrate this would be redundant.

(Goody and Bennett 2001: 186)

There are a number of assumptions made in second language acquisition research and writings. The assumption that concerns me here, and concerns many thousands of Papua New Guinean teachers at the moment, is that related to the development of an L1 literacy so that effective L2 literacies can be learned. I do not deny the important relationship between L1 and L2 learning; that is, that children who are exposed to their first language as the medium of instruction find it easier to learn the second language. What I am concerned about is the implicit conceptual leap here, from the use of language, to the use of literacies. How does this make sense when the first language has never previously been written down?

Part of the training for elementary teachers in PNG involves the development of orthographies in communities where the vernacular language does not have associated literacy forms. It is the responsibility of these elementary teachers to develop an orthography that is acceptable to the majority of the members of the community. Once the orthography has been accepted, the teachers then use it to construct teaching materials such as big books, charts, and seasonal calendars to use in classrooms to teach children how to read and write the vernacular language. Central government support for the development of these teaching materials is necessarily limited: everyone involved is aware of the impossibility of the central production of materials for approximately 850 languages. In some cases, orthographies have previously been developed, usually by either religious NGOs such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, an organisation that aims to translate the Bible into vernacular languages across the world, or by literacy workers involved in community based adult literacy campaigns. Perhaps some anecdotes drawn

from my work with teachers in PNG can illustrate some of the complexities involved here.

One of the teachers arrives late to the second week of the workshop. She spent the weekend in her village, working on the illustrations in the big book she had constructed in class. She told me, 'It took so long this morning to come to class. As I walked through the village, people, old people, grandmothers, uncles, kept stopping me to ask about the big book. They made me stop and read the book to them. They laughed, they giggled, they screamed and yelped with joy, when they realised that the words I spoke, the Tok Ples words I used in the story, were words that I had written on the pages, that their words had become print, their story told to children for many many years, was now written on pages, had become a book'.

I attended a conference organised by the Summer Institute of Linguistics about vernacular education.<sup>1</sup> I talked in one workshop about developing vernacular literacy practices that would have meaning in Papua New Guinean communities. The participants discussed the construction of written alternatives to the oral stories that establish traditional ownership of land. One of the Papua New Guineans drew a 'cultural map', a visual representation of a piece of land, with traditional perspectives drawn into it (the sago tree of one important story drawn larger than the creek nearby). Part of the map was the inclusion of text boxes, in which the vernacular story of each item was written. This cultural map could then stand alongside and equally to a western map of the same area produced by the government Lands Department. When the participants shared this map with the larger conference, a number of Papua New Guineans expressed their reservations. In summary their argument was: The development of such maps depends on the telling of stories that are secret, and sacred to many. If these cultural maps are commandeered by teachers and schools, the secrecy and sacredness of the stories will be removed. Older people will not tell younger people these important stories if they are to be used in school lessons. As one Papua New Guinean member of the conference said, 'We will only tell the stories we have already told anthropologists'.

The understanding of the relation between L1 language use and knowledge and the acquisition of L2 literacies is an unquestioned assumption in the NDOE policies related to the implementation of the vernacular education program. This assumption is difficult to argue with, especially in the light of stories told by Papua New Guinean adults about the beatings and abuse they endured during their own primary education when they arrived at school unable to speak English (as well as my own anecdotal recollections of these stories, see Romaine 1995: 243). Yes, it is important that children attend school where the language of instruction is familiar to them, and yes, knowing how to read and write in one's first language does help learning of a second language.

But can this be the only reason for the use of vernacular languages in schools? During the two years I worked in PNG, this was the driving argument for the development of Tok Ples literacy technologies in schools. It was imperative that children were taught how to read and write in Tok Ples because of the assumption that such reading and writing would help children make the transition to the reading and writing of English.

What is unquestioned here is how L1 literacy acquisition helps in development of L2 when L1 has no associated social and cultural practices that are dependent on literacy skills. Implicit in the arguments that link L1 and L2 literacy learning is an understanding of literacy as necessarily 'empowering' the individual and society. As Olson and Torrance (2001a: 15) explain, literacy and literacy programs have a role to play as 'governments and other agencies can nonetheless support the efforts of individuals, cultures, and subcultures to pursue those social changes they recognize as essential to their goals of justice and empowerment'. While Olson and Torrance and other contributors to their volume (Olson and Torrance 2001b) warn against the assumption that literacy can provide a simplistic solution to a complex array of social problems, they themselves fall into the trap of describing literacy as an instrument of power, power that can transform not only individuals but social groups.

### **Literacy and empowerment**

My own taken-for-granted assumptions about the purposes and value of literacy teaching and learning have been disrupted and challenged because of my experiences in teaching about literacy to primary school teachers in PNG. The value and importance of literacy in Papua New Guinea is not unchallenged. Arguments in this context are not about the kinds of literacy taught, but the purposes and reasons for teaching literacy at all. Fundamental to these arguments is the disruption of the Western binary of literate/illiterate, where the former is the ascendant, the indicator of true power as an individual and as a society. I found myself arguing about the importance of 'empowerment through literacy' with people whose lives are in the process of being destroyed by literate societies. I found myself clinging to the romantic ideal that is inherent in the binary of literate/illiterate; that is, that learning to read and write will save these people.

An example of the essential romantic nature of such ideals can be found in recent media reports describing Papua New Guinean landowners being beaten by men employed by logging companies determined to gain access to valuable timber holdings. The beatings were a result of landowners refusing to sign agreements for use of their traditional land. These refusals were the

outcomes of adult literacy campaigns where villagers learnt how to read the contracts offered to them, and learnt about the consequences of signing these contracts for their traditional hunting and food gathering techniques. These literacy campaigns are often predicated on the connections between literacy and 'empowerment' that underpins the work of Paulo Freire (see for example, Freire and Shor 1987). In this case however, the 'transformative' possibilities of the acquisition of English literacy skills included real and horrific physical injuries.

I am not trying here to make a case for the promotion of illiteracy, or to promote a 'return to the village' approach to development in countries such as Papua New Guinea. Rather, I want to point out the complexity and the fundamental paradox involved in assumptions made by literate societies about the value of literacy. Nicholas Faraclas has described this paradox in relation to Papua New Guinea. He believes that:

The scope for individual expression and voice in writing one's life, that is, in the determination of the general goals and the daily rhythms and activities of one's life, is much wider in 'preliterate' Papua New Guinea than in the average print literate society. (Faraclas 1997: 153)

Faraclas names the paradox here as:

if anyone in the world today can be said to be practicing critical literacies in their daily lives, it is the most traditional and most print illiterate populace of a country like Papua New Guinea. The lives of these 'illiterates' are relatively unaffected by the dominant discourses that 'read and write' and discipline the lives of the majority of the print literate peoples of the world.

(Faraclas 1997: 153)

The literate practices outlined in many literacy programs assist in the disciplining of the lives of individuals. Faraclas argues that the paradox lies in situations where the 'illiterate' people of Papua New Guinea are removed from this act of disciplining through their non-use of literacy practices that enable the governance. Of course, this does not mean that they are not governed through other means. Indeed, the naming of such people as 'illiterate' enables the regulation of their lives, as they are constructed as people who need to have their lives changed through the teaching and learning of literacy practices.

What I am trying to do is to make visible one of the most fundamental assumptions which is normally taken-for-granted in work on literacy. This assumption may be valid to those of us who live and work in comfortable middle class societies, but is it as valid to the woman working in the highlands field, or to the 'big man' in the Engan village whose power is based on his oral skills of argument? As Limage and others have illustrated (Gillette 1987; Limage 1993: 30–31), mass literacy campaigns initiated by UNESCO

in the 1960s and 1970s mostly failed in their attempts to deliver functional literacy to large groups of people living in developing countries. The causes for the failure are usually attributed to the type of literacy promoted (a functional, skills based approach), or to the method of implementation. Once again, these literacy campaigns were predicated on the common-sense notion of literacy as a technique of power. If this notion is unpacked and viewed through non-Western eyes and ears, it becomes far more problematic.

What is it about literacy, about the acts and practices of reading and writing, that enable us to see it as a method of achieving some powerful status in our societies? Why do we take for granted that a literate person is better than an illiterate person? How has the link been made between being literate, and being an 'active and informed citizen'? Why are such citizens the ideal to strive for? Who is the better person? A male lawyer, sitting in an air-conditioned office, researching case laws, writing briefs to support his case of defence or prosecution; or a woman in the Papua New Guinea highlands, baby swinging in a string bag on a nearby tree, tilling the red soil with a stick, unearthing golden globes of sweet potatoes as she goes? In environmental discourses, the man is read as one who uses non-renewable power resources while the woman is read as one who produces a resource. In political discourses, the man is read as influencing the ways in which laws are constructed and interpreted, while the woman is read as one who is governed by these laws. In anthropological discourses, the woman is read as a 'noble savage', innocent and untouched by the impurities of modern society. In Darwinian discourses, she is located at the bottom of the rung of the evolution of the civilised society, while the lawyer is at the pinnacle. In educational discourses, the man is read as a successful subject (and master), and the woman is read as, not a failure, but untouched, 'unreached' by the tentacles of schooling achievement. So, in educational discourses, the man is perceived as a powerful subject, while the woman, because of her non-use of the techniques of literacy, is read as powerless.

This reading, within educational discourses, of the effects of literacy as a technique of power, requires an understanding of literacy as enabling, in that acquiring the ability to carry out certain literate practices will enable the individual to participate in society. This enabling necessarily limits the individual's actions, so that some actions are not possible, and only some actions are recognisable, both by the individual and by others. The acquisition of particular 'appropriate' literacy practices enables the individual to become 'effective' and, more specifically, an 'active and informed citizen'. In this way, schools work as governing mechanisms, where 'to govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others' (Foucault 1982: 221).

This governing works to construct the 'double' subject Judith Butler (1997) refers to who must, necessarily at one and the same time, be master of certain literacy practices, and submit to these practices.

Two approaches to the teaching of literacy that depend on the understanding of literacy as a technique of power are the *genre* and *critical literacy* approaches. Both these approaches are embedded within current PNG language curriculum documents. Within the genre approach, particular knowledge of genres can turn people into 'powerful instruments', and only this kind of knowledge will produce an effective society. This discourse uses medical metaphors, common in literacy discourses, where a good dose of genre will not only heal the patient but society as a whole (see Freebody 1994; Castleton 1998; and Neilsen 1998, for discussions of the medical metaphors associated with literacy discourses). So the effective citizen who is 'literate in standard English' must be literate in certain ways, must take on only specific literacy practices in order to be 'powerful instruments'. The 'power' of genres is fundamental to the development of this approach to the teaching and learning of English. Power is seen to be static, as something that can be grabbed with both hands, as long as the hands are first gloved in the correct genre. This static view of power negates the slipperiness and movability of power relations. As Foucault says:

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. (Foucault 1980: 98)

The fixing of power as a static instrument is also a feature of the critical literacy approach. In this case, though, rather than individuals being the powerful instruments, it is language itself that contains power. For example, in one Australian curriculum document, language is described as a 'powerful social instrument':

As a powerful social instrument, language helps people to:

- negotiate their places in social groups
- understand, participate in, and reform aspects of society.

(Department of Education, Queensland 1994: 8)

This statement associates changing the world, and members' participation in the world, with attainment of literacy. Such statements can be traced

back to Paolo Freire's insistence on the power of literacy, and on the link between being literate and being human:

the achievement of literacy – as understood by Freire – is a necessary aspect of functioning as a human being ... to become more fully human is to become ever more critically aware of one's own world and in creative control of it.

(Lankshear with Lawler 1987: 68)

What is unquestioned in statements such as these, and in Freire's work in general, is the need for change or reform of society, and that such changes and reforms will always necessarily be good. It would seem that, because of its inherent power, any changes made through the use of language will, necessarily, be powerful changes. Power and change are both read as positive but static entities, and the fluidity and ever-changing nature of such entities is denied.

The empowerment of the individual is inextricably linked to the improvement of the world in general, and linked to the construction of an active and informed citizen. Rose sees, in the 'language of empowerment', an emphasis on the activity of individuals:

For empowerment – or the lack of empowerment – codes the subjective substrate of exclusion as lack of self-esteem, self-worth and the skills of self-management necessary to steer oneself as an active individual in the empire of choice ... Subjects are to do the work on themselves, not in the name of conformity, but to make them free.

(Rose 1999: 268)

This 'work on themselves' is a necessary part of the governing of the population, where the state is removed from the overt acts of governance of the past, and regulation of the individual takes place through the self-management and self-regulatory mechanisms made available in contemporary society. It is my argument that such self-regulation can only take place if/when individuals acquire the literate practices that are deemed to be acceptable by the state. While in the past such acceptable literacy practices were inextricably linked to the language of the colonial power (Pennycook 1998), policy imperatives, driven by funding directions of global organisations such as the World Bank, IMF and UNESCO, have now shifted the focus to vernacular literacy practices.

It would seem that the literacy practices deemed to be acceptable to the state in PNG include practices that can only ever be used in schools. Teaching Tok Ples literacy practices in isolation from the social and cultural community contexts will result in such practices becoming schooled literacies. Schooled literacies are those practices that are only seen to be valid when used within these institutions. In the Australian context, the use of basal reading schemes, the emphasis on production of written recounts, and the development of particular forms of writing such as acrostic poems are all examples of the engagement with literacy practices that are only recognisable within

primary classrooms. Is it possible that in ten to 15 years time, educators will be able to recognise equally useless and restricted practices in the use of Tok Ples in Papua New Guinean classrooms? And will these schooled literacy practices in fact be recognisable as part of the regulatory mechanisms engaged in by the population to allow their governance by the state?

I have no answers to these questions, or any of the other questions I have posed as I have described my journey through the rhizome of vernacular education in PNG. I believe, however, that the posing of these questions can lead to the development of new 'circles of convergence':

Follow the plants: you start by delimiting a first line consisting of circles of convergence around successive singularities; then you see whether inside that line new circles of convergence establish themselves, with new points located outside the limits and in other directions. Write, form a rhizome, increase your territory by deterritorialization, extend the line of flight to the point where it becomes an abstract machine covering the entire plane of consistency.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 11)

It is possible that the creation of such new circles of convergence will lead to the extensions of lines of flight that take educators and researchers into new parts of the rhizome that will allow new understandings about vernacular education and the development of vernacular literacy practices.

#### NOTE

- 1 This was a two-week workshop conducted by Shirley Brice Heath and Audrey Grant at Ukurumpa, SIL headquarters in PNG. Published proceedings from this workshop are available (Waters 2001).

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