INTERPRETING ACROSS THE ABYSS:
A HERMENEUTIC EXPLORATION OF INITIAL LITERACY DEVELOMENT BY HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WITH LIMITED FORMAL SCHOOLING

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Martha Bigelow, Advisor

July, 2010

Acknowledgements

I am first of all deeply indebted to all the refugee and immigrant students and their families whom I have had the honor to know, in school and beyond, and who are in such a significant sense experiential co-creators of this project. It is the path we have walked together that brings the basis of any understanding of this topic and its urgency. I remember all the moments, and pray always that the world treats you well.

I want to thank my teaching colleagues, as well as administrators and staff, who over the last twenty-five years have inspired and supported me with your good work and good will. We have had some amazing times together that I will not forget, and that sometimes made a real difference.

To the monks of Blue Cloud Abbey and the American Indian Cultural Research Center in Marvin, South Dakota, goes a special acknowledgement of your kind hospitality. I am grateful for the time I have spent with you and the spiritual and intellectual life you have shared with me. And especially for the radical unconditionality.

Sincere thanks to my committee, David O'Brien, Jane Plihal, and Connie Walker, for your valuable comments and encouragement. Each of you has inspired me with your passion and erudition. Yes, let's pursue the commune idea. I would like to thank Jessie Eastman, Graduate Studies Assistant in Curriculum and Instruction, for your patience and helpfulness—it has meant so much. To Dee Tedick, thank you for your friendship and support, in particular your support for my readmission. Kristen McMaster, thank you for every minute of our professional collaborations—I have

learned so much from you about research and about being a true colleague. I am grateful to Chet Bowers, who took the trouble to review my manuscript and provide helpful comments and encouragement. Sincere thanks to my former advisor and constant friend Dale Lange, who challenged me with his passion and intellectual curiosity to go the way of the rubber dinghy. Your support over the years and presence at my defense has meant more than I can say. To my dear friend Ann Mabbott, a superlative person, deepest thanks for many years of friendship and confidence in me which often surpassed my own—you have made such an enormous difference in my life.

To Martha Bigelow, my amazing advisor and great scholar of older preliterate L2 learners, go my sincerest acknowledgement and thanks. You have been an incredibly perceptive, sensitive, smart mentor and role model to me over the past three years; it is astounding how you always know the right thing to say to get things flowing again. I am so grateful for your scholarly mentorship, wise counsel, patient guidance, and faith in my work.

Deepest regard and gratitude to David Smith, true companion in the way. The journey is unimaginable without you.

Finally I want to thank my dear husband, Marty, and my children, Simone and Dominik, who have tolerated me, comforted me, and believed in me over the years. You are my other great teachers of unconditionality and I love you.

Ecce venio, Domine, ut faciam voluntatem tuam.

Dedication

For my parents, Bob and Loretta, who taught me.

Abstract

The presence of older learners with limited formal literacy and schooling in U.S. high schools constitutes an intense and unique instance of the encounter of contextually oriented oral indigenous culture and the distanciated culture of high literacy and digitacy. Drawing on the work of Walter Ong, Marshall McLuhan, and others, I describe the distance between the noetic lifeworlds of orality and literacy as a semiotic abyss across which interpretation is difficult but necessary. The scholarly stance required is one of humility—to fail to engage the alterity of orality with sensitive attunement is an act of continued imperialism, which is morally unacceptable, epistemologically naïve, and ecologically suicidal in cognitive and natural terms. Following Marie Battiste, Enrique Dussel, David G. Smith, and others, this philosophical study locates the phenomenon of initial literacy development by high school English language learners within the history of Western epistemology, colonialism, and globalization, in particular the legacies of Kant's logic of emancipative reason, transformed in school contexts into a logic of sacrificial reason wherein the primitive ways of orality are sacrificed to hyperliteracy in the environment of reified, standardized education in the United States. Illustrative anecdotes, poetry, and assertorial argument are used to evoke instances of the encounter or orality and literacy in school settings. Refuting the primacy of both idealism and positivism in society and education, the study is inspired both topically and methodologically by hermeneutics, the ancient art of interpretation, as a way of articulating the fusion of horizons between severed hyperliteracy and oral ways of knowing in context, so that a conversation

regarding the role and instruction of literacy remains unforeclosed and capable of sustaining a common future in which oral and literate noeses are respected. A pedagogy of reciprocity between orality and literacy is proposed as a path to the **practical survival** of older oral newcomers who must acquire the artificially-toned manners of representational culture, and to the **ontic survival** of the hypostacized Western self trapped in triumphal determinacy.

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List of Abbreviations

BCE	Before the Common / Christian Era
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ELL	English Language Learner
ESL	English as a Second Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LESLLA	Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition
LFS	Limited Formal School
SAAE	Standard American Academic English
SIFE	Students with Interrupted Formal Education
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SLIFE	Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

Etymological References

>	Indicates that a word comes from that language; eg. >Lat. = from Latin
Ger.	German
Gr.	Ancient Greek
Lat.	Latin
OE	Old English

- Foreign words and source etymons are given in italics.

- Translations of source etymons are set off from the foreign source word by a comma and enclosed by single quotation marks.

  Example:

  Intentional (>Lat. *in*, 'toward' + *tendere*, 'stretch' or 'lean')

- All etymological references are taken from *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (1985). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 1

Interpreting Across the Abyss

Introduction

Our first task in approaching another people,
another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes—
for the ground we are approaching is holy…

- The Columban Fathers (n.d.)

In a culture with a collective memory of Sesame Street, Reading Rainbow, and

Head Start, in a societal context where it is not uncommon to find entrance exams to the

best kindergartens, in an environment inundated with text of every imaginable type and

format, it requires a certain humility to consider the situation of adolescent and young

adult immigrants who have not been to school and have never learned to read. One

might ask if it is possible, and how it is possible, to hear their voices at all, so foreign is

their experience to many of us who grew up in highly literate societies. Crapanzano's

(1986) cautionary remarks about the power and subversive potential of interpretation—

what he calls "Hermes' dilemma"—are of special relevance to the present work which,

though not ethnography, faces the same dilemma:

> [The ethnographer] presents languages, cultures, and societies in
>
> all their opacity, their foreignness, their meaninglessness; then like the
>
> magician, the hermeneut, Hermes himself, he clarifies the opaque,
>
> renders the foreign familiar, and gives meaning to the meaningless.
>
> He decodes the message. He interprets. (p. 51)

Situated in geography and history, the researcher confidently applies methods of collection and analysis to data (>Lat: 'given, a gift') that come from a faraway place, from the other side of a vast abyss between the way languages mean (Becker, 1989). The post-colonial critique of Western panopticism (Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Fanon, 1968; Said, 1993) mirrors Husserl's challenge to positivism (1913/1962): conclusions are neither as clear nor as complete as the researcher maintains, because epistemological determinacy is a conceit of specific occidental provenance, and the articulating agent in this enterprise—objective scientific researcher, hyperliterate Western academic—is in a state of severance from the phenomena under study. Descartes' mind-body dualism (1637/1968), Geertz's exotics (1973, 1983) even Husserl's bearers of natural attitude (1913/1962): the intellectual views the authentic world, brackets, condenses, enunciates.

The only remedy is no remedy. None of us, informants all in the project of life's interpretability, has the last word (Jardine, 1992a, 1992b). Each of us, standing primordially in need of the Other, requires inter-subjective interpretation for life to go on (Lévinas, 1969/1991). No *remedy* (>Lat., 'medical cure for disease'; >OE, 'removing an outward evil'), only *remembering* (>Lat., 'bringing the parts together again'). What I am invoking here is the imperative of ethics over being, *deontos* over *ontos* (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 170), not just how we and others *are*, but how we *should* be toward others, for somehow our call is to live ethically together whether or not we can fully understand, *given the gift* of not being able to fully understand, to assert, positively, once and for all. Caputo (2000), interpreting Gadamer, put it this way: "finitude does not merely limit, but also enables historical understanding" (p. 44). And recognition of finitude requires humility.

Scholarly humility

Humility is not generally a requirement of respectable academic scholarship in modern contexts. As scholars we do not take off our shoes upon approaching the people or things we study—we define research agendas, compile evidence, and make expert recommendations. Unlike the vast majority of the people who live and have ever lived in this world, we are too sophisticated intellectually to consider a piece of ground "holy," let alone agree on what that might mean. If we desire professional regard in prestige circles, not to mention eligibility for U.S. Department of Education grant funding, we generate experimental research which yields data collected through the rigorous application of valid and reliable methodology, not messy inter-subjective interpretations that cannot be rendered as effect sizes nor validated by the next researcher. It is not our practice to begin by acknowledging how little we understand and how impossible it is that we can understand in any determinate sense. And yet, as I begin this interpretive study across an abyss so wide and deep that it can hardly be imagined, such a humble acknowledgement is the only intellectually honest way to begin. The last thing a work such as this must do is posture as a definitive account of the abyss and those who cross it. Provocative, vigorous, divinatory, controversial—hopefully, yes; definitive, rigorous, objective, unassailable—no.

By 'humility,' I do not mean abjection or some sort of politically correct self-loathing, but simply a recognition of the inevitable fallibility, the finitude of understanding that one can aspire to, personally, culturally, and as an academic discipline or community of scholars. Humility, in approaching a scholarly study of complex human phenomena, begins with the recognition that phenomena and

understanding about them, the 'data' of a study "do not emanate from us" (Jardine, 1992a, p. 125), but are gifts to us, which provide the possibility of participatory understanding, not a triumphant mastery. Humility has to do with knowing one's place in relation to the larger world, having a sense of the common ground one shares with the rest of humanity (another term, like humility, derived from the same Latin root, *humus*), and a reckoning of the ways in which one's own people and worldviews may have seized ground from others. If our common humanity is anywhere to be found, in other words, if it is possible to interpret across this abyss, it will be possible through an acknowledgement of the essential humility required for the task.

In these pages I will attempt to highlight and frame an especially intense constellation of experiential factors, a constellation foreign to nearly every reader of this kind of work. How is it possible to interpret the meaning of human phenomena arisen in one context to members of a radically dissimilar context—accurately, without loss, without distortion? It is not. Is it possible to render an interpretation resonant enough that it can act as a catalyst of positive common understanding? This study rests on the belief that it is, provided the interpretation brings to bear a depth of engagement, a sensitivity of understanding based on a stance of humility, and a relative fearlessness with regard to outcomes, among other things. It will be another task of this study to elucidate a hermeneutic approach to interpretation worthy of a scholarly hearing, and worthy of the subject, that is, the *subjects* of the study—preliterate English language learners acquiring initial literacy and academic knowledge in U.S. high schools.

Elucidating the Title: Interpreting, and the Abyss

Interpreting

The title of this study was chosen mindfully, employing terms which signal both

the focus and the approach. 'Interpreting' is a commonly used word whose etymology

reveals deeper levels of meaning that make it specifically fit for the present task.

'Interpreting' has its origins in Middle French and Latin, meaning to explain (>Lat.

interpretari) or expound. '*Inter*' or '*entre*' refers to the action of moving between, while

the stems '*interpres*' and '*interprer*,' indicate an agent or broker. The etymon '*prêt*' is

allied to the Latin '*pretium*,' meaning price, value, or worth (it also forms the root of the

word appreciate—>Lat. *ad pretium*: 'to know the value or price of). Note that 'pound',

as in expound, is also a term used to refer to value or currency, as is price.

Stepping back from all of this we can see that there is a sense in which the act of

interpreting engages one in a project which seeks the common value in different

currencies, which seeks to connect two parties in ways that make sense and have value

to them both. As with any exchange of currencies (in this case linguistic and cultural

currencies), the conversion rate is not one-to-one, nevertheless, we proceed with the

assurance that there will be some area of overlap, something that binds us, that has

value to all parties, while the incommensurable parts constitute precisely the horizon of

inquiry, the opportunity for new learning and development of individual perspectives.

In the project of interpretation there is also the requirement that the author be equipped

to engage worthily in the interpretive act, which in this case means having a partial but

meaningful sense of what is important, what makes sense and has value, to those who

are party to the interpretation. The discipline of hermeneutics, the art and practice of

interpretation, will be called upon in this study to discern the fusion of horizons of disparate lived realities of those lives this study addresses (Gadamer, 1960/1994). If "the aim of interpretation…is not just another interpretation but human freedom" (Smith, 1991, p. 189), then it is fitting to place interpretation in service of those dreams of freedom born from the ashes of a failed and deadly colonial hubris, the dreams of unschooled, preliterate refugees to the United States.

To raise the notion of the parties of this study is to evoke the specific people on whom the study focuses—English language learners acquiring initial literacy and academic experiences in U.S. high schools and those who work with them, as well as the possible reading audience of a work such as this. As announced with a cultural sketch in the opening paragraph of this introduction, there is a great gulf between the lifeworlds of those whose experience is the central focus of the study and those who might read it. This is one of the senses in which I have found it appropriate to describe the present project as interpreting across an abyss.

The Abyss

The image of the abyss expresses profound human understandings and ancient fears. The term itself is one with roots in ancient Greek, in which its meaning is directly rendered 'without bottom,' as well as Latin, *abyssus*, a great gulf or chasm of profound depth. In early Western cosmogony the word *abyss* describes the deepest level of the sea that lies beneath the physical world, or the netherworld of the afterlife. The word mutated in old French to *abysm*, and eventually evolved into *abîme*, still carrying the original meaning of a deep chasm, but also evidently related to the verb *abîmer*, to ruin, wreck, destroy. While the Ur-meaning of 'abyss' may refer simply to a great depth that

is nearly impossible to fathom, there has been throughout the centuries an attachment of

danger, destruction, fear of the unknown, and punishment to the term, until finally, in

the 20th century, for the first time, the term 'abysmal' was used as a strictly negative

qualifier. Clearly, the notion of great depth is to some extent synonymous with fear of

damnation, of the unknown from whence none have spoken.

John Milton's reverie of Lucifer contemplating the abyss in the epic poem

Paradise lost, perhaps the most resonant use of the image in Western literature,

exemplifies conflicting perspectives of creation and destruction that this image of the

unknowable generates:

Into this wild Abyss

The womb of Nature and perhaps her grave—

Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,

But all these in their pregnant causes mixed

Confusedly, and which thus must ever fight,

Unless the Almighty maker them ordain

His dark materials to create more worlds,--

Into this wild Abyss, the wary Fiend

Stood on the brink of hell, and looked a while,

Pondering his voyage; for no narrow frith

He had to cross. (Milton, 1667/1979, p. 1453)

In Milton's verse appear the aporias of the abyss image[1]—is the abyss in fact the generative stuff of creation, not fixable as any one element but possessing qualities of all elements, or a frightening, destructive gulf to swallow us up? Is it a maternal force that births and nurtures, or a deadly hell that becomes our grave? Is the one contemplating the abyss a diabolical figure, or a kind of Hermes preparing to translate meanings across a great divide? Is interpretation itself a sort of profane act, or a sacred exercise of creativity? The obvious rejoinder here is to say that the abyss is all of these things, unresolved, in perpetual dynamic generativity, but what does that imply for the abyss addressed in this study, the abyss between the world of primarily oral high school English language learners with limited formal schooling and the world held out to them by the culture of U.S. schools? Which direction represents the path to life, which the dangers of death, and under what circumstances? Whatever our relationship to it, the image of the abyss in titular position signals that the focus of this study is no mere matter, no "narrow frith" that can be incorporated into inherited perceptions and managed by existing master plans. Contemplating the abyss, trying to fathom its depths, presents a primordial challenge—to our conception of self, other, knowledge, world—a challenge with consequences, one on which our common fate depends. As Nietzsche so aptly put it, "When you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss also gazes long into you" (Nietzsche, 1886/2003, p. 65).

Neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire, / But all these in their pregnant causes mixed... The abyss is chaotic, multi-dimensional. What are the alterities of experience, of status, of frame of reference, that can be identified in the situation on which this

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[1] My reference to this poem does not equate newcomer immigrants with Lucifer, but is offered to consider the deeper resonances of the abyss image in the Western tradition.

study focuses? We can note the chasm between the home language and the target

language, not just a collection of new vocabulary to learn but more—the abyss between

how languages *mean* (Becker, 1989), their referential field, their semiotic relationship to

that field. This great gulf between languages, one relatively few Americans ever really

cross, becomes every ELL student's eponymous characterization and life challenge.

Next we may note the related chasm between the home culture and the target culture, a

leap associated with shock to the self (Zaharna, 1989, 1991), alienation, re-ordering,

and, sometimes, profound ontological transformation which has been described as

taking on a new, third culture born of the encounter from first and second (Adler, 1975;

Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). There is the chasm between the developing world

environment of most countries immigrant students come from, associated with

economic and educational deprivation, political turmoil, and physical danger, and the

first-world status held by receiving countries, places that are winning the global game,

an elite club of a few countries in a position to dictate terms, a club led by the United

States, still perhaps the world's superpower (Gray, 1998; McMurtry, 2002). And then,

elusively, there is the chasm between life within orality and life in literacy, and the

emerging transformation to life in digitacy, what I will in this study refer to as the

noeses of these media, each state of media life with its own complex constellation of

consequences for the individual and culture (McLuhan, 1967, 1964/1994; Ong, 1982,

1988, 1992). There are other chasms that may be operative as well—racial, for instance,

or religious, or climatological. The abyss is not a single thing, but manifestly multiple.

Situating the Study

An introduction such as this announces a philosophical approach and polemical tone to the study that deserve explication. Besse and Galisson (1980) have called for expanding the range of address of the field of second language education beyond theories of language acquisition and methodologies of instruction to include a crucial polemical function whereby the field profoundly contemplates and passionately argues its purposes and futures. In the spirit of Besse and Galisson I situate the present study as follows: This is a hermeneutic study of a particular valence of otherness, defined by specific parameters of language, culture, schooling, and mode of communication in the locus of the American high school classroom in the present era.

Educational and Philosophical Traditions

The study can be associated within the broad tradition of critical and interpretive philosophical studies that have influenced education and curriculum theory in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere over the past fifty years (Cherryholmes, 1988; Giroux, 1988; Giroux & McLaren, 1994; McLaren, 2007; Noddings, 1984; Pinar, 1975, 1988; Van Manen, 1990). To narrow the focus of alignment a bit, this study draws heavily on the hermeneutic, indigenous, and ecological perspectives represented in the work of such educational researchers as Battiste & Henderson (2000), Bowers (1993c, 1995, 2001), Jardine (2000); Jardine & Friesen (2003), Jardine, Friesen, & Clifford (2006), Ross (1989), and Smith (1999d, 2006e). These alignments will be reviewed in Chapter Two.

While varied in approach, and it must be said that they disagree with each other on many points, participants in the critical and interpretive philosophical education tradition to which this study refers may be said to have the following in common: they

typically stand in dissent to the pervasive metaphysical legacy of the European

Enlightenment and the exaggerated role it has assumed in Western and colonized

cultures. Educators working in this tradition reject the universalist claims of positivism

and of scientific technical epistemology, claims based on the severance of subject and

object, and more, on the subjugation of the object to the autonomous subject who is

empowered by the formidable and purportedly objective engine of objectivity. They

understand that the dominating role of the Eurocentric powers is and has always been

sustained via the exploitation and silencing of non-rational Others (colonized people,

women, the insane) who are now demanding a restitutive accounting. A common goal

of educational researchers working in this tradition is to identify and rescue human

science research, in education in particular, from the scientific technical grips of

enlightenment rationality: alienation, disempowerment, mechanization, standardization,

dehumanization of persons more and more defined as resources to be exploited for

economic and political purposes. The dissenting tradition I refer to here is strongly

influenced by continental, postmodern, non-occidental and indigenous philosophical

movements from a wide variety of scholars over the past century, including Arendt

(1971), Bateson (1972; 1991), Bhabha (1990; 1994), Derrida (1976; 1978), Foucault

(1970; 1972), Gadamer (1976; 1964/1994), Husserl (1913/1962), Heidegger (1962,

1971), Jameson (1991), Kristeva (1989), Lévinas (1969/1991, 1979, 1987), Lyotard

(1984), Mazrui (1990; 1998), Merleau-Ponty (1945/1995. 1960/1987, 1964), Nandy

(1983, 1988), Ricoeur (1981, 1992), Spivak (1988, 1993, 1999). I would like to note

here that since this study seeks to situate the topic within the history of epistemology, I

will give notice at appropriate times, as I have in the list of scholars provided in the

preceding section, of traditions of scholarly work by authors whose output is often

prolific. The particular works I refer to under a scholar's name are often only a small

representation of her or his body or work; I will refer only to those with which I am

directly familiar.

Topical Focus of the Study

The tide of young refugees arriving in the United States from war-torn countries

where there was no opportunity to attend school nor to learn to read and write continues

and grows (Bigelow, 2007; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a). The task of adjusting to life

in a radically different culture is difficult—all the more unimaginably difficult when a

person is recovering from the trauma of war and displacement. The task of cultural

adjustment facing these older students is significantly compounded by many factors:

their relative lack of academic development and the orality of their cognitive

development in their first language, the fact that they have little or no knowledge of

English, and the inadequacy of high school level instructional programs specifically

designed to meet them at the level of the most basic skills, and offer them an articulated

path to grade-level proficiency. The ethos of American high schools, defined in our

times by standardization of academic knowledge and assessment in defined subject

areas, is profoundly foreign to newcomer students who have been orally educated in

embedded traditional contexts. Not only are these students required to assimilate

massive amounts of new information, they must also learn new ways of learning, and

new ways of considering what counts as knowledge worth learning at all. In facing

these inestimably challenging tasks, newcomer students without prior literacy or

schooling are able to draw on the cultural capital embodied within their communities, a

resource that supports them in navigating the alien ways of American high schools

(Bigelow, 2007). On the school side of things, there is a nascent but growing awareness

of the particular profile of these students, and growing attention to their sociocultural

and instructional needs (DeCapua and Marshall, 2010a; DeCapua, Smathers and Tang,

2009; Freeman and Freeman, 2002). While it is nearly impossible to estimate the

number of preliterate English language learners in U.S. high schools since there is no

agreed-upon definition of terms and students' background is often not known, it is fair

to say that the number of newcomer ELL's arriving without academic skills has been

growing rapidly and presents considerable challenges to high school ELL and academic

programs (Magnuson, 2003).

Discussion of Designators

Students who have not had consistent, nor indeed any, opportunity to attend

school have been referred to by different names, such as *limited formal schooling* (LFS)

(Freeman & Freeman, 2002), *interrupted schooling* (DiCerbo & Loop, 2003), or *no* or

limited prior schooling students. Sometimes they are called *overage* because they need

instruction usually given to younger students (Moran, Villamil Tinajero, Stobbe, &

Tinajero 1993; Paiewonsky, 1997). More recently the terms *students with interrupted*

formal education (SIFE) and *students with limited or interrupted formal education*

(SLIFE) have come into use (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010; DeCapua, Smathers & Tang,

2009). Students who have limited or no literacy skills in either their mother tongue or

another language are also referred to by many different names. A common general term

is *preliterate* (Schifini, 1997); in some settings one also hears *late initial literacy*, *late*

onset literacy (Wayman, McMaster, Sáenz & Watson, in press), *low literacy LEP*, or

late emergent readers (Jiménez, 1997). Burt and Peyton (2003) propose a very differentiated classification system based on the exact literacy background of the student and the home culture, accounting for differences in the type of writing system used and the degree and type of cultural diffusion of literacy. In this study I use the term *preliterate* as a general but imperfect term to indicate someone who has not acquired or is in the early stages of acquiring basic literacy skills, including functional alphabetic and phonemic awareness. My use follows the spirit of Burt and Peyton's system, because most of the students I refer to come from cultural backgrounds in which the mother tongue has no written history.

Yet, the term *preliterate* is an unfortunate moniker; as the great theorist of orality and literacy Walter Ong pointed out, the word *preliterate* presents orality, the primary modeling system of human communication, as an "anachronistic deviant" to the writing system that in fact followed it (Ong, 1982, p. 13), all of which implies a sort of inadequacy of oral people, an evolutionary developmental continuum along which primitive oral people can and should progress to a higher ground of literacy. Can a person be intelligent, worthy, dignified, brave and valuable without being literate? Who would answer "no" to that question? What would it say about a person, culture, or school system who did, either in as many words or tacitly by policy and practice? These definitional matters raise moral questions that will be addressed further on; for the moment I will proceed with the conviction that being literate is not a necessary condition for being human, if for no other reason that the fact that nearly all members of the human race have lived and died without literacy.

As regards the issue of educational background, I will use the acronym LFS, as a global signifier to indicate students with limited and/or significantly interrupted formal schooling, to include those with no formal schooling at all. The reasons for my choice are three. First, the motivation for this study is to understand the situation of the more challenged older students, that is, those who have had very significant gaps in schooling, not those who have missed one, two, or three years. Second, this acronym is currently the most commonly used designator in the high schools in my area.

Third, and most importantly, as with the word *preliterate* there is an implied sense of deficit in these terms, which encompass people who may have had very significant education in oral and traditional modes. Inasmuch as the term *education* derives from the Latin *educare*, meaning 'to lead, to lead forth,' we must recognize that all of the students we meet have indeed been educated, perhaps in ways that are quite complex (see, for instance, the elaborately organized oral education of the LoDagaa people of Africa reported in Goody, 1987). So although they have already been educated—led forth from childhood into the practices of the cultural commons (Bowers, 2006) in which they were initiated—they have not been *schooled* in the manner of Western academic schooling, a formal institution that enacts a particular set of values and practices (Illich, 1973) and which happens to be regnant in the present era. In light of these considerations, I have elected to employ the commonly used acronym *LFS* which, though still a deficit-structured term, at least specifies that any lack these student have is not in education per se but in formal academic schooling in the Eurocentric sense.

A final note on designators and terms: one may wonder how long terms like *preliterate* and *limited formal schooling* apply once students have received instruction in our schools and begun to acquire the ways of literacy and academic learning. Certainly, these terms will not do as accurate descriptors of students progress; we could only say that a student was preliterate with limited formal schooling when he or she arrived, and even then one student would be a little more or less preliterate or formally schooled than the next, and so on *ad infinitum*, in a futile quest for precision of description. For the purposes of this study, these terms refer to the student's situation prior to and upon arrival in U.S. high schools, evoking at once their relative lack of formal academic schooling and their immersion and proficiency in the orally constituted modes of knowing and learning in which they matured.

Methodological Orientation

There are as many ways to approach thinking about preliterate ELL students in their encounter with the full smack of educational and cultural novelties in the context of U.S. high schools as there are academic disciplines and research methodologies multiplied by each other. In pursuing a deeper understanding of the encounter, we could consult neurologists, trauma researchers, psychoanalysts, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, poets, technology experts, political scientists, historians, aid workers, communication professors, second language acquisition researchers, teachers, literacy coaches, social justice activists, assessment experts, and so many others. The collection of experts would each operate with certain assumptions based on the background literature they are familiar with, and would draw on the reservoir of their understanding to identify an endless number of constructs and variables for study. Some would operate

with a very tight focus on highly circumscribed phenomena (eg. Kurvers, Hout, &

Vallen, 2007), others would take the wide-angle lens view to discern larger contours

(eg. Akinnaso, 1981). Often the choice of focus and approach is quite well-defined by

the traditions of the discipline or methodology, and each choice has merit in

contributing to a better understanding of this little understood topic.

    This study, which is interested in what instances of experience within a wide

experiential abyss can reveal about cultural beliefs and practices, employs a variable

action on the continuum of focus between telephoto and wide-angle lens, allowing

insights from the various vantage points to inform each other, continually building a

deeper and more nuanced interpretation. This movement, known as the hermeneutic

circle (Dilthey, 1976; Gadamer, 1960/1994; MacDonald, 1988), employs a continual

back-and-forth of interpretation between part and whole, zeroing in on an experiential

or artistic artifact, and then relating it to broad contours visible on a large canvas. Smith

(1999e) compares the hermeneutic circle to collecting the pieces of a puzzle,

assembling the pieces where they may fit across the image, until slowly a clearly

discernable, though always incomplete, picture emerges. The hermeneutical approach

taken in this study will be laid out in more detail in Chapter Three.

Interpretive Thematic Focus of the Study

    In addition to signaling the methodological approach, it is also important to

further define which part of the vast topic will provide the interpretive access point or

organizing theme. Building upon two decades of interest in educational epistemologies

and an understanding of the denaturing and dehumanizing legacies of the post-

enlightenment subject-object split, I have spent the past couple of years engaged in

sustained scholarly study along various paths that could provide the deepest possible level of understanding of the existential nature of learning to read for the first time as a high school student, in a new language, English, in a new culture, the United States. Very little research has been directed specifically at the topic (exceptions include Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Tarone, Bigelow, & Hanson, 2009), and this relative paucity ended up presenting itself as an invitation to consider the radical heart of the matter of literacy development, to dig right down to the apophatic core of it: If we want to understand the matter of acquiring literacy as a young adult, then we need to start by attending to what it is like to grow up without literacy—within the personal and cultural ecologies of orality (Bowers, 2007). While the theme will be developed in much greater depth below, suffice it to say here that it is not so much the facts of orality or literacy or digitacy as discrete skill areas in themselves that will be shown to make the difference, but their surrounding lifeworlds, their existential noeses.

From among the exceedingly numerous topical possibilities, then, the existential continuum of orality-to-literacy has emerged as the primary interpretive theme of this thesis. It is now possible to gather together the frames of reference that inform the study and express its purpose in a general statement: This is a study which undertakes a comparative exploration of the noeses of orality and literacy and their respective characteristics and consequences, from the perspective of dissenting post-enlightenment philosophy devoted to ending the reign of Eurocentric imperialism, employing the interpretive tradition of hermeneutics, to gain a deeper understanding of historical, political, instructional, and ethical dimensions of initial literacy development of high school English language learners with limited formal schooling in U.S. schools.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Considerable research has focused on the literacy and learning situation of younger English language learners (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2006), and on second language and literacy acquisition by adolescents and adults who are already educated and literate in their first language (Bialystok, 2002; Cummins, 1991; Ivey & Broaddus, 2007). There has, however, been very little research on adolescent and young adult English language learners with no or limited formal schooling who have not learned to read in their native language or any language (Genesee, Lindhold-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006, Tarone and Bigelow, 2004). A common problem is that research on language learning simply does not take into account categories of prior schooling and degree of prior literacy. Research on older language learners tends to assume that students have received grade level schooling and are literate to a high academic level (van de Craats, Kurvers, & Young-Scholten, 2006). In their review of all the major journals publishing SLA studies, Bigelow and Tarone (2004) found that "researchers rarely study adult and adolescent immigrant learners with very low [print] literacy in any language" (p. 689-90).

Second Language Acquisition Studies

As stated previously, research that specifically addresses the matter of learning to read initially in an L2 in adolescence or adulthood is rare, but interest in the area is growing. The international LESLLA forum (Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition) was created in 2005 to focus scholarly attention on this issue;

much of the research reviewed in this section was published in LESLLA volumes. Many of these studies employ experimental or quasi-experimental methodology to examine the question from the perspective of conventional lines of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and literacy research, applying recognized theoretical constructs to the analysis of the phenomenon of late onset initial L2 literacy among LFS students, or investigating how the phenomenon confirms or expands current theoretical models.

One interesting line of research has investigated stage (Juel, 1991; Chall, 1999) versus non-stage (Goodman & Goodman, 1986) models of literacy acquisition, with the stage models describing a roughly three stage process: logographic, alphabetic, and orthographic (van de Craats, Kurvers, & Young-Scholten, 2006). Kurvers (200) found evidence that adult LFS initial literacy ELLs who are learning to read words go through essentially the same phases as children learning to read in L1, specifically: visual recognition, letter naming, decoding, partial decoding and direct recognition.

Another line of inquiry addresses the acquisition of basic skills and processes and the timing of that acquisition. Meta-phonological skills and letter knowledge are the first building blocks for any L1 beginning reader. In addition to these skills, Verhoeven (2004) found that, for L2 readers, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse markers are primary determinants of decoding and reading comprehension. SLA research has established that pre-existing oral proficiency in L2 predicts success with literacy in L2 (Condelli & Wrigley, 2004). The older LFS preliterate student therefore arrives in high school in an incredible bind, one rife with implications for adolescent self-image. As Young-Scholten & Strom (2006) put it: "With no L1 metalinguistic skills to transfer and little L2 linguistic competence upon which the development of metalinguistic

awareness can 'piggyback,' such a learner is more like a baby than a pre-school child" (p. 50).

Following Alderson (1984), Bernhardt (2005), and Bernhardt and Kamil (1995), some researchers have asked, what is the minimal linguistic threshold of morpho-syntactic competence needed for an adult LFS preliterate student to develop initial literacy in L2, and is there a critical period for acquiring this threshold? Young-Scholten and Strom's (2006) study indicates the importance of L1 phonemic awareness, and pre-existing L2 oral skills—phonology, morphology, syntax, vocabulary—in the adult L2 literacy acquisition process. They conclude optimistically that "with sufficient time and effort, even adults without any native language schooling can become literate in English" (p. 64). Juffs (2006), emphasizing the important role of working memory, often highly developed in preliterate adults, is unwilling to accept the critical period hypothesis on its face, suggesting that "other factors such as motivation, exposure, and culture play an even greater role than age in predicting success" (p. 99).

Case studies exploring the phenomenon also strike an optimistic tone. Bigelow (2006) investigated the ways in which the cultural capital resources of an adolescent preliterate Somali English language learner in a Minnesota high school setting served to offset academic deficits. Perry's (2007) case study addressed Sudanese refugee adolescents both literate and preliterate, with and without prior schooling, also emphasizing the need to recognize student strengths and not overestimate the durability of educational deficits.

Some studies have viewed issues related to the phenomenon longitudinally, revealing a correlation between age and academic literacy acquisition. Research by

Collier and Thomas (Collier, 1987, 1989; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002) has been

widely cited as evidence of the interaction of age, prior education, and length of time

needed to achieve academic proficiency. Here is a summary of their key findings

relevant to this study: (a) the older you are when you begin to acquire literacy and learn

a language, the harder it is, the longer it takes, and the more you need repetitive

practice; (b) previously educated ELL students who begin American school at age

twelve need more than five years to reach academic parity; and (c) for most adolescent

learners without prior schooling, the length of time required for full mastery of

academic English is seven to twenty or more years depending on age of initial

schooling, and assuming consistency of quality input and instruction, an assumption

that is not often enough warranted. It should be noted that it is possible to obtain a high

school diploma without full academic mastery—many adolescent LFS preliterate

newcomers graduate and continue their academic development on the postsecondary

level. This issue, fraught with complications, is one I will discuss at length below.

Collier and Thomas' research has been critiqued in close detail by Bigelow (2010), who

argues that some of the findings have been inflated in ways that the research

methodology does not warrant, and have been used inappropriately to limit older

learners' access to effective instruction.

Curricular and Instructional Research

The following section provides a review of literature that bears directly on

school learning by LFS students, and topically rather than methodologically convened.

The reader will therefore note that the provenance of material reviewed here is varied—

some arises from SLA research, some from literature on school instructional practices

and curriculum design, and some from within the field of teacher education. The paradigmatic approaches represented in this and future sections of the review range from scientific technical to theoretical to polemical in nature. As will become clearer in Chapter Three, a hermeneutic approach to inquiry suggests that a topical organization of the discussion as offered here is preferable to separating the discussion into 'research findings' versus other interpretive forms, since the assumptions underlying hermeneutic research do not grant primacy to positivistically grounded research but rather consider the contributions of any scholarship according to its topical relevance.

The first observation to be made here is that most instructional models and recommendations for ELL students in schools do not substantively address the unique situation of older LFS preliterate students, if it is addressed at all. The SIOP Model (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008) adopted by many schools in the U.S. and elsewhere provides useful tools for instruction of ELLs, but not specifically for limited formal schooling students without prior literacy. The otherwise thoughtful book *Supporting the literacy development of English learners*, published by the International Reading Association (Young & Hadaway, 2006), devotes all of two paragraphs to 'emergent readers,' without differentiating between elementary and secondary student needs. A popular teacher resource text by Peregoy and Boyle (2001) often used in teacher preparation programs offers a more substantial discussion of emergent literacy and a description of instructional strategies, but it is still quite limited and does not address the specific situation of secondary students. The Center for Applied Linguistics' national Working Group on ELL Policy, described as "a group of nationally recognized researchers with significant experience in various aspects of

policy and practice regarding the education of ELLs" (Working Group on ELL Policy, 2010, p. 2), recently released its policy recommendations for fine-tuning the No Child Left Behind law (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) in a document entitled "Improving Educational Outcomes for English Language Learners: Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act" (Working Group on ELL Policy, 2010). Despite its call for more accurate categorization of ELL students for purposes of accountability reporting, instructional interventions, and teacher preparation, this document contains no mention whatever of preliterate students with limited formal schooling.

Though relatively few in number, other instructional research studies are focused directly on the needs of this group of students. Kurvers (2007) found that adult LFS preliterate learners did not learn to decode at all using a sight method of reading instruction, while most did learn given direct phonics instruction. The same study determined that more intense, compact attendance at an ESL class increased student literacy learning better than less frequent attendance stretched over more time (Kurvers, 2007). Condelli & Wrigley (2006) conducted what is perhaps the largest scale study done to date on adult LFS preliterates, a longitudinal "What works" study involving nearly 500 students in 13 schools in seven states. Major findings include the importance of using (a) instructional strategies to connect lessons to students' real lives, (b) a variety of modalities and activities to keep students engaged, and (c) the students' native language.

Regarding the American secondary school setting, a study by Wayman, McMaster, Sáenz and Watson (in press) identified the importance of peer assisted

learning in adolescent initial literacy instruction. This study noted the differential rates of literacy acquisition among preliterate versus already literate adolescents, as well as the misleading role of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) in initial vocabulary assessments of preliterate LFS students. Wayman et al. also found positive correlations between fluency and reading comprehension as measured using the curriculum-based measurement approach (CBM), a commonly used method for measuring fluency which has students read aloud as the researcher notes miscues. The importance of fluency as a prerequisite to automaticity, a necessary skill of competent readers, has been established by reading research for many years (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). It remains to be seen whether fluency training is an important consideration in development of literacy skills in LFS preliterate ELL teens, and how it should be prioritized vis-à-vis other instructional goals.

Some researchers have focused on the appropriateness of school program design for addressing the particular needs of LFS students without prior literacy. Berman, Chambers, Gandara, McLaughlin, Minicucci, Nelson, Olson, and Parrish (1992) reported that many school programs are poorly designed for meeting the needs of LFS learners, finding that the curriculum is abstract and organized around college entrance requirements and standardized tests. Callahan (2005) found that students with low or no literacy skills were often tracked into lower courses of study, and were given repetitive, mimetic tasks rather than cooperative or life-experienced based challenges that engaged them cognitively and affectively. Valdés (2001) also noted the tracking problem, and the prevalence of rote vocabulary learning, copying, and covering the textbook, to the exclusion of meaningful learning that stimulates the thinking of older learners.

Other researchers argue in favor of customized programs outside of the regular curriculum to meet the needs of LFS students. Pierce (1987) reports on a Special Needs High-Intensity Language Training (HILT) Program created in five secondary schools in the Arlington, Virginia, Public School district, emphasizing its important role in providing newcomer LFS students with initial "survival skills" for school and basic introduction to the sounds and letters of English (p. 1). Walsh (1999) studied a specialized high school program in Boston for newcomer refugee English language learners without prior literacy nor consistent prior schooling. She found, among other things, that conducting a separate, highly focused literacy program for these students, outside the high school curriculum, was an essential component of their long-term academic success. DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) emphasize the many benefits of dedicated newcomer programs, including less stress and anxiety for learners, and the opportunity for highly trained and empathetic teachers to customize instruction. Acknowledging concerns regarding unequal educational opportunities that sometimes accompany newcomer program designs, they insist that these inequities can be overcome by careful administrative attention and insist on the benefits of a separate program. I found a similar attitude in an exploratory study with one Somali preliterate student, who expressed this view: "Like for people who come from Africa, and they don't know English and they don't know how to read and how to write, the first thing is, they don't have to go to the high school, they have to go to ESL, where the people will help them learn English" (Watson, 2007, p. 11).

These perspectives are mentioned here not as part of the movement in some academic environments to exclude newcomer ELLs from meaningful access to content,

but as an acknowledgement of the very steep ramp adolescent ELLs without prior literacy or schooling face when entering American high school. The needs of these particular students require creative solutions which may involve re-examining current beliefs about what programs can and should be designed to provide the best possible starting platform for their future academic progress. Whatever solutions may ultimately emerge, they depend on an honest reckoning without paradigmatic prejudice—the needs of these unconventional students will be not met using conventional thinking. As DeCapua and Marshall (2010b) have rightly asserted, existing instructional models and interventions based on best practices already identified in the field—grouping strategies, cognitive strategy training, scaffolding, curricular modifications, and cultural sensitivity—are useful but not enough: "What is needed is an overall reconceptualization of the education of [students with limited or interrupted formal education]" (p. 51).

Having noted the relative paucity of good instructional research and curricular design models to meet the needs of older preliterate learners, I would like to turn now to a review of a couple of promising instructional efforts that very specifically address these students. Freeman and Freeman (2002) provide a targeted program for limited formal schooling, arguing that these students "have needs that traditional ESL and bilingual programs…cannot or do not meet" (p. 33). The fact that they carefully distinguish between long-term ELLs who have been in the host country for many years, newly arrived ELLs with adequate schooling, and newcomers with limited or no formal schooling sets their work apart from most. They provide valuable recommendations for scaffolding instruction, selection, and modification of appropriate material, and exhibit

particular sensitivity to cultural background and to the trauma and isolation many older LFS students experience.

Most promising for customizing instruction to the learning situation of high school preliterate learners with limited formal schooling is the work being done by Andrea DeCapua and Helaine Marshall and their colleagues (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b; DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2007, 2009), which deeply contemplates the cognitive and social profile of students from traditional orality and proposes specific instructional approaches based on that profile. They are careful to distinguish between Western academic priorities based on individual autonomy, abstraction, and the primacy of literacy and the orientations of other cultures which center on collective value, practical frames of reference, and face-to-face communication. This work is unique in the field in that it is substantively founded on the understanding that older students "who have not participated in [the Western] model of education have cognitively different ways of understanding and interpreting the world" (2010, p. 52) Their Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) asks three things of teachers: (1) understand and accept the unique and radically different cognitive and social orientations of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE); (2) creatively combine processes characteristic of SLIFE students and those of U.S. schools; and (3) focus on U.S. learning activities with familiar language and content (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010b, p. 53). This ground-breaking work is of great significance in an educational stance committed to intersubjective understanding, a topic I shall explore in depth further on.

In a more consciously political vein, Cummins (2000) attributes the significant gaps between best practices for language-minority students and the kind of instruction they actually receive in schools to inequities in power distribution in the United States—immigrant and refugee families do not typically have the power to shape school policy. This argument envisages all language minority students, but it must be recognized that it applies in a particularly urgent way to LFS preliterate students whose learning profile is even more distant from the mainstream than that of schooled ELLs. Cummins' point rings true to those of us with significant experience working with ELLs in schools. Mirroring the patterns of their homelands, immigrant families typically trust the school to do what is best and tend not to advocate for change and improvements in instruction, if they even had a clear idea what those should be. Meanwhile, other family groups who are vocal and involved are often able to influence school programs, and school dollars, in ways that benefit their children. As a result, money and expertise tend to flow to those areas that have stronger advocates, leaving less funding and attention for students who have no mouthpieces. The cumulative effect of these societal prejudices expressed in the inequitable use of school resources and lower instructional quality constitutes a new segregation, whose unspoken motto holds that a lower level of service and disregard for instructional needs is "good enough for those students."

On the Need to Customize Programs and Instruction

Whatever one's opinion regarding optimal methods and designs, whether ideologically motivated or based on external evidence, the position of this study is that educators of LFS preliterate ELLs are called to conduct the instruction of reading and content proficiencies in a manner that is sensitive to, indeed that interacts purposefully

within, the socio-ontological characteristics of the encounter. Appropriately sensitive

conduct entails both targeted research efforts and instructional implementations that

refuse to ignore the situation of older students from oral backgrounds learning to read.

In his study on the implications of literacy for students of oral background, Nigerian

scholar F. Niyi Akinnaso (1981) is specific:

> More work has to be done on what the learner brings into the learning
>
> situation as a condition of determining the nature and dimensions of the
>
> difficulties he or she encounters in the process. In this regard, the learner's
>
> social, cultural, and linguistic background should not simply be noted on his or
>
> her file, but *actively used as important parameters for the structuring of*
>
> *instruction and counseling, as well as for the evaluation of the learner's*
>
> *performance.* (p. 183, italics added)

If we are to heed Akinnaso's admonition to apply the particular social, cultural,

and linguistic background of students as important parameters for structuring instruction

for students of orality, it will require a better understanding of how oral language

interacts with other modalities. This is the focus of the field-expanding research of

Bigelow, Tarone and Hanson (2009), who examine the distinction between oracy and

literacy and its importance for learner- and instruction-based research in SLA. Their

findings have demonstrated that some of the language processing abilities that have

been considered inherent, universal human abilities in the Chomskian school of thought

in second language acquisition (Chomsky 1968, 1972) may actually be the specific

consequences of alphabetic print literacy. These include: ability to notice oral recasts,

accuracy of recall on elicitation/imitation tasks involving grammatical correction, and

certain morphosyntactic characteristics of learner interlanguage. Bigelow and Watson (in press) provide the most comprehensive survey to date of research, programs, and issues related to educational level and second language learning. They call attention not only to the body of current research findings and the need for increased focus on older ELLs with limited formal schooling, but also begin to frame the issue in its epistemological and ethical dimensions, considering both the instructional needs of learners who have come of age in orality, and also the deeper cultural and epistemological characteristics of orality. This issue will be explored in subsequent chapters.

From the perspective of conventional SLA, literacy instruction, and program research, while early findings suggest certain patterns and important areas for further research, it is clear that there is still much that we do not know about adolescent and young adult initial literacy acquisition in a second language. The stakes however, are high, as is the number of people involved. Studies have pointed to epidemic ELL high school drop-out rates in the United States (Fix, M., Papademetriou, D., & Cooper, B., 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Fry (2005) claims that ELL students constitute 25% of all high school drop-outs, and that of these, 70% are ELLs with limited formal schooling (LFS). In the global arena, Wagner, Venezky, and Street (1999) have noted that there may be even more people around the world who learn to read and write in a second language than in their native language, a notion of great hermeneutic interest in itself.

Consequences of Literacy Approach

Another way of approaching the question of what happens when adolescents learn to read for the first time in a second language is to explore what research has to say about the consequences that literacy has for individuals and cultures. To raise this issue sets us squarely in the realm of the interface between orality and literacy, the primary interpretive theme of this study which will be elaborated in much detail in subsequent chapters. In this review section, I will provide an introduction to some of the primary points from this body of work.

As a general statement it may be noted that while some scholars have concentrated on the cognitive or psychodynamic consequences of literacy, and others have tended to focus more on sociocultural consequences, all those writing in this tradition agree that literacy's effects are profound. The roots of the question of how literacy may transform individuals and societies may be traced in the Western tradition to Plato, who in the final section of the *Phaedrus* depicts Socrates urgently enjoining his companion to avoid the contemptible foolishness of the technology of writing. Let us listen in to a part of their conversation which I have abridged here:

> Socrates: I can not help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence… And when they have been written down they are tossed about anywhere among those who do and among those who do not understand them…
>
> Phaedrus: That again is most true.

Socrates: May we not imagine another kind of writing or speaking far better than this is, and having far greater power—which is one of the same family, but lawfully begotten? Let us see what his origin is.

Phaedrus: Who is he, and what do you mean about his origin?

Socrates: I am speaking of an intelligent writing which is graven in the soul of him who has learned, and can defend itself, and knows when to speak and when to be silent.

Phaedrus: You mean the word of knowledge which has a living soul, and of which the written word is properly no more than an image?

Socrates: Yes, of course that is what I mean. (…) Only in principles of justice and goodness and nobility taught and communicated orally and written in the soul, which is the true way of writing, is there clearness and perfection and seriousness. (Plato, 1993 version, pp. 88-91).

It is remarkable to contemplate this ancient diatribe against writing, produced by the same culture that gave the world the phonetic alphabet which would transform it in just the manner warned against here, penned by the same author who bequeathed the Occident its Platonic ideational structure, made possible, ironically, by the phonetic alphabet. In invoking this passage here, I wish to signal that the issues Socrates discusses with Phaedrus are deeply relevant to the present study, and indeed are deeply felt in our time—the issue of oral authenticity "written in the soul" is at the heart of rap culture, the pragmatic mediation of expression and silence is a constant theme in East-West discourse, and certainly any academic scholar reading these pages has anguished over the problem of having his or her written words tossed about by those who may or

may not understand them. As I will demonstrate further on, there are many people who agree partly or utterly with Socrates that oral communication lies closer to the heart of truth than do literacy or other representational forms, although these people are not typically the ones responsible for conducting research and instruction to support the education of LFS high school students. I will argue that, at the very least, understanding the particular affordances of orality in human consciousness and culture should be required of such responsible parties.

Researchers like Goody (1968, 1977), Havelock (1963, 1976), Lord (1960), Olson (1977, 1994), Ong (1977, 1978, 1982, 1988, 1992), and Parry (1971) make the claim that literacy brings about major changes in the way people think about themselves and the world, because literacy fundamentally alters the structure of intellectual processes and cultural relations. The enduring nature of the written word, the objectification and explicitness made possible by alphabetic literacy, the development of formal rhetorical and logical structures, the codification and categorization of knowledge—all of these engender a culture of the literate intellect which casts the world in abstract categories, and allows, indeed requires, everything in the world to be classified as items belonging to specific determinate categories.

Effects of Phonetic Alphabetic Literacy

In contrast to writing systems that are ideographic (eg. Chinese *hanzi*, Korean *hanja*) or syllabary (eg. Hebrew, Vai, Cherokee, Japanese *kana*), some researchers have described the cultural consequences of an alphabet that is fully phonetic, the first of which is generally accepted to have been developed by the ancient Greeks between the 8th (Goody & Watt, 1968) and the 7th century BCE (Wolf, 2007). Havelock's (1976)

three criteria of a phonetic alphabet will suffice for my use of the term in this study: (1) a limited number of letters or characters, preferably twenty to thirty; (2) a complete set of characters that can represent all the sounds of a language; and (3) consistent correspondence between each visual symbol and all the phonemes in the language. The cultural consequences of alphabetic script adoption, according to Havelock (1963) and Olson (1977), include a new preference for literal truth over myth, a shift of favor from poetry to prose, the development of logical procedures that constitute rules for thinking, and a new emphasis on definitions and abstract categorizations and taxonomies.

McLuhan (1964/1994) made the more general argument, echoed by Ong, Goody, and Olson, that the phonetic alphabet, in contrast to ideographic forms, made it possible for the first time to communicate without reference to context, auguring a revolutionary shift in human relations:

> Many centuries of ideogrammic use have not threatened the seamless web of family and tribal subtleties of Chinese society. On the other hand, a single generation of alphabetic literacy suffices in Africa today, as in Gaul two thousand years ago, to release the individual initially, at least, from the tribal web. This fact has nothing to do with the *content* of the alphabetized words; it is the result of the sudden breach between the auditory and the visual experience of man. Only the phonetic alphabet makes such a sharp division in experience, giving to its user an eye for an ear, and freeing him from the tribal trance of resonating word magic and the web of kinship. (p. 84)

This provocative argument introduces the theme I will pursue in Chapter Four—the generative power of medium and its sociocultural effects. It is interesting to note that

the perspectives on the consequences of literacy reviewed here arrive at conclusions

reminiscent of Tarone, Bigelow, and Hanson's (2009) in the second language

acquisition domain, which hold that some language processing skills seem to be a

function of prior alphabetic literacy. Certainly McLuhan and Olson would agree.

Intriguing studies employing neural imagery show clear distinctions in the areas

of the brain that are activated when people read in different scripts. Bolger, Perfetti and

Schneider (2005) found that the alphabet-reading brain requires far less cortical space

and thus less neural energy than either syllabary or ideographic reading, and that

alphabetic reading appears to be confined to the left hemisphere, while ideographic

reading uses both hemispheres. Studies done on the same person reading in different

scripts provide fascinating illustrations of these phenomena; in the 1930s Chinese

neurologists discovered that a man bilexical in Chinese and English who suffered a

stroke causing damage to one area of his brain lost the ability to read in Chinese, but not

in English (Lyman, Kwan, & Chao, 1938). Japanese readers use neural pathways

similar to Chinese when they read in *kanji* script, which uses the ideographic characters

of Chinese (Nakamura, K., Honda, M., Hirano, S., Oga, T., Sawamoto, N., Hanakawa,

T., Inoue, H., Ito, J., Matsuda, T., Fukuyama, H., & Shibasaki, H , 2001), and in a

distinctively different manner when they read in syllabary *kana* script (Feldman and

Turvey, 1980). Whether properly described as a consequence, an antecedent, or a co-

terminous instance, there appears to be a different cognitive engagement somehow

inherent to the way different scripts collect and represent meaning. In this connection it

is worth recalling Native American philosopher and Jungian scholar A.C. Ross' (1989)

observation that Western educational systems place far too much emphasis on the

functions of the left brain—as alphabetically-shaped systems, they could hardly avoid doing so.

Cognition in the Absence of Alphabetic Literacy

Approaching the matter from the other side of orality / literacy abyss, several studies have suggested that people who have not acquired alphabetic literacy do not develop cognitive structures associated with occidental logical reasoning, that is, application of abstract principles to various theoretical or actual occurrences of that case as defined by sentential statements. Classic studies by Vygotsky's student Luria in the 1920's and 1930's (first published in1976) demonstrated the inability of preliterate LFS adults to engage in logical reasoning as required to complete a syllogism: In the far north, where there is always snow, all bears are white, Luria explained. Novaya Zemlya is in the far north and there is always snow there. To his next question, "What color are the bears there?" subjects responded that they didn't know, they hadn't been there, bears are different everywhere, they only knew about the bears where they lived. (It should be noted that there was no language barrier between subjects and investigators.) Interestingly, repeated attempts by Luria and his team to explain the basic propositions of the argument resulted not in convincing the subjects, but in making them angry about wasting time on so foolish an activity as speculating about distant situations they could not possibly know about. They insisted on reasoning situationally, by enthymeme, meaning that they were unwilling or unable to agree to the generalized primary proposition of the syllogism—that up in the north all bears are white—because they had no direct experience to bear it out.

In a similar study, Greenfield, Reich, and Olver (1966) compared Wolof children in Senegal who attended school and could read to their age peers without those opportunities. Formally educated, literate children had no trouble grouping objects according to abstract, logical categories, a task that preliterate children who hadn't been to school were unable to perform; instead they sorted objects according to concrete characteristics or functions.

Based on findings from their study of the Vai people of Liberia, Scribner and Cole (1978, 1981) rejected broad claims that any literacy at all brings about a predictable cognitive restructuring involving increased abstract reasoning abilities, proposing instead that literacies in different languages, used for different purposes, each produce local cognitive effects related to the function of that written language in people's lives. In a chapter co-authored with Scribner and Cole, Goody (1987) found similarly that the kind of reasoning that Vai people engaged in depended on the degree of literacy they had in particular kinds of scripts; those literate in syllabary Vai script used for functional life-related purposes engaged in more contextual reasoning, while those literate in alphabetic English script used for formal educational and career purposes reasoned in the manner of Western logical categorizations.

Olson (1977) argued that it is a defining characteristic of formal alphabetic text that it requires readers to discount their experience and prior knowledge as the basis for determining the reasonableness of statements, and to rely instead on the provisions of the text alone, those provided by lexicon and syntax. Those who have difficulty with logical academic tasks simply "lack experience suspending prior knowledge and expectancies in order to honor the sentence meaning of the statements" (p. 273).

Olson's position accords with the SLA research of Van de Craats, Kurvers, and Young-Scholten (2006), who found that adult preliterates are not *a priori* able to distinguish between real life experiences and what is written on a page—they need to be explicitly taught that written material does not always, or even often, refer to real life experience. Whether one takes the strong or the nuanced view, all of these examples lend credibility to Petersson, Reis, Askelof, Castro-Caldas and Ingvar's (2000) assertion that "literacy may in fact change brain architecture" (p. 365). On the ontogenetic level, we also see here the roots of the revolutionary suggestion that, in order to join the ranks of the educated, people should trust not their experience and instincts but what is written on the page. Socrates' prophecy fulfilled?

These perspectives on the cognitive consequences of literacy resonate intriguingly with key notions in the theory of second language education and education generally. The finding that people without academic literacy reason enthymemically rather than accepting the universalizing quality of syllogistic structure presents the flip side of Cummins' (1979) interdependence hypothesis. This hypothesis, supported by studies on L1-L2 transfer and the impact of prior literacy (Koda, 1988; 1993; Ringbom, 2006) holds that people who have already developed concepts as codified in literacy in their first language are able to transfer those underlying understandings to terms and structures in a second language which reference the same conceptual territory. Accordingly, if they haven't acquired the concepts in prior academic language experiences, they have difficulty acquiring them in a second language. This latter point, I would argue, is exactly the point that the Luria, Greenfield, and others conducting similar sociocultural literacy studies also make. Furthermore, the studies based on pre-

and partially literate people's performances on syllogistic and other formal reasoning

tasks recall the work of Basil Bernstein (1971) whose distinction between elaborated

and restricted language codes turns in large part on facility with Western-style logical

reasoning mediated through language which Bernstein determined via performance on

syllogistic and other formal reasoning tasks very similar to those done by Luria and

Greenfield. Bernstein's well-known point: mastery of elaborated codes affords access to

power in society and academic education in particular, while limitation to restricted

codes (of which the enthymemes used by Luria's subjects are an example mirrored in

Bernstein) signals limited range of social power.

      The preceding discussion suggests some hermeneutically important points. One

is that, in direct contrast to Smith's observation that young postmoderns find

"unrepresented life too slow, too pedestrian to be real" (Smith, 1997, p. 66), older

preliterate individuals without academic schooling appear to consider *represented* life,

as rendered in writing or reasoning, unreal to the point of annoyance and

meaninglessness. This insight leads to a second point: literacy and abstraction are not

ontically neutral, universally consistent activities. One of Ong's central insights (1982)

holds that writing entails a *loss*—the loss of orality and the cultural heritages associated

with it—but it also opens other potentials on which our very survival within the

progress of codified culture is based: "We have to die [to orality] to continue living [in

literacy]" (Ong, 1982, p. 15). Wolf (2007) extends Ong's perspective, making the

strong inter-relational claim that reading is not only "our best vehicle to a transformed

mind" (p. 18) but a vehicle which makes possible a liberation from the confines of our

own thinking as we acquire an "expanding sense of 'other'" (p. 9).

A Wider Lens: Epistemological and Political Approaches

Postmodern Perspectives

Scholars writing about language from a postmodern perspective (e.g., Lyotard, 1984; Derrida, 1976, 1978; Kristeva, 1989; Foucault, 1970, 1972) are less sanguine than Ong and less triumphal than Wolf about the Western promise of knowledge and understanding via representational literacy, what Foucault (1970) describes as "breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things" (p. xv). Consider the example he quotes from a "certain Chinese encyclopaedia" regarding the different categories of animals: there are those "belonging to the emperor, embalmed, tame, sucking pigs, included in the present classification, having just broken the water pitcher, and from a long way off look like flies" (Foucault, 1970, p. xv). The point I wish to make here is about the indeterminacy of categorization: just as the categories on Foucault's list allegedly made complete sense within a certain culture whose understanding is now lost, so by the same semiotic token does it makes sense that I couldn't know whether there are white bears in Novaya Zelmya, no matter what you tell me, because I haven't been there.

It is only through the artificial twists of logical reasoning, afforded by the unique properties of the phonetic alphabet, expanded and codified in the period of the Enlightenment, propagated through universal literacy initiatives beginning in the 1850s (Graff, 1979), and ensconced in the very meaning of intellectual intelligence as construed in our schools and universities, that the sentence comes to have greater meaning than one's experience, as discussed above in the review of Olson's (1977) work. What I am describing here is an instance of the post-modern critique of the dual

enlightenment legacy of **logocentrism**—the belief that words can be made to completely contain and positively (in the sense of utterly, completely) express reality, and **severance**—subject from object, humans from nature, experience from truth (Derrida, 1974, 1976; Foucault, 1970; 1972; Jameson, 1991; Lyotard, 1984; Spivak, 1999). Similar critiques have been issued in the phenomenological and hermeneutic tradition, and in the viewpoints of indigenous and non-Eurocentric thinkers, as I will review below. The fact that both the science-inspired positivistic stance toward language and the creation of a state of severance were precisely cultural, that is, took place in a certain place and time and were not part of other cultures' histories until colonialism, is at the core of the issue this study addresses. I will dwell at length in Chapter Six on critical insights in the history of epistemology, specifically on the ways in which alphabetic literacy gave rise to the scientific method and a complete restructuring of human thought, which paved the way for triumphant colonial aggressions, was transmogrified into neoliberal globalist market hegemony, and has been adopted by national, state, local, and district administrators in the form of academic rigor and codified standards of knowledge. For the moment, by way of review, it is important simply to note that the motivation for philosophers like Derrida or Husserl to promote the deconstruction, or at least containment, of Western metaphysics is largely the same motivation which prompts leaders in other cultural traditions to object to the forcible exportation of the cognitive imperialism (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) of the West in the form of Enlightenment principles encoded in academic literacy and Western-style education.

Critical Perspectives

As a leading voice in critical language education, Alistair Pennycook presents well-articulated accounts of English as an agent of colonial legitimation (1994; 1998) and of second language classrooms as sites of contested power relations (1989; 1990). His book entitled *Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction* (2001) is careful to herald its position within a Western tradition of critical inquiry that stretches back to Marx, Engels, the Frankfurt School of critical theory, and includes more recent critical pedagogues like Freire (1970, 1985, 1989), Giroux (1988), Giroux and McLaren (1994), McClaren (2007), and Shor (1992). Pennycook's work is epistemologically similar to the work of Gee (1986; 2008) and Street (1995) in the field of literacy and discourse studies. Along with other researchers working in the tradition of critical language studies such as Auerbach (1986, 1991) and Tollefson (1995), Pennycook provides bold and useful excavations of inequity in power embodied in discourses and social practice, issues that affect LFS ELL students deeply, and are indeed at the core of the reasons for their presence in "first world" classrooms at all. Further, scholarship in this tradition typically has a very committed practical engagement, in community literacy initiatives, for instance.

While worthy both of review and of respect, what the critical language tradition does not take up is the deep Western imperialistic bias contained in the critical tradition itself. Let me hasten to affirm that this does not make the critical tradition necessarily useless, only particular, as indeed are all discourses. On this point, and in the context of the present study focusing on the encounter of traditional oral and Eurocentric literate modes of knowing and communicating, it is important to recall the fuller heritage of

critical studies, expressed in Mazrui's (1990) well-documented and passionately argued

point that both Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels applauded the colonial project,

considering "imperialism an engine of progress in Asia and Africa" (p. 20). Their

attitude is emblematic of the political stance of the industrialized world in general,

which holds a belief in "the hierarchy of civilization" (Mazrui, 1990, p. 19) wherein

European societies are at the top and barbarian societies are at the bottom, able to

improve their ranking only by acquiring Western education and modes of thought and

communication. By way of example Mazrui quotes Marx on the British occupation of

India:

> We must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive as they
>
> may appear, had always been the solid foundation of oriental despotism, that
>
> they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it
>
> the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules,
>
> depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies… England has to fulfill a
>
> double mission in India: One destructive, the other regenerating – the
>
> annihilation of all Asiatic societies, and the laying of the material foundations of
>
> Western society in Asia. (Marx, 1853, cited in Mazrui, 1990, p. 20)

Over a century after Marx, Jürgen Habermas, arguably the most notable heir to

the Frankfurt school critical tradition, carried forward the same imperialistic,

Eurocentric, rationalist biases in his *Theory of communicative action* (1984), casting the

indigenous African thinking exhibited by the Azande people—their tolerance of logical

contradiction in particular (Fleming, 1997)—as the "very prototype of an unreflective

mode of mythical thought" (Irele, 2001, p. 247). Habermas evokes the example of the

Azande for the express purpose of contrasting this primitive mode of thought with the West's great gift of intellectual progress offered to the world—what Habermas calls occidental rationalism (Habermas, 1984). Exiled Argentinian theologian Enrique Dussel, from whom the present study draws significantly, is sharply critical of Habermas and others like him who are widely cited in progressive circles even as they promote a Eurocentric modernist view that they position as universal. In Dussel's words, "a European definition of modernity, such as Habermas', overlooks how European modernity constitutes all other cultures as its periphery" (Dussel, 1995, p. 33).

Similar exposés regarding the critical tradition as enacted in the work of Freire (1970, 1985, 1989) and borne out in constructivist literacy initiatives in South America have been articulated by Bowers (Bowers 1993a; 2005), who describes the ways in which these educational projects are at odds with fundamental orientations cherished in traditional cultures and essential to the survival of our shared planet. Like his ideological progenitor Marx, Freire exhibits what Bowers identifies as a social Darwinist agenda (C.A. Bowers, personal communication, February 11, 2010), evidenced for instance in his book *Education for critical consciousness* (Freire, 1989), which describes a hierarchy of human development from barbarian (indigenous) to civilized (Eurocentric). In this Freirean hierarchy, people from "the most backward regions" (p. 17) are lodged in a state of "semi-intransitive consciousness" which means that their "sphere of perception is limited…they confuse their perceptions of the objects and challenges of the environment, and fall prey to magical explanations because they cannot apprehend true causality" (p. 17). Next comes the stage of "naïve transitivity," characterized by such attitudes as the over-simplification of problems, a strong tendency

to gregariousness, a lack of interest in investigations, and on-going magical

explanations (p. 18). Without the proper guidance, a person can fall from naïve

transitivity to a state of "fanaticized consciousness" (p. 19); with critical education

however, he can reach the next stage of "critical transitivity," which entails deeper

interpretations, an empirical disposition to test one's findings, and soundness of

argumentation (p. 18). Finally, a person who is truly critical can achieve

conscientizaçao [conscientization], a term denoting Freire's highest stage of human

evolution, which he describes as "the development of the awakening of critical

awareness" that "must grow out of a critical educational effort based on favorable

historical conditions" (p. 19). The image that emerges here is that Freire's worldview is

one which explicitly ranks levels of human consciousness according to level of formal

critical education. It is a view of human social evolution consistent with Marx's stated

position on colonial expansion—the white man's burden position. Both views, which

represent some of the most triumphal cognitive imperialism that has ever been

expressed, are decidedly inconsistent with a true conversation based on mutual respect

with indigenous, traditional, oral ways of knowing.

No one is claiming, as far as I know, that Marx, Habermas or Freire had an

active disdain for any culture in particular; indeed, their work, as critical work in

general, appears to have laudable intentions of improving human circumstances,

eliminating harmful illusions, and enhancing freedom, but in attempting to do so it

clearly employs distinctly Eurocentric forms of rational analysis that devalue other

ways of knowing. The point is that, in general, what critically toned projects seek is an

end to uncritical, magical thinking that they see as the hallmark of traditional oral

cultures. The emancipation of these marginalized people, their progress in this view, depends on acquiring the higher consciousness of Eurocentric rationalism and the empowered agent. What needs to be asserted here is that while there is much to respect in the Western critical tradition, and in some ways in the Enlightenment project itself, these traditions were and are distinctly Western, they differ in many of their fundamental adherences from non-Western indigenous worldviews, and they position themselves as objectively superior to primitive thinking precisely on the point of what counts as good, wise, correct thinking. In the next section, I will evoke some of the epistemological and ontological diversities characteristic of people and cultures not yet fully enclosed by Western hegemony (Bowers, 1993b), what might be called the global counter-cultures.

Indigenous Perspectives

Critique of neocolonialism. Indigenous scholars from around the globe have provided sharply critical analyses of the worldwide encroachment of the "1492 World System" (Amin, 2003, p. 60). Such critiques are exceedingly and appropriately numerous and arise from every corner of the globe and every discipline. I will review just a few here as a way of introducing themes relevant to the present study, acknowledging the difficulty and danger of categorizing some scholars as indigenous or from traditional cultures and others as Western. Many have achieved very high levels of accomplishment in both, if the word 'both' even has an intelligible referent here. Many have hybrid citizenship, ethnicity, and linguistic and cultural formation experiences, all of which have certainly affected their worldviews. Furthermore, there is no such objective thing as "the indigenous view" or "the Western view," per se, or any other

conceptual entity proclaimed as an objective, immutable entity. In discussing the

historical unfolding of events and ideas, there is always a danger of subsumption, and

that would be quite at odds with my purpose here. Let me not belabor the point, but

only say that I don't put any great stock in the categorization, only in the imperative of

respecting the alterity of certain viewpoints speaking out for the interests of their own

marginalized people. Whether a certain practice, viewpoint, or writer is "truly" a

representative of one tradition or another is not the main issue here—such will always

be a subject for interpretation. What is important, and far too uncommon, is to look not

only to research generated by dominant culture scholars if the purpose is to find out

what others are thinking.

Considerable work has been devoted to revealing and critiquing the on-going

effects of the massive conquest of the world by European powers and those capitalist

democracies created in the Eurocentric image: the United States, Japan, and to some

extent Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The field of neo-colonial/post-colonial

studies includes such leading theorists as Amin (1989, 2003), Battiste and Henderson

(2000), Bhabha (1990, 1994), Hall (1990) Jameson (1983, 1991, 1998), Mazrui (1990,

1998), Nandy (1983, 1988), Said (1978, 1993), Spivak (1989, 1993, 1999) as well as

scores of other scholars conducting targeted work in various disciplines and contexts

around the world.

Kenyan-born scholar Ali Mazrui (1990) traces the profound arrogance of the

colonial project to its origins, evidenced even in the work of so freedom-loving a

thinker as John Stuart Mill:

There is a great difference between the case in which the nations concerned are

of the same, or something like the same, degree of civilization, and that in which

one of the parties to the situation is of a high, and the other of a very low, grade

of social improvement. To suppose that the same international customs, and the

same rules of international morality, can obtain between one civilized nation and

another and between civilized nations and barbarians is a grave error…

To characterize any conduct towards the barbarous people as a violation of the

Law of Nations, only shows that he who speaks has never considered the

subject. (Mill, cited in Mazrui, 1990, p. 19)

Indian social theorist Ashis Nandy (1983, 1988) provides an authoritative

argument rich in literary, political and historical examples of how colonialism, defining

everything according to its own myopic yet triumphalist agenda, violently distorts both

the colonized culture and its people and the colonizers as well. While colonized peoples

are forced to incorporate the West, says Nandy, the reverse is never equally the case

(1983, p. 75), permitting the propagation of a customary, one-sided ignorance among

the very folk who claim a position of objective omniscience. Egyptian-born economist

Samir Amin (1989, 2003) demonstrates how European colonialism has been

transformed in our day into U.S.-led neoliberal globalization under the banner of

capitalism buttressed by military conquest, a system he critiques as fundamentally

destructive and doomed to obsolescence. Far from a development initiative for

peripheral nations, "the deployment of capitalism on a world scale does not virtuously

enable those who are 'lagging behind' to 'catch up' with those who are ahead" (2003, p.

76) but rather continually reinforces its own interests in which millions are condemned

to die in order to preserve the social order of what Amin calls "the Triad": the U.S., Europe, and Japan (2003, p. 61). The violence of neocolonialism is distinct from older forms, according to Indian scholar Shiv Visvanathan of the Centre for Developing Societies in Delhi. In response to a global economic development plan promoted by the influential Club of Rome, he writes that:

> There is little blatant aggression, no group of colonials sitting around a table and carving colonies like steak… Why kill when you can co-opt? …There is no Cortez or Shakha here. It is killing through concepts, through coding, by creating grammars that decide which sentence can be spoken and which cannot (Visvanathan, 1991, p. 378).

The eminent scholar of colonialism Edward Said (1978, 1993) understands the world in this current period of neocolonialism as fraught with "a huge number of ecological, economic, social, and political pressures tearing at its only dimly perceived, basically uninterpreted and uncomprehended fabric" (1993, p. 20). Western powers may have relinquished political control over their colonies, but moral and intellectual rule continues insidiously in expanded, American-led form under the flag of global economic interests, hence Said's axiom: "The business of empire has become the empire of business" (1993, p. 23). Like Nandy, Amin, and Visvanathan, Said locates within the West's naïve positivistic hubris the seeds of its own downfall, but not before plenty of additional damage has been done.

Ugandan scholar Yash Tandon (1994) issues a scathing critique of the on-going "recolonization" of "miscreant subject peoples" (p. 178) which operates via political and economic disciplinary measures that destroy indigenous ways of life including

education, traditional abilities to cope with crises, indigenous spirituality, and the

environment. He emphasizes that the loss is not only to autochthonous cultures

themselves but a loss of the benefit of their knowledge for the whole world: "The world

is poorer because the homogenization of development is destructive of not only the

biogenetic plurality of the world's resources but also the cultural plurality of the world's

civilizations" (p. 183). This position is echoed in work jointly sponsored by the

Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and UNESCO's Division of

Cultural Heritage (Seitel, 2001), a working group comprised of representatives from

indigenous cultures throughout the world whose efforts are dedicated to preserving

traditional knowledge and oral communicative modes and resisting the process of

homogenization rapidly overtaking the planet in the form of a Western-styled "creeping

mono-culture" (Seitel, 2001 p.112).

Dussel (1995) has gone deeper than perhaps any other writer in his exegesis of

the self-absolving murderousness of the imperial mind. In a powerful review of Western

emancipation mythology, Dussel lays out the shockingly banal presumptions of empire

which situate Eurocentric cultures as superior on a universal, objective scale of

development defined by their will to claim freedom for their exquisitely rational selves,

as opposed to barbaric cultures that demonstrate "culpable immaturity" (p. 66) unless

they are willing to abandon traditional knowledge in favor of the Western model of the

autonomous, rational subject. The price to be paid is nothing less than anguish and

death for those cultures who fail to fall in step with modernity, at the hands of fully

justified Western powers who provide the necessary civilizing pedagogy—the white

man's burden once again, which, by the way, wouldn't be so hard to bear if the savages

didn't resist so much:

> The conquered victims are culpable for their own violent conquest and for their
>
> own victimization. They should have abandoned their barbarity voluntarily
>
> instead of obliging the victimizing conquistadores to use force against them.
>
> (Dussel, 1995, p.66)

There is something uncomfortably familiar here. As I will argue in Chapter Six, the

practices of dominant culture education in the U.S. have to a great extent, wittingly or

not, applied the same "sacrificial paradigm" Dussel describes (1995, p. 66) to the design

and conduct of education for limited formal schooling ELL students raised in the

barbaric modes of orality rather than the rationalistic modes of alphabetic literacy. It is

necessary that their oral noetic ways be sacrificed in order to achieve real progress

toward the objectively superior evolutionary stage afforded by academic literacy and all

the privileges and priorities it represents.

    Critique of neocolonialism in education. Some researchers have devoted their

attention to neocolonial issues as they are enacted in the educational arena. Latino

anthropologist Francisco Ramirez (2003) discusses the problematics of adopting

Western formal academic education with its particular scientific and economic biases in

local contexts throughout the world which do not share the same assumptions but

nevertheless want to be taken seriously on the global stage. Malaysian professor Syed

Farid Alatas (1993) describes how the uncritical implementation of Western academic

discourse in Third World countries leads to a process of "normalization" (p. 324),

whereby cultures are Westernized and the real pathologies of their development are

misunderstood and neglected. He argues for a careful integration of Western and native modes of knowing to create a hybrid academic discourses that reach beyond what any can alone.

Chinese scholar Rey Chow (2003) focuses on issues related to the colonization of language instruction in China under the banner of progress. Chow laments how the modernization process in China has caused the Chinese people to "become increasingly 'alphabetized' and 'romanized' into a new literacy," characterized by the "Westernization of expressions and grammar, the reduction of complex characters to simplified ones, and the phonetic spelling of Chinese words" (p. 176). Chinese scholar Huhua Ouyang (2003) describes in detail the folly of attempting to inject American constructivist approaches to language and pedagogy in a Chinese classroom, even in a school considered "progressive" in that country.

Kenyan intellectual Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1994) describes language as the collective memory bank of a people which was painfully suppressed when colonial education replaced indigenous languages and their memories with oppressor language that "inevitably carries racist and negative images of the conquered nation" (p. 35). Formal Western education of Africans, through the non-neutral medium of Western languages, has resulted in locking up the vast knowledge of Africa in the

> linguistic prison of English, French, and Portuguese. Even the libraries are really English (or indeed French or Portuguese) language fortresses inaccessible to the majority. So the cultivation of these languages makes for more effective communication only between the elite and the international English-speaking bourgeoisie. In short the elite in Africa is, in linguistic terms, completely

uprooted from the peoples of Africa and tied to the West. (Thiong'o, 1994, p. 37-38)

A body of Indian scholarship of particular interest to this study considers the ways in which literacy is and has been an "instrument of oppression" (Pattanayak, 1991, p. 105). Revered scholar Ananda Coomaraswamy (1947) criticizes drastically inflated claims regarding literacy's magically beneficent effects in an early book entitled *The bugbear of literacy*, going so far as to call literacy a curse. In his fascinating study of a wise but illiterate elder, socioliteracy researcher Kishwar Shirali echoes this sentiment, observing that "the power and arrogance of literacy knows no bounds" (Shirali, 1988, p. 91). Illiteracy is associated with all the world's blights—poverty, malnutrition, lack of education and health care—while literacy is linked with prosperity and the advance of civilization (Pattanayak, 1991). Admonishing linguists and educational theorists for a blind belief in the manifest advantages of literacy, Pattanayak places the myth of literacy in the global political realm, arguing that "theorizing that proclaims the superiority of literacy over orality, rather than the differences between them, has a disabling effect on 800 million illiterates of the world who are hereby branded as second-class citizens" (Pattanayak, 1991, p. 105). Following precisely the spirit of Pattanayak's argument, this study refutes the inherent superiority of literacy either as a panacea for the world's ills or as a benign and beneficent instrument in and of itself. It is a primary purpose here, as Pattanayak suggests, to explore the differences between orality and literacy, a task to which Chapters Four and Five are devoted.

Holism and spirituality in indigenous knowledge. Several scholars emphasize the theme of holistic interconnectedness in indigenous knowledge, with a focus on the central role of spirituality. Brazilian researcher Aracy Lopes da Silva (1999) explores how, in contrast to rationalized Western models of education located in the intellect, indigenous education in tropical South America situates learning within the body, "creating a synthesis of social, cosmological, psychological, emotional, and cognitive meanings" (p. 251). African sociologist Jean-Claude Quenum (1999) draws attention to the role of the sacred in the initiation rites of traditional education in his native Bénin, which emphasize physical rites of passage, knowledge of practices and taboos, mastering sacred languages, and recognition of everyone's role in the hierarchical order of society. His book, *Interaction des systèmes éducatifs traditionnels et modernes en Afrique* [Interaction of traditional and modern educational systems in Africa] (1999), presents an in-depth study of the challenges of conducting Western-style education in communities across Africa that remain strongly tied to traditional modes of knowledge.

In an interpretive study of his native Chagga educational system which he relates to African indigenous education in general, Tanzanian scholar R. Sambuli Mosha (2000) describes the concept of *ipvunda* (pp. 16-30), a Chagga word for education that refers to the profound interconnectedness of people, nature, and spirituality that underlies the practice of education, always understood as intergenerational sharing of factual knowledge *and* morality. Mosha proposes three primary critiques of the effect of Western educational values in conflict with *ipvunda*: The first critique explicates how Europocentrism, defining European ways as the apex

of civilization, has "plunged [Africans] into an abyss of colonization and neo-colonization, oppression, and exploitation" that has led indigenous citizens to a position of "despising and rejecting their own culture and civilization" (p. 171). The second critique addresses the separation of knowledge from morality in European-style education, an approach which is profoundly at odds with *ipvunda*, striking at the heart of what it means to be African in that it "*deifies* knowledge, science, technology, and a never-ending thirst for information." He continues: "The emphasis here is on *deifying*. When these become gods, personal and community experiences of inspiration, intuition, and all matters spiritual are jeered at" (p. 177, italics original). The third critique asserts that, in contrast to traditional views of *ipvunda* as initiating young people into the practices and moral norms of an organic community, Europocentric education is presented as a gateway to wealth and possessions. As Mosha puts it: "European education is more concerned with earning a living than with learning how to live" (p. 181), and has itself become "a commodity one buys for investment for wealth and profit" (p. 182).

Native American Jungian philosopher Dr. Allen Ross (1989), like some other international scholars, is a person who in a generation has navigated the yawning chasm of the abyss. Ross dwells at length on the great imbalance he perceives in today's developed world, not just among tribal people but the dominant population as well, manifested in all manner of spiritual sicknesses—alienation, psychoses, violence, and prejudice. Drawing on Jungian and Native American philosophies, and clearly in direct touch with whatever benefits academic hyperliteracy has to confer, still Ross concludes

that "the culprit was the educational systems" (p. 15) which privilege reading and writing over all other forms of knowledge:

> We go to school, we learn how to write words, we put the words into sentences, we put the sentences together into paragraphs, then combine the paragraphs into term papers. Education stresses that if we want any knowledge or information, we must learn how to do library research. Consequently, we're book people. We have reached a point where educators say that if knowledge or information is not in a book, we shouldn't believe it. It has to be written down, it has to be somebody's research to be credible. (p. 15)

This account of the cause of much of our modern suffering, which could just as well serve as a description of a learning sequence for preliterate LFS high school ELLs, recalls the earlier discussion about the chasm between real-world knowledge and that knowledge that is given on the page, but the point is made here by a person who has himself traveled the abyss and knows the affordances of both orality and literacy. I note that, as in the perspectives of several other indigenous scholars reviewed above, Ross is not advocating a complete rejection of literate Western schooling, but a better balance between this and other modes.

Marie Battiste, a member of the Mi'kmaq tribe of Nova Scotia, Harvard and Stanford-educated, and now a professor at the University of Saskatchewan, has become one of the most provocative theorists of neocolonial / postcolonial studies working today. Dr. Battiste has labored for decades with other indigenous representatives from around the world under the auspices of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, a subgroup of the UN Commission on Human Rights Sub-Commission on Prevention of

Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. This group, which works to expose the heinous legacies of colonization and proclaim the human rights and rights of self-determination of indigenous people, continues to face ardent opposition from dominant nation-states that "are preoccupied with a different idea: how not to end colonization, and how to prolong their gross privileges" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 7). Battiste and her colleagues have provided exceedingly detailed analyses contrasting Eurocentric and indigenous worldviews, focusing on differing understanding of language, education, knowledge, rationality, perception, and the relation of humans to nature and to each other. Although obviously highly proficient in Eurocentric modes of thought and language, Battiste and Henderson indict Eurocentric education for its abstract definitional bias, a system "not attached to an ecology or to its intelligible essences" (p. 36) but rather to a narcissistic notion of objective positivist universality. "This quest for universal definitions [that] ignores the diversity of the people and their views of themselves" is a process destructive to traditional oral-based ways (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, pp. 36-37), and represents what Battiste and Henderson call "cognitive imperialism" (p. 37)—the conquest of the indigenous mind by Western forms of knowledge and education.

Western Scholarship in Support of Indigenous Perspectives

Many scholars from Western cultures join their voices to indigenous colleagues in opposing the unquestioned, uncontrolled propagation of the Western world view and mode of education codified in academic literacy, describing these as particular and interested rather than universal or neutral, and in many ways damaging to non-Western forms of understanding, as well as to the planet we all share.

One of the early contributions to this line of inquiry is a remarkable book by American philosopher Raul Radin, with a laudatory forward by John Dewey, entitled *Primitive man as philosopher* (1927/1957). Radin explores how Western European peoples were conditioned by alphabetic literacy to "elevate thought and thinking to the rank of the exclusive proof of all verities" (p. 61), while indigenous philosophy locates truth always within "the reality of the phenomenal world and the social world" (p. 61), not excluding, but also not privileging thoughts, feelings, or anything else that enhances and interprets lived experience.

More recently, scholars working in the border ground between anthropology, sociology, semiotics, and linguistics have addressed the radically different cultural orientations to language and language use that exist in this world today, differences which simply can not be apprehended without further ado by researchers and reduced to universally accessible categories. A.L. Becker (1992), a gifted hermeneut, has provided a door to understanding language as deeply indeterminate in its nature—always evanescent, both revealing and obscuring what it does and does not intend to say. Among the stunning examples Becker narrates is a fascinating look at the cognitive/expressive structures of Javanese oral epic via an arduous scripturalization process through which endless serendipities and obscurances of meaning were revealed (Becker, 1982). Ron and Suzanne Wong Scollon (1981, 1990, 1995) have carried on decades of essential work revealing the deep differences between Western and other cultural perspectives with regard to communication, noting in particular the vast chasm between cultural adherences to representational expression (writing, digital media) versus face to face communication. While the West foregrounds the imperative of

expressivity (>Lat. 'to squeeze out'), traditional cultures such as the Athabaskan people of the North American northeast hold a different relational view enacted in a much greater reserve with regarded to language, as demonstrated in this adage: "If a Whiteman waned to go hunting with a guy, first he's talk a lot with him to be sure it was safe to trust him. I'd rather go hunting with a man to find out if it was safe to talk with him" (Scollon and Scollon, 1990, p. 3).

Semali and Kinchloe (1999) explore the layers and meanings of the notion of indigenous knowledge, locating this concept as part of a project of resistance to Western hegemonic educational practices that take indigenous ways barely into account. With reference to his long experience teaching in Tanzania, Semali (1999) provides an in-depth critique of the clash of indigenous and Western notions of knowledge in African classrooms, focusing on the concept of "indigenous literacy" (p. 309) which he proposes as a term to denote not textual literacy but practical indigenous knowledge that is not written nor typically valued in classrooms. It is poignantly notable that for all the author's impressive experience and obvious respect for indigenous knowledge, still he feels compelled to give this knowledge the name *literacy* (>Lat. for 'letter,' referring explicitly to writing), a testament to the very great power of the notion of literacy in our reading world, indeed, the same pervasive power that Ong refers to in his manifesto against the term *oral literature* (1982).

Smith (1999b, 1999c) describes the West's schizophrenic relationship with literacy as symptomatic of exhausted colonial metaphors that have not only devastated the world but the colonizers themselves. The crisis of literacy in societies surrounded by reading material, he claims, is not that at all but rather a crisis of relationship, a loss of

meaningful human context. Educational theorist C.A. Bowers (1993b, 2006, 2007) has argued forcefully against the notion of language and mode of communication as mere conduits of meaning. He describes how the notion of language as the servant of autonomous thought is a quintessentially Eurocentric position[2] typically taken-for-granted as universal and general and promoted as such throughout the world. He argues that this notion is linked to an anthropocentric view of the world that is causative of the ecological crisis facing all of us (Bowers, 1993c). The West's singular devotion to scientism, the autonomous subject, and the notion of strictly designative communication as apotheosized in literacy and digital media, a devotion which excludes traditional knowledge based on ecological reciprocity between people, cultures, and the natural world, represents according to Bowers (2007) a "Titanic mindset"—with the Eurocentric powers at the helm, we are obliviously, in self-congratulatory celebration, steaming directly for the iceberg.

Review Summary

In this review of literature I have presented findings from second language acquisition studies, pedagogical, and program design research which give a sense both of the unique profile of older LFS language learners acquiring initial literacy, and of how much we don't really know about these learners. I then reviewed literature which addresses the cognitive and social consequences of literacy as demonstrated through the development of the individual and society in the Western and non-Western worlds. Research on how traditions of orality are distinct from traditions of alphabetic and other literacies was explored, and linked to positions in the history of epistemology in

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[2] The work of Boas (1922), Sapir (1921), and Whorf (1940) stands in notable dissent to this tradition.

positivistic, critical, postmodern, hermeneutic, and indigenous formulations. Reviewing the issue of high school ELL initial literacy acquisition via these paths has led to an understanding of how the question is part of the global history of colonial aggression transformed in our day to political and economic hegemony, a project in which the Western academe plays a key part, and one that is still engaged in the unidirectional propagation of distinctly Western notions of communication, knowledge, and values. What appears at first glance to be a pragmatic instructional matter thus appears as a moral one, asking us to consider the ways in which our policies and actions are underwritten by an imperial will to power, and, once that is faced, how deeply we are willing to engage in authentic dialog in which our own transformation is at issue—how we teach and conduct research, what we recommend in our schools and districts, what vision of the future we hold out to students, which is of course at once our own future.

A sincere attunement to the chorus of voices from around the world as reviewed above leads practitioners of education in the dominant Western model to face a notion most have never considered: alphabetic literacy in the Western academic tradition contains distinct potentialities for exclusion of voices and perspectives that not only have a right to exist in Spolsky and Shohamy's (2000) sense of linguistic human rights, but have inestimable inherent value as crucial pieces in the mosaic of world knowledges and ways of languaging. The fact that they have been largely engulfed by Western hegemony is both a moral abomination and an epistemological loss that has impoverished us all. And this is all still topical, today, right here in our midst. What occasioned this study was the realization that an intense instance of the encounter between the culture of alphabetic hyperliteracy and the cultures of oral noesis—the

same encounter enacted over centuries of colonial history—is occurring now, directly, in our classrooms, where adolescent and older learners from oral backgrounds learn to read and acquire the mode of academic knowledge as constituted at this point in our history.

For those of us who have been immersed throughout our lives in the joys of reading, the catharsis of writing, the adventure of scholarship, and a near-religious faith in the power of literacy to lift up individuals and nations, it is disconcerting to hear such strong dissent from thinkers of Western and non-Western provenance alike. For me personally—sprung from a family of writers, literate in a few languages, author of an essay expressing affection for a particular dictionary—to consider literacy and its effects as anything but salutary, even somehow potentially harmful, has seemed at times preposterous and at other times depressing. I am struck with the deep irony of the act in which I am engaged, employing the literate and scriptural modes—careful and voracious reading of literature, laboriously crafting a written dissertation—as a way of addressing the oral-literate encounter. Of necessity this work is deeply skewed; nearly every reference will be to scholarly literature rather than to oral knowledge, most indigenous voices I cite are ones I have read rather than heard, every reader will be a reader more than a listener. All the hours and months and years spent on research were spent that way rather than in the communion of human relationships. Every thought, every morpheme in a work such as this shifts and churns in the abyss, but never far from its Western precipice.

Yet, with all semiotic and epistemological caveats in place, it is clear that, whatever one's personal or intellectual perspective, the myth of literacy expanded in the

Western cultures in the mid-1880's (Graff, 1979), promoted as an agent of salvation in such ardent initiatives as the 1965 UNESCO project to bring reading and writing to the underdeveloped world (Winchester, 1985), and enacted in all the world's L2 initial literacy classrooms including my own, is not an originary human myth shared and embraced by all, but only part of the story, a part some question and some reject. The time has more than come for one-sided, power-saturated notions of language and knowledge to open to other understandings, and to do this in a way that recognizes how truly interconnected we always already are.

Contribution of the Study

To be clear: It is not the purpose of this study to suggest that we refrain from teaching adolescent preliterates to read out of an interest in preserving oral traditions and the cognitive ecology of orality. What I am advocating, and will pursue in these pages, is an honest encounter with what is at stake. After all, the way that LFS preliterate adolescents imagine and interact with the world is precisely what is at issue when they attend school and learn to read, and educators, if we are to be successful with these students, need to understand and creatively integrate the students' initial orientations wisely and carefully into our teaching. While it is not the purpose here to propose a detailed plan of curriculum and instruction, the present study, positioned as it is between traditional oral and progressive literate and digital realities, holds promise to contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon of initial literacy development by LFS high school ELL students at personal, cognitive, socio-cultural, ontological, and deontological levels. This study is conducted with the purpose of informing our pedagogical orientations, providing valuable food for thought as educators and

researchers plan, implement, and evaluate instructional programs that are both effective and intermodally, interlinguistically, interculturally sensitive in a way that remembers and abhors the past and present of empire. It is my intent to expand the issue beyond just "what works," as important as that consideration is, to the issue of what is truly reciprocal in both an epistemological and a moral sense. Guided by hermeneutic insight, I believe we may find that the two issues converge in significant ways.

The study will contribute methodologically by providing an example of a hermeneutic approach to the topic, an approach quite distinct from quantitative, qualitative, and critical research in that it takes as given and seeks to work intentionally within an understanding of intersubjectivity and the essential, interpretable ambiguity of life, an understanding hermeneutics shares with traditional cultures from all around the world. From a hermeneutic and from an ethical perspective, it is essential that the work proceed with attunement not only to what we have to teach the newcomers who come to us from the world's remaining oral communities, but what they have to teach us. The hermeneutic tone of interpretive intersubjectivity has, the reader will have noted, already taken its place in the introduction and review sections of the study, which includes aesthetic expressions, narrative accounts, and references to the intellectual and personal genealogy of this project that in other methodologies would be unorthodox. I have pondered these choices, coming ultimately to the conclusion that if this work is to be conducted honestly, not at arm's length distance but with true engagement, then it is appropriate to open these pages to real human presence—a kind of scholarship version of letting the reader hunt with me to see if it's safe to talk.

Questions Guiding the Study

What is asked of young refugees and immigrants, what does it mean in a deep sense, to attend school and acquire literacy for the first time, in English, in an American high school? What do we need to understand about political, economic, epistemological, and representational history in order to grasp the meaning of the contemporary diaspora as present in U.S. high schools today? Given all that we can understand about the personal and social factors engaged in this question, what orientation is called for, pedagogically speaking, in programs and people committed to true, meaningful, non-imperialistic work with these students? How can the practice of hermeneutic interpretation illuminate these questions?

Chapter 3

Hermeneutic Orientation of the Study

Mythological Origins

This study will draw from the rich and encompassing tradition of hermeneutics, the art and practice of interpretation, to explore the meaning of adolescent initial literacy development in English as a new language. Hermeneutics as a form of inquiry is not easily defined, a state of affairs for which we may have its namesake Hermes, a god of the Greek pantheon, to thank. Qualities ascribed to Hermes are a volatile mix, including trickery, creativity, fertility, friendliness, eternal youth, thievery, cunning, duplicity, and prophetic power.[3] He was a protector of miscreants, shepherds and cowherds, athletes and runners, anyone on a journey. Along with Prometheus and Titan, he was an inventor of fire—the spark that illuminates and warms but can also consume. Like all Greek deities, the wing-footed Hermes had a special duty; his was communicative, involving the most radical interpretation imaginable: to carry and somehow to make messages from Mount Olympus intelligible to mortals on earth, as well as to act as guide to the underworld. Called in Homeric verse '*polytropos*,' (>Gr. "of many shifting forms"), Hermes had a chameleonic, interpretive role, requiring a ready flexibility and a knack for finding clever contextual ways to communicate meaning despite immense alterity, across the deepest abyss.

Of course, as visitors of oracles have long known, messages from the gods tend to remain mysterious, which is why *hermeneutike* is usually associated with the Greek term *mantike*, or "divination" (Smith, 2010, p. 432), drawing attention to the fact that

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[3] Descriptions of Hermes in this section are drawn from Burkert and Raffan (1987) and Smith (1991, 2006a).

ambiguity is a part of any conversation, manifestly so when the lifeworlds of the communicating parties differ greatly. The notion of hermeneutics, then, carries with it the twin legacies of the possibility of intelligibility across great differences based on a common essentiality, and the eternal indeterminacy of communication which derives from the ever mutable relation of language to meaning and experience and the constantly shifting character of experience itself. Hermeneutics dwells precisely within this paradox*, in medias res*, and bequeaths this same character to inquiry bearing its name. As Canadian hermeneutical education scholar David Jardine (1992a) has put it, "hermeneutic inquiry is concerned with the ambiguous nature of life itself. It does not desire to render such ambiguity objectively presentable (as if the ambiguity of life were…some 'error in the system' that needed correction) but rather to attend to it, to give it a voice" (p. 119). All of this serves to affirm the hermeneutical insight that "knowing what to do in context," in the complex and fluid situations of life (including life in classrooms), the kind of knowledge Aristotle called *phronesis*, requires divinatory interpretation, not just establishing and following a check-list of rules and objectives that is clear to everyone.

It is not for nothing that lithe, shifting Hermes is the god of speech and writing, oratory, wit, poetry, and commerce, as well as the patron of boundaries and the travelers who cross them. In Greek, an interpreter who bridges boundaries with strangers is called a '*hermeneus,*' a boundary stone or crossing point is a '*herma*.' Although I haven't heard it put this way, we could say that Hermes represents the spirit of xenophilia, of the sense of being drawn to otherness, of being interested in what more the world holds than what is already familiar, what I myself already am or know or do.

If the field of second languages and cultures education were to select a symbolic image

for itself, Hermes would be an excellent choice. Notable, too, are the many

convergences to be found between the hermeneutic imagination and many of the

orientations expressed in oral and indigenous knowledge, making hermeneutics in many

ways one of the best methodological approaches available in Western scholarship in

terms of a topical, epistemological and ethical fit for a study reaching across boundaries

of language and culture.

Historical Antecedents of Modern Hermeneutics

Smith (2006b) has observed that "a scholar oriented by the hermeneutic

imagination is not so much interested in pondering the texts and arguments of the

hermeneutic tradition as in engaging Life hermeneutically, which means trying to

understand ever more profoundly what makes life Life" (p. 105).This is an excellent

point, and it is not my purpose to devote this dissertation to philosophical debates.

However, although it may not be typical in a methodology chapter, I consider a review

of the historical development of hermeneutic thought an important component of this

study, for several reasons. First, this form of inquiry is not terribly well known in

second language education research, and therefore a deeper account of its genesis and

interests could be of use for the discipline, perhaps inspiring others to pursue

hermeneutic studies of their own or reconsider familiar notions in a new, interpretive

light.

Second, unlike other forms of inquiry, hermeneutics does not consist of a

method so much as a set of understandings, thus it is important to dwell in a deliberately

diachronic way on the evolution and nature of those understandings. In carefully

reviewing the historical development of hermeneutic inquiry, I am consciously establishing the conditions of possibility for the reader to engage this text hermeneutically, with readerly creativity of interpretation enlivened by a set of hermeneutic understandings developed historically. Of course, one of the central insights of hermeneutic inquiry is the very historicity of understanding, meaning that we can't get a rich grasp of anything without looking deeply into its history, which is why a historical review is the only portal to discussing a hermeneutic "methodology" at all.

Finally, inasmuch as this study promotes a more authentic conversation among worldviews, it is important to make the substrata of the worldview in which I am operating explicit. In this way the work and its orientations will be more open to the scrutiny of readers from any tradition with any sort of history navigating the abyss—indigenous, non-Western, or indeed readers immersed in quantitative or other positivistic epistemologies. In tracing the history of hermeneutics, I give notice of its situatedness, its interestedness, thereby opening the dialog not only to the points made in this study but to the ground from which they spring. In the following section, then, I offer a brief history of the hermeneutic tradition in Western scholarship.

Epistemological / Semiotic Background of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has been practiced in various forms for thousands of years. Smith traces the earliest impetus for hermeneutics as the invention of writing (Smith, 2010), pointing out that in oral societies, as I shall explore in much detail further on, meanings were relatively transparent thanks to the ready availability of facial expressions, gestures, and follow-up elaborations, as well as to the simple but powerful fact that the referential field speakers shared was defined by the intimate familiarity of an embedded

context and a set of shared traditional understandings. With the advent of writing began a new tradition: the schismatic separation of "speaker" from "audience," inserting a much greater degree of indeterminacy and misinterpretation than inheres in oral communication. The greater lesson to be drawn from this is that hermeneutics is called upon whenever and to the extent that people can't fully express in words what they are thinking or feeling, a state of affairs that always exists, as well as to the extent that people "mean" differently, whether in speech or in writing, a state of affairs that definitively marks our diverse world, most tellingly in our classrooms where people and systems of diversity on dimensions of language, culture, and communicative mode come together for a common purpose. The appropriateness of hermeneutic inquiry for a study such as this one revolves in part on the consideration that the original need for a discipline of hermeneutics travels the same conceptual territory as the situation of preliterate adolescents in their encounter with schooling, that is, the distinct modal affordances and silences of orality and literacy. In this sense, we might say that hermeneutics is involved here both topically and methodologically.

Hermeneutics from the Classical Period to 1800

The term *hermeneutics* was first used by Plato in the *Politicus*, there was a school of hermeneutics in Alexandria in the 1st century BCE, and it is the subject of Aristotle's foundational work on language and logic, *Peri Hermeneia* (Smith, 2006b, p. 106). The term *hermeneutics* was adopted later by biblical scholars engaged in much the same task as Hermes'(making divine messages available to the understanding of human beings), an issue that took on a new degree of importance in 16th century Europe with the Protestant reformation. Suddenly, the matter of understanding divine meanings was

no longer mediated through the authority of the Roman Catholic Church but through the interpretive understanding of the individual reader in direct contact with the text, *sola scriptura*, a situation which called for some kind of guidelines as to what constituted a worthy interpretation. Inasmuch as biblical interpretation is an act that stretches across centuries, cultures, worldviews, and the relation of human and divine to excavate some kind of commonly intelligible meaning, hermeneutics was a natural place to turn.

This period accordingly brought forth considerable new scholarship in a hermeneutic vein. Matthias Flacius Illyricus' *Clavis scripturae sacrae* [Keys to holy scripture], which appeared in 1567, emphasized that a good interpretation needed to exhibit a deep understanding of the functions of language and of word origins, a position shared by all practitioners of hermeneutics up to the present day, who invariably find a good etymological essential (Smith, 2010). The term 'hermeneutica' may have been introduced to Europe in 1630 by the theologian Johann Dannhauer (Mueller-Vollmer, 1985) who wrote *Idea boni interpretes* [The idea of the good interpreter], a document which drew directly from Aristotle's *Peri hermeneia*, although Dilthey claimed that European hermeneutics began with the Reformation a century earlier (Grondin, 1995, p. 19). A 1699 work on secular hermeneutics by Ernesti, *De natura et constitutione Hermeneuticae profanae* [On the nature and constitution of secular hermeneutics], presaged the future direction of the field away from biblical interpretation (Mueller-Vollmer, 1985). Perhaps the most important scholar of the era was Johann Martin Chladenius, a theologian and son of a theologian, who hoped to (but did not manage to) establish a new hermeneutic branch of philosophy with his *Introduction to the correct interpretation of reasonable discourses and writings* (1742),

the first, though certainly not the last, systematic treatise on interpretation theory written in German. This accessible work, widely discussed in its day, included Chladenius' famous notion of point-of-view or perspective [*Sehepunkt*] as being key to hermeneutic work, a notion that remains central today.

19ᵗʰ Century Hermeneutics

Chladenius' dream of situating hermeneutics within philosophy was carried forward in the early 1800's in the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, considered the founder of both modern Protestant theology (Mueller-Volmer, 1985) and the father of modern hermeneutics (Grondin, 1995). Like many of his time, Schleiermacher was grappling for a new understanding of knowledge in the wake of Kant's epoch-making 1781 work, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [*Critique of pure reason*], whose revolutionary claim was that we cannot really know anything with certainty, we cannot encounter the *Ding an sich* [the thing in itself], because we see everything through the lens of our inherently limited perception—in Kant's famous image, we see the world as if through green glasses, believing, erroneously, that the world is truly green. Responses to Kant ranged from the transcendental idealism of Fichte and Hegel in the one extreme to a rampant sense of futility in the other, a sense that led the composer Felix Mendelssohn to describe Kant as *"alles zermalmenden Kant"* [Kant who crushes everything] (Grondin, 1995, pp. 4-5), and is said to have occasioned the suicide of German Romantic author Heinrich von Kleist, who could not live with the idea that Kant may be right, that everything we are sure of is actually an illusion (Koesters, 1981). The term *nihilism* (>Lat., *nihil*, 'nothing at all') was coined during this period by philosopher Friedrich Jacopi to describe the post-Kantian despair, as was Jacopi's notion of

'fideism' (>Lat., faith), an attempt to restore hope by emphasizing faith's role in understanding, a notion that directly influenced Schleiermacher (Grondin, 1995). Schleiermacher's interest in defining a systematic method (Ger.: *Kunstlehre*) for the art of hermeneutics was thus part of an atmosphere of German intellectuals and artists trying to come to terms with the legacy of Kant.

Schleiermacher's *Compendium of 1819* gathered together aphorisms and short paragraphs on hermeneutics that he had been compiling over a dozen years and formed the basis for a lecture course he taught in hermeneutics at the University of Berlin until 1834. While notes taken by his students were made public in 1839, it was not until 1958 that one of Gadamer's students, Heinz Kimmerle, arranged to have Schleiermacher's manuscripts published in their entirety (Mueller-Volmer, 1985). In 1978 they were published in English under the title *Outline of the 1819 lectures* (Schleiermacher, 1978).

Some of Schleiermacher's provocative positions which continue to resonate within hermeneutic inquiry included the arguments that (a) hermeneutics is not just the art of interpretation but of understanding; (b) any understanding of a single part is conditioned by an understanding of the whole and vice versa; (c) this part-to-whole process is continually shifting and emerging and therefore no interpretation is ever the final, definitive one; and (d) the art of interpretation is involved not only when encountering difficult texts, but in the encounter with any text or spoken discourse (see Mueller-Volmer, 1985, pp. 72-80). Another key insight, perhaps the closest Schleiermacher came to defining aspects of an interpretive method or *Kunstlehre*, was his distinction between loose and strict interpretation, where loose interpretation takes place constantly in normal daily life, while strict interpretation is in play when we

encounter something foreign to our experience and need to find a way to understand and communicate it. This relates to Schleiermacher's maxim that interpretation always arises from an initial misunderstanding, an orientation that acknowledges the alterity of the other (a person, a work of artistic genius), and calls for "a necessary dialogic relationship between what one understands and what one doesn't" (Smith, 2010, p. 435). The doctrine of misunderstanding, according to Grondin (1995, p. 7), signals a certain modesty at the heart of hermeneutic inquiry.

Most intriguing of all may be Schleiermacher's claim that interpretation consists in two interdependent gestures—the **comparative**, which is masculine in nature and seeks to analyze and categorize, and the **divinatory**, a feminine force, whereby one seeks empathetic understanding with the author, applying the natural human "susceptibility to intuiting others" to try to "transform oneself into the other" (Ormiston & Schrift, 1990, p. 98). Smith (2006a) maintains that Schleiermacher's emphasis on the divinatory was a way of insisting that creativity and imagination are necessary to understanding, since, if knowledge is never fixed but emergent and evolving, it takes a diviner, not a scientist, to be able to understand it. As Smith has put it, "Understanding the truth of a strange or difficult situation requires an act of imagination to see possible meanings, rather than just expecting meaning to reveal itself, by itself, and then be simply reported by a researcher" (2010, p. 435).

The divinatory aspect of Schleiermacher's approach to interpretation reaches back to the image of Hermes and forward to the work of Ricoeur, who took up the challenges and possibilities of radical empathy in his book *Oneself as another* (1992), while the hermeneutic task of balancing analysis and intuition that was given great

momentum in Schleiermacher continues to the present time, most publicly perhaps in the debates between Gadamer and Habermas (Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989). Although he never succeeded at and eventually abandoned his project of creating a comprehensive method (Smith, 2010), Schleiermacher's work proved highly influential to all future hermeneutic articulations, not least in the sense that, since Schleiermacher, the projects of hermeneutics and those of general philosophy significantly converge.

Wilhelm Dilthey, a biographer of Schleiermacher, philosopher, literary critic, historian, and avid student of psychology, was the central figure in hermeneutics in the second half of the 19th century. Though not a theologian, Dilthey valued the work of Schleiermacher for its way of situating human understanding as essential in any account of knowledge, a controversial position in the face of positivist and behaviorist movements that were gripping Europe in his day and continue to cast a very strong shadow over education and social sciences in our time. A prolific writer (his work fills twenty-five volumes) and irrepressible thinker who held the chair in philosophy previously occupied by Hegel, Dilthey's work influenced that of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Max Weber, and the Frankfurt School theorists. Dilthey has been called the "Newton of the Human Studies" and "the most important thinker" of his era (Rickman, 1979, p. 1), no small recognition considering his era was that of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and William James. His contributions to the philosophy of science and the hermeneutic tradition, though under-recognized in the non-German speaking world, are numerous and profound (Rickman, 1979). I will explore the most significant here.

Dilthey was a devotedly global thinker, interested in a vast range of subjects and ideas, and his work reflects this in its tendency to fulsomeness and constant cross-

referencing. Rickman has noted that his style, which "was not one of hitting nails smartly on the head, but of verbally exploring a subject by successive formulations" (1979, p. 16), put him at odds with philosophers of his day (and ours) who preferred succinctly simple, aphoristic statements. Constantly approaching everything in terms of its *Zusammenhang* [context, connections to other things], Dilthey was disturbed by the increasing specialization he observed in the academic disciplines, a movement he saw as inconsistent with the interdependence of all knowledge. Focused on the need for increased rather than decreased cooperation among the disciplines, he spent a large portion of his career working out a system for understanding the unique roles and methods of each discipline in service of the greater project of articulating how they might work together. In the course of this massive project he organized the disciplines into two meta-categories according to the manner of knowledge involved in them: *Naturwissenschaften* [natural or physical sciences] and *Geisteswissenschaften* [sciences of the mind or human sciences], a distinction he insisted on and which is his best-known legacy, although Rickman has argued that he was originally simply translating John Stuart Mill's categories of physical and moral science into German (Rickman, 1979, p. 59).

It is important to pause for a moment here and note that there is no English word for '*Geist*,' which, like the French word '*esprit*,' is translated depending on context as mind, spirit, ghost, or wit. '*Geist*' thus refers to multiple dimensions of what distinguishes humans beings in their inner make-up from animals, as well as the products of mind or spirit, such as culture, language, codes of morality, and so forth. Furthermore, it should be noted that the term *Wissenschaft* does not in German

reference the same conceptual territory as the English word 'science,' the latter with its strong overtones of positivism and scientific method, but rather is closer to the English terms 'discipline,' 'scholarly tradition,' or 'form of knowledge.'

Rickman has offered an example that crystallizes the difference between *Natur-* and *Geisteswissenschaften*: when we study a ruler's ambition to power or the anger of a character in a novel, we have an understanding of these based on our own similar human experiences; by contrast, "we shall never know what it feels like to be a piece of iron attracted by a magnet" (Rickman, 1979, p. 8). The physical sciences, according to Dilthey, are concerned with knowledge that can be directly observed and codified, leading to scientific explanation. The human sciences, on the other hand, involve every area of human endeavor where the difference is precisely human understanding and experience, and include, according to Dilthey, politics, economics, sociology, anthropology, law, literary scholarship, and philosophy. Psychology and hermeneutics, along with philosophy, were human science disciplines that Dilthey considered implicated in all of the others, playing a special role not limited to themselves but necessary as a sort of portal to understanding human sciences in general. Dilthey may be seen as continuing and significantly expanding Schleiermacher's emphasis on understanding [*Verstehen*], a notion crucial to the human sciences in that it refers to the capacity of humans to engage creatively and empathetically in an intersubjective way with unknown phenomena. This stance honors both the emergent quality of knowledge and experience, and also the ability, indeed the right, of human beings to speak for themselves, to share perspectives on their own experiences and thoughts, something the objects of study in the natural sciences can never do. Dilthey's distinction between hard

and human sciences can thus be summed up this way: "Nature we can explain, humans we must understand" (Smith, 2006a, p. 108).

Dilthey stands out as a brilliant thinker who insisted on a common sense approach to the study of human life, one that treated human beings as human beings, not examples of categories or guinea pigs in research projects, an orientation which distinguishes Dilthey from highly derivative scientistic approaches in his time and ours (Rickman, 1979). Modern hermeneutic and phenomenological research (eg. Dahlberg, 2006; Giorgi, 1970; Giorgi, Aanstoos, & Fischer, 2000; Jardine, Friesen & Clifford, 2006; Smith, 1999; 2006; van Manen; 1990), with its focus on the lifeworld and experience of the human person, is deeply indebted to Dilthey's insistence on maintaining the integrity of the human perspective within a uniquely human branch of science. Indeed, all disciplines that take the importance of human context as paramount—from anthropology to sociolinguistics to Gestalt psychology—owe much to Dilthey's work.

2oth Century Hermeneutics

Czech-born, German-schooled mathematician and philosopher Edmund Husserl, an admirer of Dilthey's and best known as the father of phenomenology, is not always reviewed in texts on the history of the hermeneutic tradition (eg. Ormiston and Schrift, 1990), nevertheless I will include him here since he laid out many of the concepts that would become formative to modern hermeneutics, beginning with his landmark work *Logical investigations*, written in 1900 (1900/1970). Deeply anti-positivist in orientation, Husserl developed the concept of intentionality which forever rooted the notion of understanding in its inter-subjective, conversational character (Husserl,

1900/1970, 1913/1962). It is easy for modern speakers of English to misinterpret

Husserl's intentionality—it does not refer to a person's intentions, as in 'plans to do

something,' but rather to the directionality of experience, the sense in which a subject is

always drawn toward and seeking an object, to complete the circle of understanding.

This meaning is revealed in the Latin origins of the word 'intention': *in*, 'toward,' and

*tender*e, 'to stretch, to lean.' One of Husserl's central projects, on which he insisted in

the forty thousand pages of text he produced over his career, was to "overturn the

Enlightenment preoccupation with 'objective reason'" (Smith, 2006a, p. 109). Husserl

held that there can be no such thing as objective inquiry since the subjective

consciousness of the researcher is always already implicated in the world and vice

versa. There is no "world" separate from human being, and no "human being" separate

from world, rather, the relationship is better understood as one of intersubjectivity. The

authority of understanding is only established in reference to the *Lebenswelt* [lifeworld],

the lived experience of real persons.

This leads us to Husserl's famous exhortation to go *zu den Sachen* [to the things

themselves] in search of understanding, a position that, despite its use of the other

German word for 'thing,' does not obscure the fact that it stands in opposition to Kant's

dictum that the *Ding an sich* [the thing in itself] will always elude human reason.

Husserl himself, of course, recognized this, and so dedicated an enormous amount of

elaborate and sometimes obscure discussion to how, methodologically, one could be

sure of isolating the essences of a phenomenon, as made available through

intersubjective understanding. In this effort Husserl revived Plato's notion of *eidos* and

used it to refer to the way in which intelligible forms express the immutable genuine

nature of a thing, in Husserl's language, its essence. Smith (1988) has pointed out that

Husserl's search for essences led him to posit a transcendental ego that landed him in

the terrain of Platonic ideal forms and the post-Kantian German idealism of his time,

and was fraught with the same problems. (It is worth recalling in this connection that

Ur-Idealist Hegel wrote several tomes on phenomenology.). Nevertheless, the work of

Edmund Husserl represented, then as now, an intellectual bulwark against modes of

inquiry that attach their validity to their objective distance from the lifeworlds of real

people and their experiences, and continues to prove useful for guiding the practice of

phenomenology's cousin, hermeneutics. It might be said that where phenomenology

emphasizes the primacy of the direct encounter with experience as an expression of

essences, hermeneutics focuses on the ways in which any experience speaks not only of

but beyond itself, a potentiality realized through creative interpretation that is

primordially intersubjective, a point Husserl understood so well.

Husserl's articulation of a phenomenological method for apprehending essences

exercised a strong influence on phenomenological modes of research as enacted in the

work of Bollnow (1974; 1987), Dahlberg (2006), Dahlberg, Drew, and Nystrom (2001),

Giorgi (1970), Giorgi, Aanstoos, and Fischer (2000), Langeveld (1971; 1983),

McClelland, Dahlberg, and Plihal (2002), van Manen (1990), and many others. His

most important legacy for hermeneutics, in addition to theoretical groundwork he laid

for understanding human science research, was through his influence on his colleague at

the University of Freiburg, Martin Heidegger, who expanded Husserl's work to develop

an encompassing theory of hermeneutics in texts such as *Being and time* (1962) and *The*

basic problems of phenomenology (1975).

Heidegger's work was significant for casting interpretation not as an act in support of understanding but as the fundamental mode of human existence, and hermeneutics as the practice of that mode (Smith, 1991, p. 192). We do not *do* hermeneutics from time to time, in Heidegger's conception, nor is it a methodology or category of analysis, rather, "interpretation is the primordial work of Being" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 43). Heidegger can thus be said to have accomplished the replacement of metaphysics with hermeneutics as *prima philosophia* [first philosophy], in Aristotle's sense of a discipline not concerned with "a specific province of Being, but with Being in its universality" (Grondin, 1995, p. 9). One of Heidegger's greatest critiques of Western metaphysics was the way in which it attached truth to an insistence on presence via propositional, syllogistic, grammatical logic, as if the meaning contained in a complete statement was all the meaning there was. Heidegger's own example (recounted in Grondin, 1995, p. 12) is worth retelling here: Suppose a weary carpenter at the end of his day says "the hammer is heavy." Following the propositional logic of subject and predicate, the form "S is P" renders the meaning fully, making a theoretical statement (heaviness) about an independent object in the world (the hammer). This logical reading, which focuses on what is presently at hand in the statement, neglects the suffering of the carpenter, which more than the heaviness of the hammer represents the real Being, the Being-in-Time, of the situation. This quality of specific being in time is what Heidegger expressed as *Dasein* [Being there, being present], a notion saturated with the finitude of existence and a ringing insistence on the historicity of understanding, as opposed to the metaphysical notion of Being as ideal and universal, never confined to an experiential or temporal instance, and expressed

fully in the subject and predicate of propositions. One sees here the philosophical antecedents of Luria, Goody, and Olson, whose work noted the refusal or inability of primarily oral people to suspend experience and accept the truth of propositional statements—Heidegger is in a way their great apologist.

Human authenticity, according to Heidegger, depends on an acceptance of our finitude and the finitude of our understandings, "a recognition that I can never know, in any final sense, who and where I am" (Smith, 2006a, p. 110) that leaves us the possibility, indeed the responsibility, of discovering our Being and that of others as enacted in time and shared through language. Heidegger's famous dictum, "Language is the house of being" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 21) draws attention both to the dialogic operation necessary to achieve understanding of oneself and others, and to the "dual action of disclosure and concealment" (p. 21) inherent in linguistic expression, a condition which itself underscores the finitude of understanding. Rather than give in to our chronic fear of our own finitude as expressed in human mortality, a path that can only lead to a sense of despair and pointlessness, Heidegger enjoins us to accept our finitude as the condition of our authenticity—in life as well as in scholarly endeavors— a perspective Heidegger's thought shares with Eastern philosophies, Buddhism in particular (Smith, 2006a, p. 110). Despite the lingering stain on his reputation from his endorsement of National Socialism, Heidegger had enormous influence on a generation of scholars, including Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, and his students Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Gadamer and Hermeneutics

Gadamer, widely recognized as the pre-eminent philosopher of hermeneutics of the 20th century, applied his vast scholarship in Greek and European philosophy to the challenge of interpretation in his landmark work *Truth and Method* (1960/1994). In this book, which has inspired an enormous amount of scholarship as well as commentary among other great contemporary thinkers (among them Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas, and Richard Rorty), Gadamer laid out the strongest argument yet developed that method is never available as a solitary instrument for general application, because it consists of the same interpretable character as those phenomena which it would seek to reveal. In this sense, as Jardine has pointed out, the book's title is essentially ironic, since in the hermeneutic conception "'truth' has little to do with 'method'" (Jardine, 1992a, p. 81), a key point of contrast between hermeneutics and rationalistic or scientific-technical approaches to knowledge acquisition. To conduct hermeneutic inquiry in the tradition of Gadamer, as in the case of the present study, is to recognize that "it is impossible to establish 'correct method' for research in advance of an encounter with what is being investigated…because *what* is being investigated holds at least part of the answer to *how* it should be investigated" (Smith, 2006e, p. 110). It is for this reason that I made deliberate notice in the introduction and literature review chapters of how this study came to be framed and what specific dialogic engagement it participates in. In what follows I will review key points in Gadamer's philosophy that explain his position of skepticism regarding *a priori* methodology as well as other important aspects of Gadamer's thought.

The first point to be explored is that, for Gadamer, the final word with regard to the meaning of an experience or text is not to be found within the confines of the source alone. Gadamer writes:

> The real meaning of a text, the way in which it speaks to the interpreter does not depend on contingencies that the author and his original public represent. At least, it is not exhausted by them. It is also always codetermined by the historical situation of the interpreter. The meaning of a text goes beyond its author not only occasionally but always. (cited in Warnke, 1987, p. 74)

In trying to understand something, a school practice or a work of art, the whole truth can not be ascertained through a closer and closer examination of the thing, for example interviewing another teacher, or collecting another set of student journal entries. This is because whoever or whatever the object of study is, it is embedded in all of its contextual forestructures which both situate it and limit it, therefore it is able to speak with a situated authenticity in a sense, but is never able to fully interpret itself.

We understand this point well in our daily lives in schools—I used to think of it often when a former ESL teaching colleague at an urban junior-senior high school, a truly dear, gentle person, used to complain about the very strong presence of Latino gangs in our program,[4] at one point calling in exasperation down the hallway that "we just got another new student from *that* ethnic group." Her sentiment was understandable—it was heartbreaking to see sweet, earnest, newly immigrated 7th graders inevitably approached by gang members, to watch and begin to know the

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[4] This anecdote, based on lived experience, does not in any way suggest that gang problems are confined to the Latino community, nor does it suggest that many or most Latino immigrants are in gangs. It reflects a situation that existed in a particular place and time, from the perspective of a few particular teachers.

progression as their attitudes and clothing changed, almost overnight acquiring a cynically knowing but somehow exhausted look, and to hear the whispered stories from the kids who didn't jump in to a gang recounting what the others had done for their initiation, and "can you please give me a ride home, *maestra*?" Of course, the gangsters themselves were frightening—tattooed, hard-looking, jeering adolescent powerballs. I remember well the sense of dread walking to the car after work on days when I had been forceful about halting the cruising of young girls or the selling of product in my class. My car had been keyed, and I had seen a burly ex-Marine teacher knocked out cold in the commons while students cheered.

But I also remember all the times when students of various ages and degrees of gang affiliation, even in a couple of cases very active gang participants, could be enticed to really focus and cooperate in class, or could be induced by a variety of clever schemes to stay after school and work on homework or "projects the teacher needs help with," creating moments when the gloriously beautiful humanity of that individual, the irreplaceable beloved child his or her parents remembered, was so directly, vividly in evidence, a teacher had to struggle to hold back tears, to stay cool and keep everything going. And so although I fully understood and shared some of my colleague's feelings, I always wondered how she came to put all her focus on increased surveillance and punitive response, entailing constant visits from the assistant principal, a steady stream of referrals for in-school suspension, and a repositioned video-camera in the hall, but not really changing anything—there were always considerably more behavior problems in her classes, and of course the stream of new Latino students continued unabated. Her emphasis, I felt, did not speak to the whole story of the impact of economic and

educational inequity, of how larger societal and global practices lead to poverty,

hopelessness, alienation, and ultimately the attractiveness of gang membership, and

how even if they had made terrible decisions and done terrible things, they were still

human beings, somehow still filled with promise, still our students looking to us to see

what kind of world we hold out to them.

The hermeneutic point (one of them) is that, if you asked only my colleague

about her experience with Latino students and gangs, you would get only her take on

the issue, and indeed, if you asked only the two of us, our two perspectives would be all

you would get, most certainly not the entirety of truth with respect to the question. This

situation of finitude, Gadamer says, continues to apply even if we were to inquire with

every single teacher who ever dealt with Latino students, or gangs, or every person who

ever studied them, every theory that ever addressed Latino immigration or crime in our

cities, our countries, or our the entire planet. Neither through extensive interviewing,

nor through careful methodological adherence, nor via statistical measures employing

validity and reliability checks, nor indeed through hermeneutic interpretation will we

ever have the definitive spin on this or any question. It is one of the central hermeneutic

understandings that no matter what we do to approach studying something, "we do not

arrive at a determination of its 'objective' meaning" (Warnke, 1987, p. 74).

The exact same situation, then, that applies to the phenomenon to be interpreted

also applies to the interpreter who wants to understand something, as well as any of the

investigative tools available to him or her, because the researcher also, as well as the

disciplinary knowledge s/he employs, is constrained by the beliefs and understandings

acquired through immersion in a particular contextual tradition. These forestructures are

what Gadamer refers to as *Vorurteile* [prejudices], but he does not mean this in a

negative sense. In my example about Latino students and gangs, my neighbor brings her

set of prejudices which give shape to her understanding, but so do I. Gadamer reminds

us on this point that no one is the sole authoritative author of his or her beliefs, rather,

like language, we inherit ways of understanding from our social and intellectual

experiences, adapting and applying them, mostly unconsciously, as we in effect

interpret our way through life. Gadamer calls this embeddedness of the individual in

tradition *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* or effective historical consciousness, a

mouthful of a term which denotes the way the structures of our understanding are

conditioned by our historical circumstances. One might also think of this notion as

indicative of consciousness' characteristic of being activated by experiences within

history, where 'historically effective' is understood as consciousness being responsive

or sensitive to historical circumstances. Understanding therefore is not to be conceived

of as a fully objective or subjective act, indeed Gadamer commented that effective

historical consciousness belongs more to unconscious Being that to deliberate

consciousness (Warnke, 1987, p. 80). The important point to be made for this study, for

both topical and methodological reasons, is that this finitude does not just refer to

individual understanding but to all of our disciplinary understanding of concepts such as

rationality or objectivity or truth or scientific method, which are themselves subject to

effective historical consciousness—they are expressions of a particular tradition.

Warnke writes:

> In this regard Gadamer holds that the error of the Enlightenment is to have
>
> assumed a wholly ahistorical idea of reason and hence to have contrasted reason

and method on the one hand, to prejudice and tradition on the other. To see that

any understanding of a subject-matter is necessarily prejudiced, however, is to

see that the idea of reason itself refers to that which has come to be taken as

rational within a particular tradition. (Warnke, 1987, p. 80)

This acknowledgement that the forms and practices contained in any tradition

(including our tradition of occidental reasoning with its syllogisms, rigorous methods,

and abstract categorizations) are themselves historical and particular, not universal and

indicative of a successful, intelligent person, is one of the points at which hermeneutics

creates an opening of the Western tradition to the possibility of true conversation with

other forms of orally toned, indigenous knowledge that do not share the West's beliefs

regarding truth, knowledge, or anything else, but are embedded within their own

traditions.

It should be noted that it is by no means Gadamer's purpose to throw out reason

or rationality or any other inheritance of Western epistemology. In fact, in contrast to

most other philosophers since Kant who have opposed rational scientism in the study of

human understanding, Gadamer argued that these forestructures of understanding

bequeathed by the Enlightenment tradition are not inherently distortive of truth for those

of us who have inherited them but to the contrary are necessary to interpreting anything

at all, most particularly phenomena that are new. In this sense, Gadamer's may be the

one philosophy in the post-Kantian tradition that "did not recommend itself as an

overcoming of metaphysics" (Grondin, 1995, p. 17) but sought a way of linking the

hermeneutic circle not only to present conversations but past and future ones as well.

What is required, Gadamer insisted, was that one's own prejudicial field be carefully

and continually scrutinized over and against the new learning one acquires in a genuine conversation with another, and that one's prejudicial understandings be constantly open to modification based on that new learning.

At the heart of Gadamer's hermeneutics is, then, the notion of genuine interest in conversation with the Other in a *fusion of horizons*, a notion inspired by the knowledge that the place where my understanding goes as far as it can go, my horizon, is exactly where I can take up a true dialog with the Other. If we are to forge true understanding, we can't participate falsely in conversations, seeking twists of advantage, trying to outwit the other and duking it out so that our side wins. Rather, we have to enter dialog with a genuine interest in the subject matter of course, but also a truly genuine interest in learning what the Other, the realm beyond my current horizon of understanding, has to teach, in particular how the Other challenges my own views. A quality required for genuine conversation in Gadamer's sense is tact, which, far from just a reminder to be polite, assumes that the Other has something to teach me and actively seeks the ways in which what the Other has to say is illuminating in matters that concern us both (Gadamer, 1960/1984, 1986). This relates to the role of *phronesis* in Gadamer's thought, a term used by Aristotle in the Nichomachean ethics to denote practical knowledge, the kind of knowledge that lets us know what to do in situations with other people. *Phronesis* entails a sort of actively open mindfulness that is attuned to the resonances in contextual moments, not only hearing but engaging with what the Other says, and responding to the complex wholeness of what is at hand in a way that is tactful (>Lat. for 'touch'), that derives from being *in touch with* what is going on. When I think of *phronesis*, I think of all the attuned, sometimes risk-laden moments that led

up to a rather intimidating, twenty-something, *Vatos Locos* gang member giggling—

giggling—as he told a story from his boyhood while scrubbing graffiti off desks in my

classroom one day after school.

Although a sort of dialogic quality was always understood to be at work in

interpretation, it was Gadamer who emphasized the awareness that genuine

conversation is at the heart of the search for truth, and that what is at stake is our

commitment to face our past, attune to our present, and work out a common future in

which life can go on (Smith, 1999a; 2006a; 2010). There is no truth condition if

everyone does not have a place at the table of dialog, if everyone's viewpoint is not

truly listened to and carefully considered, and if all do not enter in with the expectation

that one's perspectives may be changed (Warnke, 1987, p. 100). On this point, Smith

(2006a) has applied Gadamer's understanding of conversation to the global stage in a

way directly relevant to the present study:

> You cannot have a conversation if one partner has no desire for it or if his/her
>
> worldview does not value it necessarily. This is, I believe, a big issue for
>
> international relations in the age of globalization. What are the implications for
>
> a globalizing world of traditions that are exclusive in their self-interpretation,
>
> wherein being in conversation with the Other does not imply the possibility of
>
> change within one's own worldview? (p. 108)

The implications, I would respond in answer to Smith's question, are pregnant in the

situation we have already. Thus it is not enough to provide laptops and literacy to

Africa, we must engage in a mutually genuine conversation about what it is that such

actions are intended to achieve, in whose interests, for what purposes. We may end up

agreeing to disagree, a possibility Gadamer always keeps open, but the larger point is this: Gadamer's hermeneutics rests on the conviction that the search for truth will be served much more faithfully through engagement in genuine conversation, in which all of us belong (not just the wealthy and the powerful), and in which we know our perspectives may be changed, than by a naïve wielding of predetermined methods for freezing and studying a bit of truth. Here Gadamer reflects the model of Socratic dialog: the outcome of a genuine, committed conversation will not be a final, definitive understanding, to be sure, but it will bring all parties who participate sincerely to a place different from where they started. I think that conversations with the colleague I mentioned in the anecdote above regarding gang presence in our ESL program had that ultimate effect—how much more revealing these conversations would have been if other parties to the issue (families, students) had been included. Perhaps the telling of the story here will have that hermeneutic effect for the reader, in ways the original participants could not possibly know.

Contemporary Hermeneutics

After Gadamer, hermeneutics took something of a Gallic turn in the work of philosophers Paul Ricoeur and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who each in different ways have applied hermeneutic thinking in a postmodern landscape. In his 1981 book *Hermeneutics and the human sciences* Ricoeur noted the urgency of the hermeneutic project in light of ever more nuanced understandings of linguistic and cultural polysemy—the more we appreciate the fact of myriad contextual differences in our world, the more we require active and devoted interpretation, and the more we should maintain a healthy skepticism with regard to universalistic declarations (Ricoeur, 1981).

Ricoeur affirmed the ways in which hermeneutics rises above not only the particularity of texts, but of parochial operations to interpret them, an understanding which he sees as placing hermeneutics significantly in the realm of ethical relations with the Other, a position with which the present study began. Merleau-Ponty advanced the fields of hermeneutics and phenomenology in such influential books as *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/1995) and *Signs* (1960/1987). In his final book, *l'Oeil et l'Esprit* [The eye and the mind/spirit], Merleau-Ponty (1964) claimed that science takes the role of manipulating life rather than living it, a notion he explored in considering how traditions in the West (for instance, literacy traditions) have situated knowledge entirely within the sense of sight, hence we refer to visionary thinkers, we say that good writing illuminates a topic, and "I see" means "I understand." In contrast to oral/aural modes which are inherently receptive, involved, and immersed, Merleau-Ponty shows how analytic thinking as favored in the West approaches the world with an eye functioning as a scalpel, carving up holistic phenomena in manageable pieces that can be described and categorized. This is expressed in his famous dictum: "Vision dissects" (cited in Ong, 1982, p. 71).

Hermeneutic scholarship of a philosophical or theoretical nature continues to be pursued in the contemporary work of scholars like Bernstein (1983), Caputo (1987, 2000), Grondin (1995), Madison (1988), Ormiston and Schrift (1990), Schrag (1986), Seebohm (2004), Wachterhauser (1986), Warnke (1987), and Weinsheimer (1991). Like the god Hermes himself, hermeneutic inquiry appears to have a kind of eternal youthfulness, maintaining and even increasing in relevance after more than two millennia.

Hermeneutics and Education

Over the past fifty years or so, hermeneutics and the related discipline of phenomenology have been important paradigms for the conduct of educational research, in particular where there is interest in moving beyond the framework of a positivistic approach to researching human experience, and also among international scholars who seek areas of correspondence between their traditions and Western academic formulations (Smith, 2010). Several theorists have provided comparative analyses of paradigms of educational inquiry that include the hermeneutic approach, for example Cherryholmes (1988), Guba (1990), MacDonald (1988), Madison (1988), Polkinghorne (1983; 1988), and Short (1991). Scholars who have explored the nuances of hermeneutic inquiry in its applications to education include Carson and Sumara (1997), Danner (1997), Demetrion (2005), Gallagher (1992), Jardine (2003; 2006), MacDonald (1988), and Smith (1999; 2006). The work of these scholars represents a great variety of approaches to hermeneutics and topics to which hermeneutic understanding is applied. It is worth noting here that, based on his review of adult literacy practices and research paradigms, Demetrion (2005) recommends hermeneutic inquiry as the most appropriate mode for research and practice in literacy education for older learners in the United States.

<div align="center">Synthesis of Hermeneutic Understandings</div>

. At this point I would like to provide a synthesis of hermeneutic understandings as they relate to the conduct of educational research, based on both the historical review and the applications of hermeneutics in education referred to in the preceding

paragraph. This will allow me to locate the design of this study within the larger synthesis.

As a careful review of the history of hermeneutics makes clear, there is no hermeneutic "methodology" which can be described procedurally and independently of the matter to be studied, rather, how one engages in hermeneutic inquiry is always a function of the creative and attuned interaction between an interpreter and the phenomenon s/he is interpreting. It has often been noted that interpretive inquiry is a supple tool (Madison,1988; van Manen, 1990), leaving a high degree of discretion, and responsibility, to the judgment of the researcher. In hermeneutic research, it is incumbent on the author to present a meaningful interpretation illustrated by scholarship, stories, etymologies, logical arguments, poetry, and any other forms of support which create an image that a reasonable person can understand and be persuaded by. The present study makes use of all of these forms.

Hermeneutic research is distinct from positivistic and ethnographic research models whose validity is assumed to derive from the accuracy of the application of a methodological program defined *a priori*. Both conventional quantitative statistical and qualitative ethnographic research practices enact a model based on the observation of phenomena by an objective party (the researcher), whose claim to validity relies not primarily on the persuasive weight of the argument but on the authority of the method and the rigor with which it is applied. Inquiry of this type relies not on the acknowledgement of subjectivity but on the conviction that subjectivity can be nearly or fully expunged from the research process through rigorous application of method. Two key assumptions of this form of research are, first, that phenomena are discreet,

distinctly definable and isolable, and can be addressed as such if correct methods are used and, second, that the same project and the same results could theoretically be replicated by another researcher under the same conditions. Modes of inquiry which operate in this manner are what Habermas refers to as employing "instrumental rationality," and they reflect the kinds of assumptions Dilthey associated with *Naturwissenschaften* [natural sciences]. Madison has termed this mode of inquiry "method in an abstract and formal sense" (Madison, 1988, p. 28). It should be noted at this point that the form of method described here is no longer even embraced as orthodoxy within the hard sciences, as the work of Born (1949), Capra (1984), Einstein (1916), Heisenberg (1958), LaTour and Woolgar (1979), and Prigogine and Griese (1980) has shown.

By contrast, hermeneutic research enacts a form of inquiry which, following Dilthey, is intentionally attuned to the particular character of the *Geisteswissenschaften* [human sciences]. This is what Madison describes as "method in a normative sense" (1988, p. 28), a notion he compares to the application of ethical norms which call for responsible and rational judgments that "can never be simply 'applied' to concrete situations…in such a way as automatically and unequivocally to tell us what exactly we should do" but rather "serve only as guiding principles in choosing among courses of action" (Madison, 1988, p. 28). Rather than instrumental rationality, human science inquiry relies on principled rationality (Madison, 1988) that is enacted through assertorial argument (Polkinghorne, Lindén, Sages, Piotr, & Beach, 2003), a form whose claim to validity depends on the erudition and insight of the researcher, and ultimately lies in the mind and heart of the hearer or reader who, in the end, may agree

or not with the image presented, but if the research is successful will be afforded the opportunity to see the phenomenon at new levels of depth and complexity. Polkinghorne (1983) has compared assertorial argument to the dialogic discourse of courtroom trials, in which each attorney can and must present whatever evidence assists in making the case, including testimony, forensics, theories, patterns, and so forth.

Hermeneutic research (including the present work) calls for a characteristic depth and breadth of scholarship, particularly philosophical scholarship, and a reader could study all of the scholarly references in a project such as the present one to gain an understanding of how the argument was constructed. S/he may or may not come to the same conclusions; indeed, there is no assumption in hermeneutic research that a particular instance of it can be repeated by another, because (a) it is possible for reasonable people to come to different conclusions or have different interpretations of the same phenomena, and (b) human science research, including hermeneutics, is based on a presumption of intersubjectivity, as explicated above. This presumption means that the content of the research is acknowledged to consist of, and derive its power from, the intersubjective reality created by an engaged interaction between researcher and the people s/he is studying, as interpreted by that particular person situated in time and place.

It is necessary for the engagement to be deep and real, and the interpretation to be highly evocative and insightful, in order to establish a compelling picture for the well-informed, critical reader, one that liberates her/his thinking on the topic. The hermeneutic research study must be written with a clarity and insightfulness that is accessible to the reader, while at the same time challenging her/him to a new narrative

vision, creating the conditions of possibility for a new understanding. In its hermeneutic nature, this study aims "not to report meaning but to create interpretive meaning" (Smith, 1991, p. 201), in a manner that honors the ambiguity of the issue, that restores the issue to its original difficulty (Jardine, 1992). The study will be a successful if provokes new ways of thinking about givens, about what is already present before and among us, about where we are going in a deep sense, and where we could go.

<div align="center">*Hermeneutic Design of the Present Study*</div>

In the fullest sense of the hermeneutic tradition, the present study brings a variety of sources and insights to bear in constructing an understanding across the abyss. These include etymology, poetry, personal experience, constructed anecdote, analysis of hermeneutic, historic, and philosophical texts, and persuasive argument, all of which have already appeared in these pages. In gathering and presenting a variety of materials, this study is guided by Madison's principles of phenomenological hermeneutic inquiry (Madison, 1988), which call for the text to have (a) coherence within itself; (b) comprehensiveness in addressing the particular focus of analysis; (c) penetration into the topic as opposed to a surface treatment; (d) thoroughness, appropriateness and contextuality with regard to the topical area; (e) agreement with actual viewpoints of the author (as opposed to reductionism or cynicism); (f) suggestiveness with regard to future research; and (g) potential for extending understanding.

Scholars of hermeneutics and those who draw from hermeneutics employ a variety of stylistic and topical modes in their interpretive approaches. The present study adopts an approach to hermeneutic interpretation inspired by the work of David G.

Smith and David Jardine, internationally recognized educational theorists specializing in hermeneutics whose work has been discussed on several occasions above. In particular, this study is enlightened by Smith's focus on post-colonial and globalization issues in education (1999, 2006) and Jardine's emphasis on an educational hermeneutics of ecology and abundance (2000, 2006).

More than any other scholar, Smith brings to bear an understanding of socio-cultural and religious discourses on the matter of how schools, practices, and beliefs about education have come to be configured and acted out in the West. An expert on theology, Asian philosophy, and global relations, Smith has engaged hermeneutics to excavate the effects of colonialism and market logic neocolonialism on Western ways of thinking about self, Other, and the role of education (Smith, 1999e, 2006e). His *tour de force* essay entitled "The specific challenges of globalization for teaching and vice-versa" (Smith, 2006c) is of particular note in this regard. In contrast to both neo-Marxist perspectives that seek to develop revolutionary consciousness and deconstructionist-toned projects that emphasize rupture, Smith has noted that hermeneutics, with its goal of linking past, present, and future understandings, has a particular appeal for international scholars from cultures of strong tradition who are inclined to honor past practices and wisdom and opposed to rejecting tradition in favor of innovation and construction of new systems of practice (Smith, 2010). "In this sense," Smith says, "hermeneutics holds promise for a new conversation amongst the world's people regarding our shared future" (Smith, 2010, p, 436). This remark signals a consistent theme in all of Smith's work, that is, the value of hermeneutic understanding for its power to reveal how regnant discourses foreclose or seek to foreclose on a creative

common future among the world's people. Here again is an indication of the unique fitness of hermeneutic inquiry for the present study.

Like Smith, Jardine is an extraordinarily gifted writer who presents his thoughts on challenges and possibilities in education in the form of evocatively rendered hermeneutic essays (Jardine, 1998, 2000; Jardine & Friesen, 2003, 2006). Drawing from Gadamer, Jardine has been foremost among curriculum theorists in articulating the deeply ecological point that educational understanding subsists not so much in debates over what we do or ought to do, but arises from engagement with "what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (Jardine, et al., 2006, p. xxiii):

> Gadamerian hermeneutics is not about method or conscious intent or experience, or about ideal portrayals of what ought to be, but about something that happens when we understand, a rattling of air between my own individuality and agency and hopes and desires, and the great blood bath I'm standing in the midst of and to which I owe something of my life. (Jardine, et al., 2006, p. xxiii)

In the fulsome presence of the individual person, practice, or phenomenon resides a holistic connection to all others, provided the interpreter dwells without preconditions, without preoccupation over one's own agency, in mindful attunement. "Somehow," Jardine writes, "from out of mindfulness to *this*, the particular object before us, in its very particularity, becomes like a sacred place where the whole Earth comes to nestle in relations of deep interdependency" (Jardine, et al., 2006, p. xxiv). The affinity of Jardine's hermeneutics to indigenous knowledge with its focus on holistic understanding (Battiste & Henderson, 2000) is abundantly clear, and serves to underscore the appropriateness of his particular hermeneutic spin for the present study.

Smith (1991) has described three "requirements of the hermeneutic imagination" in educational research: (1) a deep attentiveness to language, both diachronically in etymological study and synchronically in its constitutive role in identity and culture; (2) a deepening sense of the interpretability of life itself, remembering always that "*how* we interpret is very much related to our macro-frames" (p. 199, emphasis original); and (3) an attitude of unconcern about hermeneutics itself. This last point deserves elaboration:

> Hermeneutics is not really concerned with hermeneutics per se; that is, with its character as another self-defining imploding discourse within a universe of other discourses. Far more important is its overall interest which is in the question of human meaning and of how we might make sense of our lives in such a way that life can go on. […] This means that the mark of good interpretive research is not in the degree to which it follows a specified methodological agenda, but in the degree to which it can show understanding of what is being investigated…from the inside out and outside in. (Smith, 1991, p. 200-201)

A close, proximal experience of the challenges of the abyss is a necessary precondition for the researcher conducting a study like this one. It will be my task to travel, like Hermes, from inside out to outside in, bringing a full range of historical, philosophical, political, literary, etymological, and other insights to bear on understanding and interpreting the questions at the heart of this study. It is a journey entailing *responsibility*, a "taking of responsibility for myself as an integral part of my interpretation of other things, other people" (Smith, 2006, p. 109), *acceptance* of the fact that in a true inter-subjective encounter with the Other, my own self-understanding will necessarily change, and also a certain *loss*, the loss of my current self-

understanding, the loss of the idea that my ego structure is my own to possess, to interpret on my own (Smith, 2006). Hermeneutics begins with the awareness that, even to the deepest level, irrespective of our wanting and willing, we are in it together.

Situatedness of the Interpreter

While intentionally interpretive in the most divinatory sense possible, this study will be thoroughly focused on the experience of living, breathing adolescent preliterate English language learners. In this study I will be fully on the horns of Hermes' dilemma, with an imperfect but ardent sense of *deontos* as guide. In taking a position along the fault line between fearless interpretation and absorbed engagement with those experiencing the phenomenon under study, this project may be compared in locus and tone to Crapanzano's radical hermeneutic ethnographies (e.g., 1980, 1985) or Becker's (1989, 1992) use of hermeneutics in ethnolinguistic studies.

The conceptual territory of the study is one in which I have been implicated for many years: American public high schools serving English language learners with little or no prior schooling or literacy. As the first teacher of scores of newcomer high school refugees and immigrants from El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Liberia, Mexico, Oromia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, and elsewhere, I have been privileged to work on a day to day basis with students immersed in the experience I wish to investigate. As one of the very first teachers many of these teenagers and young adults had ever had, at a time when they were beginning anew in a new land, learning a new language as they learn to read for the first time, I have had a special position, a familiarity, a certain surefootedness, in the refugee immigrant community. In an intimate way that defies easy explanation, I have been a part of my

students' lives and their families' lives, during and beyond their high school years, and

they have been a part of mine. (It is worthwhile recalling here the root meaning of

familiar: >Lat. *familia*, family.) My positionality in this study is both professional and

personal; my cognitive understanding of newcomer LFS preliterate students has been

carved and shaped by research, and by close, intense pedagogic experiences over a long

term. Seebohm (2004, p. 208) has described the "gift of empathy" as necessary to

hermeneutic interpretation of the texts of life experience. My empathetic engagement

has been woven and nurtured by close, meaningful, caring relationships, many of which

have endured remarkably. Because the quality of a hermeneutic study depends so much

on the preparation and positioning of the interpreter, it is relevant that I come to this

task prepared by immersed experience with eyes to see and ears to hear.

Constructed Anecdote and Interpretation

One of the interpretive instruments I employ in this study is the constructed

anecdote, a form which is particularly dependent on the intimate embeddedness of the

interpreter. The term 'anecdote' derives from the Greek: *an*, 'not' + *ekdotos*,

'published' or 'given,' thus there is a sense of anecdote as involving a secret story that

only intimates are privy to. The use of constructed anecdote as a device for presenting

themes and experience in educational research, in particular hermeneutic

phenomenological writing, is described in van Manen (1990), who calls this form

"narrative with a point" (1990, p. 69), indicating that it is important for the anecdote to

carry a sense of purpose and cogency. An anecdote is not to be understood as a mere

illustration or embellishment to otherwise boring text, but as a "methodological device

in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us" (van

Manen, 1990, p. 116) in the manner of an allegory or parable. Van Manen further notes

the prominent place of the anecdote in oral tradition, and emphasizes its social and often

conversational character; one of the uses of anecdote in Western literature that van

Manen refers to specifically is Plato's *Phaedrus* (Van Manen, 1990, p. 120) which I

excerpted in Chapter Two.

Of particular relevance to this study is van Manen's discussion of the function

and power of the anecdote in educational writing. Anecdotes bring a sense of

concreteness to abstract theoretical thought, and they stand in contrast to the "alienated

and alienating discourse of scholars who have difficulty showing how life and

theoretical propositions are connected" (van Manen, 1990, p. 119). Anecdotes provide

"concrete demonstrations of wisdom and sensitive insight," and "may acquire the

significance of exemplary character" (van Manen, 1990, p. 120). Anecdote is a valuable

device in human science research because it blends the textual forms of educational and

philosophical research with the narrative quality of a story. In van Manen's (1990)

description,

> A hybrid textual form is created, combining the power of philosophic or
>
> systematic discourse with the power of literary or poetic language. Anecdote
>
> particularizes the abstracting tendency of theoretical discourse: it makes it
>
> possible to involve us pre-reflectively in the lived quality of concrete experience
>
> while paradoxically inviting us into a reflective stance vis-à-vis the meanings
>
> embedded in the experience. (p. 121)

Rosen (1986) has described anecdote as having the power to compel attention, to lead

us to reflection, to involve us personally, to transform by teaching, and to allow us to

gauge our own deepened interpretive sense. Van Manen (1990) comments that anecdote

has the paradoxical power of telling "something *particular* while really addressing the

general or the *universal*" (p. 120).

Smith makes evocative use of constructed anecdote in his chapter "Experimental

eidetics as a way of entering curricular language from the ground up" (Smith, 1988).

Following an introduction to the theoretical territory of his essay, he draws on his

experience in schools to construct the narrative tale of a schoolteacher and her students,

allowing the character and their experiences to exemplify cogent points which he

analyses in a concluding interpretive section. Smith has stated that he recommends the

constructed anecdote as the preferred method for his doctoral students to approach the

depiction of educational reality, since the novelistic quality of the anecdote allows a

richer portrayal of truth than a positivistic sampling or ethnographic report (D.G. Smith,

personal communication, Oct. 12, 2008).

In this study I have already made initial use of the anecdotal mode in order to

provide a concrete narrative way of reflecting on theoretical aspects of hermeneutic

philosophy. I will continue to weave significant use of anecdotal narrative into the text,

in order to exemplify the themes of analysis, meaningfully incorporating my scholarly

findings and providing an evocative interpretation. This approach allows the work to

highlight different aspects of oral thought and cultural and personal factors in the

encounter with schooling and literacy, and offers a useful and refreshing contrast

between descriptive narrative and dense scholarly interpretation. Inasmuch as the

experience that constitutes the topic of this study involves profound, largely

unconscious transformations implicated in the encounter of primary orality with a

culture of hyperliteracy, I suggest that the topic of this study is one to which the use of constructed anecdote is particularly suited.

Summary of Hermeneutic Orientation

As should be clear from what has preceded, the interpretation proffered in this study has not and will not follow the form of a tight, linear, expository argument but rather is modeled hermeneutically after Smith's writerly use of "tropes circulating conversationally" (Smith, 2006c, p. 15), in the manner of evocations that permit us to explore "the way in which the meaning of what is at stake is connected to a whole constellation of issues that cannot be unraveled in the usual discrete sense of Western analytic thinking" (Smith, 1999b, p. 61). Smith draws here on Gadamer's notion that understanding any text or situation is "best achieved not by frontal attack but by attending to how meaning 'floats' in, out, through and around the specificities at hand" (cited in Smith, 1999b, p. 62). One is reminded in this regard of McLuhan's manner of writing in oracular "probes," of which his most famous, "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1994/1964, p. 7) regards the topic of this study and will be explored in Chapter Four.

In hermeneutic terms, the design of this study contains aspects of "inside out" interpretability, that is, the research gesture is to interpret events and interactions arising from within the individual or school setting, as well as larger, "outside in" themes such as suggested by Smith's (1999) assertion that, inasmuch as literacy is always acquired within a relationship (teacher to student, parent to child), a crisis of literacy must also be understood as a crisis of relationality (p. 71). This insight presents a contrast to Ong's (1982) point that for orality, an interlocutor, a relationship, is essential, while

scripturality requires solitude (p. 34). The interplay of reciprocities like the one just

outlined is the manner of theme which a hermeneutic study is uniquely suited to

develop, and promises to allow the phenomenon under study—young adults having no

chance to attend school, learn to read, or even remain in their homeland—to speak

significantly beyond itself.

Van Manen (1990), drawing from Blum & McHugh (1984), reminds us that in

educational theorizing, we are "recommending a certain way of standing in the world"

(p. 170). To do justice to a theory, he says, the researcher must render a "strong reading

of everyday stories" (van Manen, 1990, p. 170) in order to strengthen the point they

would make. I began this study with a conscious recollecting of the risks of

interpretation, particularly across cultures and languages, and the extreme ethical

responsibility one bears in making any claim to understanding phenomena outside the

pale of one's experience. Following my personal history and deep motivation for

conducting this study, I *will* be recommending a certain way of standing in the world,

one which remembers the appalling damage caused by colonialism and neo-

colonialism, one which accepts the responsibility of hyperliterate academics to meet and

embrace the preliterate Other with humility, tact, and professional commitment,

acknowledging and seeking the ethical imperative of an inter-subjective future.

Furthermore, based on what I am able to interpret from my experiences and the stories

of the students themselves, I will be recommending a way of *standing in the world of*

the American high school, with the charge of introducing new refugees to formal

education and initial literacy in a second language.

Chapter 4

The Power of Medium

The woods of Arcady are dead;
And over is their antique joy;
Of old the world on dreaming fed;
Grey Truth is now her painted toy;
Yet still she turns her restless head:
But O, sick children of the world,
Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us whirled,
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,
Words alone are certain good.
Where are now the warring kings,
Word be-mockers?—By the Rood
Where are now the warring kings?
An idle word is now their glory,
By the stammering schoolboy said,
Reading some entangled story:
The kings of the old time are dead;
The wandering earth herself may be
Only a sudden flaming word,
In clanging space a moment heard,
Troubling the endless reverie.

-- W.B. Yeats, *The Song of the Happy Shepherd* (1997, p. 3)

In this excerpt from a poem written at the end of the 19th century, Yeats gives

notice of epochal changes in the human spirit carried on evolving notions of the word,

Homer's *verba volante*, bearing joy or grey truth, sickness, stammering, historical

entanglements, an earth flaming and clanging to trouble the endless reverie. Words are

now our warring kings, vying for viability, struggling for supremacy. Whose words will

reign, how, why? Will anyone, will the earth survive? Here we see in concatenation the

conflicting cavalcade of human perspectives: not just language, the word, but how it is

embedded in contexts and in nature; not just contexts, the earth's cultures and

environments, but how they are enacted in the word. These are difficult issues to tease

out, for we only ever have our own thought structures with which to reflect on our

thought structures, we only ever have our own language to reflect on our own language.

As Battiste and Henderson (2000) have put it so well, "Like all attempts to make people

aware of the categories in which they think, the attempt to make people aware of how

the language they speak affects the way they view the world is a difficult and

sometimes agonizing activity" (p. 73).

The notion that traditional cultures living in harmony with an orally-toned

worldview are characteristically quite distinct from cultures that have fully embraced

the technologies and affordances of literacy, and that these distinctions might have

relevance for literacy and academic instruction of students from oral environments, is a

notion that has largely escaped the attention of educational researchers and policy

makers in countries that receive older preliterate immigrants and refugees. The second

language education profession, which has a particular vantage on and interest in this

question, has focused little research on it, with notable exceptions as reviewed in

Chapter Two. Second language education or SLA studies that focus on limited prior

education or prior literacy as a factor in nearly every case consider these issues

empirically, as a variable, rather than in a noetic or sociocultural way oriented toward

interpreting the *meaning* of being orally traditioned in a hyperliterate world. Inasmuch

as more and more students from oral backgrounds are experiencing their initial

meaningful encounter with literacy and academic language in our second language

classrooms, it is not only appropriate but necessary that the profession delve deeper into

understanding how older preliterates think and learn and connect to the world. It is also,

as I have argued previously, a matter with global ethical ramifications.

On the Danger and Importance of Interpreting the Impact of Medium

The matter of attempting to characterize thought and culture according to its

dominant medium is a sensitive one, prone to overstatement and over-extrapolation, and

always caught in the dilemma of acknowledging and honoring difference on the one

hand without essentializing characteristics of difference nor presuming to fully and

accurately understand them on the other. It is thus important to begin this chapter,

whose purpose is to explore and contrast characteristic patterns of thought and life

within oral and literate media environments, with an understanding that this work is

automatically, profoundly hermeneutic—interpretation across this abyss is required if

we are to understand anything at all about what it entails, while at the same time any

points made or conclusions reached are also emphatically interpretive, themselves

subject to and requiring further on-going interpretation along the dialogic lines that, in

the hermeneutic conception, constitute human understanding. What I am striving for

here is a sense of a the particular fusion of horizons within a multi-valenced, oral-

literate continuum, not a structuralist checklist of oral or literate characteristics reified

in time and concept nor a systematic study which isolates variables in order to observe

their manifestations or effects in a context.

While I have consulted the most trenchant research available on the topic, most

of which arises from an eclectic group of scholars in linguistics, sociolinguistics,

sociology, anthropology, theology, psychology, ecology, and indigenous studies, still

the characteristics or patterns that I report will not apply to every person or even every

culture that operates orally, and may strike the reader as caricatures more than

characterizations. Likewise, characterizations of literate life and schooling in the West

will necessarily describe *some* instances rather than all instances, and the reader may

well disagree that they form an interpretive pattern deserving of attention. It is well to

recall here that the purpose of this study is to provide a *strong* reading, one that makes a

strong polemical case from a certain point of view. It is not the task of this study to

review and represent all viewpoints in a purportedly objective gesture that the

hermeneutic approach itself refutes.

Just as it would be a mistake for me to create portraits that posture as

determinate descriptions, so, too, would it be a mistake for the reader to take the

existential portraits presented here and treat them as determinate. Ong recognized this

problem in his book *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word* (1982), which

I draw from significantly in this project. His insistence that the characterizations of oral

mind are offered interpretively rather than empirically in the positivistic sense is woven

throughout the text; at one point he specifically cautions the reader not to approach

aspects of the portraits as "mathematical concepts" that can be "differentiated

mathematically" but rather as "existentially grounded concepts" that refer to the

lifeworld of experience (Ong, 1982, pp. 71-72). This is the manner of response I would

make to critics such as Gee (2008) of work in the tradition of Havelock, Goody, Olson

and Ong: the patterns noted as characteristics of oral mind do not need to be addressed

as determinate, dichotomous categories and are not offered as such, but rather are

interpretations that make an attempt to engage with the effects of oral medium in their

uniqueness. The same point holds for characterizations I will offer here of the

environments engendered by literate and digital media. I would add that in the case of orality, it is particularly important in our age to highlight its unique characteristics, as opposed to the too-common practice of describing orality as a subset of literate Western thinking, or not to consider it at all.

In a sense, such debates resurrect the tensions reviewed above between hermeneutic inquiry and more determinate approaches to scholarship, be they positivistic or critical in orientation. The idea that characteristics of oral or any other mind can be measured at all is a decidedly Western approach to truth and knowledge—this notion is not to be found in oral indigenous traditions. We shall not resolve these tensions here; I simply state that my intention is to give whatever voice I can to the distinctly oral way of life and knowledge, and to try to contrast and relate it to the distinct ways of hyperliteracy and digitacy in which we live on this side of the abyss, that is, to articulate the fusion of horizons in the Gadamerian sense. If there is a danger in overstating the differences or rendering them too characteristically, I would argue that the greater danger is already upon us, that is, the danger that the characteristics of oral and indigenous knowing receive little if any attention at all in educational or any circles of power in Western countries. Before proceeding to a more general consideration of the power of medium, I suggest that it is worthwhile to examine why orality as a factor has been neglected, and why it must be included, in educational research.

On the Underinclusion of Orality as a Factor: Differing Viewpoints

There are different ways of accounting for the near exclusion of the oral-literate distinction from second language and other educational research, even as, over the past

several decades, significant attention has been focused on other dimensions of difference such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, and physical and mental exceptionality. One could look to imperialism and its consequent mindsets that privilege Western versions of educational priorities nearly always inscribed in literacy on one end of the spectrum, or, on the other end, to well-intentioned ideologies which seek to avoid characterizations that highlight differences for fear such characterizations may appear to ascribe cognitive or social deficits to people of oral background. Goody and Watt note in a seminal 1968 chapter that idealistic reactions against Eurocentric views have "gone to the point of denying that the distinction between non-literate and literate societies has any significant validity" (Goody & Watt, 1968, p. 28). While this ideological viewpoint is understandable, it also holds potential for erasure of different ways of being, a danger which recalls Bourdieu's axiom (1991) that linguistic exchanges are always mediated over the contested ground of expressivity versus censorship (p. 37)—the political nature of discourse in any context determines which aspects will and will not be deemed worthy of attention.

It is the danger of reducing Other to same—emphasizing how very like us the Other is—that theorists like de Certeau (1991), Foucault (1970, 1072), Kristeva (1991), Lévinas (1969/1991, 1979, 1987), Spivak (1988, 1999) and hosts of others warn against. In my view, an analysis such as Gee's (1986) which sorts approaches to the issue of orality in relation to literacy as either dichotomizing (Goody, Ong, and Olson) or non-dichotomizing (Chafe and Heath), is itself another instance of dichotomization. In the hermeneutic, indigenous, and ecological understanding of experience as always

inherently dualistic, a point I explore below, it is sometimes preferable to emphasize unity or similitude, and sometimes better to call attention to distinctiveness. Indeed the Hebrew text of Ecclesiastes teaches just this lesson in reminding us that "there is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens… A time to tear down and a time to build up;… a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Eccl. 3:1,3,4). It is just this ever-shifting nature of wise judgment in context that evokes the need for the wisdom of *phronesis*, where the question is never, 'which manner of analysis is superior?' but always, 'what approach is called for in the current situation?' Given the current state of affairs, where hyperliteracy is the virtually unchallenged emperor in its home countries and elsewhere, and the dominant Western response to Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?' (1988, p. 24) has tacitly been to insist that if the subaltern wants to be heard it must read and write, I would argue that what is called for is deliberate, humble attention to the contours and lessons of the alterity of subaltern orality. It is my position that precisely the political aspects of colonial and neocolonial erasure call for a tipping of the hermeneutic scales in the direction of expressivity of orality's distinctiveness in Bourdieu's sense. In the next section I will lay out the thoughts that undergird this position, as well as important caveats.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of sensitivity with regard to characterizing the pre-existing situation of older students with limited prior schooling and literacy for, as Bigelow (2010) has so eloquently argued, research that describes the distinct profile and needs of these students can easily be manipulated by those who seek to reduce funding or limit their access to an excellent education. (Bigelow's account is a stunning modern example of exactly the vulnerability of writing referred to in Plato's

Phaedrus, cited in Chapter Two). The issue revolves precisely around what shall be considered "an excellent education." After a great deal of research and reflection, countless conversations with colleagues, and years of work as an ESL teacher, coordinator, and teacher coach with the direct responsibility for deciding which content and pedagogy is appropriate for high school preliterate ELLs, what credits they need to graduate, and what level of performance is appropriate to passing classes, I am taking the position that the prevailing situation in the United States and elsewhere is not one in which these students are receiving an outstanding educational experience, leading them to solid, reliable proficiencies that can then serve them well as they seek to build a new life in this country. I am not alone in this impression, and the problem is not confined to the United States; a Canadian colleague recently concurred, emphatically, that the situation is similar for LFS newcomers in Canadian high schools. These remarks in no way imply a sort of characteristic inadequacy of LFS students in general; to the contrary, it must be understood by everyone concerned that these students are worthy individuals with skills and valuable experiences who have suffered often unspeakably and who deserve respect, even special consideration in light of the extremely difficult hand they have been dealt.

But, as the saying goes, one who has seen an elephant cannot lucidly deny that elephants exist. The achingly vivid memories of numberless scenarios in which the education system, with my complicity, has failed to truly educate these students, are always with me, and have been present with me as ephemeral co-authors of every page of this study. I cannot lucidly deny that I have seen, been party to, and deeply regret that many students who arrive in American high school without prior education and literacy

graduate without adequate skills that even by a generous stretch of the imagine can be considered correlative to a high school diploma. And so I have come to question, very deeply, whether it is "generous" to focus on and overestimate the skills that preliterate high school students *have* vis-à-vis the kinds of skills they *need* in hyperliterate society, as I and other profoundly committed ESL professionals tend to do, or whether it is something else. Often enough, among caring people, advocating for on-time graduation of LFS newcomers with significant skill gaps is a case of celebrating the valuable strengths such students bring, a good and appropriate gesture but not in itself a resolution of the question of what counts as a good high school education for these students. Or it is often a case of throwing up one's hands in frustration and letting things slide in the face of daunting institutional barriers that make the ESL teaching profession, especially in urban public schools with high numbers of preliterate LFS students, one in which burnout and abandonment are prevalent.

The Challenge of Engaging with Orality in Schools: An Anecdote

This sense of futility was very much present in a case I was involved in which entailed deciding whether a certain extremely insistent, previously unschooled senior should be allowed to graduate, even though his skills were still quite low. This case had wrenched my sensibilities throughout the two years I knew the student, during which time he and his family made clear that they expected him to graduate as a function of seat-time rather than proficiency. Indeed, he was one of the students who first made me aware that something very particular was going on pedagogically with older ELL students who had not been to school, a pattern I continued to observe and wonder about as a teacher and eventually undertook to study as a researcher. I recall with unyielding

clarity the final meeting between me as ESL department head, the guidance counselor

who usually determines graduation eligibility, and the very generous-hearted, student-

centered principal, to decide whether this student would be allowed to graduate—this

meeting stands in my memory as emblematic of the problem. At the end of a long and

exhaustive conversation (the last of many) in which all the issues involving state and

school policies and instructional options remained intractable to resolution, the principal

finally closed the matter, saying, "What can we really do for him here anymore?" The

student was allowed to graduate, the family was appeased, his constant appeals to talk

to the "school authorities" ceased, the school didn't have to pay for him anymore,

teachers didn't have to modify lessons anymore, we didn't have to gerrymander his

schedule anymore. This one was off our plate.

And it was a terrible decision. I learned later that, having been denied admission

at community colleges due to low academic skills, he was unable even to get a job at a

paper box factory because he was unable to fill out the application appropriately. Even

had he been admitted to a community college, as more and more students with low

skills are, that would be more a function of the increasing trend of modified entrance

requirements and the addition of transition classes at the colleges than a resolution of

the deeper problem. As community college staff are readily able to confirm, high

schools are deferring the problem forward when they graduate under-prepared students,

a practice which is curbed by standardized testing requirements under No Child Left

Behind (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001), but continues for students who fall within

the state-determined window of recency of arrival in the U.S, which in my state of

Minnesota has varied in the past decade between one and three years. The point here,

though, is not to review specific state or school policies which will vary from place to place, but to raise the more general issue of whether we are doing a service to students by allowing them to advance and graduate even though their skills may be quite low. Doing so, I suggest, often overestimates the availability and quality of programs to serve these students at the college level, and constitutes a real disservice to those who do not end up going to college at all.

The other component of this story, one which varies from state to state but always looms, is the matter of high school students "aging out," that is, reaching an age past which they are no longer allowed to attend high school, or after which the school receives no funding to educate them, or both. This raises a host of other issues, among them the typically ardent desire of students to receive a high school diploma matched by their ardent opposition to adult education programs, and the variable quality and availability of adult education opportunities for those who want to continue but do not take the college path. It is not the purpose here to explore the details of aging out policies, but to call attention to the very poor articulation that generally exists between high school and adult basic education options. Not all preliterate students without prior schooling in American high schools are ready to attend college after a few years of instruction and, as I have argued, many do not receive a solid base of skills that can serve them if high school is their final formal education. Let us not fail to notice that the barrier of aging out of high school is an artificial one, and one whose arbitrariness is demonstrated precisely by the situation of older preliterate high school students who often need more time than is allowed in order to achieve functioning proficiency. The solution, I suggest, is not to prematurely graduate them, but to lobby strenuously for the

additional time and programs that they require, and to design those programs in such a

way that students are not faced with navigating an artificial barrier between one form of

school (high school) and another (adult education). I want to add that when I share this

story and what it has taught me at conferences of ESL teachers, it always prompts a

flood of memories about similar agonizing experiences from the unresolved territory of

state and school education policies and the instructional needs of older LFS preliterate

students. This case is surely not idiosyncratic but representative of all of the similar

cases in all of the high schools that serve students who arrive without prior literacy and

schooling.

The view taken in this study is that, for a host of legal and moral reasons, some

of which I undertake to explicate in these pages, we must do a better job of designing

articulated programs at every level—high school, Adult Basic Education, and post-

secondary—that honestly face the actual situation of older preliterate ELL students,

their strengths *and* needs, which necessarily requires attention to the disparities between

what they know and what they need to know in order to have access to a society

profoundly different—not least for its astoundingly high valuation of literacy-derived

skills—from what these students and their communities have known before. There are

many factors that add to the difficulty of the task these students face, and it is quite

simply our educational, legal, and moral responsibility to dedicate the best instruction

and appropriate funding to ensure their success. My position is that the too-common

practice of institutions and individuals of laying blame on the students or their families

is neither appropriate nor accurate. To the contrary, the pedagogical profile of high

school preliterate ELL students is in nearly every case a consequence of forces beyond

their control, while the task of teaching them appropriately within realistic timeframes in a manner that constitutes support rather than yet another massive hurdle is *always* the task and responsibility of funding agencies, schools, and educators who must be held accountable.

And so I want to affirm what a grievous moral error is committed when studies that focus on how an individual or group may differ educationally from mainstream assumptions and policies are used to exclude that individual or group from excellent services, as Bigelow (2010) has warned. And yet, I hold to the conviction that ideological orientations must not be allowed to consistently trump deeper equity concerns; in order to determine how best to teach students from oral backgrounds so that they may have a place at the societal table, it is necessary to consider the distinctive characteristics of their situation and worldview in whatever way is available to us. In pursuit of that goal it has been of central importance to this project to consult indigenous scholars respected for their learning, wisdom, and passionate advocacy in order to hear what they have to say about the dynamic of oral/traditional versus literate/Eurocentric representation and knowledge as carried out in schools and societies. As referenced in Chapter Two, clearly there is a message that the West must hear, and it is not about how very similar indigenous ways are to those of the West, or how very thoughtfully the West has sought to honor and include non-literate knowledges in academic schooling.

Approaches to Understanding the Noeses of Different Media

In this section I will provide an introduction to the research on oral noesis as contrasted with the noetic environment of high literacy and digitacy in industrialized

societies. The broad base of scholarship evoked here is represented across many decades in the work of those who may be considered the forbears of this manner of interpretation, among others: Akinnaso (1981), Battiste and Henderson (2000), Becker, (1982, 1989, 1992), Bernardo (1998), Boas (1922), Bowers (1988, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1995, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2007), Chafe (1982), Cajete (1995), Deloria (1970), Ferguson (1986), Finnegan (1970, 1977), Foley (1977, 1980, 1997), Goody (1968, 1977, 1987), Goody and Watt (1968), Greenfield, Reich, and Olver (1966), Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1981), Hillman (1993), Hogan (1995), Illich (1973, 1991), Jousse (1925), Lévi-Bruhl (1910), Lévi-Strauss (1962), Lord (1960), Luria (1976), Havelock (1963, 1976), McLuhan (1967, 1964/1994), Mosha (2000), Olson (1977, 1994), Olson and Torrance (1991), Ong (1967, 1971, 1977, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1988, 1992), Parry (1971), Radin (1957), Ricard (2004), Ross (1989), Sapir (1921), Scollon and Scollon (1981, 1990, 1995), Scribner and Cole (1978, 1981), Smith (1988, 1991, 1997, 1999e, 2006e, 2010), Tannen (1982), Whorf (1940), and Winchester (1985). Let it be noted that including this list of scholars is not to imply an inexorable linear development of thought, nor a state of agreement among them, but is offered as a way of opening to the reader the body of work that informs my argument—these are the voices who have most strongly influenced the particular creative interpretation I am making of the encounter of orality and literacy.

As will become clearer, the notion of orality as inspired by this body of work and forwarded in the present study does not simply refer to the act of speaking or of using the oral-aural modality, but rather to the *noesis of orality*. Noesis is a term derived from the Greek for 'insight' in the sense of intuitive or immediate understanding, as

opposed to 'dianoia,' which refers to rational or discursive thought. Although the term is sometimes used to denote intellectual processes or cognition in a general sense, I employ the term noesis, as does Ong, for its deep resonances with the intuitive cultural lifeworld. Nigerian scholar Abiola Irele, who makes applicative use of Ong's concept of noetics, describes the term as designating "the relation between the mental landscape of a cultural community and its modes of cognition" (Irele, 2001, p. 249). Becker (1982), who also adopts the term from Ong, uses it similarly to denote the reciprocal relation between the particular way that languages mean and the particular patterns of thought and perception present in a sociolinguistic environment. The noesis of orality, then, indicates the constellation of lifeworld circumstances that accompany and are afforded by the oral mode in cultures where orality is the sole or predominant mode of human linguistic intercourse.

Grasping Orality: Challenges to the Literate Imagination

Probably the first thing for people conditioned in a world of literacy to understand about life within orality is that it is nearly impossible for us, hyperliterate academics in particular, to understand life within orality. Ong writes:

Fully literate persons can only with great difficulty imagine what a primary oral culture is like. Try to imagine a culture where no one has ever 'looked up' anything—this is an empty phrase, with no conceivable meaning. Without writing, words as such have no visual presence. They are sound. You might 'call them back', recall them. But there is nowhere to look for them. They are occurrences, events (1982, p. 31).

Ong and other scholars have noted in this connection that the Hebrew word for 'word' is 'dabar,' a term which also means, simply, 'event.' To try to imagine all information, all knowledge, all communication, as 'event,' is mind-boggling—as soon as anything is expressed, it is gone, except in memory. No records keep track of who was born when and where, no deeds memorialize to whom land or other possessions belong, no constitutions proclaim the basis for laws that will govern the land, there are no definitions for words or sayings that are not immediately available in experiential context, the theories and ideas developed by anyone can only ever be shared with those in direct earshot. The entire collective knowledge of a culture must necessarily be contained and transmitted in ways and in amounts that can be held in memory, for there is no other place to store it.

In cultures of primary orality, people's worth, education, and place in society is not in any way determined by the ability to read and write. Winchester (1985) provides a humorous but thought-provoking take on this issue in his allegory about an imagined group of aliens from another planet who, out to conduct some positivistic research on the role of literacy on earth, dropped a 'litron bomb' that destroyed everyone's ability to read. As you can imagine, in the wake of the litron bomb a very different set of people ascended to leadership positions than those in power in our literate world, with qualites such as knowledge of how to do things, diplomacy, empathy, and memory skyrocketing in importance.

Discourse in oral societies is always accompanied, simultaneously, by innumerable levels of other meaning-bearing elements—gesture, facial expression, volume, verbal inflection—making oral communication much more transparent than

linear, unimodal writing. As Ong notes, the writer struggles in vain to evoke a full

context of meanings that are easily accessible in physically proximal communication

(Ong, 1982). The greater point, the noetic aspect of this, is that the characteristics of

communicative mode, over time, lead to corresponding abilities, preferences, and

traditions within in culture: if you spend a lot of time sensing and interpreting unspoken

cues, you and everyone else get good at such sensing and interpretation, and this

becomes inherent to how you interact with the world and construct knowledge. In an

oral culture, one would never emphasize that something is true by calling it '*literally*

true', or say that instructions were followed 'to the letter'—such expressions only

surface in sociolinguistic contexts that place such high value on literacy as to equate it

with truth and precision. It is interesting to note that this English usage has a French

equivalent in '*littéralement*' and a German one, '*buchstäblich*'; both languages use a

word that, as in English, refers explicitly to letters of the alphabet to emphasize that

something is exactly or truly so, a truth criterion that is not only unknown but

unimaginable in oral settings.

These examples provide a background for understanding that the way people

live and learn and spend their time in oral cultures—the enveloping noesis—is

decidedly distinct from the taken-for-granted ways of life in literate, and now digital,

cultures of the industrialized societies. From our earliest moments in literate cultures, in

many cases even before birth, literacy is inscribed in our being in ways that are foreign,

even today, in cultures of strong orality. We hyperliterates may be able to reason to this

distinction, we may respond to depictions of oral culture in novels like Achebe's *No

longer at ease* (1961) and *Anthills of the savannah* (1988) or in films such as *The gods*

must be crazy (Uys, 1980), *Dances with Wolves* (Costner, 1990) and *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009). This very study is predicated on the belief that we can understand something about the distinctiveness of orality and create more ethical, meaningful reciprocities between oral and literate and digital ways of knowing. But we cannot interiorize the oral noesis. Ong may in fact be understating the manner when he writes that "freeing ourselves of chirographic and typographic bias in our understanding of language is probably more difficult than any of us can imagine" (1982, p. 76). Ong's own memorable example illustrates the point:

> Though words are grounded in oral speech, writing tyrannically locks them into a visual field forever. A literate person, asked to think of the word 'nevertheless,' will normally (and I suspect always) have some image, at least vague, of the spelled-out word and be quite unable ever to think of the word 'nevertheless' for, let us say, 60 seconds without adverting to any lettering but *only* to the sound. This is to say, a literate person cannot fully recover a sense of what the word is to purely oral people. (Ong, 1982, p. 12, italics original)

A message that Ong emphasizes throughout his work is that the movement from orality to literacy is only ever in one direction: individuals and cultures may sojourn from orality to literacy, but no one goes in the opposite direction—starting out literate and later, through deliberate acts of learning, acquiring the ways and means of orality. Those, such as classics scholars, who learn languages only in the scriptural modes may want to argue this point, but, again, this study is not considering orality simply as a language modality, but as evocative of a noetic environment, a cultural mentality, a way of life, one that is at least partially, and often quite fully abandoned when a person or

culture fully embraces the affordances of literacy. It is this sense of finality that gives rise to Ong's axiom that one must die to orality to enter into literacy, an idea that I introduced in Chapter Two and will explore further in the final interpretive section.

An Anecdotal Example of the Power of Medium

At this point, acknowledging the foregone difficulty, I want to take a moment to consider how we might better grasp the profound effect that medium of communication has on what is valued enough to be communicated and how life is conducted. Perhaps some who are reading these pages are old enough to remember when telephones were always landlines, usually only one in the house and it was rotary—no cordless handsets, no call waiting and no caller i.d. Think back. How was life structured differently, based just on the affordances of the medium? I remember very clearly the extent to which parents were able to screen calls, and the very limited privacy for conversations. Politenesses were observed, codes were developed, calls were scheduled. Conversations couldn't go on too long, as the phone had to be shared. My cousins from the farm laughed at my complaints, because theirs was a party line where others who didn't honor the ring tone assigned to each house on the party line would routinely "rubber in," that is, listen to others' conversations, for fun and gossip. In all the single line homes, every call that came to the house was answered, usually in a formalistically civil way—there was no knowing who the caller could be, and in any event the very occurrence of the ring had a sort of community function. If you called someone who was on the phone, you got a busy signal, period. If someone wasn't at the address you called, you couldn't talk to them, although you might talk to someone else at that location. The old style of telephoning was conducted within a general understanding

that an individual could not be reached, constantly, no matter where they were, and that

when you called you might end up talking to someone else, a friend or family member,

instead.

The point that you couldn't reach people wherever they happened to be, though,

is the kind that we think of *now*, after things have changed, in an age of cellular phones.

From the time of the original telephone exchanges when an operator was needed to

place calls, to the party line, to single landlines in homes, to our era of a cell phone

attached to a single person, there has been a steady diminution in the extent to which

telephoning belongs to the public sphere. Since that time not only the manner of

interpersonal relations has been impacted by changes in telephonic media but myriad

other aspects of society as well, from employment to entertainment to the environment,

as is always the case with the arrival of new media. Even for those who lived it, it is

fairly hard to remember all the ways in which life was distinct then from our present

telephonic situation—for a younger generation it is barely imaginable at all. Practices

and values have changed, primarily due to changes in the often completely

unintentional affordances of the medium which pervade society far beyond the

imagination of those who invent them and discrete acts related to their use. To put the

final topspin on all of this, there is mounting evidence (Rich, 2010) that cell phones

may cause brain tumors, to the extent that the country of France has taken significant

legal steps to limit their use—another affordance that will have affects far beyond those

intended by makers and users of cellular phones. Fundamental changes in medium of

communication change human life in fundamental ways, and this holds whether we are

talking about oral people acquiring literacy or literates "coming to terms" with the

affordances of electronic and digital media. As the West's great theorist of these issues,

Canadian sociologist Marshall McLuhan (1964/1994), has put it:

> We are no more prepared to encounter radio and TV in our literate milieu than
>
> the native of Ghana is able to cope with the literacy that takes him out of his
>
> collective tribal world and beaches him in individual isolation. We are as numb
>
> in our new electric world as the native involved in our literate and mechanical
>
> culture (p. 16).

McLuhan's work stands in obstinate counterpoint to any approach that would

seek to subsume the impact of medium of communication under other categories, such

as language or culture. In his influential and prophetic books *The Gutenberg galaxy:*

The making of the typographic man (1967) and especially *Understanding media: The*

extensions of man (1964/1994), McLuhan explicated his signature notion that the

various forms of media—writing, the phonetic alphabetic, chirographic culture,

printing, and finally electronic media—are semiotic extensions of the human central

nervous system, each instance of which extends and amplifies human beings, even as it

brings about and expands a "never-explained numbness…in the individual and society"

(p. 6). McLuhan explicates this phenomenon with reference to the Greek myth of

Narcissus (>Gr. *narcosis*, 'numbness'), where the young man falls irretrievably in love

with an extension of himself—his image in the pond—which numbs his perceptions and

makes him incapable of responding in actual human relationships, even with the

beautiful nymph Echo who tries in vain to woo him. This tale echoes much in today's

media culture, for instance, the tendency to fall in love with extensions of oneself such

as Facebook or Twitter, endlessly reporting even the most banal events of one's day to the world, or enclosing oneself in the private auditory universe of one's iPod.

Strongly influenced by McLuhan, Ong (1967) has described the territory addressed here from the perspective of three stages of the word: (1) the unrecorded word of oral culture, (2) the denatured word of alphabet and print, and (3) the word of "electronics and the sensorium today" (p. 87). Reflecting for over twenty pages on the "complications and overlappings" (pp. 53-76) of this stage schema, Ong nevertheless, like McLuhan and others in this tradition, insists on the pronounced and characteristic kinds of impact each form has on human life.

On the Limitations of Language for Expressing Truth and Meaning

Following the French philosopher Henri Bergson, McLuhan radicalizes the argument by asserting that the act of speaking already diminishes and impairs the values of the collective unconscious and constitutes a distanciation of the individual from a wider and deeper truth (McLuhan, 1964/1994, p. 79). This realization resonates with monastic traditions all over the world that observe partial or total silence, and is in accord with practices in many cultures (Asian and Native American for instance) where silence plays a much greater role in communication than in Eurocentric environments. It is worth recalling here that the word 'express' derives from the Latin *expressare*, 'push or press out,' related to clay being pressed out and taking hard form. Thus there is a sense in which an inherent plenitude of potentiality is immobilized as soon as meaning reaches hard form in the level of words (Watson-Schneegans, 1994).

The Western debate over whether language in any form can express the fullness of meaning goes back to ancient times, with Aristotle seeming to hold that "nothing is

ever lost in the transmission from soul to speech to writing" (Smith, 2010, p. 434), and Socrates and Plato finding that notion unsustainable, as we saw in Chapter Two. The Aristotelian perspective, Smith argues, underwrites positivistic and logical confidence that if proper methods are followed and correct logic is used, equivalencies and probabilities can be stated with certainty. The other, Socratic/Platonic side of the coin is represented in interpretive traditions which are sensitive to how words both conceal and reveal meaning.

An understanding of the dual nature of truth appears in many quarters; in the Western tradition it is notable that the ancient Greek word for 'truth,' *aletheia*, is a word which means both 'to reveal' and 'to conceal.' Spanish language philosopher José Ortéga y Gassét, a great admirer of Dilthey's, has described how utterances are always both "deficient" and "exuberant" (Ortega y Gasset, 1959, p. 3) that is, any expression always says less, and more, than what is intended and what appears directly in words. The teachings of Buddhism are replete with images of the variability of linguistic expression in its relation to truth. In the classic text of the *Te-Tao Ching* we learn that "the name that can be named is not the constant name"(1993 version, p. 55), a statement that recommends a certain reserve with regard to the otherwise confident presumptions of scientific positivism, as well as declarations of benchmark educational standards in the various disciplines. Contemporary Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn enjoins us to remember that words, which he compares to containers, are not just neutral signs but rather give shape to what is expressed: "With words it is especially difficult to escape from conceptual categorizations…Remember the empty bottles? They had definite shapes and sizes even before being filled" (Hahn, 1988, p. 49).

Japanese psychologist Takeo Doi (1985) has devoted much attention to the ways in which language always simultaneously hides and reveals, and has related this work to Asian and Western cultural contexts. According to Doi, the instant we say something, we exclude everything else, casting light on one particular area from among the infinite possibilities and consigning everything else, the areas not selected for expression, to shadow. All language has this double function, bringing to surface only a tiny tip of an interrelated iceberg. "We could almost say," Doi writes, "that it is actually from out of the shadows that words emerge" (1985, p. 31). Reflective of its great sensitivity to the reciprocal dynamic of silence and expression, the Asian psyche, argues Doi, is better aligned with this linguistic reality than is the American psyche in particular, sparing Asia many widespread psychic problems that plague American culture, including alienation, loneliness, depression, and violence to self and others. What Americans desperately long for, according to Doi, is what is known in Japanese as *amai*, translated as 'belonging'—and this is precisely what an attenuated focus on expression and self-expression precludes. All of this recalls the literature reviewed in Chapter Two which refutes the notion of language as a mere conduit of meaning and describes worldviews based on reciprocal interconnection.

Bearing in mind these insights on the evanescent relationship between the specific facilities of language and the chthonian chaos of what is meant or can be meant, this study takes the position that there is infinitely more going on in language use than simply giving verbal or scriptural expression to a thought with no addition, loss, or distortion of meaning. This is manifestly the case when we are talking about different languages, different modes, and attendant differing worldviews, which do not without

further ado lend themselves to easy representation within other systems, a false assumption of Eurocentric thinking which Battiste and Henderson have called "the illusion of benign translatability" (2000, p. 79). Following the body of scholarship on which this study is based, the visual symbolization of meaning that began with little clay tokens and erupted repeatedly in fits and starts, in various global locations, morphing through all sorts of forms—cuneiform, hieroglyphic, rebus, pictographic, ideographic, logographic, logosyllabic, syllabic, morphophonetic, phonetic[5]—did not amount to just a visual symbolization of meaning but rather, in each case according to its specific characteristics and the extent of its diffusion, to a revolution in the structure of psyche and society.

Some Effects of Alphabetic and Academic Literacy

Much has been said in the preceding pages about transformation in mind and society since the invention of the phonetic alphabet, but one point not yet noted is the improbability of its having been invented to begin with. As Goody and Watt (1968) have put it, "The notion of representing a sound by a graphic symbol is itself so stupefying a leap of the imagination that what is remarkable is not so much that it happened relatively late in human history, but that it ever happened at all" (p. 38). Greek myth describes the Phoenician King Cadmus as both the bringer of literacy to the Peloponnesus and the sower of dragon's teeth that, once planted, transformed into warriors which conquered the Greek city states. McLuhan locates in this mythical account the notion that the phonetic alphabet, from the beginning, "meant power and authority and control of military structures at a distance" (McLuhan, 1964/1994, p. 82),

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[5] Historical information on the development of writing is taken from Goody and Watt (1968), Ong (1982a), and Wolf (2007).

and notes that phonetic letters not only visually resemble teeth, but "their power to put teeth into the business of empire-building is manifest in our Western history" (McLuhan, 1964/1994, p. 83).

In Chapter Two I surveyed the unique properties of the phonetic alphabet according to Olson, Ross, Deloria, and others. McLuhan's theory extensively explores what he calls "the lineal structuring of rational life by phonetic literacy," claiming that the phonetic alphabet's affordance of "breaking up of every kind of experience into uniform units in order to produce faster action and change of form (applied knowledge) has been the secret of Western power over man and nature alike" (McLuhan, 1964/1994, p. 85). The phonetically represented word, says McLuhan, "sacrifices worlds of meaning and perception" that were contained in hieroglyph, ideogram, and, by extension, in the spoken word and its characteristic patterns (McLuhan, 1964/1994, p. 83). Noted French African literature scholar Alain Ricard concurs on the point that the West is differentiated from Africa by the West's particular logic of rationality which is "impossible to separate from alphabetic writing" (Ricard, 2004, p. 22). It is important to note the great extent to which these semiotic perspectives accord with the positions of indigenous thinkers such as Ross (1989), Deloria (1970), and Battiste and Henderson (2000) reviewed earlier, as well as ecological orientations expressed in the work of Bateson (1972, 1991), Berry (1988. 2009), Bowers (1993b, 1993c, 1995), Hillman (1993), Hogan (1005), Jardine (1998, 2000), and others, leading to the understanding that the phonetic alphabet and the cultural forms it has facilitated are far from neutral in a semiotic sense, and far from harmless in a political one. Smith has borne out this point in asserting that "the culture of literacy, which Western culture is, has created its own

crisis in the sense that a culture oriented by print is one oriented by a particular way of arriving at what should be valued, and how" (Smith, 1999c, p. 71). What is valued, as we have seen, is abstract categorization, linear thinking, definitions and indexes, propositional logic, syllogistic reasoning, reference to texts, and methodically conducted research for truth validation; what is pre-empted is experience, context, community, belonging, ambiguity and spirituality—pre-empted by the authority of the eminently scrutable written phonetic word.

This is not at all to say that the phonetic alphabet has nothing but derogatory effects or potential effects, any more than the legacy of science or scientific thinking has been or could only be entirely negative. In contrast to other forms of writing, phonetic alphabets are profoundly speech-related—anything that can be said can be written down just as it is, with much less gnomic indeterminacy than always inheres in ideographic or hieroglyphic forms, for instance. As an avid user of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) for learning and teaching foreign languages I can attest to the great usefulness of a universal phonetic representation system. To be able to note instantly, in writing, the sounds of an authentic utterance without needing to know what it means has enormous value for being able to repeat, practice, and analyze the language paradigmatically and syntagmatically—it provides one with a preserved sample. At the same time, the power to preserve language in this way also represents a largely unrecognized danger, the potential for divorce from meaning, for misunderstanding and misuse accompanied by an impression of instrumental mastery, as well as an inherent need for trust relationships where none are promised or guaranteed. The danger of an over-extrapolated phonetic alphabet is coterminous with the danger of overextended

positivism—it proceeds with an objective method, appears to capture truth without adding or subtracting anything, and can be replicated by anyone properly trained. And yet all the same weaknesses are present here as explicated in the hermeneutic critique of logical positivism: the sample is frozen, quite amenable to being passed from hand to hand without true grasp or appreciation of rich semantic resonances that connect to the sociolinguistic community. Only the exterior surface is captured, and nothing of the inner life of meaning that gives language its reason for existing at all.

Benefits and Pitfalls of Phonetic Alphabetic Literacy: An Anecdote

I would like to illustrate this elusive point with a story about a speech I once gave in Hmong, a language in which I have no proficiency. A trusted native speaker of Hmong also fluent in English gave me the Hmong version of what I told him I wanted to say, and then I phonetically transcribed the Hmong phrases he pronounced for me using IPA. This exercise required the sharpest use of my knowledge of IPA, as well as careful, repeated practice with my tutor; in other words, technical competency played a major role. However, as I stepped up to the podium to deliver the speech to a large Hmong-speaking audience (who afterwards confirmed that it was intelligible), what struck me was the pivotal role that trust and relationship played in this endeavor—how easy it would have been for a translator to render the points of my message less than faithfully in Hmong, and how easy it might be for some to assume that I had learned Hmong. Most threatening, perhaps, of all is the way in which the false sense of proficiency I both acquired and gave, one that was based only on an extremely frozen, inauthentic relationship with the Hmong phrases I uttered, and required no understanding of or true interest in the Hmong community, could easily become a

mindset of mastery and control. This, I would argue, is precisely what typically happens in the various enactments of the positivist scientific paradigm—the ability to preserve, dissect, analyze and replicate lends a patina of professionalism and competence that is nearly universally admired, while the fact that the encounter is severed from the human lifeworld is ignored. The point here is that the phonetic alphabet, while making available incredible opportunities for reflecting exactly word for word what is said, carries with it a distanciation of expression from understanding which creates vulnerability and potential for abuse and manipulation.

The Ambivalent Legacy of Alphabetic Literacy and the Printing Press

Perhaps the most striking social advantage of a phonetic alphabet is its democratizing function (Ong, 1982). Learning to read and write, a skill that takes decades to master in ideographic traditions, suddenly becomes accessible not only to privileged scribes, clerics, and nobles, but to common people. As many have pointed out, it takes as little as a few hours to learn a typical phonetic alphabet, while the acquisition of all Chinese ideograms, for instance, takes anywhere from twenty to thirty years and requires an enormous amount of neurological space (Wolf, 2007). The democratizing revolution of literacy was particularly notable in Europe after the Reformation, when knowing how to read for oneself took on a new spiritual purpose. During this same era came the other immensely democratizing invention after the phonetic alphabet: the printing press. Eisenstein (1979) has demonstrated in her massive two-volume work the encompassing changes in all dimensions of life brought about by the alphabetic printing press, from the expansion of the European renaissance to the rise of modern capitalism and science to colonial exploration to, notably for our purposes,

the birth of more generally diffused knowledge and universal literacy as serious

projects.

Ong (1982) relates the invention of the printing press to the dynamic of orality

and literacy, pointing out that the objectification of words as 'things' that began with

the phonetic alphabet and developed in chirographic writing reached a new level of the

"denatured word" (Ong, 1967, p. 35) with the advent of print. This augured other

changes, as Ong argues, "alphabetic letterpress printing, in which each letter was cast

on a separate piece of metal, or type, marked a psychological breakthrough of the first

order," embedding the word for the first time in the manufacturing process and turning

it into a commodity (Ong, 1982, p. 116). Prior to the printing press, in the age of

manuscript culture, writing retained the poetic relation to sound, and typically served to

"recycle knowledge back to the oral world" (p. 117) in the oral forms of Western

rhetoric, recitations of texts, and oral demonstrations, of which the modern doctoral

defense is a lingering example. Words themselves were treated as random or aesthetic

shapes in chirographic and early printset culture in ways "which often seem to us

crazily erratic in their inattention to visual word units" (p. 118). Thus texts of the early

1500's such as Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Gouernour* contain very

strange hyphenation even of major words, and inconsequential words like "The" were

set in huge typeface on a title page, while what we would consider important words are

split and crowded in a way that violates our modern sense of textuality (cited in Ong,

1982, p. 118). What underlies this sense of violation, Ong says, is related to the

affordances of print itself: "print situates words in space more relentlessly than writing

ever did," leading to a psychological effect in cultures of high print literacy that "we

feel the printed words before us as visual units" (p. 119). I would suggest that this manner of hermeneutic insight sheds a different light than the usual SLA take on the construct of 'print literacy': it is more than just another scrutable variable to consider in designing a study of preliterate students, or a discrete skill whose acquisition may constitute an instructional goal (think of all the initiatives to teach 'sight words'), but a generative force in its own right with power to influence not only those studied but those conducting studies. In the manner of all media including speech itself, alphabetic printing is a medium that fundamentally impacts its users.

The Odd Phenomenon of Learned Latin

For 1500 years, literacy took an unusual turn in Europe that is not particularly democratic but is relevant in several ways to the present study. After the fall of the Roman Empire around 500 CE, when Latin language was giving way to countless vernacular dialects that would much later cohere into French, Spanish, Italian, German, and so on, school was conducted in a particular form of Latin that functioned as a uniform means for students (only males) with disparate home languages to become literate and receive instruction. This highly standardized, codified form, called Learned Latin, was pressed into service after Latin had ceased to play the centralizing role of the language of empire, thus Learned Latin was the mother tongue of no one, and functioned entirely as an artificial instructional vehicle through which to build literacy and knowledge of general subjects through access to ancient texts.

Ong notes that several features of the nature and function of Learned Latin make it a paradoxical case in history (Ong, 1977; 1982). There were no female users of the language, no mothers knew it and it was not used at home but only at school.

Therefore, it was not connected to the unconscious as languages learned in infancy

always are, it was not part of the individual's "linguo-speculative thought system"

(Amati-Mehler, Argentieri, & Canestri, 1993, p. 45), making it a language devoid of

visceral feeling and predisposed to clinical objectivity. There were no purely oral users,

that is, every single user of it could also write it, another element that lent an aura of

authority to Learned Latin. Ong (1982) posits that the already formidable power of

writing to separate the knower and the known, establishing the conditions for

objectivity, was significantly boosted by the widespread scholastic use of this artificial

written language:

> Learned Latin effects even greater objectivity by establishing knowledge in a
>
> medium insulated from the emotion-charged depths of one's mother tongue,
>
> thus reducing interference from the human lifeworld and making possible the
>
> exquisitely abstract world of medieval scholasticism and of the new
>
> mathematical modern science which followed on the scholastic experience.
>
> Without Learned Latin, it appears that modern science would have got under
>
> way with greater difficulty, if it had got under way at all. (p. 112)

While such cases of a language unimplicated in anyone's psychic structure but used

widely for educational purposes are rare, I would argue that there are two languages

with many of the same characteristics as Learned Latin in operation in the present era:

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), a target language and language of instruction the

world over that is quite distinct from the English that any native speaker uses, and is

linked to projects of economic and political development in complex ways (House,

2003; Jenkins, 2007), and Standard American Academic English, the language of

educational standards and standardized tests, institutionally ensconced but quite distinct

from any version of natural American English, and also linked to political and economic

constructions of progress and privilege. As in the case of Learned Latin, these are

languages that are, by their formation and function, distanced from the psyche and

lifeworld of human beings, reified and preserved outside of *Dasein* for instrumental

purposes that are prolix in their complexity. I will apply the theme of artificial academic

English further in the concluding chapters.

<center>*Literacy and Digitacy*</center>

Concerns over the impact of medium in our present era revolve not so much

around literacy, but around the effects of digital media. It is not the immediate purpose

here to study the effects of digitacy in depth, but it is relevant to note that, just as

Socrates once worried that writing would diminish human intellect, so now the cover

story in a recent issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* asks, "Is Google Making Us Stoopid?"

(2008, July/August). In this piece which traces the affordances of literacy with reference

to Luria, Ong, Scribner and Cole, and others cited in the present study, the author

concludes that the cognitive orientations encouraged by Google and other immediately

available, surface-structured digital media are indeed distinct and distinctly

impoverished. A few months later, another cover story in the same magazine posed the

counterquestion, "Is Google Actually Making Us Smarter?" (*The Atlantic Monthly*,

2008, November), and laid out the case that the kind of consciousness encouraged by

Google and other digital immediacy media represents an evolutionary new intelligence

that will be the hallmark of successful people in the future. The debate that started

thousands of years ago thus rages on, with passionate advocates on either side of the

question and many, perhaps most, seeking a middle way. As this chapter is concerned with the general question of the power of medium, I would like to look briefly at some interesting points in the modern conversation about digitacy and its effects, with particular reference to the situation of high school LFS ELLs who must face head-on the secondary literacy environment of digital communication even as they must simultaneously come to terms with noesis of initial literacy.

Research has shown that a younger generation raised on digital forms has experienced changes in brain architecture according to the affordances of the medium (Beach & O'Brien, 2008; Small & Vorgan, 2008), and appears to have lost its taste and patience for extended reading, along, presumably, with an appreciation of the particular aesthetic and intellectual insights that depth reading of fiction or non-fiction texts can provide. A body of scholarly work in literacy education is now focused on students' preference for "textoids"—small, digestible chunks of text or multimedia presentations of information or entertainment material as found, for instance, in graphic novels and electronic montage forms (Fischer, 2006; O'Brien & Dubbels, 2009). Work in this vein appears to have accepted and embraced the cognitive changes wrought by changes in medium, which always result in changes in content, not only of reading material but of lifeworld and values. This school of thought sees multimedia forms, whatever their cognitive consequences, as inevitable and laudable, or at least not lamentable, developments. A frequent argument is that textoid-based forms accommodate the kind of consciousness students have already constructed by the time they get to school, thus pedagogical initiatives which employ digital and textoid-type approaches promote

student motivation and engagement, inarguably a crucial consideration especially in challenged schools.

Another school of thought represented by such scholars as Adler and Van Doren (1972), Bloom (1994, 2000), Hirsch (2000), Wolf (2007), and adherents of the Great Books approach strongly resists the loss of depth literacy since they see literacy as a unique and actualizing human activity which has impacted human cognition in a very desirable way and which reaches its highest form in great literature. Those of this persuasion do not accept but on the contrary struggle against the constellation of phenomena that surround the decline of engaged reading in American culture, what modern literary critics routinely refer to as the death of the novel (Sukenick, 2003). Many school English teachers may be counted in this camp; they tend to resist changes to English curricula which recommend digital media projects involving images, film, sound, and so on as replacements for projects which engage students with great literature. Teachers of this mindset are also typically resistant to modifications of the high-standards English curriculum on behalf of the learning needs of ELL students, including most particularly those with limited prior schooling and literacy. The learning gap for these students seems to be envisioned in the title of Wolf's popular book on literacy development: *Proust and the squid: The story and science of the reading brain* (2007), where the famously profuse French author Marcel Proust represents for Wolf the apogee of soaring human literary achievement, while the squid, a creature whose brain cells have been considered by reading researchers as eminently rudimentary and adaptable, a sort of neurological blank slate, represents the state of human mind prior to

literacy. In this view, high school ELL students without prior schooling are closer to the squid.

Another viewpoint that is skeptical or resistant to a full-on embrace of digitacy in education is that of ecological and indigenous thinkers, who see this development as another distanciation from lived life in nature and community, from hermeneutically understood *Dasein*, a further extraction of the being of a person from the heart of traditional ways connecting the individual to elder, community, and nature along the modes of face-to-face oral communication. The argument can cogently be made that digital media restore some of the features of oral noesis, constructed along the semiotic exuberances of image, sound, and iconography. Yet there is no denying that, while digital media may permit the electronic maintenance of social relationships and may emphasize the role of the imagic in American culture (as opposed to phonetic alphabet linearity), they are not at all automatically supportive of in-person relationships, nor of ecological values undermined by manufacturing and instrumental use of resources in order to produce digital technologies, points that Bowers (1988, 1995, 2006), Bateson (1972, 1991), and Goldsmith (1992), among others, have so strenuously and authoritatively argued. Examples of changes in the lifeworld as a result of digital media are legion—the reader can insert any number of phenomena s/he has observed involving texting, social media networking, and graphic and multimedia—and these changes are by no means only negative any more than all the feared changes brought about by literacy have been harmful to human life. But they do operate on a platform of physical distanciation. I recently overheard a couple of friends in their twenties decide not to attend a high school reunion "since they can always check with anyone they want to see

on Facebook or Twitter." How quickly you get a return text message has become a gauge of the closeness of relationships, and it is an effort to get everyone to agree to stay off of phones and blackberries during dinner. There are even digital media casualties--people have been injured and killed crossing the street while texting, hit by drivers talking on their cell phones, an astounding example of the way that personal digital media sever people from attunement to the physical environment, making them absent to what, or who, is present. Whether embraced or rejected, the extending and distancing function of the medium is starkly in evidence.

Orality and Digitacy in Conflict: An Anecdote

I would like to share a particularly poignant example of the relation of digital media to a transformation in immigrant family experience. Over the past few years, the literacy education program at the University of Minnesota has partnered with a challenged urban high school to create a program situated within the English curriculum that has students using various forms of digital media to explore themes and questions of interest to them, as a way of promoting textual and digital literacy (Lewis & Scharber, 2010). I should add that I worked in the ESL program housed in the same building, and so am directly familiar with the school and student body. The program, entitled DigMe, a name linking digital media awareness to affirmation of self, was reported to be very popular; indeed, clips that the researchers showed of student films evinced great creativity, engagement, and critical involvement with important civic themes. The point I want to bring out here, though, was contained in an off-hand remark by an immigrant student participant, who told one of the researchers, "I had to *teach* my parents about Powerpoint! They didn't even know what Powerpoint *was*!" This story,

shared at a presentation of the DigMe project to a scholarly audience, was presented

with an air of accomplishment, and occasioned appreciative chuckles from across the

room. It is heartwarming in a way to think of immigrant students teaching their parents

the latest technology, a practice which might end up benefiting them all in an immediate

pragmatic sense.

What struck me, however, was how this remark speaks to the immense abyss

between what has mattered in this immigrant community up to now as opposed to the

great unquestioned value of the Powerpoint program. I want to ask, in what way do

technologies such as these have a similar noetic role to play in immigrant communities

as the Coke bottle fallen from an airplane played for the Sho people of the Kalahari in

the 1980 film *The gods must be crazy* (Uys, 1980)—irresistibly interesting, of uncertain

function and purpose, a differentiator between those in the know and those outside, and

ultimately too damaging to traditional values to keep around? Before we proceed further

to cover the planet with the blanket of Western educational values and technologies,

shall we not at least pause to consider how the artifacts of literacy and digitacy interact

with values contained and expressed in other media, reflective of other worldviews

(Bowers, 1988, 1995, 2006)?

The great generational reversal engendered by changes in media takes center

stage in this story—the role of the venerated wise elder who holds all valuable

knowledge in the community is exchanged for the role of an ignorant who doesn't even

know what Powerpoint is, requiring instruction from his or her own child in this crucial

matter that represents one of the gateways to progress and development of the

individual into an empowered and self-affirming modern agent. The child, meanwhile,

is dismayed and embarrassed by his or her backward parents, and even shares this feeling with researchers he or she has no real relationship with, but who are representatives of the privileged and empowered academic class that students are encouraged to emulate. Here is an allegory of the giant ruptural leap across the abyss from relations that obtain within oral noesis to the technologically mediated structures of Western academic literacy and technology, one which asks us to consider in a deeper way exactly what makes knowledge of how to use Powerpoint or any digital media, or written texts for that matter, indubitably superior to other kinds of traditional knowledge and the relationships supported by it. Changes in media always call attention to questions of deeper cultural value, whether we notice it or not.

<p align="center">*Summary of the Power of Medium*</p>

From this aperçu of some key considerations in the nature and history of representation in the West, one begins to get a sense that the transformation from orality to literacy to digitacy is not a bland issue of acquiring new skills, leaving a person or a culture unaffected. I have tried to show that these effects are related to the affordances inherent in the medium itself which, in the manner of all media, deeply impacts its users to the point that we might wonder who, or what, is doing the using. Where orality is always enacted in a living context involving reciprocities of speaking and listening, reading and writing and, in a unique way, digitacy are isolating activities, removed and removing from the engaged lifeworld. Noted hermeneutics scholar Caputo (2000) has observed that

> writing reduces language to a diminished but ideal condition, to a linguistic
>
> concentrate, put in a sort of deep freeze… It is precisely because writing has

lowered the body temperature of language to near death, slowed down its living

functions to a point of almost perfect immobility, that language can acquire this

permanence… A strange thing on earth is writing. It is just this ideality, this

ghostly *Geistigkeit*, which gives the tradition its real power to hand itself down.

(p. 52)

It has been my goal in this chapter to deepen the understanding of the impact of

medium, with a special emphasis on the myriad dimensions of difference between

primarily oral and literacy-based orientations. The anecdotal example above about

lifeworld changes wrought by changes in telephone technology is a tiny piece of a much

larger revolution, one which is present with the intensity of clashing tectonic plates in

classrooms where older students from oral traditions enter into an often rushed

encounter with the very foreign world of academic literacy, a world in which the body

temperature of language is lowered to near death, while the students' entire life

experience has been within a world of language in its fully vivified oral nature, typically

without any of the participants—students or teachers—being aware of the magnitude of

what is taking place. I will look deeper into this issue in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

The Noesis of Orality

Background to Oral Noesis

This study proceeds with the understanding that people from strongly oral and indigenous cultures conduct their lives in ways that are characteristically distinct from the ways of hyperliterate Eurocentric cultures, and that it is in the moral and educational interest of the West, in particular the field of second language education, to take deliberate steps to learn what those characteristically distinct ways are. Certainly there are many scholars we could consult on this topic; I have reviewed the work of some in Chapter Two. In this section I will focus primarily on the three scholars, Walter Ong, Marie Battiste, and James Youngblood-Henderson, whose work I have found to hold great power to provoke thought and strengthen moral resolve both in the general sense of epistemological and ethical relations in a global world, and in the situated project of crafting the best possible educational opportunities for older preliterate L2 students.

As is the case with other categories of sociological analysis like race, class, or gender, orality as a construct must be considered as both significant and indeterminate—variable in various contexts, interacting with other constructs, not a single, rarefied, objective thing, but an important thing nevertheless. Within a hermeneutic conception, as indeed within an oral indigenous way of knowing, we can let it be both. Likewise, it is important to note that proposed stages or characteristics of orality must be considered neither as determinate categorizations, nor as evolutionary phases of development, nor as measures of the intelligence or worth of any community,

nor even always mutually exclusive. They are interpretive rather than diagnostic or strictly descriptive, offered not as a last word to end thought, but as images to provoke and deepen thought. Ong specifically locates the project of characterizing oral noesis within an exegetical, hermeneutic gesture, most pointedly perhaps in a 1988 article in which he argues that not only interpreting oral noesis but communication in oral culture itself is, from one utterance to the next, by its negotiative and ever indeterminate nature, deeply hermeneutic (Ong, 1988). It is not the purpose here to assign certain cultures or communities to one or more of the stages; it will be up to the reader to determine the usefulness of these interpretive constructs for understanding particular people and situations s/he may be involved with. Nor is it the purpose to claim that Ong's schema is incontestably true; while I find it a very useful approach to considering neglected questions, the reader may join me in disagreeing with aspects of the characterizations. Finally, I want to give notice that for purposes of provoking deeper reflection, I will often refer to characteristics of orality as they might pertain in conditions of pure orality, and leave it to the reader to make the mental adjustment for cases where orality and other modes are present simultaneously.

Stages of Orality

In his discussion of the characteristics of oral noesis, Ong (1982) refers to three stages or types of orality: primary, residual, and secondary. Primary orality refers to the increasingly rare situation in which a culture is untouched by literacy. There are a few cultures left in the world in which reading writing plays virtually no role, and some where literacy has been introduced but for various reasons is not significant in a general cultural sense. We may refer to cultures where reading and writing have a low degree of

impact on the daily life of significant segments of the population as primarily or strongly oral cultures or communities, as I have already done in preceding pages. The country of Somalia, with its exceedingly strong devotion to the forms and functions of orality (Irele, 2001) and a history of civil turmoil over the past twenty years which has prevented many from attending school, may be considered a primarily or strongly oral culture in many ways. Residual orality, according to Ong, refers to all the traces and practices of orality that persist, sometimes for a very long time, in cultures where reading and writing have become and remain meaningful activities for the population at large. We could look at residual orality in widely literate Yugoslavia, for instance, where a strong tradition of oral epic rhapsodizing continues and flourishes (Foley, 1977) or we could consider practices such as swearing a verbal oath in court or the doctoral oral defense as instances of residual orality within strongly literate cultures such as Canada, Europe, and the United States. Secondary orality refers to the kind of orality that arises in highly literate, technologized cultures manifested in technologies like telephone, radio, television, and recorded music. Secondary orality depends on and presupposes writing and technology. The highly stylized, technology-dependent oral form of rap music is an example of a practice that belongs to secondary orality.

While Ong's tripartite lens for looking at stages of orality is highly generalized, a condition that widens its scope but limits its contextual specificity, Irele, referencing Ong's general scheme, proposes three levels of orality particular to the African continent (Irele, 2001). The first level refers to ordinary communication used for denotative, factual purposes. The second level involves "rhetorical uses of language" that are "ever-present in traditional African discourse through the use of proverbs and

aphorisms…what one might call the 'formulaic' framework for speech acts, discursive modes, and indeed the structure of thought" (Irele, 2001, p. 9). Irele's characterization of everyday African thought and discourse as structured in this manner accords quite significantly with Ong's understanding of orally-toned cultures, as we shall explore below. The third level consists of carefully stylized creative and performative uses of language which are the oral counterpart of written literature and which represent, according to Irele "the basic intertext of the African imagination" (Irele, 2001, p. 11). For our purposes here, levels two and three are of special relevance since it is at these levels that the distinctive African oral noesis is vividly enacted; it is also here that the analytic schemas of Irele and Western scholars in the manner of Ong converge.

Metacharacteristics of Sound and Memory

The first characteristic features of oral noesis to consider are actually metacharacteristics—the unique qualities of sound, and the massive role that memory plays in oral culture. Orality is a mode conducted primarily within the auditory field, the world of sound, while literate cultures, the United States in particular, are highly focused on the visual mode, the world of sight. Oral cultures participate in the sensual world in a different way than highly literate cultures do, and the nature of their sensual engagement profoundly affects the respective cultural noeses afforded by the two modes. An understanding of orality thus needs to begin with a reflection on the nature of sound, a mode that is never permanent but exists "only when it is going out of existence" (Ong, 1982, p. 32):

> There is no way to stop sound and have sound. I can stop a moving picture
>
> camera and hold one frame fixed on the screen. If I stop the movement of
>
> sound, I have nothing—only silence, no sound at all. (p. 22)

The oral word, Ong explains, is not "a thing or a reification, but an event, an action,…a call from someone, to someone, an interpersonal transaction. No interactive persons, no words" (Ong, 1988, p. 267). Based on impermanent sound with no way to preserve it, more elaborated, sustained thought in oral cultures depends heavily on communication with an interlocutor. By contrast, as readers of these pages well know, complex thought in literate cultures is encoded in writing, which can be and usually is done alone.

Where vision accommodates both motion and immobility, sound, especially that which emanates from living creatures, is only ever dynamic, utterly resistant to stabilization. Hearing, the human sense that responds to sound, is a primordially open, receptive sense, whereas vision is open-or-closed, intentional, focused—hence Merleau-Ponty's observation that "vision dissects" (cited in Ong, 1982, p. 71). Unlike the gaze, which is necessarily directed, a characteristic of visuality with vast semiotic and political implications (Berger, 1972), auditory events in proximal context are diffuse. We are enveloped in sound, it comes at us rather than the reverse, while the sense of sight is one which we deliberately direct or perhaps choose not to use at all—thus we can say that, in its natural proclivities, hearing is inclusive, while sight is exclusive. We receive sound as a function of our permeability, we direct sight as a function of our will. Ong posits that the sound-attuned world in which strongly oral folk are immersed provides a way of understanding how oral noesis situates the individual within a web of relations, as opposed to positing the individual as an agentive originator, as Eurocentric

cultures do. It is interesting to note in this connection the work of French neurologist

Alfred Tomatis (1974), who has found provocative correlations between the particular

sound environment people were exposed to and their sense of well-being or lack of it,

leading him to conclude that listening is our "royal route" to the divine (cited in Wilson,

2000, p. 11), a finding which concords with Ong's notion of the affinity of sound and

thought (Ong, 1967). We can appreciate how the qualities of each of these senses have

immediate epistemological and spiritual implications: sound favors attunement,

participation and harmony, while sight favors agency, exploration and clarity of focus.

The other metacharacteristic to bear in mind in considering the psychodynamics

of orality is the incredible load such cultures place on the memory. Everything that is

worth passing on needs to be preserved in memory as mediated through the oral mode.

With no or limited means of recording thoughts in writing, strongly oral cultures have

developed nimble and powerful ways of preserving and recalling the collective

knowledge of the community, as well as jettisoning information that is no longer useful.

Knowing requires memory—it means not just to think of something once, but "to be

able to bring it into consciousness" as needed (Ong, 1981, p. 123). Oral cultures are

infused with habits and structures that enhance memorability, since, "once the words are

said, unless they are said in a way that is itself memorable, they are gone for good"

(Ong, 1981, p. 123).

Of course memory plays a role in literate environments, but the importance of

memory is diminishing in a world where we can access a great fund of knowledge

whenever we wish from digital servers available on call via the internet. As Ong has

observed, "the residual orality of a chirographic culture can be calculated to a degree

from the mnemonic load it leaves on the mind, that is, from the amount of memorization the culture's educational procedures require" (Ong, 1982, p. 41). Educational settings in fact provide a good sense of the differential role that memory plays in oral and literate cultures—it is common to observe the classroom experience of high school and adult preliterate students who often strongly prefer memorization as a mode of learning, and are often able to remember huge amounts of information if it is presented in a way amenable to the mnemonic skills. We will explore some of various means oral cultures use to preserve and recall knowledge in the next section.

Characteristics of Oral and Indigenous Noesis

In this chapter I have elucidated many of the critical issues related to characterizations of oral (or any) mindset, and have looked at key moments of the literacy and orality with a philosophical hermeneutic lens. In the remainder of this chapter I will explore characterisitics of oral noesis based on the body of Ong's work (1967; 1971; 1977; 1978; 1981; 1982; 1988, 1992), as well as that of other scholars, and encapsulated in Ong (1982), pages 37-57. I have numbered the characteristics one through nine, as Ong does. As I proceed, I will make note of remarkably similar points as expressed in indigenous worldview, which is always orally grounded, following the work of Battiste and Henderson (2000). I will continue to make strong use of constructed anecdote here to provide illustrations of the clash of oral noesis and academic hyperliteracy in ways that reflect the lifeworld situations in which the phenomena are embedded.

1.) Additive Rather than Subordinative

Ong describes oral style as strongly favoring additive construction, appending additional phrases with 'and' rather than subordinating one thought categorically to another through the use of subordinating conjunctions such as 'while' or 'whereas.' Oral communicative style favors pragmatics in service of the kind of communication needs that take place in the bodily presence of speaker and listener, while typographic discourse relies more on syntactics—the analytic subordinations that characterize writing (Chafe, 1982). We might say that the oral mind tends toward connectedness, while the literate mind seeks rational hierarchy and synthetic reduction. In support of this thesis, Ong points to recordings of primary oral narrative as given in Foley (1980). Oral epics such as the Mwindo epic of central Africa (Johnson, Hale, & Belcher, 1997) make a noticeably frequent use of additive construction: 'and then…', 'and then…'. Teachers of LFS high school students commonly note a preference for what in standards of good English writing are called "run-on sentences," that is, sentences connected additively. Battiste and Henderson's discussion of indigenous worldview as one of "appositeness" (2000, p. 79) resonates with Ong on this point.

Anecdote. I experienced the strongly additive quality of Sudanese oral culture in my work as a diversity consultant for a Midwestern American city. Community meetings were held in the multicultural center of the city which included a large gym. Speakers waited their turn at the microphone to address the community—once a speaker had the microphone that person was allowed to continue as long as s/he wished. It was remarkable to those of us from Western traditions who attended these meetings regularly not only that the weekly convocation tended to last over five hours, but that

each speaker would conclude a thought by intoning the word for 'and,' holding on to the timbre of it almost in the manner of singing, in order to additively link to the next thought.

2.) Aggregative rather than Analytic

Oral communication, as Irele (2001), Goody (1968; 1977, 1987), Ong, and others have noted, is organized to a very high degree around formulaic expressions which are instrumental in aiding memory: "clumps of fixed expressions…not so much simple integers as clusters of integers" (Ong, 1982, p. 38). Verbal formulas and epithets that can seem heavy, redundant, or cliché to the literate mind are essential for preserving oral knowledge. Thus, according to Ong, oral works refer not to the oak but to 'the sturdy oak,' not just the soldier but 'the brave soldier.' Homeric verse is constantly visited by 'wise Nestor' and 'clever Odysseus,' European fables are well familiar with 'the sly fox' and 'the wicked witch.' Political examples of residual orality are found in aggregate expressions like 'the glorious revolution of October' in the former Soviet Union, 'the dear Leader' in modern Korea, and 'footsoldier in the Reagan revolution' in the United States. Fixed expressions are significant repositories of knowledge acquired arduously over very long periods of time, therefore, in oral cultures, there is a need to keep them intact as there is nowhere outside the mind to store them. In sharp contrast to the analytic focus of Western thought and education, Ong notes that in oral cultures "without a writing system, breaking up thought—that is, analysis—is a high-risk procedure" (1982, p. 39).

Indigenous oral language, according to Battiste and Henderson, is reflective of a deeply understood rapport with nature, with the hidden but intelligible essences of

things. Language in this view does not merely *refer* in an objective and distanced way,

but makes manifest in the spoken realm what is synergistically connected to the

unspoken realm. When people speak from within a reciprocal relation between

perceiver and perceived, human and nature, expression is evocative and formulaic

rather than linear and expository: "their oratory and writings sound more like poetry

than prose" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 74). The goal is not so much to put one's

own stamp on discourse as a necessary gesture that earns one regard and renown, but to

attend carefully to the resonances of nature, elders, and community. In Mi'kmaw

culture, proper conduct toward nature and humans is passed on in the concept of

"dignities"—anecdotes which model lessons in a formulaic manner rather than "explicit

rules which are useless in a spontaneous world" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 78).

Classroom Anecdotes. An ESL teacher shared a story from her adult education

classroom which demonstrates the contextual power of aggregate expressions. One

woman was absent quite a few times from class, and no one seemed to know why.

Another lady mentioned that she had missed class a few times to stay home and make

baklava, a very time-consuming process. The class humorously speculated that the

constantly absent woman must be making baklava. After that, whenever someone was

absent, everyone just said, "she's making baklava," expressing not just an absence, but

a shared memory borne of the unique cohesion of the context. A similar thing happened

when a student kept having trouble remembering academic points learned previously in

class, a common challenge for older students without prior literacy and schooling—

finally the woman exclaimed, "I left my memory in Bosnia!" From that day forward,

whenever students couldn't remember, they said "I left my memory in Bosnia" whether they were from that country or not.

     Star Trek Example. An episode entitled Darmok from the television series *Star trek: The next generation* (Menosky, 1991) provides a fantastically vivid illustration of formulaic language that is well worth a view even for non-Trekkies. The story has Federation Captain Picard (a familiar heroic figure to fans of the series) transported to the unknown planet El-Adrel with Captain Dathon of the mysterious Tamarians, a race which uses English words but only in the form of aggregate metaphors that were formed over the history of the people as a result of shared experiences. Because of the metaphoric nature of Tamarian language and the categorical paradigmatic nature of English, the two languages were unintelligible even to Starfleet's universal translators— they could capture the words, such as in the statement the alien captain kept urging on Picard, "Darmok and Jalad at Tanagra!" but they had no idea what it meant, since it referred in a formulaic way to an ancient historical experience as encoded in Tamarian mythology. Availing themselves of their vast technological capabilities, the Enterprise crew tried in vain to decipher this mysterious language. On the planet, however, where the two captains faced a monstrous enemy bent on killing them both, Picard began to figure out the Tamarian metaphoric system through use of gesture, facial expression, and noting which metaphors Dathon used in what experiential contexts. Picard and Dathon joined together in battle against the dangerous entity, resulting in Dathon's being mortally wounded. As Dathon lay dying, Picard, who had come to respect the other captain a great deal, retold part of the telluric Epic of Gilgamesh with the aid of

gesturing, facial expressions, and props, ending with Gilgamesh's mourning for his slain companion Enkido, a foreshadowing of Picard's mourning at Dathon's imminent death.

The trouble was not over, however, for neither the Federation nor the Tamarian crew knew about the understanding that their captains had achieved on the planet, and started firing on each other. Captain Picard arrived back on the Enterprise just in time to use the Tamarians' own metaphors, accompanied by hand gestures and dramatic facial expressions such as Dathon had also used, to communicate the friendship and cooperation he and their captain had built, as well as describing Dathon's heroic death. At this news, the Tamarian crew bowed in ritual mourning, and after a moment of conferral, faced the crew of the Enterprise and intoned, most solemnly, "Dathon and Picard at El-Adrel," a new entry into Tamarian language which forevermore would denote, in metaphoric fashion, a situation in which unintelligibility and mutual suspicion were overcome by an experience where people facing a common danger come to trust each other by their actions. The new metaphoric expression may also be understood to pragmatically refer to a new relationship of cooperation between the Tamarians and the Federation.

To be accurate, however, it must be acknowledged that from the linguistic perspective of the Federation crew, the same one I am using in this work, it is not actually possible to state with certainty the meaning of the metaphoric version, how it should be translated into our more linear language system—the metaphoric version is defined as much by its ambiguous as its designative character, leaving much, permanently, to interpretation. And that is indeed the point. This story, like the baklava and memory stories above, demonstrates the powerful designative differences between

metaphoric, formulaic language and directly referential paradigmatic language, as well as the way in which formulaic, aggregative expressions are always testaments of community, as Denny (1991) has also observed.

3.) Redundant or copious

Oral discourse, says Ong, is characterized by a very high incidence of redundancy, "repetition of the just-said" (Ong, 1982, p. 40). In face-to-face communication, especially but not only where there is a large audience, repetitiveness aids in comprehension, allows hearers to confirm what they thought they heard, recalls earlier points made, and allows the speaker to emphasize a point while affording a moment of time in which to collect the next thought. Where modern Western cultures venerate crisp, clear, linear thought and typically disdain discourse that repeats the same points over and over, oral cultures encourage fluency, fulsomeness, and volubility. European rhetoricians of the still significantly oral Middle Ages called the redundant features of discourse, of which they made deliberate, extensive use, '*copia*', and writers of the period produced text that appear to the literacy-trained mind as "bloated with amplification, annoyingly redundant by modern standards (Ong, 1982, p. 41). A passage from the Mwindo oral epic of central Africa (Johnson, et al., 1997) serves to illustrate both the aggregative quality of oral style and the use of redundancy:

E! Munkonde, forger of large spears,

Forger of spears.

Munkonde, forger of large spears,

Forger of spears.

Munkonde, forger of things that are feared,

Forger of large spears.

Forger of things that are feared.

E! Munkonde, we are going to Roba-Land. (p. 287)

We can see here how the aggregative title of Munkonde, 'forger of large spears / things that are feared', incantatively accompanies his name, and repetition of the name and aggregative title continues for seven lines before new information, 'going to Roba-Land,' enters the narrative. If the teller of this tale needed a moment more to collect him- or herself before orating the next strophe, s/he could continue the redundancy as long as needed without offending an orally toned audience.

In our time we may note that one of the first lessons modern debate teams learn is a residually oral lesson in redundancy: 'tell what you're going to tell 'em, tell 'em, and tell 'em what you told 'em.' The residually oral forms of political speeches in cultures of high literacy also employ redundancy in this manner. But these instances in highly literate culture are quite limited in number and scope, more the exception than the rule, and are associated with residual oral practices whose lineage is the *copia* of rhetoric rather than the tight conventions of writing. Modern sensibilities, including very particularly as encoded in standards of good academic writing, warn against redundancy as a prominent pattern of discourse, but this is a technologically rather than a naturally-grounded preference. As Ong puts it, "sparsely linear thought as occasioned by writing is an artificial construction. Redundancy is much more natural to human thought (Ong, 1982, p. 40)

The schooled Western mind is not one marked by the tendency to repeat things just said, but by the ability to synthesize and summarize, to condense large amounts of

information into its constituent arguments, to find the main idea. Educational standards of instruction and assessment are focused on sparseness of expression and analysis to an overwhelming extent. Economy of expression is valued—there is little patience or appreciation for exceedingly copious text, a point I experienced recently in a course which explored the phenomenological writings of the famously fulsome Edmund Husserl. Near the end of a fittingly complex discussion about nuances of Husserl's ideas, a graduate student in business asked, with a tone indicating that it was time to get sensible and summarize: "Can we just get the bullet points on Husserl?" In an academic environment that favors concision, it is not hard to understand why high school newcomers without prior schooling typically find it extremely difficult to distill a discursive whole into the form of an outline, or to locate or articulate a main idea.

4.) Conservative, Traditionalist

In the absence of writing, knowledge in oral cultures must be remembered and repeated or it will be lost. Great energy is expended in oral cultures in saying over and over again what has been arduously learned over the centuries, bringing a sense of responsibility about conserving knowledge and a sense of danger if anything threatens to break it up and lose it. This, says Ong, leads oral cultures to a naturally conservative or traditionalist worldview, one which tends to favor what is known and cherished and tends to be skeptical about what is new. The figure of the wise elder has importance in oral societies unimaginable in cultures of high literacy and technology. In oral environments without recourse to records and databases, old men and women who can share the stories and knowledge of many years are especially revered as the imparters of sayings which constitute the core knowledge of the culture—the oldest person is

typically considered, by virtue of age, the most knowledgeable. There is a saying in Oromo culture which poignantly reflects the intersection of oral traditionalist noesis and the literate phenomenon of libraries: "Every time an elder dies, a library is lost" (Oromsis, 2009).

 Anecdote: The Importance of Elders. Not long ago my family brought a young native of Sierra Leone in his early twenties to my husband's parents' house for Thanksgiving weekend. This native speaker of Fula had arrived in the U.S. a few weeks before, and my ESL class was his first school experience. Being a newcomer to English, he didn't say much during all the family events of the weekend, but his eyes were lively and he was clearly participating with smiles, laughter, head-wagging, all sorts of facial expressions and gestures, most especially when my nearly blind, 83-year-old father-in-law told his long, well-worn stories about past glories or tragedies—at these my student was absolutely rapt. Later the family remarked very appreciatively how much the young man had enjoyed Lefty's stories. Perhaps only I realized that, with his very beginner English proficiency, this young man couldn't understand hardly anything of what was said—the fact that an elder of very advanced age was telling stories was enough to capture his undivided attention. Needless, perhaps, to say, typographic cultures present contrasting patterns regarding elders; storing knowledge outside the mind downgrades the importance of the wise elder, repeater of the past, in favor of younger discoverers of something new. Old people are often seen to be behind the times, as demonstrated in the example given above regarding elders who didn't know about Powerpoint.

 While traditionalist in mindset, it is important to note that oral cultures do not lack creativity, although it characteristically takes the form of re-creating and re-

interpreting instances of traditional aesthetics and wisdom so that they are fresh and

meaningful for a living audience (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Creativity in oral

cultures is strongly interactive and performative (Goody, 1977), governed not so much

by the question "what can I do that is totally new?" but "how can I truly engage my

audience in a memorable way?" Oral artists understand well that engaging an audience

is very much a matter of employing images and patterns that are familiar to people

while combining, extending, and performing them in provocative new ways.

 The conservative oral mindset, according to Ong (1982) discourages intellectual

experimentation. There is no sense in oral cultures of human beings having the role of

creators or authors of reality (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Bowers, 2005). Battiste and

Henderson specifically contrast the Western hubris of naming the world with an

indigenous understanding which seeks attunement with the realities of nature that

humans take part in but do not create; they indict Eurocentric practice for its arrogant

but naïve belief that "the people who have the power to decide what a thing will be

called have the power to decide reality" (2000, p. 74). Eurocentric cultures, foremost

among them the frontier mythos of the United States, value experimentation and

exploration, new discoveries, ground-breaking inquiry. The death of the author has been

declared (Barthes, 1968) to make way for the individual reader who constructs his or

her own meaning from the text. It has become almost religiously necessary for

institutions of learning—schools, districts, universities—to define themselves in their

mission statements as explicitly constructivist. A teacher in a high school for ELL

newcomers recently stated, with righteous pride, that his best day as a teacher is "a day

when the students take over the class." The bold overtaking of the known by the new is admired in Western cultures to a degree quite foreign to oral noesis.

5.) Close to the Human Lifeworld

In oral societies, all knowledge is conceptualized and verbalized in reference to the human lifeworld. Without writing, there are no "elaborate analytic categories" that structure knowledge at a distance from lived experience" (Ong, 1982, p. 42). There are no skill manuals that describe how to practice a trade, no written compendium of best practices in any discipline, indeed, there are no disciplines in the Western sense (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Deloria, 1970). Oral cultures are characteristically unconcerned with facts or statistics that are unrelated to community activity. Genealogies are common and some have been written down, such as the 'begats' of both the Old and New Biblical Testaments; these are not, however, examples of abstract lists, but are a memorializing recitation of family and clan relations completely connected to the lifeworld. As I noted in previous chapters, experience is a teacher that orally educated people trust and rely on, and it takes a lot of convincing to get them to believe an abstract fact or categorization that conflicts with or lies outside of their experience. Of course those of us raised in highly literate milieus also act and think in ways conditioned by our experience, an experience which always already includes the distancing affordances engendered by alphabetic literacy. The more accomplished we are, in general, the better trained we are to seek further validation in forms of knowledge that are constructed at an intentionally objective distance, a turn that has led us to devalue experience within a lifeworld community, has diminished our attentiveness to the lessons of experience, and allows us to choose textual or categorical

versions of truth even when experiential ones directly conflict. In this mindset, it is

possible and even sometimes required to deny that elephants exist even if you have seen

one.

Battiste and Henderson (2000) discuss how indigenous knowledge cannot be

learned from a book but only from extended conversations with elders which require

time and trust. Those who hold knowledge bear a particular experiential responsibility

tied to the reality of lived life:

> To sustain Indigenous knowledge, one must be willing to take on responsibilities
>
> associated with that knowing, especially putting the knowledge into daily
>
> practice. When an Indigenous elder says, "I know," it is a temporary reference
>
> point. If such knowledge is to be contained or if the relationship is to be
>
> sustained over time, then the elder must not just know the relationship, he or she
>
> must respectfully live it and know how to renew it. (p. 41)

Knowledge isn't knowledge, in the indigenous conception, unless and until is it put into

practice, and is experienced as renewable, in daily life. The common modern instruction

to 'do as I say, not as I do,' itself reflective of deep discordances between Western

beliefs and how life is conducted, is meaningless or puerile in an indigenous

environment.

Classroom Anecdote. An interesting example of this occurred in a sheltered ESL

science class at a large urban high school. Newcomer students, the majority without

prior schooling, were asked to do an enrichment activity from the textbook which

involved classifying line-drawn cartoons of activities such as hockey, bowling, tennis,

swimming, golfing, gardening, etc. according to whether they were indoor activities,

outdoor activities, or both. Students were to write A on the pictures for indoor, B for outdoor, or C for both. This scene presents many dimensions of the challenges that ELL students face, in particular those without prior literacy and schooling. The first challenge was of course trying to understand what the pictures represented, as few of the students knew about such sports as hockey or golf or even gardening as a leisure activity. Another difficulty was with reading the names of the activities, a phonetic labor which as often involves reading the teacher's lips as reading the letters on the page. The labels students were told to use followed the "abecedary" system, using the alphabet itself as an indexing tool. This caused more problems than those raised in an alphabetic world might imagine, with students tending to write 'inside' or 'outside' or 'I' or 'O' on the pictures, rather than an artificial designation of A, B, or C. It was a very difficult exercise, brightened a bit by the fact that many of the students had participated in after school programs in ice-skating and tennis, held at indoor facilities in the area.

The truly astounding moment came at the end of class, when the very kind and well-meaning teacher went through the activity with the class, displaying correct answers on the overhead projector, as students rushed to confirm and correct their responses in one of those flying eraser moments so common in such classes. When he got to tennis and asked how it should be classified, an unusual number of hands flew up—the students who had been bussing to an athletic club for months to attend tennis class were confident to say that tennis was an indoor activity (and likely proud to know exactly what the activity was). The teacher's answer key, though, had this listed as an outdoor activity, and so after some animated discussion, he finally decided that "we will

just *say* that it's an outdoor activity, ok?" Several students looked to me with questions

in their eyes (I was the adult organizer of the tennis program), but no one said anything.

Still, erasers did not fly so fast this time, and I was acutely aware of a feeling of

discomfort in the room, testimony to a direct clash between the desire to do well in

school, get good grades, please the teacher, and act like a student versus the knowledge

derived from one's direct, lived experience. One might wonder why the teacher didn't

just go for option C, 'both'; I suspect it had to do with ease of grading from an already

completed answer key, or perhaps was strongly colored by the teacher's own

experience, certainly not to any malice on the teacher's part. The point I want to make,

though, is about the ease with which the teacher and certainly any number of resident

American students can adopt an arm's-length relationship to knowledge, we can just *say*

that something is what it isn't if it helps us get a good grade—it doesn't matter anyway.

Oral cultures do not think of knowledge this way. Knowledge comes from experience,

is transmitted within experiences, and always matters. Finally we may note the strong

role that the traditional authority of the teacher played—a word from him was able to

override the experience of a dozen orally-educated students.

6.) Agonistically toned

Strongly oral cultures, according to Ong, appear to literates as highly agonistic

in their verbal performance and their lifestyles. Writing allows abstractions that

disengage knowledge from the arena of human struggle, separating knower from

known. In orality, knowledge is embedded in the lifeworld, keeping it within the

context of struggle. Thus it is common to engage others in verbal debate, bragging,

parading one's exploits, flyting (reciprocal name calling), sounding (insulting another's

mother), celebrating physical behavior, and descriptions of violence. In her touching book *Monique and mango rains*, Holloway (2007) provides interesting narrative descriptions of the 'joking cousins' in Malian tradition. This is a practice embedded in certain kinship relations which bring with them the role of engaging in mutual insults as a form of greeting. Radin (1957) posits that, by virtue of the normality of agonistic expression as a part of experience, primitive (oral) cultures are able to avoid the illnesses caused by suppression and maintain a better psychic balance, experiencing nothing like the prevalence of psychic pathologies in modern Western cultures.

On the other side of the same expressive coin, oral cultures engage in fulsome praise, celebrating the glory of a hero or community. The entirety of the world's oral epics—among them The Iliad, The Odyssey, The Epic of Gilgamesh, and the vastly numerous oral epics of Africa—may be seen as celebrations of the glory of cultural heroes. A striking example is encoded in a poem of the Jo-Yugenya people of the Kenyan region: "What have we, Jo-Yugenya, not done? We have even killed an Arab/Swahili hermaphrodite!" (Owino, 2002, p. 49). What may strike the literate as "insincere, flatulent, and comically pretentious" is the natural product of a "highly polarized, agonistic, oral world of good and evil, virtue and vice, villains and heroes" (Ong, 1982, p. 45). I would suggest that this form of residual orality can be found in melodramatic art forms, as well as American television programs which are based entirely on very outward agonistics, such as certain talk shows, reality shows, and professional wrestling. Perhaps Goth and Hip-Hop culture in the United States and Europe are examples of acting out archetypes of the psyche for which there is no room in polite literate culture.

Educational environments that seek to maintain an atmosphere of quiet work and purpose based on self-discipline, without passion or disruption, stand in contrast to the exteriorized agonistics of oral cultures. The high incidence of medicating boys so that they can maintain a calm demeanor in school may be one of the ways that American culture sublimates natural agonistic tendencies. In charter schools that serve Somali newcomers, it is common to hear expressions of amazed disbelief from white, mainstream teachers about the level of noise and physical chaos in the hallways, a situation that is resolved in the classroom only by an extremely firm teacher hand. This is not at all to imply that young people from oral cultures misbehave more than others, but perhaps some of them have a natural tendency to be more agonistically effusive in ways that count as misbehavior in school. The role of agonistics is one that, I believe, interacts strongly not only with orality but with cultural and ethnic preferences even in cultures of diffused literacy.

7.) Empathetic and Participatory rather than Objectively Distanced

In oral cultures, learning or knowing means achieving close, communal identification with the known. Writing sets up the condition for objectivity in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing, giving way to the notion of 'individual soul' in literate traditions. In oral environments, it is more appropriate to speak of 'communal soul', as all knowledge is understood to derive from pre-existing relationships. Battiste and Henderson (2000) provide a richly elaborated image of the empathetic and participatory nature of indigenous understanding, in which all knowledge is interconnected in a web of relations:

> Knowledge is so much a part of the clan, band, or community, or even the individual, that it cannot be separated from the bearer to be codified into a definition (p. 36)… All knowledge flows from the same source: the relationships between a global flux that needs to be renewed, the people's kinship with the other living creatures that share the land, and the people's kinship with the spirit world. (p. 41)

The task of the individual in this world of interconnected flux is to attend carefully to each of dimension within the holistic but conflicted ecosystem so that the world may be reunified:

> Indigenous ways of knowing hold as the source of all teachings caring and feeling that survive the tensions of listening for the truth and that allow the truth to touch our lives. Indigenous knowledge is the way of living within the contexts of flux, paradox, and tension, respecting the pull of dualism and reconciling opposing forces. (p. 42)

In these descriptions, which show knowledge to be possible only from within a fluctuating, participatory web where one listens with caring and feeling for the truth, we are a long way from Eurocentric conceptions of distanced, objective knowledge and the rugged individualism that is the epithet of American culture.

High School Anecdote. I would like to share a story from a high school experience that illustrates the different levels of distance educators have from the human lifeworld, and how these levels of distance impact empathetic understanding and the instruction of preliterate newcomers. At an urban high school which has the specific mission of educating the district's newcomer ELL students, a math teacher whom I will

call Mr. Warsame was experiencing a lot of frustration with the new "discovery" math curriculum. Mr. Warsame, a native of Somalia, is a very intelligent, multilingual veteran teacher, a man devoted to his immigrant and refugee students whose experiences mirror his own in many ways. While his task of bringing students whose learning needs begin with basic addition and subtraction to a point of being able to manage algebra and geometry in just a few years had always been a great challenge, things took a turn for the worse a few years ago when the district adopted the new curriculum and a new pedagogical approach to go with it. This expensive new constructivist curriculum followed a lesson model that called for a brief "launch" or introduction, then devoted the bulk of the class period to an open learning phase in which students were to act as independent inquirers who use their cognitive schemata to discover patterns and create solutions, and closed with a brief wrap-up when results are shared with the class. Introduction of new material in the textbook was through contextual vignettes which described an event in which the target math skill would come in handy—the whole textbook in other words, was presented as a series of story problems in English, based on American cultural contexts, albeit using inclusion-friendly names like Juan and Farhiya and Amadu and Ying.

Since he began implementing this approach a few years back, Mr. Warsame had seen a troubling decrease in student learning and an increase in frustration, copying, and "losing assignments." Many of his students, some years most, had not been to school before, and didn't have the prerequisite skills that the new curriculum assumed students to have. He had attended several professional development courses in best practices for ELL students, including courses in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, and

knew that all ELL students, especially those with limited education and literacy, need to have careful, step-by-step, explicit, scaffolded instruction that meets them at their level. The new math approach that he was required by the district to use was in many ways the diametric opposite of what research and his own experience told him was effective practice with ELL newcomers lacking formal schooling.

And so, although he felt that "all but a few of my students just can't learn this way," Mr. Warsame followed the mandates communicated at regular district professional learning community meetings of math teachers, many of whom reported how difficult this new textbook series was even for their English-speaking, grade-level educated students, although some, from the more affluent high schools with few ELLs found that the discovery approach to pedagogy worked well. As the year progressed and the disparity between mandated instructional approach and real instructional needs of students became more and more painfully apparent, Mr. Warsame shared his impressions with the school's instructional facilitator, an experienced ESL teacher and teacher educator whom I'll call Ms. Mohahan, asking somewhat furtively if he could use the adaptive math series he had used in the past even though he was being instructed by the district to use only the new curriculum. Ms. Monahan's response was that, yes, of course he could, if it allowed the students to learn the material, which the two spent some time confirming matched topically almost chapter by chapter with the new curriculum. Ms. Monahan relayed all this to the principal, who spoke to Mr. Warsame in support of modifying presentation of content so that students could learn it. This was after all the district's ELL high school, charged with tailoring instruction to meet the unique needs of its unique student body.

Some time later, it became clear that Mr. Warsame was still trying to stick with the prescribed curriculum, which resulted in some very painful class experiences which Ms. Monahan observed as part of her duties. She could see that it was torturing both students and teacher to try to conduct lessons in this way, going through pedagogical motions that could not have much meaning for students, amounting not only a waste of instructional time but a sort of systemically intentional inflicting of pain motivated by an inquiry-oriented ideology that was based on assumptions appropriate to a literate, numerate, well-educated, English-proficient, ideal student. Mr. Warsame was trying to respect the authority of the district, the students were trying to respect the authority of Mr. Warsame, and the result was an excruciatingly painful simulacrum of learning that had nothing to do with what, by virtue of their experience, the students needed nor with what, by virtue of his experience, the teacher knew they needed. When Ms. Monahan spoke to Mr. Warsame about this, he threw up his hands in a recognizably East African gesture and said, with evident frustration, that all the math teachers were being told in no uncertain terms by district administrators, in meetings run by professional consultant types that came off a bit like propaganda sessions, that all teachers were to use the new curriculum not only faithfully but enthusiastically. He compared it, chuckling, to the old Soviet system (he had lived for years in Cuba), but expressed concerns about his job if he were to stand against the tide.

When invited to a meeting with the principal and the district math curriculum coordinator, Ms. Monahan, a veteran of many wars between ESL departments and administration, was thrilled to think that perhaps here would be an opportunity to customize the district policy in support of newcomer ELL math needs. She therefore

laid out, in full and honest detail, what the experiences in this school had been with the math curriculum, describing how tortuous the experience was, something akin to educational waterboarding, which certainly no one wanted or intended. Motivated by the exciting potential of this partnership with the district curriculum office that could truly benefit LFS students and not sweep their needs under the rug, she delineated point by point some basic understandings from research about good content instruction for older ELLs, an area of research and teaching Ms. Monahan specialized in. The math coordinator shared the district perspective on math instruction, talking about the desire to move away from rote memorization and direct instruction, and the two, in over an hour's conversation, explored how the current district policy did and didn't converge with best practices for ELL students, in particular newcomers without prior schooling. When the principal returned to the room, all three agreed that the math coordinator, Ms. Monahan, and Mr. Warsame should team up to work on creating guidelines for a model math curriculum with ELL and LFS student needs in mind. Ms. Monahan left the room ecstatic, and rushed to tell Mr. Warsame. Spirits were lifted that day. It came therefore as a surprise when the principal received a phone call from a senior district curriculum administrator a few days later, letting him know how the conversation, especially the word *waterboarding*, had shocked the math coordinator. This district is *not* waterboarding, came the message from above. As for the instructional needs that were the focus of the conversation, here is the outcome: the prescribed math curriculum continued as before, and nothing further was done with the plan to create guidelines for teaching math to high school ELLs.

This anecdote reverberates with the clash of oral noesis and hyperliterate academic practices on many levels; what I want to highlight here is the differential extent to which knowledge that is empathetic and participatory, versus objectively distanced, impacts decisions about what to do in this experiential context, that is, *phronesis*. Although himself a person of high literacy and numeracy, born and educated in pre-war Somalia, Mr. Warsame is deeply attuned to the lifeworld of his students, both as their teacher and as a member of the ethnic community. His interests are entirely fixed on how they can learn best, and he is a fan of any curriculum that can support them. But he is also a person with real life concerns, in fear for his job if he bucks district programs. Ms. Monahan, a veteran of many schools and many policy battles in which the best interests of ELL students almost always lose, is weary of the new segregation whereby the actual needs of students are sacrificed to a pedagogical ideology out of touch with the students' experience and the experience of those who teach them. The district math coordinator, who is herself most certainly evaluated on how faithfully she implements the mandated curriculum, and sees herself as an advocate for academic rigor, is not only out of touch but is unconcerned with getting *in* touch with the actual experiences of a few students and teachers who represent a small proportion of the total district enrollment, and who attend an alternative high school anyway. She, too, is a real person with real-life concerns, and her performance evaluations will not be enhanced by deviating from the plan. Even the curriculum itself is based on imaginary idealized experiences—the story problems—which may be intended to be more interesting and socially inclusive, but end up have the contextual, lifeworld effect of excluding the students whose experience, and English reading

proficiency, is quite distant from the cultural and educational assumptions on which the curriculum is based.

The inexorable, take-no-prisoners, progress model of cognitive imperialism is on full display in this story: power emanates from the center via professional development meetings that give teachers the playbook, manipulate their mental endorsement, and finally subjugate the classroom lifeworld, forcing all the non-literate, non-academic vibrancies into strictly foreign formats that distort and maim and deaden. The horror to those in power is not the pain of what is happening but the marketing disaster of having someone use the word *waterboarding* to describe the effect of the curriculum on a particular group of marginalized students. What matters is that district spent a lot of money on branding this past year, and the last thing they need are some fringe staff members using inflammatory language; what is completely ignored are the lessons that could be derived from attunement to the lifeworld of students and teachers. Hermeneutically understood, this story, as so many others in schools today, demonstrates the practice and failure of applying the thinking of the *Naturwissenschaften*, the natural sciences, to educational situations requiring the insights of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the human sciences. It demonstrates the blind pursuit of a scientific-positivist ideal of academic *rigor*, which, like rigor mortis, freezes policies and scenarios so that they can be expertly sectioned, rolled out, bought into, and evaluated, when what we need is an infusion of academic *vigor*, a way of carrying out the events of education that is deeply, intersubjectively attuned to lived life, to *Dasein*, to what the real and often unexpected needs of the situation are.

Curriculum theorist James MacDonald once quoted Einstein's question: "What does a fish know about the water in which he spends his life? (MacDonald, 1988, p. 102). From the literate scientist perspective, the fish knows nothing about water, not the chemical formula, not the temperature of freezing and boiling, not how to purify water or mix it with other substances, nor any of the scientific minutiae that are the province of hydrologists. From the oral indigenous perspective, the fish lives and breathes water, is enveloped by water, is born, finds a mate, gives birth in, and dies in water. A fish knows how to navigate water, sensing and responding to its slightest undulations every minute of its life. No one knows more about water than a fish. The difference is precisely to what extent knowledge is conceived as empathetic and participatory as opposed to something one has or wields from a state of separation. Both kinds may be considered knowledge, but not of the same thing, and not with the same costs and consequences.

8.) Homeostatic

Ong refers heavily to the work of Goody and Watt (Goody, 1977, 1987; Goody & Watt, 1968) in making the argument that oral societies are characteristically homeostatic, living in a present whose equilibrium is maintained by sloughing off memories no longer relevant to the present conditions. The interests of a well-functioning community prevail over the interests of history, or of individuals, that are not longer germaine. Oral historians and West African griots leave out parts of genealogies and histories that don't support the communal order of today. A striking case is reported in Goody and Watt (1968) regarding the Gonja people of Ghana. The founding king of the Gonja state had seven sons according to British written records of

the time, and the state was accordingly divided into seven provinces. When the history

was to be recorded again sixty years later, after two territories had disappeared as a

result of political changes, oral historians reported that the founding king had five sons,

insisting that the British records, reflective of a past situation now irrelevant and

potentially disruptive, were wrong. As Ong notes, this is a worldview that strongly

favors the winner, a tendency that affects the recitation of genealogies and does not

accommodate a jurisprudential model founded on claims of legitimate grievance for

past wrongs. Henige (1980), a scholar of Ganda and Myoro kinglists, notes that "the

oral mode…allows for inconvenient parts of the past to be forgotten" in the interests of

the "exigencies of the continuing present" (p.255). The story above about the math

curriculum provides an example of a violation of homeostasis—what was working

fairly well in an embedded experiential context was destroyed by a forced adherence

with ideas from outside that were irrelevant and harmful to the healthy functioning of

the classroom community.

Another aspect of homeostatis, according to Ong, is evidenced in the way that

oral cultures jettison old words or expressions that do not serve the present order. Oral

cultures employ what Goody and Watt have termed "direct semantic ratification" (1968,

p. 29), by which words have their meaning within immediate contexts that are

transparent to all. Oral cultures are uninterested in definitions such as provided by

dictionaries, elucidating layers of old meanings. What matters is the functionality of

expressions and meanings today—do they enhance the social order we are living in

now? This quality is always preferred to a factual account which might cause damage or

stir things up. Battiste and Henderson devote a chapter section to "decolonizing the

Eurocentric need for definitions" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, pp. 36-38) which they

identify as the quintessential gesture of cognitive imperialism.

This is an area of stark contrast to American educational practices, which place a

fantastically heavy emphasis on defining words and concepts, the very act of definition

being in its own right a focus of study, as in the case of the Frayer model classroom

activity. As any teacher of ELL newcomers will tell you, finding the meaning of a word

from a dictionary or having to define a word in an academic way is one of the most

excruciating academic exercises that students without prior schooling go through.

Definitions themselves consist of more academic words, employ bizarre dictionary

syntax and punctuation, and are often more complicated than the original term. And

how is one to know which of the listed definitions is the right one? As I mentioned in

the introductory chapter, I am a person who loves my dictionaries; for people like me it

may be hard to accept the fact of how strange it is to people of oral background to 'look

up' a word, when their entire life experience has been conducted using words that are

directly related to the lifeworld and understood by all. I note that on this particular

dimension, oral and indigenous ways of knowing do not converge with the hermeneutic

emphasis on etymological understanding, which of course, as noted above, got its first

academic impetus with the advent of writing.

9.) Situational Rather than Abstract

The last of Ong's characteristics of oral noesis is one which I have already taken

up to a considerable extent in preceding chapters, and is strongly resonant with the oral

characteristics which locate knowledge in the lifeworld (#5) and understand knowledge

as empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced (#7). Indeed either of

the anecdotes told in those sections—the science lesson with the pretend categories, or the agonies of the prescribed math curriculum—could as well be recounted here. Ong holds that primarily oral people operate situationally and do not think in purely artificial abstractions, such as syllogisms or procedures of rational logic. Many researchers have made similar observations (Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Goody, 1968, 1977; 1987; Jousse, 1927; Olson, 1977; 1996; 2002), while others (Bernardo, 1998; Denny, 1991) locate the distinction not in orality as such but in other factors, such as contextualized versus decontextualized constructions of knowledge. Others have pointed out that oral thought is very much influenced by ephemeral factors such as present in religious or spiritual beliefs and practices (Mosha, 2000), and this is a good point I basically agree with. But here I would argue that spiritual beliefs and practices are not best described as based on abstractions but on mythopoetic consciousness—developed over centuries of tradition, infused in the experiences of the community, resonant with revelation and the natural world—a synergistic realm quite different than the entirely artificial abstraction built on the phonetic alphabet, Learned Latin (no one's mother tongue), and the subject-object severance of objective science. As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, I am going on the record as saying that concerns over whether it is orality that disinclines one from artificial abstractions or the coterminous effect of decontextualization, or something else, only matters if the goal is to create a deterministic, mutually exclusive classification system that holds up to the scrutinies of science—this is not the goal here, nor an important goal within indigenous understanding, as indigenous thinkers cited in these pages make perfectly clear.

Citing Luria (1976) and others, Ong reports that oral people, when asked what items go together, tend to prefer functional categories, grouping a saw together with wood and a wagon, as one would to approach a construction job, and resisting groupings based on purely abstract categories such as 'tools': a hammer, a saw, a scythe. If asked to identify shapes such as a circle or square, oral people say the name of an object, for example a plate, while those with some schooling say circle. When asked to define what a tree is in words, people of oral education simply point to a tree, quite annoyed at the silly question. Where indigenous thought classifies phenomena ecologically, based on a high degree of intuitive thought, Eurocentric science categorizes according to properties that are inferred from necessary relations in the structure of the object classified but may have little relevance to lived life (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Thus, as Ong notes, artificial categorical thinking appears to oral people as "uninteresting, trivializing" (1982, p. 52).

Classroom Anecdote. A gifted ESL teacher and researcher, Lisa Gonzalves, recently shared this story about how difficult it is for her older students without prior schooling to grasp abstractions. Her question: How do we help our pre-, non-, and low-literate learners begin to connect the 'real' with the 'abstract'? As it is an astoundingly clear and illustrative example of this point, I will include it here, unabridged and in italics, in her original first-person version.

> *In my classes with such beginners, we spend a lot of time using their own experience to present, scaffold, re-scaffold, review, and scaffold again new with old material. I think we can all agree that the more pertinent and relevant the content the better the retention, despite the speed of success. However, at some*

*point the students have to make the 'jump' to begin working with the abstract -
books, worksheets, standardized tests, forms, etc. And this is usually where my
students start having serious problems.*

*I'll give an example to illustrate my point. Recently we were doing a unit
on directions. Left, right, one block, two blocks, next to, across from, etc. This
was mixed with vocabulary of 'places in the community' - coffee shop,
restaurant, etc. So for about two weeks we practiced saying who was sitting
'next to' whom or 'between' whom and where things were in our classroom, we
physically stood up and used a 10 x 15 floor map of our neighborhood (our
creation) to practice 'turning right' and 'turning left' to get from point A to point
B, we walked around our neighborhood and pointed out whose house was
'across from' whose house, and so on. We made word cards and matched oral
with written, we placed this word card 'next to' that word card. We made
statements using prepositions and we created our own sentences, orally, with
word cards and written. I felt my students were ready to make the next jump.*

*So I graphed out a one block grid of the main drag nearest our school,
drawing the buildings out but not labeling them. The idea was that they would
label them during a little outing. I made the grid into a worksheet, copied off a
class set, and off we went to Webster St. to label our map. Once we got to the
street, we orally talked about all the different businesses, reviewed our
vocabulary, stated what was next to what. No problems.*

*Then I went to have them fill in the map (remember we had already
practiced using our floor map). We did the first few labels together, starting at*

the corner and working inward. I figured they'd 'get it' after doing a few

together, as all they had to do was label the one next to the last one. Nope.

While they could physically see in front of them that the pizza place was next to

the hotel, they could not transfer that onto the paper. I held the paper up, to

show them where they had correctly labeled the hotel on their piece of paper,

then pointed to the pizzeria which was physically to the left. "So, where would

the pizzeria be on the paper?" I expected a somewhat correct response but

instead there was absolutely no transfer, just confusion. Even though the content

was of their own neighborhood, their own life (as opposed to a textbook) the

paper version held no value, despite their accuracy with producing the

vocabulary orally.

While there were students who were successful, the amount of literacy a

student had in their L1 correlated directly with whether or not they could

perform the task. This has happened time and again, this lack of transfer from

real to unreal. I know there have been plenty of studies done on the cognitive

effects of literacy and the lack thereof, but how to we interpret those findings

into our lesson plans? (Gonzalves, 2010. Used with permission.)

I know of no report from classroom experience that does any better a job of

portraying the immense hurdle that abstraction can pose for older students without prior

schooling and literacy, nor indeed of any more tenacious and creative instructional

attempts to try to navigate this abyss. Gonzalves' own classroom appears to be an

outstanding interpretation into lesson plans of findings surrounding cognitive challenges

of literacy. What strikes me most is how sensitive Gonzalves is to the actual as opposed

to the imagined or ideologically-derived educational needs of her students—this story resonates with the glorious harmonies of a highly literate teacher on one side of the abyss attuning empathetically to the situation of adult students on the other side of the abyss, whose orally toned noesis she can never know from the inside. So yes, this story, as others we have seen throughout the discussion of Ong's characteristics of orality, has a lot to say about great frustration and difficulty occasioned by the distinct differences between oral thinking and the kind of thinking required in literate academic contexts. But it is also a story full of promise and hope, based precisely on the intersubjectivity of a truly committed, genuine conversation.

Some Conclusions

I wonder, in light of all that has been discussed in this study so far about oral noesis, whether we might consider the possibility that the kinds of questions one asks from a Western perspective to determine the cognitive landscape of oral people are, simply put, not the right questions. Ong alludes to this in stating that

> it is perhaps impossible to devise a test in writing or even an oral test shaped in a literate setting that would assess accurately the native intellectual abilities of persons from a highly oral culture… Oral folk assess intelligence not as extrapolated from contrived textbook quizzes but as situated in operational contexts. (Ong, 1982, p. 55)

Being proficient, knowledgeable and capable within a noesis of orality is not the same as being proficient, knowledgeable, and capable in a literate and digital environment, but this distinction is not one that has seeped much into the educational consciousness of Eurocentric cultures. High school newcomers without prior schooling do, indeed,

struggle terribly with stealthily worded true-or-false questions, essential and non-essential characteristics of definitions, and abstract categorizations according to a few inherent (or arbitrary) characteristics, leading to an impression that they are "low-performing students," which they often are on these measures. But the question is: what do these measures measure? Does it make any sense to assess primarily oral older students using measures such as these which anyone who has taught high school in the U.S. in the last ten years knows are exceedingly common? And then the even bigger question: Does it make sense to assess anyone this way? Do we want the knowledge of water that a scientist has, or that a fish has? Or is it possible to have both?

I would like to close this chapter by suggesting that, in the United States at this moment, it is an urgent necessity of the highest order that we step back and look at all of this with a clear head and a heart connected to people and to the earth before we rush headlong into projects such as the new movement to create National Core Standards as promoted by the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA). Initiatives like this one would carry even further the movement already underway to standardize and categorize all disciplinary knowledge and would be tested in accompanying national standardized assessments. The cognitive, and actual, genocide that has been visited upon subjugated and indigenous peoples whose descendents populate our ESL classrooms is morally horrific beyond measure. Now I want to ask: What will it mean to our society, our world, our collective future, if we ignore the wisdom of oral indigenous noesis and give in to the augmented abstraction and reification of our children—our *children*—to this new extent? And so, while I argued at

the beginning of this chapter that it is pragmatically wrong to diminish the gap between the knowledge that orally educated high school newcomers bring and the knowledge they need to gain an empowered position in society, the greater moral and epistemological issue is revealed when we consider what the distinct kinds of knowledges are that anchor the abyss. What kind of world would truly, sustainably be best, most supportive of vivid human and natural life? What knowledge or interweaving of knowledges can reunify such a world? In other words, the question is not just what preliterate high school students need to learn to function in our hyperliterate world, but what do we need to learn about oral and indigenous noesis in order that the world as a whole may go on.

I believe that Battiste and Henderson (2000), drawing on Cajete (1995) speak for all of humankind when they call attention to the suspicion with which Indigenous people view Eurocentric categorizations—they do not know why they should manifest their knowledge and ways to Eurocentric researchers with whom they have no basis of trust, and they do not want to be assimilated under Eurocentric universal definitions. In the Western tradition, writers like Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, H.G. Wells, Walt Whitman, and a host of others have sounded the call against the steady, stealthy deadening of human life; the film *Children of Men* (Abraham, 2006) presents an unbearably stark depiction of a refugee-hating, self-hating, no longer fertile future that is in some ways already upon us. Chapter Four began with Yeat's poem sounding a knell of epochal changes and overturning values on which the fate of our planet depends, and I devoted much of it to describing under-recognized negative effects of the affordances of alphabetic literacy on the human soul, made particularly visible in

hyperliteracy's encounter with orality. In Chapter Five I have explored in depth some of the unique characteristics of the noesis of indigenous orality, contrasting these with the strikingly different affordances of hyperliteracy, and concluding with a call to consider the value of oral and literate knowledge in terms of the kind of world we want to promote in education and in general. Believing truly in the hermeneutic power of human beings to authentically engage in conversation that would overturn some of their dearly held prejudices, I want to suggest that Yeats' image of antique joy giving way to grey truth and the world ending in flames may be taken not necessarily as a elegy but as a cautionary tale. In the next chapter, I will delve deeper into the existential nature of post-Enlightenment, neo-imperialistic, market-driven forces as presently constructed in their historicity, in interaction with the noeses of indigenous and oral cultures as considered in Chapter Five. Perhaps by understanding better where and how damage has been done, we can envision the conditions for a better common future.

Chapter 6

Legacies of Imperial Will and Enlightenment Rationality
in Society and Education

> O dear white children casual as birds,
> Playing among the ruined languages,
> So small beside their large confusing words,
> So gay against the greater silences
> Of dreadful things you did.

--W.H. Auden and C. Isherwood, *The Ascent of F.*6 (1936 /1979, p. 18)

Introduction: Facing the Legacies of Empire

Approaching this chapter is a fearful act, the abyss is staring back at me and I am filled with foreboding, a sense of sorrow. The voices and gestures of inquiry rimming the abyss are so discordant, the imperial carnage, past and present, so unrepented. The full horror of it is overwhelming, exceeding the capacity of mind and heart to bear. How many have suffered and died so that political and economic interests of the great powers, under whose wing projects like the present study have their place, could be secured? We could take an early example: within 50 years of the Columban landfall in 1492, all but a few of Hispaniola's indigenous Taino people were exterminated. That means somewhere between tens of thousands and 3 million people (de las Casas, cited in Dussel, 1995) died on that island in those few years to make room for the Spanish empire. We could stay on the same small patch of land to witness the devastating effects of three hundred years of French empire on the Haïtian people, enslaved to produce fantastic wealth for a Gallic country far away. Finally we might

pause to face the brutal U.S. domination of Haïti, including 15 years of direct U.S. military occupation and governmental control in the early 20th century, an important initial test of America's imperialist potential (Scott, 2004). The earthquake in January of 2010 in this 'poorest country in the Western hemisphere' was a tragedy, but it took nowhere near the toll as the manmade tragedies that began when the bullies of the West arrived.

As much as we might wish it, the imperial will is not a thing of the past—the West has not become a benign uncle; we are not absolved. The Eurocentric world has not reached a neo-Hegelian plane of glorious rational modernity, and history, despite Fukayama's triumphant proclamation (1992), has not come to an end with the West declared the winner. The "planetary paradigm" by which Eurocentric modernity places itself at the center of world culture and all other systems at the periphery (Dussel, 1998, p. 4) may be disinterested to hear from the "underside of modernity" (Dussel, 1995) it has created, but this is morally unacceptable—it must hear. As Smith has argued, "the undiluted suffering of those making the 'freedom' of Europe/America possible has to be brought into the center of deliberations regarding human futures…in stark and vivid terms" (Smith, 2006d, p. 66). Let us bring it to the center:

> The slaughter of 500,000 Iraqi children since 1990…somehow has to register deeply within the dream structure of Washington policy wonks and war gamers. The screams; the pleadings; the endless crying; the vacant stares of trauma; the open, bleeding, pus-filled wounds; the limbless corpses; the orphaned masses; the napalmed faces: Mr. Bush, Mr. Cheney, Mr. Rumsfeld, Mr. Wolfowitz, please take a seat. Witness these things, smell them, think of your own children,

then think of a better justification than Madeleine Albright provided when queried on the matter: "We think the price was worth it" (McMurtry, 2002, p. 68). Rest assured, humanity will not stand for this kind of delusion much longer. If this is your god, we want no more of 'him.' (Smith, 2006d, pp. 66-67)

The political imperialism of times past with its colonizers and colonized has morphed into the no less violent machinations of a global market system which casts the human being as "*homo oeconomicus*" [economic man], a term Polanyi (1944) used to describe the current age in which individuals and whole societies are viewed as 'human capital' or 'human resources,' that is, evaluated by those in power in terms of their economic worth. Under this way of thinking, it is justifiable to wage war in order to secure oil fields in the Middle East as long as some weapons of mass destruction are imagined to be cached there, and just as justifiable to ignore millions of genocidal deaths in Rwanda or Sudan where there is no real economic interest. In the global market system, as in old-time colonialism, just a few countries hold the field. Hetata (1998) reports an astounding disproportion that has only widened since he wrote: "The countries that form the Group of Seven, with their 800 million inhabitants, control more technological, economic, informatics, and military power than the rest of the approximately 4 billion who live in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America" (p. 274). Thus if one wants to gain a view of the new economic order, it is a matter of "gazing north at the global few" who hold the wealth, and then "glancing south at the multitude" (Hetate, 1998, p. 274-275) who, after centuries of plunder by one kind of foreign invasion after another and the political chaos these leave behind, subsist largely

in poverty, millions dying every year for lack of the most basic provisions—food, clean water, shelter.

We of the global few have all been moved by the plight of the wretched multitude, rendered in shocking news reports and emotional appeals to adopt a hungry child. We may have donated money or time to outreach agencies that serve people in need at home and abroad. The people of United States and other industrialized nations are generous in many ways, and it is not the purpose here to deny that, but rather to call upon the very sense of empathy that occasions such generosity and enlist it in considering the matter on a structural level. We have heard the tale of the village located on the bank of a river whose people undertook the solemn task of retrieving the murdered bodies that floated down everyday from somewhere upstream, in order to give them a dignified burial. It is a good and humane thing these villagers did, but at some point the same impetus should bring them to seek and abate the source of the killing.

Sensitive, empathetically attuned ESL teachers of older newcomers, I call on the very privileged knowledge that your trusted role confers on you: Haven't we all seen these faces, sensed the anguish of the plundered multitude, especially in the just-immigrated who sometimes sit for weeks at their desks, shell-shocked by what they have been through so recently, now giving themselves over to our ministrations? How many times in your teaching life have you listened to stories of torture, whose physical scar is there before your eyes on an arm or a face, or heard of a midnight escape from home just ahead of attacking rebels, everyone running in different directions and some never seen again, or harrowing journeys north at the mercy of mercenary coyotes, or

relatives being raped, maimed, or killed as a child or spouse watched? Sometimes I feel

that of all first-world citizens, ESL teachers, by virtue of direct, constant, engaged

relationships with our students, are the most in touch with vicious realities that nearly

all of our compatriots barely consider, or consider as realities very distant and

unconnected to anything we do in the wealthy industrialized countries. And so we must

ask ourselves: How can we fail to notice, and give notice of, the connection between the

scenes of horror back home that sent these students to our classrooms, and the Western

spirit of colonialism, a spirit underwritten by Eurocentric righteous superiority, and

enacted in interventionist U.S. policies that continue, unabated, to this very day, of

which the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and the neoliberal policies of NAFTA are

only the most spectacular examples? I want to ask, are we ready to say that we will not

stand for this kind of delusion any longer?

Even without any historical memory, which surely all of us must have, the

fragments and artifacts I have gathered in the preceding pages leave little doubt that,

from the perspective of the rest of the world, the triumphant white West carries on its

casual play among the ruined languages, so gay against the greater silences of dreadful

things we, or our forbears, or our systems have done. No, I am not arguing that all

Americans and Europeans are horrible, intentional evil-doers, any more than all

Germans were enthusiastic Nazis. And yes, countless average citizens may have very

little if any knowledge of the veiled interventions by the U.S. government carried out

'in the national interest,' or of the global economic control agenda of shadowy groups

like the Bilderberg Group, and the Organization for

Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (McMurtry, 2002). Certainly many

good people do not see how these structures within our own society are directly

causative of the harm and suffering of other people, or perhaps people see but feel that

harsh measures are necessary to maintain our own safety and lifestyle. And finally, no,

the United States does not have a monopoly on a national will to power, nor the

sentiments that underlie proclamations of manifest destiny, nor the will to use lethal

force to achieve one's ends. But at some point, as a function of our very morality, don't

individual citizens have to say 'enough' and stand against the bullying, especially the

bullying that we ourselves can influence? There is a difference between military or

economic colonial conquest of a country and cognitive imperialism via Western words,

concepts, and epistemological values—what Visvanathan calls "killing with concepts"

(1991. p. 378), but why would we want to endorse any of it? Wouldn't a person of good

will want to put the greatest possible distance between him- or herself and the kind of

thinking that made and makes imperialism possible, justifiable, and probably indignant

at the portrait I am painting here?

If we have any sense of history and morality, if we truly listen to the voices of

the world's non-Western indigenous people insisting on their right, first of all, to *live*,

and then, to lead lives according to the validity of their own knowledge and cultural

forms, I believe that we in the regnant Western education industry shall find it difficult

to continue confidently promoting our versions of truth and knowledge, with, let us

admit it, very little by way of true self-critique. As I have argued above, what is called

for is authentic, hermeneutic conversation with other ways of knowing, in which our

own epistemological prejudices do not constitute the unquestionable truth criterion but

can themselves be called into question. To the reader who may have been wondering

what political and economic imperialism has to do with language and literacy instruction, here it is: *we need to have this conversation with orality, the subaltern radical Other of literacy, putting our presumptions which are all based on literacy's constitutive relationship with academic excellence on the table for examination.* In order to conduct this conversation in the context of a dissertation, in this chapter I will consider the legacies of Enlightenment rationality and the imperial will to power in light of the particular characteristics of medium and oral noesis explored in Chapters Four and Five, in the context of American high school classrooms where orally traditioned newcomers first meet literacy and the academic mindset. What I want to provide is a strong image of the existential encounter between this hyperliterate world which surrounds and constitutes us and defines our educational configurations, and the world of orality which still today constitutes the primary web of many of the world's people, and remains in residual strength in all others to varying extents.

The Enlightenment Conception of Knowledge

As I have argued above, the properties of the phonetic alphabet provided for a severance of language from meaning and affect in a gesture which mirrors the distinction between orality and literacy in general: acts of signification that once could only be understood within context, in embedded communication between interlocutors sharing a web of meanings, were replaced over centuries of scriptural development by the authority of the written word, whose audience is faraway and imaginary and whose power is durability, logic, and method—propositions, definitions, indexes, precision of observation and of description. The universal applicability of the phonetic alphabet, combined with the artificiality of Learned Latin, provided the conditions for the birth of

an objective scientific method in the work of Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Isaac

Newton, and a philosophy of the thinking subject separated from the world he observes

as expounded in Rene Descartes.

Ontological Schism of Subject and Object

As scholars of critical, postmodern, and hermeneutic traditions have shown,

literacy and scientism were the blades that achieved the ontological schism of the

Enlightenment age. In his oft-cited work, *The postmodern condition: A report on*

knowledge, Lyotard (1984) has described the epistemological state of postmodernity as

an end-stage function of the definitive splitting of subject (a person, a knower) from

object (a thing, a system, another person) ushered in by the invention of the Greek

alphabet, through the introduction of scientific method, and finally reaching its highest

expression in enlightenment philosophy. The Cartesian axiom that began with 'I think,

therefore I am' in practice quickly became 'I think using the correct method, therefore I

can say with certainly that this is this, and that is that, and I am in control of all of it.'

Here we see the origin of propositional logic in its foundational isomorphic form of

S=P, subject equals predicate, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, is precisely the kind

that so vexes adult learners of oral background. The inevitable breakdown of so

excessively confident an epistemology is what, Lyotard argues, has brought about a

postmodern condition characterized by a loss of faith in any kind of master narrative

and a semiotic universe of ungrounded floating signifiers, prompting resignation or

celebration, depending on one's ideological perspective.

The dawning of the Enlightenment, a century named for its ability to see things

in the light after a long fumbling about period reaching from the dark dawn of human

existence to the European Dark Ages and Inquisition, saw its own share of malcontents, romantics who warned against the potential of growing fanaticism with regard to literacy and science to overtake true experience in a natural world. Thus Wordsworth, in his 1798 poem *The Tables Turned*, writes:

> Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;
>
> Or surely you'll grow double:
>
> Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;
>
> Why all this toil and trouble?
>
> …
>
> Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
>
> Come, hear the woodland linnet,
>
> How sweet his music! on my life,
>
> There's more of wisdom in it.
>
> …
>
> Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
>
> Our meddling intellect
>
> Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:
>
> We murder to dissect.
>
> Enough of Science and of Art;
>
> Close up those barren leaves;

> Come forth, and bring with you a heart
>
> That watches and receives. (1798/1979, p. 154)

As Socrates once warned Phaedrus about writing, here Wordsworth warns a Friend of the toil and trouble wrought by this new notion of science, carried in books, distancing us from nature and the greater wisdom she imparts to the heart that watches and receives. The core disposition of the scientific epoch with regard to life and inquiry receives here its epigram: "We murder to dissect." Wordsworth's poem strikes me as an 18th century corollary to the contemporary cautionary tale of the Stepford Wives (Levin, 1972)—in order to have things perfectly standardized and under your control, you need to immobilize them, eliminating their ambiguity and unpredictability. In the end, rather than a perfectly functioning society, you are left with a frozen simulacrum of life— meaningless, joyless, and ultimately unsustainable.

The Power and Violence of Scientific Method

In a parallel to the current situation, the scientific potentialities that struck fear in the hearts of some during the period of the Enlightenment were welcomed by many others who well understood the human empowerment they offered. Just as theological knowledge no longer needed to be translated to individuals by the clergy, so, too, the Book of Nature could now be read by any literate using the correct method. Facts became not merely interpretable via churchmen, elders, or oracles, but *determinable* through the rigorous use of method—and facts, in the mindset of science in every age, equal truth. Furthermore, as Francis Bacon asserted, truth's purpose is to give man power over nature: "truth and utility are perfectly identical" he wrote in *Novum*

Organum, and "that which is most useful in practice is most correct in theory" (cited in Nandy, 1988, p. 44). It is in this way that European cultures achieved what had been unthinkable in every previous era of human history and still is in many cultures—the apotheosis of the human subject, wielder of science, arbiter of truth, straightforward predictor of the future, master of the natural world.

Alfred Lord Tennyson's 1850 poem, *Flower in the crannied wall*, gives a unique glimpse into the scientifically-fueled divine pretensions of Enlightenment man:

Flower in the crannied wall,

I pluck you out of the crannies,

I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,

Little flower—but if I could understand

What you are, root and all, and all in all,

I should know what God and man is. (1850/1972, p.1209)

Here we see in full operation the agentive dispositions of science—a living thing is uprooted, causing its death, in order that a casual passerby may hold it, root and all, contemplating what truths a study of the now-dead thing could reveal—we murder to dissect. And those truths, let us not fail to notice, will by logical analogy impart the knowledge of the essence of man *and* God to this inquiring subject, this thinker, the one who *is* because he thinks in a certain way. A contemporary poet writes in critique:

I have just one question, Alfred:

Why did you pluck the flower? Why did you

pull it, root and all, from the crannied wall?

You might have simply observed the flower,

marked its vibrant blooming color;

you might have sniffed its fragrance,

brushed your fingers over its petals;

you might have simply wondered

that the flower was alive and growing

in a chinked rock wall.

Instead you plucked it, root and all,

and tried to analyze it.

What you did tells on you, Alfred; and in a way

it tells on all of Western civilization. (Dinkleberry2010, 2010)

The kill-it-to-study-it affordances of scientific method have created their own culture, one that has extended itself into, and in many ways defines, the mindset of the present day. In a sort of reprise to Tennyson's poem, Bateson notes that modern systematic botanists who look after vast collections of specimens in their herbaria commonly have difficulty identifying a living plant. If you bring them one, they will respond, "Let us press it for a few days and we will be able to tell you what it is" (Bateson, 1991, p. 248). This is a remarkable statement, even more remarkable as we consider the enormous extent to which this way of thinking has encroached its way from the physical sciences into the human sciences as the collective work of Dilthey, Husserl, and Heidegger warned and Derrida, Foucault, Jameson, Kristeva, Lyotard, and Spivak exposed. In a way, though, the botanist's statement is unsurprising in an era when most of us have either fully embraced or at least grown accustomed to the requirement that to achieve rigor, science must kill or significantly immobilize.

It is understandable that Western science appears to people of other traditions as artificial, disconnected, and out of touch with the natural and human lifeworld (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 1995; Hogan, 1995), since these are in fact intentional conditions of Western science. Battiste and Henderson are particularly critical of ethnographic applications of the Eurocentric scientific mindset in attempts to codify and categorize the knowledge of non-literate indigenous people, admonishing these studies for portraying "cultures sufficiently frozen to be objects of scientific knowledge" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 32). What we need to take note of here is that, from the Enlightenment perspective underwriting Eurocentric research, cultures *need* to be frozen to be studied just as flowers need to be plucked and methods need to be carefully followed and you need to not be a fish to understand water. We need to note here that it is just this Enlightenment mindset that allows scientific researchers conducting reading studies on preliterate adults in the name of the search for truth to state with perfect *sangfroid* that, since these adults lack particular kinds of metalinguistic awareness as codified in the SLA canon, their minds are "more like a baby than a pre-school child" (Young-Scholten & Strom, , 2005, p. 50). The attitude this statement betrays is not usually expressed so openly in scientific SLA research, but by virtue of its participation in positivist epistemology (as opposed to conscious intent on the part of researchers), such an orientation underlies all of it.

Epistemological Weaknesses of Scientism

One of the epistemological problems here is that the very methodological requirements which call for a frozen sample also inhibit understanding of systems based on radically different assumptions. In the case of oral indigenous knowledge, the norms

of science make it epistemologically impossible for Eurocentric researchers to comprehend indigenous consciousness, because this consciousness is interconnected with an ever-changing natural and human world, and therefore "has always required particular responses to particular ecologies built on flux" that don't fit neatly into measurable categories (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 31). In an educational context, we saw in Chapter Five how things went awry when math curricula predetermined and pre-designed for other realities were forced onto a classroom of newcomers, without care for the lifeworld understandings of either students, teacher, or instructional facilitator, all of whom fell victim to what Battiste and Henderson call "imperial value contagion" (2000, p. 32). In all cases, what I am addressing here is not just a matter of bringing conflicting epistemologies into conversation, an important project in its own right, but also, urgently, a moral matter of refusing to continue the project of imperialism in any form, in any setting, including the classroom. It is more than time to reconsider how our educational practices, including and especially literacy instruction and research, continue the Enlightenment-driven gestures of freezing, murdering, and dissecting, on both moral and on epistemological grounds.

Despite a half-century of critique of the highly standardized, instrumentalist Tyler rationale for education (Tyler, 1949) by curriculum theorists of the reconceptualist school (Pinar 1975; 1988; Pinar and Reynolds, 1992) and others, and even the recent recanting of Diane Ravitch (2010) who now claims that she was wrong about standardized testing—it *doesn't* help students learn better—many in education cling to the notion that the more structured, scientific, and standardized the practice, the better it is. A vestige of this Enlightenment sentiment can be found in the contemporary

preference in some educational circles, not least governmental funding agencies, for "evidence-based practices," which are defined as practices derived from studies using scientifically rigorous, mathematically mediated methods, that is, the Enlightenment-derived methods of the physical sciences. The paradigm shifts within science itself, as theorized in Kuhn (1970), observed in LaTour and Woolgar (1979), and announced in chaos theory and quantum physics (see, e.g., Capra, 1984; Einstein, 1916; Heisenberg, 1958; Prigogine & Griese, 1980), seem not to have permeated some quarters of educational thinking. To the contrary, as mentioned above, there is talk of expanding the standardization mindset to a national level, a move which would achieve a level of homogenization of knowledge and schooling practices unparalleled in the United States, indeed in human history.

Smith (2006e) has noted the trouble these discordances cause for new teachers, who are prepared in colleges of education that have widely embraced more narrative, interpretive ways of knowing in their courses, leaving new teachers sometimes struggling to orient themselves within school systems still clinging to standards and practices based on a positivist view of education. It is a great irony of the age that, even as science itself abandons paradigms of determinacy for paradigms of flux, many American school districts and governmental education agencies defend ever more vehemently a frozen conception of knowledge borrowed from Enlightenment codifications of science that may have a place within physical sciences but never were particularly suited to the spirited scenario of the human sciences. Such allegiances are not simply a matter of scientific concerns, but of the political will to power, an issue I will take up below in a discussion of empire and the sacrificial paradigm.

Summarizing what has been discussed so far, we can say that the Enlightenment notion of knowledge as that which is derived from a frozen object, predicated on the ontological severance of subject from object, the semiotic severance of writer from audience, and the ascendancy of the human subject to a place previously reserved for the divine, has grown into a full-blown conception of the world as our object, to be "valued, understood, and utilized according to human needs" in an enactment of what Bowers calls "the myth of the anthropocentric universe" (Bowers, 1993, p. 135). I want to take a closer look at this notion of an anthropocentric universe from an oral indigenous perspective.

Anthropocentric Mindset of Enlightenment Rationality

While we may chuckle at Shaw's observation that "science is a new religion, and disinfectant is its holy water" (cited in Goldsmith, 1992, p. 93), this is actually a matter of serious import in exploring the encounter of oral and literate academic noeses. There is no doubt that a worldview based on an epistemology scrubbed free of divinity and spirituality is not one which is shared by most of the world's people, perhaps none of the world's oral indigenous people, and very few of the newcomer students to our high school ELL classrooms, as anyone who works in these settings is quite aware. Indigenous spirituality, furthermore, is not incidental to but rather utterly interwoven with indigenous knowledge and education. Mosha has written that "indigenous education puts spirituality and a life of virtue at its very center" (Mosha, 2000, p. 3) because indigenous Africans see all of reality as "the handwork of an Infinite and Eternal Divine Mystery [that] gives birth to the universe and continues to create, recreate and sustain it" (Mosha, 2000, pp. 7-8). In similar fashion, Native American

ways of knowing represent an indivisible unity of the natural, human and spirit world

(McGaa, 1990). Spiritual practices are instances of knowledge gathering, and vice

versa—there is no belief in knowledge as separate from subjectivity, the world, or the

divine. To the contrary, there is an understanding that the world was divinely created

and is not defined or controlled by the efforts of human beings. Traditional knowledge

differs profoundly in this way from Western scientific epistemology, and presents a

direct challenge to militantly atheistic or aspiritualist mindsets, asking them to declare

whether they are in open conversation with an understanding of the universe as infused

with spirituality, or whether they disdain such an understanding on scientific or other

intellectual grounds.

Psychic and Ecological Consequences of Enlightenment Rationality

I want to step back and contemplate what it has meant for the psychic and

ecological health of Eurocentric cultures themselves to have lived in the wake of 300

years of Enlightenment epistemology. This is important, of course, for those of us who

live within this system, but also in a particular way in the context of this study, as it is

just this Enlightenment-engineered educational world that we hold out to oral

newcomers.

Man at the center of everything forces man to constantly exercise his agentive

role, constructing an understanding, choosing a path, creating innovation (Battiste &

Henderson, 2000). The powerful tool of science is at his disposal, but still he needs to

choose how to wield it, and what inferences to draw from his findings. The categories

imposed by Eurocentric reason are arbitrary, and so people are compelled by desire and

permitted, indeed required, by anthropocentrism to generate scientific schemata that

support the acquisition of their objects of desire (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). In the

name of his empowerment, the subject is thus constantly burdened to want and to

acquire. Furthermore, having thrown off the magical thinking of tribe, family, church

and tradition, he is left to the agency of his liberated, monadic self, isolated as no

cultural configuration has ever isolated its members (Doi, 1985), seeking life among

freeze-dried pseudo-objects and meaning in a sea of floating signifiers.

Anima Mundi is Sick

Some of the most profound and poignant descriptions of the psychic

consequences of Enlightenment mentality are provided by clinical psychologist James

Hillman, who observes that the soul of the world, *anima mundi*, is sick—diseased by

breakdowns between technological capabilities, human relations, and ecological

wisdom which result in disasters like the Gulf oil spill, the financial industry meltdown,

and devastating bombings all over the world, manmade illnesses which in turn sicken

the world's people. Hillman (1993) reports that

> the distortions of communication, the sense of harassment and alienation, the
>
> deprivation of intimacy with the immediate environment, the feelings of false
>
> values and inner worthlessness experienced relentlessly in the world…are
>
> genuine realistic appraisals and not merely apperceptions of our intra-subjective
>
> selves. My practice tells me I can no longer distinguish clearly between neurosis
>
> of self and neurosis of world. (p. 93)

Like Doi (1985), Hillman understands the rampant psychoses of our age, in

which school shootings and suicide have become commonplace and one in ten

Americans is taking medication for depression (Fournier, DeRubeis, Shelton, Hollon,

Amsterdam, & Gallop, 2009) as inextricably connected with systemic forces directly

traceable to legacies of the Enlightenment. So, too, does Smith, who has explicated the

specific connections between discursivity, hyperliteracy, and the neuroses and

ecological crises that plague Western societies (Smith, 1999b, 1999c). He argues that

the logocentric legacy produced by the union of literacy and science in the

Enlightenment has led to a fantastic proliferation of linguistic forms in print and digital

formats and a refocusing of philosophy on language as its central project, even as we

witness "the widespread cultural confusion in the West, now very close to the surface,

signified most obviously in the postmodern move to show the inability of language to

contain a call to action which could be held in common" (Smith, 1999c, pp. 84-85).

So it seems, following Smith, that the more we turn to language as a form

positively capable of articulation as given by the Western metaphysics of presence, in a

postmodern environment in which a common basis for understanding seems impossible,

the less we have to say that makes any difference for each other or for the world.

"What moderns and postmoderns have in common," says Smith, "is their inability to

affirm the organic unity of corporeal life as *it is lived*" (2006b, p. 10, italics original), a

dire diagnosis of the Western psyche that indigenous cultures understand all too well

(Ross, 1989) with dire consequences for pedagogy. It is within this state of affairs that

a deeper interpretation of modern crises of literacy is called for, because, as Smith

points out, it is not a lack of print or digital reading materials but precisely a lack of

meaningful relationships that hampers literacy efforts (Smith, 1999b)—between family

members, between students and teachers in overtaxed schools, between the global few

who have means and the global many who have little, between humans and the natural

world, and finally, perhaps most tellingly, between the ability of texts to express wisdom and the wisdom that is required for our planet and its people to go on.

This point is reinforced by Dr. Andrej Maruai, who notes that countries with low Gross National Products and high literacy, such as his native Slovenia and the Indian state of Kerala, also have markedly high rates of suicide (cited in Pozun, 2000). Maruai posits that through increased literacy, people gain greater understanding of their comparatively dismal circumstances, but without relationships that could improve the situation of these now-enlightened people, the result is an increased sense of futility leading to suicide. The great African American orator Frederick Douglass, a former slave, reported a similar feeling of regret about literacy—just having this skill led to false hopes and a depressing realization that literacy without reciprocity does not constitute an improvement in the human condition as he experienced it (cited in Pozun, 2000). I am reminded of Coomaraswamy's plaintive remark that literacy may indeed be necessary within contemporary cultural configurations, but that "necessities are not always good in themselves….some, like wooden legs, are advantageous only to men already maimed" (Coomaraswamy, 1947, p. 23).

The Myth of Literacy

The question of whether texts are able to provide wisdom that enhances relationships and life, or whether literacy is more like a wooden leg to a maimed society, brings us to a consideration of the powerful myth of literacy, a technology held out as a palliative to a remarkable number of the world's ills. Social versions of this myth attribute to literacy the power to alleviate all manner of societal problems, such as poverty and health concerns. The human actualization version holds that literacy

(leading to literature) represents a unique instance of full human potentiality, while the critical manifestation of the myth of literacy focuses on how it allows people to name the world and become empowered. Medical metaphors surround the issue of literacy, as evidenced in an article in the Jakarta Post casting illiteracy as a disease that must be "eradicated" (Evaries, 2009). The Lagos Nigeria Guardian not long ago published a piece describing how "reading makes a man," while lamenting that "residual oral culture is ruining our reading habit... There are people who can afford to buy books but will prefer to have someone…narrate the story to them" ("Reading Makes a Man," 2009). This amazing comment, which is a kind of reverse way of stating Ong's notion that you have to die to orality to achieve literacy, tells a powerful tale about how literacy has been positioned as the hallmark of a mature, educated person. Clearly, "the handicap of illiteracy is far more profound than is suggested by the simple inability to read" (Scholes & Willis, 1991, p. 230).

A recent cover illustration of *The New Yorker* magazine (June 8 & 15, 2009) brings us back around to the diseases of the Western world and how they relate to science and the myth of literacy. The image presents an amazing semiotic juxtaposition of factors—a lone figure in a helmeted environmental suit relaxes in a sort of garden along a crumbling wall not, perhaps, unlike the crannied one from whence Tennyson plucked his flower. Above the figure (human? alien?) hovers a spacecraft, in the distance we perceive a run-down New York skyline. But our fellow is happy, on his face a little smile of contentment as he sits atop a vast pile of technological rubble— keyboards, hard drives, cellphones, i-pods, floppy disks, CDs, monitors, walkie-talkies, a plethora of formats now carpeting the ground as junk. The one remaining

communicative device in use is the novel-length book the bald figure is reading. No title is discernible—just the bookness of it is enough. No other beings are about, things are clearly in a state of environmental ruin (although a few tenacious flowers poke through), perhaps this is the last human on earth as aliens prepare to land, or perhaps there are no more humans and this is an alien visitor who found a quiet earthly corner in which to indulge in the universal pleasure of reading.

This magazine cover image may especially please the Great Books adherents, pointing as it does to an enduring love of books and the limitations of technology in a post-apocalyptic world. It is reassuring in a way to think that people of the future may still care about some of the things we care about, that our society's faith in the gifts of literacy seems to be ratified by descendant generations, even though that faith is shown here to be deceptive—literacy clearly did *not* solve society's problems. I want to suggest that if we apply the entirety of what has been considered in these pages, we can trace the provenance of this image back through the electronic age, to the invention of scientific method, to the development of distanciated literacy, all the way back to the affordances of the phonetic alphabet. While I am not claiming that such a world is the inevitable result of phonetic literacy, the study I have made does indeed demonstrate that the mindset made possible by literacy made possible this tragic image, with its depicted costs of breathable air, a clean, in-tact environment, and companionship, damages caused by but not fixable by science—all scientific knowledge, mediated by literacy and technology, can do is provide ever more sophisticated, artificial means of survival. In the context of this study, we need to affirm that such images are a world away from the noesis of orality, embedded in proximal communication, and not on its

own causative of environmental degradation or the psychoses brought about by discordances between signifiers and human meaning. The reader will certainly have other responses to and interpretations of this polysemic magazine cover, but I think we can agree that it reflects a deep societal concern about what literacy and digitacy ultimately mean and what role they will play in the future of the Earth, a concern that is well-founded.

What all of this points to in terms of a study of initial literacy development by high school ELLs of oral background is that, at the very least, it behooves technologically advanced, hyperliterate societies to reflect more deeply on the psychic and ecological consequences of our devotion to literacy and digitacy, or more precisely our exaggerated expectations about how these media can benefit our world and underestimations about their harmful noetic and ecological potential. Such a reflection, conducted honestly, necessarily leads to a certain temperance with regard to the expanding scientific standardization of education, and an eagerness to rethink how we engage in literacy instruction of older newcomers. It is at this moment of fusion of horizons, just here, that appears the realization that orally traditioned indigenous cultures may have knowledge as crucial to the survival of people from industrialized societies as we, and often they, believe our literacy and informatics are to them. In the final chapter I will sketch some conditions of possibility for educational practices based on a conception of reciprocity between oral and literate scientific worldviews.

The phenomena of literacy, enlightenment, science, technology, empire, and the creation of the United States constitute not discrete moments but a continuum within occidental history. Wolf (1982) traces the lineage as follows:

> Ancient Greece begat Rome, Rome begat Christian Europe, Christian Europe begat the Renaissance, the Renaissance the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment political democracy and the industrial revolution. Industry crossed with democracy in turn yielded the United States, embodying the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. (p. 5)

This is a very long story—full of violence and care, despair and discovery, love of country and conquest of other countries—and at this present historical moment, it is the United States that serves as the standard bearer for a way of life that was conceived three thousand years ago along the Mediterranean Sea. Gray (1998) has described America as "the last great Enlightenment régime" (p. 2), a place where the "the contradictions of modernity are revealed with special luminosity" (Smith, 2006b, p. 10). In this section I will look at some of those contradictions as they appear in American society and high school classrooms where ELL newcomers learn to read.

The American empire manifests itself in both military and economic forms, the former typically enlisted in service of the latter although the reverse can also be the case, and like all empires it is driven by an instinct for survival. South African author J.M. Coetzee (1980) has written that:

> Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of cycles of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and

ends, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against

history. One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how

not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era. (p. 133)

As in the cases of Rome and England in previous eras, America's global hegemony,

which is maintained by military bases on every continent and provides its citizens with

a standard of living only dreamed of by the vast majority of the world's population, will

not be surrendered easily even as signs of the end of empire are now undeniable. Such

signs include imperial overstretch (Kennedy, 1989), referring to the condition wherein

the country's resources become dissipated to an unsustainable point, and the crisis of

legitimacy (Bello, 2002), that is, the difficulty of persuading others of America's moral

right to rule, a situation that described great swaths of world opinion toward America

following the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The moral high ground that Americans for several generations have been raised

to believe our democracy-loving country uniquely occupies has been revealed in its

mercenary character not only militarily, but more and more in terms of class-specific

economic interests that may posture as patriotic at home but are global in their voracity.

John McMurtry, a piercing investigator of the forms and powers of a new global market

condition that he terms "the new totalitarianism" (2002, p. 81), reveals how

transnational corporations have marketed and financed political leaders, among them

Tony Blair in England and George W. Bush in America, "to ensure that captive states

serve them rather than the peoples by whom governments are elected" (McMurtry,

2002, pp. 81-82). Globalization forces that are associated with conservative free market

advocates in the U.S. and are elsewhere designated by the term *neoliberal* are

diametrically opposed to a worldview which seeks genuine conversation between people and traditions with differing points of view, indeed, the new global market economy has no need of old-fashioned individual nations:

> The deep pattern of the male corporate gang in its global form is, as David Rockefeller put it at the June 1991 Bilderberg's meeting in Baden Germany, a "supranational sovereignty of an intellectual elite and world bankers which is surely preferable to the national autodetermination practiced in past centuries."
> (McMurtry, 2002, p. 81)

It is important that educators of good will understand: the tiny group of latter day mob bosses who run most of the world already and are doing everything they can to secure the rest of it for themselves and their privileged progeny are not the friends of average citizens, even less of disempowered refugees and immigrants, whose ruined economies and political systems are casualties in a global chess game that started as raw conquest but has always been motivated by a profoundly self-serving economic acquisitiveness.

Business Interests and Education

In the educational arena in the U.S. and elsewhere, we see the same forces at work in the constantly advancing takeover of education by business interests, often enough with the participation of districts and educators themselves either out of ideological convergence or resignation to the new order (Smith, 2006c; Spring, 1998). The forms that this encroachment takes are myriad, from product placement within classrooms to the intentional alignment of curricula with specific workforce requirements to the elimination of courses without direct economic value to the replacement of public with for-profit schools. Mark Slouka (2009), one of America's

finest social critics, has traced the transformation of American education from an institution that once valued the free thinking promoted by liberal arts degrees to one which now valorizes only market thinking, as encoded in his proposed neologism "mathandscience" (p. 38) a perfect union of Enlightenment scientism and neoliberal economic globalization interests.

The relevance of these points to the present study is clear. When we promote a more equitable, intersubjective approach to understanding how to practice literacy instruction with students of oral background, or even more radically, to consider the very limits of the literate paradigm to inform human wisdom, this pits us in struggle against hegemonizing, homogenizing forces that would turn our classrooms into standardized factories where commodified workers are produced to prolong the empire of economic interests whose only interest is their own profit, and who make no pretense of respect for the world's cultural traditions, nor are inhibited by any moral compunction about political or cognitive conquest. Nothing could be further from the mind of the new imperialism than adopting an attitude of interest toward the characteristics and lessons of oral indigenous noesis.

The Myth of Sacrificial Reason

This is where market meets imperial will, which, as Dussel has shown (1995; 1998), is both ruthless and self-righteous in its application of Kant's doctrine of emancipative reason, a doctrine holding that those who do not choose freedom as provided by Eurocentric rationality are living in perpetual immaturity. As discussed above, Hegel extended Kant's doctrine to claim that European civilization has transcended culture by creating a Universal Culture of freedom through reason. Others

may have quaint, charming, or violent cultures, but they are primitive, not yet developed, not yet in a state of full human actualization as the West is. The modern version of this triumphant view is articulated by Fukayama (1992), who claimed that the achievements of U.S. democracy buttressed by free-market economy represent the culmination of History, a transcending of the vicissitudes of developmental history in which less developed cultures remain mired.

What is missing in these accounts is the central consideration with which this chapter began: the violence of empire in all its forms. In his massive study, Theweleit (1987, 1989) demonstrated that the will to exercise exterminatory power as in the holocaust of World War II was not an aberration but the logical consequence of Enlightenment rationality that subjugates the physical to the rationally cerebral. Dussel, as noted above, locates within the Enlightenment legacies of Kant and Hegel the will, indeed, the responsibility, to take the lives of backward primitives who refuse the civilizing gifts of the West, be they religious, intellectual, or economic in nature. As Dussel argues, "Modernity as myth always authorizes its violence as civilizing whether it propagates Christianity in the sixteenth century or democracy and the free market in the twentieth" (Dussel, 1995, p. 71). The myth of emancipative reason thus becomes, for subjugated peoples of the periphery, the myth of *sacrificial reason*, whereby those who do not accept Western rationalism remain in a primitive state and may be, indeed must be, sacrificed in the greater interests of global progress (Dussel, 1995; 1998). It was in fact through the sacrificing of the Other at the altar of modernity that modernity came to be:

Whereas modernity gestated in the free, creative medieval European cities, it came to birth in Europe's confrontation with the Other. By controlling, conquering, and violating the Other, Europe defined itself as discoverer, conquistador, and colonizer of an alterity likewise constitutive of modernity. Europe never discovered the Other as Other but covered over the Other as part of the Same; i.e., Europe. Modernity dawned in 1492 and with it the myth of a special kind of sacrificial violence which eventually eclipsed whatever was non-European. (Dussel, 1995, p. 12)

Here we see revealed not only the violent will of Eurocentric empire to power, but the way in which, as postmodernism has taught so well, every supra-ordinate discourse *depends* on the suppression of its subaltern Other in order to have its singular identity. You can't be a discoverer unless you discover *something*; you can't be a conqueror unless you conquer *someone*, and the damage caused by all this conquest affects not only the subjugated peoples but the colonizers themselves. Bateson expressed this notion very astutely in a discussion of the ethnographer's task: "When the investigator starts to probe unknown areas of the universe, the back end of the probe is always driven into his own vital parts" (Bateson, 1991, p. 245). The pain we cause others always comes back to us, though often in other forms, such as depression and suicide.

The point of this study, from the first page of the Introduction to this one, is to discover a stance of humility with regard to other cultures, a readiness to engage in genuine conversation, to learn as well as to teach, even though some of the lessons have shown how our own practices, in ways we may have never considered or imagined, are

poisonous to other forms of life, oral noesis in particular. I would like to take up this

topic within the context of education in the following section.

The Sacrificial Paradigm in ESL Initial Literacy Classrooms

Thirty years of scholarship on neocolonialism by Battiste and Henderson (2000),

Bhabha (1990, 1994), Kristeva (1991), Mazrui (1990), Said (1978, 1993), Spivak (1988,

1999) and others has explicated relationships between structures of knowledge and

forms of oppression of the foreign Other. We have seen in these pages how phonetic

alphabetic literacy and the structures of Eurocentric rationality have played a

cornerstone role in the construction of a system leading to the present configuration of

academic endeavor. In order to reach levels of academic achievement which are

considered age-appropriate in American education, high school ELL students of

primarily oral background must journey across a perilous abyss that has been

historically set against them in discourses of Enlightenment rationality combined with

violent imperial will to power, even up to and including manifestations of these in

American education. For these students, the noetic stakes are high:

> There is hardly an oral culture or predominantly oral culture left in the world
>
> today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers that is forever
>
> inaccessible without literacy. This awareness is agony for persons rooted in
>
> primary orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well
>
> that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that
>
> is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world. We have to die to
>
> continue living. (Ong, 1982, p. 15)

Death is a steep price to pay for literacy and the world it opens one to, but, lest we give in to scoffing, this is not as hyperbolic a description as some might believe. Based on the understanding of oral noesis as portrayed in Chapter Five, and the legacies of Enlightenment rationality and colonialism as explored in this chapter, I submit that the high school ELL initial literacy classroom presents a modern manifestation of *the myth of sacrificial reason*, in which students are forced into an artificial relationship with language and with the world that drains the oral indigenous life out of them, and a survival mode with regard to instruction that is characterized by massive pretending on both the students' and the teachers' parts. This state of affairs is both the observable and the predictable consequence of the encounter between a living relation with the living word/world of oral noesis and the frozen, murdered, dissected form of academic knowledge presented by and in the Western classroom. In this final section of Chapter Six, I will undertake to provide a strong interpretation of the sacrificial paradigm in initial literacy classrooms, in order to make a point that is usually suppressed by triumphant Western educational discourses, for as Said has said, "we must excavate the silence, the world of memory, of itinerant, barely surviving groups, the places of exclusion and invisibility" (Said, 2004, p. 68). We must engage the underside of literacy's modernity.

Standard American Academic English (SAAE) as codified in textbooks, disciplinary literacy programs, governmental and district standards of achievement for every grade and subject, and standardized assessments, is the modern apparition of Learned Latin, the mother tongue of no one, a set, prescribed medium developed for academic purposes, a vehicle, formed specifically around literacy constructions, which

serves to sort students according to economic future, according to class (Illich, 1973, 1991). Its primary mode of instruction is definitional, abstract, categorical, and determinate; it is sealed, like the fate of oral culture trying to acquire these norms. The artifacts of Standard American Academic English, the standardized language of education in American schools, can be found in virtually every American public high school classroom, where vast branding, marketing, and buy-in initiatives have worked hard to make them seem appropriate and rigorous. SAAE is founded on and enacts a philosophy which is devoted to the elimination of ambiguity and resists the epistemological and moral challenges of alterity. It is the academic end of history, situated outside of development, the final evolutionary endpoint of humanity's Universal Culture in all its bellicose splendor, superior to localized knowledges and invulnerable to their unscientific oral critique.

Resident American students suffer the effects of deadening, monolithic SAAE in proportion to their distance from privilege, many of them unable to march in step to its insistent drumbeat, resulting not (so far) in a radical reconceptualization of SAAE's modernist dispositions but in a redoubling of standardization efforts that, having left a lot of children behind in the past, are supposed to somehow leave fewer behind as the bar is set higher. The unspoken but obvious extrapolation is that some students are expendable, there is no intention of creating a more informed citizenry and a more equitable distribution of wealth according to the principles of democracy, but to realign American education according to the needs of the neoliberal globalized economy, which by its own definition provides just a few places at the top. The fictitious facticity of frozen academic English frustrates great numbers of native English speaking students

raised in American society, but, since they receive it over a longer time and in smaller doses, it does not shock them as it does oral newcomers. SAAE presents a surreal challenge to students who enter this noesis as young adults whose formative experiences have occurred within other cultural and linguistic paradigms. The world that they have known is gone and they are struggling to find new footing, all the trying in every way they know how to *look* perfectly adjusted, to appear as if they fit in and can smoothly manage information whose body temperature has been lowered to near death.

The vast abyss between oral noesis and that of hyperliterate SAAE receives little notice in a situation of extremely limited time and the federal requirement that each school and subset cell within the school show "Adequate Yearly Progress," determined by a standard formula under the No Child Left Behind law (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001), in order to maintain autonomy and retain funding, factors which drive teachers to ignore the actual time needed by students and surge forward to cover the required units using the mandated methods. The situation that these pseudo-educational behaviors create forces the development of elaborate measures of survival by high school students without prior schooling, which takes several forms.

LFS ELLs in High School: Examples of the Sacrificial Paradigm

Presented with impossible-to-comprehend sentences approved for high school subjects by curriculum committees made up of monolingual literates, newcomers gifted by oral noesis with the ability to interpret audio and physical cues call on their skills in interpretive listening, reading lips, and understanding body language to infer which word is on the page by looking not at the letters but at the teacher's lips, and to guess at

the meaning of a passage not by being able to read it but by reading facial expressions, tones of voice, and gestures. Asked lilting tag-questions like, "An amphibian is a warm-blooded vertebrate, isn't it?" or simply, ubiquitously, "You see what I mean, right?" oral newcomers, intuitive, eager to achieve, dutifully respond in the affirmative, and this is all the overworked, undertrained teacher needs to hear to make him believe that they have understood. It is quite astounding how often teachers ask the class as a whole, "Who finished your homework?" or "Who got only one or two wrong?" Up go the hands of students left and right—I see their papers, and, grinning, they see me looking—students who didn't understand the assignment enough to even start the homework, or got only one or two right, proudly identify themselves as winners in this obviously artificial academic game. Unlike Luria's subjects, they are not at home but newcomers in a new environment, and they are not inclined to complain about what a silly waste of time so much of this is, not when they have the ability to make the teacher happy and act the part of the proper student. These alone are accomplishments in a foreign academic world.

In the absence of academic reading proficiency and texts that have lifeworld meaning in an oral world, students struggle to laboriously 'sound out' sentences of great lexical and syntactic obfuscation from the distant side of the abyss. What choice do they have? Here is the reading passage from a homework assignment in beginning high school ELL sheltered social studies:

> Benjamin Franklin, one of the most famous men in American history, had only two years of schooling. Franklin triumphed over his lack of education by reading every book he could beg, buy, or borrow. Frequently till long after

midnight a candle burned in the room of the young man who was gaining his knowledge from the great writers of the past. Enjoying reading more than playing, never happy unless a book was in his hands or crammed into one of his pockets, Franklin was soon better educated than most Americans of his time.

Assisting a newcomer student with the phonetic reading of passages like this day after week after month, not to mention the true-false and multiple choice questions that follow, is for the sensitive educator an exercise in self-abnegation. And this is a modified curriculum version! How many times have we supported a student phonetically through these difficult passages, providing just enough but not too much help, just so they can *form the words phonetically*, as if that meant anything for understanding to students who do not have this English vocabulary? The hurdle of explaining the word 'schooling' alone is agonizing, and emblematic of the distance. And yet at the end of these gut-wrenching intervals, 'reading' is the name we give it, referring only to a jagged, halting phonetic excursion. Everyone is pretending at this point, pretending that if you can oralize some semblance of the word's surface phonemes that means you are reading, pretending that you can grasp the meaning of the sentence without knowing the meaning of most of its words, pretending that if you try hard like Ben Franklin did, you, too, will receive the amazing blessings of candle-lit literacy. Of course some preliterate high school newcomers progress beyond this stage—no one knows this better than I. The ones I am speaking for here are the many, many, many who struggle mightily, for a much longer time than either governmental or ideological conceptions typically allow.

It is easy to understand why students become adept at manipulating placeholders, a strategy often taught explicitly in reading instruction and test-taking support classes. Here is a passage incorporating obsolete English words that can illustrate the point for English-speaking literates:

> Filled with ug, the younghede Tenderis groped his way along the downsteepy path toward the cosh wherein dwelled the feared spirit-person. Squit-a-pipes that he was, Tenderis found negotiating his way through the eileber and venerated dway-berries very teenful in the nyle. He tripped over zuches spiss with maily malshaves that made him quetch at their touch. (Sperling, 1977, pp. 33)

Placeholder cues based on limited word knowledge can help us answer many questions: Where was Tenderis going? *Along* the downsteepy path, *toward* the cosh. What did he trip *over*? *Over* zuches spiss with maily malshaves. This kind of structural placeholder skill wears out its usefulness when questions inevitably turn to the definitional: Define these terms: younghede, teenful, maily. Now the student is left to ask a friend, copy, or resort to dictionary or textbook embedded definitions with the fantastic difficulty and unreality these present to the orally traditioned student. "Why *isn't* this definition correct? I copied it out of the dictionary!" It does not help to explain that the numerated options under a dictionary entry refer to different contexts known to those who read and write dictionaries but, in the case of the more academically oriented terms, are hardly ever known to students of orality.

Let's talk about copying, perhaps the most pervasive scriptural form to be found in ESL classrooms and sheltered content courses. One of the first lessons preliterate

newcomers learn is that there is good copying and bad copying. Sometimes the teacher requires it as a pedagogical exercise: 'Copy the vocabulary words and their definitions in your notebook' may be the most-repeated phrase in American education. There are also intermediary forms, such as copying portions of notes onto a special sheet that students are allowed to have with them on test day—this sheet, but not another. An unregulated form of copying occurs when on a normal lesson day newcomers take their pencils and, glancing furtively left and right, start copying whatever it looks like others are doing. Copying becomes bad when students do it without permission in order to get a good grade on complicated worksheets and tests they cannot otherwise complete. In one case a brand new student just arrived from refugee camp tried to copy the entire IPT English proficiency placement test, bubble answer options and all, on separate sheets hidden in her hijab. This she took to lunch, where she got a variety of opinions on how to answer the various questions that were often miscopied, understandably. This particular case points to the idiocy of the articulation system—the whole incident was motivated by a desire to be placed in a higher ESL level, since this student, after all, was 21 years old, and did not want to be in the lowest level which would keep her from graduating "on time." The greater lesson to be learned from watching oral newcomers navigate the weakness of this literacy-evolved form is how much copying depends on prior literacy—students unaccustomed to reading and writing make constant grievous errors in copying that they are hard-pressed to recognize even when the errors are pointed out, which errors are replicated and expanded in future copyings. How unreal and random all this must seem to orally toned students, who sometimes bring a trusted

teacher in on the subterfuge—how unreal, random, and cruel it ends up seeming to the trusted teacher.

Because, as I said above, what good are meaningless credentials? Given the senseless learning situations which so many older students without prior literacy face, it is easy to understand why many work so hard to acquire credentials at any cost, engaging in very sophisticated credit laundering maneuvers between various high schools and harried guidance counselors, leading to the not at all uncommon situation that a student can have seventy or eighty credits but extremely limited ability to read, write, and do basic math. Pretending is the fate of the sacrificial student, ghettoized to receive surface level, tokenistic standards-based content instruction that looks good only in curriculum guides and to outside evaluators of the content area, but is not meaningfully taught to students whose 'deficits' in language proficiency and cognitive academic preparation present an incredible abyss between their actual state and the subject matter we pretend to teach them and they pretend to learn.

It is my contention that the basic telos underwriting all of this is not ultimately ascribable to a failure of teacher quality or desire, nor a handicap within students, but to the authority of Western education sponsored by epistemological supremacy assumptions and the weight of empire that compels teachers and students to participate in the faking. The math anecdote recounted in Chapter Five is a stark example of this. Authorized by versions of knowledge underwritten by Enlightenment scientific rationality and the authority of empire in its Yankee culmination, American education is having a one-sided conversation with preliterate LFS newcomers that forces the transformation from orality to literacy using ill-suited but mandated methods of

standardization, and casts American schools as agents of neo-Hegelian Empire. The credit laundering, faking, and drop-out rates of older newcomers are not aberrations, but the logical consequence of Enlightenment rationality translated to school and instructional practices, and buttressed with an imperial myth of sacrifice which permits us to look upon oral newcomers as less evolved versions of Americans, who, if they do not succeed when given the same rigorous education our children receive, may and should be sacrificed in their culpable immaturity.

The consequences of the clash of oral and literate noeses constitute a compendium of compulsions: copy or fail, credit launder or fail to graduate. Some are more insidious, like the choice between embedded authentic relationships based on shared meanings, and "a better life," every refugee's mantra, which can only be accessed through academic literacy. Or the deeper, less recognized abandonment of the intimate rapport between language and meaning that characterizes the passage from unmediated life in orality to represented life in literacy. Or the transformation from seeing people as relations to seeing others as means to my ends, the hallmark of one who has truly acquired the highest level of the neoliberal globalization model. The encounter of orality and literacy inevitably engenders a sort of mnemonic plague, in which only written knowledge counts, and memories of elders and traditional knowledge become impediments to progress.

In the neo-Hegelian empire of U.S. schools, words and concepts, and the discourse and pedagogy that surround them, are treated like specimens in formaldehyde, murdered and awaiting dissection. American education in its current manifestation as a product of Eurocentric scientism requires that ideas and words be immobilized in this

way. Standardized tests are the penultimate expression of preserved, embalmed knowledge: the text booklets are their caskets, the schools vaults where they are locked for security are their vaults, the results are the students' and schools' academic epitaphs—published in newspapers for the public to decry and mourn. The encounter of vivified, intimate, contextually charged orality with frozen, preserved, immobilized academic literacy is one that forces young adults who journey from orality to literacy to undergo the process of semiotic embalming while they are living. Just as subjugated, culpably immature primitives have always been sacrificed to the higher planes of progressive Enlightenment modernism, so the noesis of orality is sacrificed to academic literacy.

The moral outrage this situation provokes is great, as it the need for redress. Just as great as the West's complicity in the on-going suffering, though, is the West's need for the particular gifts of orality as a palliative to our own suffering, a topic I shall address in the final chapter.

Chapter 7

Toward a Pedagogy of Oral and Literate Reciprocity

Although it is not the intent of this study to provide a detailed program of specific practices and instructional designs for high school initial literacy English language learners, it is also not my intent to leave us with the hopeless image of frozen knowledge and embalmed students, an image that I argue must be faced but, by virtue of a specifically hermeneutic understanding, is not irremediable. From the earliest pages I have made clear that this study does not suggest abandoning literacy instruction in favor of educational practices that embrace only indigenous oral forms of education and knowledge. What the interpretation does suggest, and has employed the strongest possible terms to show, is that rationalistically toned, positivisitically mediated, standards-embedded academic literacy has too often constituted a neocolonial gesture of conquest of human beings and the natural environment, overtaking and destroying other ways of knowing that it would not and could not valorize from its position as univocal, triumphal final authority.

Once this understanding has been faced, and a decision motivated both epistemologically and morally has been made to oppose the continuation of a one-sided conversation deleterious to the non-Western knowledges of the world and to the natural world itself, I suggest that we are in a position to open to a genuinely humble hermeneutic conversation from which, perhaps, all can benefit. It is important to note that this essentially philosophical conversation is not confined to print literacy issues alone but also relates to Western representation and technological expansion in the

formats of digitacy, for, as Bowers has pointed out, the old distinction dividing cultures into primitive oral versus civilized literate is more and more turning on the culture's relation to digitacy:

> If local cultures in other parts of the world have not yet been pressured to adopt this [computer-mediated] approach to educational reform they will shortly face the decision of whether to allocate their limited resources for the purchase of computers for the classroom or face again the criticism that they are culturally backward—as was the case when literacy was used as the basis for classifying cultures as either modern or premodern. (Bowers, 2006, p. 140)

In parallel to the larger ecological crisis of which this topic is a part, the ontological damage sequent to the encounter of oral noesis and reified Enlightenment literacy conceptions is manmade, and therefore, as in the case of the villagers recovering murdered bodies from the river, I argue that we can and must go upstream to influence the cause. This conversation, one that seeks a way out of the tragically anthropocentric *and* anthropophagic mindset of which American education partakes in a particular way in the high school ESL initial literacy classroom, will necessarily need to be held in countless contexts in encounters between people and systems of radical difference—it is not a project that can be carried out in this scriptural setting, in which I write alone. What I wish to do here is share some reflections on the possibility and curative potential of such a conversation, as considered from the Eurocentric perspective which is my inheritance and that of most every reader of this work.

Curricular Considerations

I have argued, following Akinnaso (1981; 1982), Mosha (2000), and Battiste and Henderson (2000), that the specific affordances of oral noesis and indigenous knowledge must be taken into account in planning and implementing instruction in literacy and academic thinking for people of oral background. These must not be handled solely as topical embellishments, for instance by including a unit on an indigenous group such as 'the Bantu people of Somalia,' but should ideally incorporate characteristic forms of orality into the very structure of pedagogical practices. On this point, Dr. Erica-Irene Daes, chairperson of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, has argued that the diverse elements of any Indigenous knowledge system "can only be fully learned or understood by means of the pedagogy traditionally employed by these peoples themselves, including apprenticeship, ceremonies and practice" within the "central and indispensable classroom" of the natural world (cited in Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 41).

Intergenerational Presence

These points suggest the importance of building curricula that are intentionally intergenerational in approach (Bowers, 2001) wherein elders and mentors from the students' own communities play a central role, engaging students in projects that lead them by apprenticeship not just in the acquisition of knowledge but into alternative ways of knowing that are not enclosed by industrialized culture. Elders from the receiving culture, whose experience has typically been submerged or engaged only very peripherally, may also be called upon to share knowledge of practices and contexts not accessible through books and the Internet, but that are reflective of deeper moral and

practical wisdom. Of course I do not mean to imply that just any knowledge

communicated by an older person is desirable and beneficial—an Al-Qaeda supporter,

Ku Klux clan member, virulent anti-immigration activist, or hedge fund manager may

not be the right choice to invite to an ELL newcomer classroom, although even in such

cases we need as an educational body to be able to somehow engage with our radical

Other, as these examples may represent for some people. Such will be the decisions that

schools and teachers may contemplate according their local situation and needs—my

argument here is that oral noesis teaches the importance of the stories of elders as

important guides to living, therefore, let us consider an increased attention to this in

planning instruction for newcomers and indeed for students in general who can benefit

from the intergenerational connection that is a notable preference of oral noesis.

The Natural World

What is further suggested by Daes' point is that our instruction must focus

specifically and attentively on the natural world, to the lessons we may learn from it, to

the effects our actions have upon it, and what practices damage or sustain it. This

understanding, as I have discussed above, is in no way incidental to but is deeply

inherent in indigenous thinking, evidenced not least by the fact that only with the arrival

of industrial and technological culture has the well-being of the very planet that is

everyone's common home been threatened. Within the structure of traditional wisdom,

indigenous oral cultures bring a mindset which holds not abstract but actual relevance

for our survival, one that intentionally seeks ecological sustainability not as a nice

supplement to the rest of our pursuit of happiness but a precondition to everything else.

McGaa (1990) has foretold that "generations unborn, our heirs, will curse our

generation if we do not seriously heed [the] rumbling, ominous warnings" of global

warming and ecological degradation (p. 43). In a Eurocentric environment inundated

with technology, not only our literate and digital communications but our entire life

patterns are conducted largely outside of an attentiveness to context, to place, that is

taken for granted in oral indigenous knowing, even those where civil turmoil has

disrupted traditional practices that function in harmony with nature. Ong's discussion of

the embeddedness of oral noesis in the situations of the human lifeworld is directly

reflective of this. The point to be made here is that this kind of understanding needs to

be recovered, and the traditional knowledge of oral indigenous people represents a path

to ecological understanding that Eurocentric perspectives would do well to learn from

rather than eliminate. This point is well understood by ecologically attuned Western

thinkers, such as Gregory Bateson (1972, 1991), Thomas Berry (1988, 2009), and

Edward Goldsmith (1992). Gary Snyder, the poet laureate of deep ecology, emphasizes

the need to reorient Western conceptions in a way that locates the concerns of place at

the center rather than the periphery of our educational projects, arguing that we need to

develop a

> sense of "nativeness," of belonging to the place. Some people are beginning
>
> to try to understand where they are, and what it would mean to live carefully and
>
> wisely, delicately in a place, in such a way that you… [and] your children and
>
> grandchildren and generations a thousand years in the future will still be able to
>
> live there. That's thinking as though you were a native. Thinking in terms of the
>
> whole fabric of living and life. (Snyder, 1980, p. 86)

What all this calls for in pedagogical terms is not only a study of geographical features or agricultural practices in one's home state, but a deeper inquiry into the different ways that natural resources and knowledge of the natural world are used in technologized and oral indigenous cultures. It is all too often the case in ESL and content classrooms that the study of a phenomenon such as vanishing rainforests is unconnected to a deeper study of what this phenomenon has to do with the appetites of neoliberal capitalists, or that a health class teaches only those versions of healthy living based on the Western canon. While this question is much larger than can be addressed here, at the very least I am suggesting that taking oral indigenous noesis seriously would make it a matter of routine for teachers to take cues for the content and practice of their units from the worldviews represented by the students present in their classes. Thus, in a class full of Somali and Hmong newcomers, for instance, a teacher might make it a point to study Hmong medicine in the health unit, bringing in Hmong traditional healers as experts in residence to teach students some of the traditional practices, or to study about Somali poetry in a poetry unit, calling on Somali orators to train students in this revered oral practice. True multiculturalism needs to be intentionally inclusive not only of diverse cultural practices native to the United States, an approach taken too often in that field (e.g., Banks, 1994), but to even more radically diverse practices from around the world which high school newcomers among us are uniquely able to represent.

Challenging Administrative Structures

The great challenge here is to districts and departments of education, for it is immediately clear that the kind of knowledge and approach to gaining knowledge

valued in oral and indigenous cultures may never appear in a textbook or a statement of

disciplinary standards and may not be assessable by standardized means. One would

hope that an understanding of the neoimperialist nature of unilaterally founded

educational practices will be an argument with some pragmatic weight in its ecological

ramifications, and some moral weight historically—undeniably, there are many

administrators and government education officials who, if pressed, would stand against

further violence to non-Western worldviews. Great strides have been taken in the

history of the United States to establish more equitable, less discriminatory practices—

there is no reason that elimination of the 'new segregation' of older preliterate ELL

students in American education cannot be another important arena of civil rights action.

Meeting the Learning Needs of Older LFS ELL Students

I want to change directions a bit here and focus specifically on the learning

needs of older students without prior education and how these needs can best be met in

the classroom, in light of the interpretation of orality and literacy offered in this study.

As I have argued above, there is no benefit to be reaped from underestimating or

understating the great distance students of this profile must travel to reach a point of

proficiency in academic English and content material, which themselves are in need of

revivification. Nor is it acceptable to consign these students to mismatched curricula,

inappropriate pedagogy, and arbitrary aging-out deadlines that provoke the development

of compensatory practices like pretending and credit laundering. In Chapter Two's

review of literature, I discussed instructional practices that appear to have some

effectiveness with high school preliterate ELL students; here I would like to explore in

more depth one particular approach that has been developed specifically with the

characteristics of students without prior literacy and schooling in mind—the Mutually

Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) developed by Helaine Marshall, Andrea

DeCapua and their colleagues (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b; DeCapua,

Smathers, & Tang, 2007).

Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm: A Promising Approach

The MALP approach builds on disciplinary understanding of sound pedagogical

practices for ESL instruction, which include: grouping strategies such as collaborative

learning; cognitive strategy training; supports for tasks and content using scaffolding

and other sheltered methods such as Language Experience Approach; theme-based

curriculum design with real-world relevance; and culturally responsive methods and

content that draws on students' funds of knowledge (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010b). The

MALP is significant in that it expands on generally effective practices to create a

customized approach to instruction based on an honest facing of the particular needs of

the instructional situation, which the developers say consists of three essential steps: (1)

accept the conditions the Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

(SLIFE) need in order to learn, including a strong relationship with teachers; (2) design

lessons that combine processes from their learning paradigm with that of the United

States, with a strong emphasis on collaborative learning and scaffolding and a

combination of oral and written learning modes; and (3) focus on activities that use

familiar language and content while developing the cognitive skills or academic

worldview of SLIFE (DeCapua et al., 2009, p. 39). From the perspective of

characteristics of oral noesis as interpreted in this study, these three orientational

considerations represent a uniquely humane, non-colonial gesture toward older

preliterate learners because, first and foremost, they do not sidestep or minimize the abyss these learners must cross but rather locate the pedagogical space exactly there—in the fusion of horizons between oral and academic literate ways of knowing. From that primary position, they call for lessons designed with the particular modes of oral learning in mind, in order to bridge to an American academic paradigm.

The particular characteristics of older, orally traditioned learners that the MALP focuses on were arrived at as a result of work in a variety of U.S. high school settings with students of different ethnic backgrounds. DeCapua and Marshall (2010b) have identified three main factors shared by students without prior schooling regardless of their cultural provenance: (1) collectivism versus individualism; (2) pragmatic ways of thinking versus abstract academic ways; and (3) orality of communication versus literacy. What follows is a synthesis of the MALP developers' discussion surrounding the three characteristic factors of older oral learners (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010b). Because SLIFE students are collectivist, they learn best when learning settings include strong interconnectedness between people—teachers and students—and when they can work together and share responsibility for learning. This preference contrasts strongly with educational approaches based on core American cultural mythologies that encourage independence and individual accountability. As members of oral cultures, these students benefit from significant integration of oral and literate modes of instruction, where oral discussion within a familiar context permeates topical introductions, work patterns, and assessment, in concatenation with reading and writing. Further, students of oral background seek and benefit from redundancy and memorable aggregates of information rather than a sparse, linear presentation of content and skills,

such as is typical in our system of education. Favoring a pragmatic approach to learning, they seek immediate relevance and opportunities to practice rather than analytical tasks that ask them to isolate critical features and perform little academic "tricks" like true/false, multiple choice, and so on.

It is clear that the perspectives represented in the MALP approach are convergent with the present study of the encounter of oral mindset with academic literacy to a significant extent. The accommodation of oral learners' collectivist orientation recalls the points made above regarding the embeddedness of oral learners in a contextual lifeworld where utterances have their meaning, and the preference for situational thinking based on experience versus abstract formal reasoning. The MALP developers recognize the importance of memory supports favored by orally toned learners, specifically recommending the use of redundancy and aggregate expressions as opposed to sparse, linear, syntactically complex text. The MALP presupposes oral learners' preference for experiential, pragmatic knowledge, and thus bases instruction on concrete, real-life activities designed to help students bridge from known concepts to abstract academic thinking. The point from the developers of the MALP regarding academic tricks like true-false and multiple choice recalls one of the central points of my interpretation of oral noesis, that is, the artificiality of propositional reasoning and abstract definitions which older preliterate learners find challenging or a waste of time. As discussed above, the oral approach embraces reality in a holistic manner connected to and informed by experience, while the literate approach to knowledge is expressed typically in abstractions and conceptual categorizations.

While I agree with the developers of the MALP that orally conditioned learners benefit from significant integration of oral modes in instruction, I would as an educator place more emphasis than they appear to on the need for very explicit instruction in the ways of literacy, beginning with the most basic sound-symbol correspondence lessons, and progressing through the development of initial literacy skills with deliberateness and at a pace that does not exceed their learning needs. It could reasonably be argued that the last thing these learners raised in oral noesis need is oral instruction from literates—perhaps indeed the reverse is true. One conclusion that I would not want to have drawn from this study is that because oral learners favor oral modes, instruction in initial literacy classroom should take place primarily orally—oral readings, oral presentations, oral discussions, etc. It is important to raise this issue here, as it is common to see teachers conducting classroom instruction for older LFS students rely very heavily on oral modes; a typical scenario has the teacher reading a book while students listen, followed by oral discussion of the story—this is perhaps an engaging approach but it does not help students learn to read. Certainly newcomer LFS students often gravitate toward the talking part of the lesson, since this is the part where they can often perform better. What I want to add to a discussion of the MALP, then, is what I consider the imperative of focusing lessons on students actually reading at their developmental level—letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, stories, whatever is appropriate—and using oral activities as a support to this rather than themselves being the focus.

While not representing a definitive solution to the challenges faced by older oral learners in U.S. high schools, the MALP has gone a considerable distance in creating

non-imperialistic conditions of possibility for a living encounter of the oral mindset and the very different intellectual landscape of academic literacy. It is a worthwhile starting point for teachers and schools seeking to customize instruction to create and optimal learning opportunity for high school preliterate English language learners.

<p align="center">*Final Ontological and Deontological Considerations*</p>

I would like to end the final chapter with a meditation on the ontological and deontological understandings that we may derive from this interpretation of the encounter of orality with literacy.

We might consider the matter in a global semiotic sense, under the notion of exuberances and deficiencies. From this perspective, we are all deficient in different ways, and our handicaps have distinct sources and consequences. The Latin root of 'oral' refers to an opening, an orifice through which depths of understanding may be achieved, intimately linked with the sacred—the oracle imparts mysterious portents, *ora* means not only speech but prayer. Literacy (>Lat. for 'letter') is the letter of the law rather than its spirit, the externally accessible, knowable, translatable. If our reference point is modern American academic literacy, it is clear that older preliterate people have a disability which inhibits participation in the vast workings of the literate world, but it must also be seen that literates, especially the highly literate, have a disability which precludes participation in the vast workings of the oral world, the ways of people for whom meaning is embedded in proximal context with a known community. Each way of living has its own lineage, its own noesis with its own rules and a completely different set of skills needed to navigate it successfully. Both ways are deficient in a certain *sense*, one governed by hearing, the other governed by sight, but one

deficiency—illiteracy—puts people at a disadvantage for accessing power and privilege, while the other—illorality—puts people at a disadvantage for accessing relationship and belonging.

On the other hand, regardless of where we end up in maturity, all human beings spring from oral roots. Each of us is oral first. As children we all develop in the ways of orality—our world consists of relationships with caregivers, we develop understanding in primary oral relationships, indeed, our very ability to understand anything at all is developed by years of practice at perceiving and interpreting speech (words, sentences, prosody), but also gesture, facial expression, physical caresses and care, and of course, silence. The early oral phase of life, which is also the fulcrum of development for the entire person, unfolds entirely in embedded oral context. There are no meanings or messages from scriptural authorities, no abstract linear explications unconnected to the oral mythopoesis. In the case of people who remain in orality, life continues and develops along these lines, gaining nuance, skill, and differentiation. In the case of people who join the world of literacy, there is a bifurcation that fundamentally changes conditions, and the conditioning of the person, forever. There remains however an experiential basis, a memory of oral being, that evokes in us a longing for a time of pre-reflective, tacit understanding, even as we maintain our individual character and differences. This recalls de Certeau's notion of "union and differentiation join[ing] together" (1991, p. 17, author's translation) out of a sense of moral care and ontological connection, a notion that can provide a basis for common understanding between cultures of literacy and orality.

The Gift of Orality

The endurance of writing, according to Caputo, is inextricably a function of its mortification, awaiting like Cinderella the kiss of orality, what Gadamer calls the *Vollzug*: "the breath of the living subject, to bring it back to life" (Caputo, 2000, p. 52). I want to suggest that, considered against the psychoses of the literate occidental world, the noesis of orality brings the possibility of a healing gift, in the sense that much of what we in the hyperliterate academic cultures lack is precisely what oral cultures possess. It is appropriate therefore to speak not only of the challenges of orality, but of the *gift of orality*, a gift that some in Eurocentric cultures have understood the value of, but the institution of American education has yet to position itself to receive. What is needed in order to perceive the value of the gift of orality is an embrace of the hermeneutic path, the philosophy of the middle way, which refers not to a sense of pandering compromise but to an understanding that the wisdom which may guide us in our present circumstances arises precisely from within our current circumstances, from here in the middle of things, from a deeper understanding of how we got to where we are now and what is needed so that our future is not foreclosed but open and sustainable. The philosophical reference here, as noted earlier, is to Gadamer (1960/1994), who elucidated a way of reconciling the inheritances of tradition and the presence of the new through the articulation of the fusion of horizons, a spirit that has guided each page of this work.

A Pedagogy of Deep Reciprocity

I want to suggest that an understanding of the fusion of oral and literate horizons provides a new epistemological frame of reference, located in a recognition of the

pragmatic and ethical imperative of a pedagogy of **deep reciprocity** in educational and societal relations with people and cultures of orality. From this perspective, the Biblical command (Luke 6:27) to love your enemy, the Other, is not only and not so much about 'doing the right thing' but also, perhaps mostly, a statement of our own need: the oral Other has noetic knowledge that the West is suffering from a lack of, and requires to survive. Smith (1999a) has put it this way:

> Without an appreciation of the radical mystery which confronts us in the face of every other person, our theorizing must inexorably become stuck. For then we are no longer available for that which comes to meet us from beyond ourselves, having determined in advance the conditions under which any new thing will be acceptable, thereby foreclosing on the possibility of our own transformation.
>
> (p. 136)

By this understanding, the underside of modernist literacy, which is orality, is just that to which we of the Eurocentric cultures need to remain open in order maintain the possibility of our own transformation. By the same understanding, the reverse is also true.

This perspective allows us then to affirm that there is no responsible choice other than to teach literacy and academic knowledge to all who come to live in this and other societies of high literacy. Literacy *is* an enormously powerful tool in the world as it has come to be configured, the use of which needs to be powerfully tempered by an embrace of the noesis of face to face relations with other people and the natural world. As I have argued so strenuously, we must teach literacy to older adult newcomers in a way that both makes sense pedagogically in light of their specific orientations, and that

recovers a heart of morality in global intercultural relations. The better angels of our

nature call upon us to leave the mindset of political, economic, and cognitive

imperialism permanently behind.

This study has constituted an exemplar of the conviction that we learn more

about what makes *sense* for both oral and literate worlds by reflecting on the existential

nature of oral cultural experience in its encounter with literacy. The gift of orality to our

pedagogical transformation consists precisely in how much we stand to learn about the

weaknesses and fallacies of our own instructional designs by noticing how they are

received by those who are previously untouched by a cynical, distanciated relation with

knowledge and experience. An intersubjective, valence-structured orientation of deep

reciprocity in the context of literacy instruction to oral newcomers might be stated this

way: On the one hand, we have a responsibility to teach in the most effective, humane

way, so that high school age oral newcomers have a fair chance at ***practical survival*** in

a world of hyperliteracy. On the other hand, we have the opportunity to cultivate our

ability to be open and attuned to the ambiguous plenitude of relationships and the

natural world through meaningful engagement with spontaneous, embedded, orally-

toned ways of being, so that our hyperliterate selves may have a fair chance at our own

ontic survival.

The unfathomable abyss may turn out to be an image of both death and life:

death to the lonely, bitter, know-it-all Western self, and life to… life.

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