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Interrogating the ethics of literacy intervention in Indigenous schools

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ABSTRACT: *Recognising that literacy is fundamental to the educational success of Indigenous students, this essay reviews current literacy intervention programs from a social justice perspective. It reveals the tension between policies and initiatives that have addressed the two key rights of Indigenous people – the right to access mainstream knowledge and language through the provision of empowering education and the right to sustain their own languages and cultures through culturally responsive education. In particular, the essay focuses on the National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) – a large-scale initiative supported by the former Liberal and the current Labour government in 2004-2008. A spin-off from NALP has been the formation of the Accelerated Literacy Consultants' Network that provides professional development sessions in Accelerated Literacy and literacy education more broadly to teachers from Aboriginal Independent Community Schools across Australia. The essay questions the view of justice in the NALP's theoretical and pedagogical design and its effects on teaching and learning in Aboriginal schools. The paper, then, discusses the primacy of ethics in literacy education in order to make it more hospitable and responsive to cultural-linguistic differences.*

KEYWORDS: *literacy intervention, Indigenous schools, recognition, redistribution, ethics of teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Literacy education in Australia has been a central point of debate and intervention for the last three decades. Since the early 1980s, it has experienced a roller-coaster of policy changes. The focus and the content of these changes have varied over time. Yet, they have all been driven by concerns about falling literacy standards and the efficiency of schooling, seeking to close the gap in educational achievement. For political purposes, these concerns have often been re-articulated in terms of "literacy crisis" to create anxiety in the public sphere and, in turn, to shape the debates about what counts as literacy and what kind of interventions are required.

These debates have polarised the positions of the political Right and Left, as well as triggering academic "literacy wars" between psycholinguistic and social-constructivist approaches to literacy. The debates have also made various shifts in literacy demands of the contemporary world more apparent. For instance, a shift from relatively stable industrial economies to globalised and post-industrial ones has triggered the global economic concerns about literacy levels as a key indicator of economic productivity. As Robertson argues, educational systems are now required to be responsive to trends within the international marketplace "through creating appropriately skilled and entrepreneurial citizens and workers able to generate new and added economic values" (Robertson, 2000, p. 187). At the same time, a shift from mono-culturally geared print-based media spaces to multimodal and linguistically diverse information environments (Luke, 2005) has fuelled concerns about social

justice in literacy education. It has become clear that education systems have to deal not only with economic demands but also with the increasing diversity of social and cultural literacies, multiple identities and discourses that students bring to their classrooms.

How governments and education systems are actually dealing with differences today is, however, highly problematic. We should be cautious about accepting the neoliberal discourse of literacy crisis and associated standard-based reforms at face value. In developed countries like Australia, low levels of literacy are not a large-scale problem, but rather indicate a problem of under-provision of a socially just education to disadvantaged socio-cultural groups. For instance, efforts to ameliorate the performance of Aboriginal students by attempts to raise their literacy levels have not improved matters much because they did not address a set of larger social, cultural and linguistic issues. In this regard, the increasingly powerful discourses of neo-liberal reforms in education tend to divert attention from the continuing marginalisation, chronic unemployment and economic decline of Indigenous communities and from the complexities of identity, language and power relationships in education. Instead of addressing these issues, it is more convenient to explain educational disadvantage and unemployment as being the result of illiteracy, rather than a cause of it. In so far as illiteracy is one of the concrete expressions of an unjust social reality (Freire, 1985), it is important to recognise that literacy is not simply a matter of providing access to the powerful knowledge and discourses. Such an access will not break the cycle of poverty or compensate for socio-economic disadvantage unless it works in tandem with Indigenous community aspirations for an empowering education that remains culturally inclusive, socially just and critical (Nakata, 2000).

Recognising that literacy is fundamental to the educational success of Indigenous students, this essay reviews current literacy intervention programs from a perspective of redistributive and recognitive justice (Fraser, 1995, 1997, 2000). It reveals the tension between policies and initiatives that have addressed the two key rights of Indigenous people – the right to access mainstream knowledge and language through the provision of empowering education (redistribution) and the right to sustain their own languages and cultures through culturally responsive education (recognition). The essay then focuses on the National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) – a large-scale initiative supported by the former Liberal and the current Labour government. I question the program's intent and capacity to empower Indigenous students through literacy education that misrecognises their identities, cultural practices and knowledges. I, then, discuss the primacy of ethics in literacy education as a way of making it more hospitable and responsive to cultural-linguistic differences.

LITERACY INTERVENTIONS: THE PARADOXES OF REDISTRIBUTION AND RECOGNITION

Many literacy interventions have been justified from a social justice perspective, even the most conservative ones. It might be useful therefore to start my discussion with a conception of social justice as a multi-faceted political practice (cf. Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002). According to Fraser (1995, 2000), most types of social injustice incorporate a mixture of economic and cultural injustices. Economic injustices create obstacles to the equal participation of people in economic life by denying them resources and

goods. These injustices are distributive in their nature and, in this case, people are subjected to severe material deprivation and, hence, suffer from misdistribution. Cultural injustices, on the other hand, can prevent people from full participation in social practices that are built on hierarchies of cultural value, thereby denying them equal respect. In this case, people suffer from cultural inequalities or misrecognition. Those who focus on economic injustices see the problem in the class structure of society and hope to redistribute economic capital from the rich to the poor (Fraser, 2000). Members of the second camp, by contrast, put emphasis on the cultural dimension of social practices and seek recognition of cultural, ethnic, social and gender differences. It is possible, of course, to identify "collectivities" that are subjected to either forms of injustice. For instance, Fraser (1997) believes the contemporary proletariat is an example of being subjected to misdistribution, while sexual minorities represent a case of misrecognition. However, she also recognises the problematic nature of perceiving social groups as "pure collectivities". Indeed, her general standpoint on the perspectival dualism of economic and cultural forms of oppression is that justice today requires both redistribution and recognition, as neither alone is sufficient.

In searching for an alternative political-ethical framework, Fraser (1997) introduces the concept of bivalent collectivity when a group experiences injustices that are traceable to both political economy and culture simultaneously. I argue, drawing on Fraser's work, that literacy interventions in Indigenous communities have emphasised either the socioeconomic aspect of literacy (redistributive education) or its cultural and symbolic aspects (recognitive education). The proponents of the former perspective on educational interventions perceive literacy as a means of economic empowerment that would raise the capabilities of Indigenous people to function in the Australian economy more effectively and, in turn, lead to a more equal distribution of material resources. The advocates of the latter perspective view literacy as a means of interrupting cultural domination, non-recognition and/or disrespect of Indigenous identities, knowledges and practices and as a means for culturally responsive and just education.

Despite the fact that advocates of these contrasting standpoints have been quite vocal and active in pursuit of their aims, both socioeconomic injustices and cultural injustices are pervasive with regard to Indigenous communities. Both are rooted in politics and practices that have systematically disadvantaged them and neither can alleviate the situation. If one attempts to ameliorate the socioeconomic circumstances of these communities by only attempting to raise literacy levels, it does not help much in achieving parity of participation in social life. As Freire once said, "merely teaching men [sic] to read and write does not work miracles; if there are not enough jobs for men able to work, teaching more men to read and write will not create them" (Freire, 1972, p. 25). At the same time, recognitive claims often "take the form of calling attention to, if not performatively creating, the putative specificity of some group and then of affirming its value" (Fraser, 1997, p. 160). From this perspective, Indigenous ways of meaning-making, narrating and representing are conceived as radically different from or incompatible with Western literacy practices. Such a differentiation of the Other can work against the project of a just literacy education that both responds to differences and enables people to operate beyond the real and imagined boundaries of culturally different spaces. For instance, perspectives that only "celebrate" differences, without questioning the underlying relations of power or

considering cultural hybridization, can further contribute to their stigmatisation and valorisation. Thus, two perspectives on literacy education of Aboriginal people stand in tension with each other and this can impede the project of a socially just education.

With this distinction in place, we can now look briefly at the recent history of policy-making and research that have addressed, directly or indirectly, the question of justice in the literacy education of Indigenous people. Not so long ago, in the heyday of multiculturalism and Keynesian welfarism in the late 1970s – early 1980s, debates about social justice in education were typically played out in terms of economic redistribution of resources and recognition of cultural identities, languages and ways of knowing. Drawing on the tradition of egalitarianism and developments in multicultural policy-making, many educators were committed to change the detrimental consequences of the preceding "Protection" legislation that institutionalised the segregation and cultural-linguistic assimilation of Aboriginal people as well as inferior education practices in separate mission or reserve schools (Hollinsworth, 1998). The primary agenda of progressive education, in this regard, was to justify, defend and enact a radical shift from the assimilationist policies and deficit views of educating Indigenous students and to the recognitive models of literacy pedagogy that would enable these students to maintain their cultural values and still participate effectively in society.

Recognitive frameworks

Studies into Aboriginal ways of living and learning have followed the seminal work by Stephen Harris (1980, 1984), who described traditional learning styles among Aboriginal communities. Focusing on real-life, context- and culture-specific practices, research in this tradition pointed to the failure of conventional Western schooling methods to accommodate effectively the Aboriginal ways of learning and responding to schooling. The 1980s were marked by establishing community education initiatives which, among other issues, focused on the development of courses to meet the needs of Indigenous communities. These initiatives required the increase of resources available to teachers and emphasised collaborative work with government agencies to design and implement curriculum that was relevant to the education of Indigenous students (Partington, 1998).

Particularly significant in the 1980s was the publication of *Aboriginal Perspectives on Experience and Learning* (Christie, 1985) and *Teaching Aboriginal Children* (Christie, Harris & McClay, 1987). These books provided an examination of Aboriginal world views, a discussion of how these differ from Western world views and an analysis of the ways in which socio-linguistic and socio-cultural differences can lead to misrecognition inside the classroom and impact on learning. Even though such publications raised the educators' awareness of cultural difference and mapped an alternative "Both Ways" approach to education (e.g. a bilingual and bicultural approach), they also represented an essentialised view of Indigenous culture as inherently incompatible and radically different from Western culture (Mishra, 1996; Nicholls, Crowley & Watt, 1996). This, in turn, has been seen as the work implicitly contributing to the ideology of cultural binarism and covert racism that relates to "the identification of such slippery categories as "Western knowledge" and "Indigenous knowledge"" and to who can know and who can speak with respect to these knowledges and who can authorise their incorporation within curricula (McConaghy, 2000, p. 10). Some calls were made both internationally and locally to move away

from disempowering "culturalism" and to the empowerment of communities through education and other political actions (cf. Benhabib, 2002). Others called for a more radical and critical departure from obsession with ethnographies of "cultural difference" (cf. Friedman, 1999) and instead to look at socio-political reasons for Aboriginal academic failure and ways of "decolonising" Indigenous education.

Redistributive frameworks

Some of these issues, particularly the empowerment of Indigenous people in education and improvement of learning opportunities in the area of language and literacy, were recognised in the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1989). This policy identified the equality of access to educational services as a way of redistributing dominant literacy to Indigenous communities. The work of Brian Gray and others in the early 1990s represented a response of researchers and educators to this political demand. By drawing on systemic functional linguistics as an organising framework for the development of "socially constructed learning", these researchers have seen access to Standard Australian English (SAE) and literacy as a way of empowering Indigenous students (Dawson & Gondarra, 1994; Gray, 1990; Veel, 1991).

Central to this pedagogical framework has been a process of negotiating content and methods for learning between teachers and students, within which teachers provide models to guide the learning of standard language and English literacy, and support students' staged movement from the initial deconstruction of texts (that is, the first stage of reading) to the re-construction of textual content (that is, the end-point of writing). This approach represented a departure from the "Both Ways" approach to Indigenous education or, as Walton (1990) put it, this was "the English side of two-way education" (p. 224). It also heralded a shift from the recognitive frameworks of literacy education to the redistributive ones.

These developments in policy-making and educational research lent a distinctive shape to arguments about socially just literacy education in Aboriginal schools. Taking for granted that Standard English and literacy provided the appropriate framework of an empowering education, this approach aimed to redistribute powerful literacy (and cultural-linguistic capital) from the mainstream to the Aboriginal minority. In the eyes of the protagonists of this approach, just education demanded that Indigenous students gain access to the dominant literacy in order to be able to participate on a par with others in social life. The argument focused on exactly what should count as a "literate discourse" and how to scaffold students' access to it. Engrossed in conceptualising "the what" and "the how", the proponents of the literacy access framework apparently felt no necessity to consider "at what cost" to one's sense of cultural and linguistic identity such redistribution might be enacted. Another set of questions has arisen with regard to the substance of redistributive education. How much access is granted and to what kind of discourses? Who grants this access and on what terms? Is there a space for the recognition of Indigenous literacies, textual practices and knowledges? And, most importantly, what are the effects of the redistributive framework of literacy education on students' learning and teachers' work?

The neoliberalization of redistributive frameworks

From 1997 onward, literacy interventions in Indigenous schools have acquired a distinct neoliberal character. A major thrust of government policies for schools has been the development of national standards and the establishment of nationally comparable data against these standards. As a result, programs of national or state-wide testing have been introduced to monitor the extent to which these standards are being met and to evaluate the effectiveness of different instructional and intervention approaches designed to improve literacy outcomes. This led to the development of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan as enunciated in the document *Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools* (DEETYA, 1998). In 1999, the *Adelaide Declaration* reinforced a set of goals directed towards strengthening the literacy and numeracy achievements of all Australian school children. Among other things, these policies reaffirmed socially just schooling as the framework for achieving equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for Indigenous students:

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve, and over time, match those of other students. (MCEETYA, 1999, 3.3)

Some directions were outlined in developing more effective models of education for Indigenous students. As a result, there has been a proliferation of research projects supported by the Commonwealth Government, and some of these pointed to preferred models of research and education (see the review of the projects, Parliament House, 2000). The scope and the quality of these projects make them deserving of consideration as a foundation of neoliberal policy development at national, state and local levels. These projects identified a tension between those programs that value and centrally draw upon Indigenous culture, identity, world views and literacies and those that are more oriented towards the development of English language and literacy skills as a basis for further education and workplace preparation.

Those who represent the former group have argued for an education that is relevant to Indigenous students. They put forward the following main reasons: first, if education is relevant, students are more likely to attend school and, by implication, to learn and, second, culturally relevant education also recognises the value of Indigenous peoples and thus enhances positive self-identification and motivation. These studies identified principles that are relevant to Indigenous students and their education – that is, those that address and recognise issues of Indigenous identity and culture, create an education environment in which students want to remain, enhance teacher professionalism and readiness to engage with the life-worlds and languages of their students, emphasise family and community involvement and build a positive sense of self (identity) as something that is centrally linked to educational outcomes (Cairney, 2002; Herbert, Anderson, Price & Stehbens, 1999; Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe & Gunstone, 2000). This view, as Schwab (2006, p. 2) argues, has remained an ideal because "in the rush to attain literacy and numeracy benchmarks, educators and systems seldom recognise the degree to which Indigenous people are disappointed in the failure of Western education to conserve and reaffirm elements of traditional culture."

To be sure, it was exactly in the rush to warrant better learning outcomes that the neoliberals focused more on the explicit acculturation of Indigenous students to a

"schooling culture" and the Standard English on which the school system is based (Northern Territory Department of Education, 1999). This was indicative of a broader shift in policy-making from social justice to an economic agenda. Large-scale programs, such as the *Scaffolding Literacy Project* (Gray, Cowey & Axford, 2003), have been financially supported to develop effective teaching methods in this regard. Unlike other short-term projects, this was an ambitious five-year program aiming to accelerate the literacy skills of Indigenous students in regional and remote Australia and to develop a sustainable pedagogy. As such, the program was predominantly oriented towards an increase of learning outcomes, pedagogical effectiveness and quality of school and teacher support. This approach was in many ways parallel to approaches developed in the 90s in the USA by educators for African-American and ESL students (Delpit, 1995; Harris-Wright, 1999; Johns, 2002). However, as Malcolm (2003) argues, the scaffolding literacy approach in Australia is "independent of a focus on the Indigenous literacy practices" (p. 7). What we have witnessed in the process of implementing the economically driven models of education and its rationalisation is the departure from the recognitive frameworks of literacy education and bilingual schooling.

Current neoliberal reforms in Australia are changing the way we think and argue about a socially just literacy education for Indigenous peoples further. These reforms are primarily driven by discourses of accountability, effectiveness and performativity rather than by the transformative project of social justice in and through education. It is true that neoliberal initiatives attempt to redistribute dominant literacy across diverse schools, school systems and the cultural-political geographies of schooling. Yet, such reforms are aimed only at correcting inequitable learning outcomes without addressing, or partially addressing, the underlying framework that generates them. The National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) is an illustrative example of a current neoliberal take on closing the gap in literacy outcomes through accountability processes, performance indicators and the substantial financial injection in rolling out programs that "work" across jurisdictions.

The aim of NALP has been to bridge the educational divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by adopting an intervention approach known as Accelerated Literacy. This approach has been seen by its proponents as pedagogy that can be successful in improving the literacy levels of Indigenous students, many of whom are ESL students with a history of school failure. It has been claimed that the NALP does more than just "accelerating" the literacy competencies of "at risk" students, but that it is enabling them to become participants in a literate society. However, due to the political pressure, the program has focused centrally on accountability, influencing the curriculum and pedagogy. In this sense, the NALP has been introduced primarily to monitor learning outcomes in Indigenous schools on a national scale, as well as providing "expert" support to teachers to improve their effectiveness (Gray, 2007). By making connections between low literacy outcomes and economic marginalisation, this program has seen the remedy in implementing a highly structured and scripted pedagogical framework to support teachers.

The accountability regime and pedagogical principles of this program, however, reflect a broader political turn away from the recognitive ethics in education. I ague below that in search for a quick or, rather, "accelerated" solution, literacy intervention programs like the NALP adopt, or are forced to comply with, a reductive and

economistic view of fixing literacy. The impact of such interventions, as this article will go on to argue, are multidimensional and profound, involving a series of transformations in educational governmentality, teacher professionalism and professional education, curriculum, assessment in/of schools and the social relationships between teachers and students.

ACCELERATED LITERACY, OR ENFORCING LITERACY EDUCATION WITHOUT ETHICS?

Australian newspapers today are filled with dismal depictions of the performance of the current government in closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. Indeed, despite the rhetoric of crisis and subsequent initiatives to make literacy education more effective and increase teacher quality, current reforms continue to fail Aboriginal schools, teachers and students. In the pursuit of accelerated results, both former and current neoliberal government have been heavily preoccupied with the collection of statistics and the development of technologies of classifying and enumerating the effectiveness of literacy teaching and learning. This has allowed literacy education to be rendered calculable, supposedly "transparent" and, therefore, governable (cf. Bonnet & Carrington, 2000). While this type of governmentality has been instrumental in conveying standards and monitoring learning outcomes, it has also led to the development and introduction of the normative curricula that inevitably harbour misrecognition as their by-product. The fundamental assumption of the neoliberal approach to literacy intervention is that uniform, externally formulated standards in literacy and a strict accountability system (that relies upon high-stakes tests) can improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, it is questionable that the curriculum of cultural-textual domination and pedagogy of assimilation can be enthusiastically embraced by students who are still suffering racial discrimination.

The NALP represents this kind of literacy intervention that forces students to comply with an alienating system of schooling. It is designed to promote a literacy curriculum that reflects an ideology of literacy as a set of technical skills – that is, a means-ends rationality that is demanded by a neoliberal economic model. Brian Gray, as a key academic involved in developing the NALP, has identified in this regard dominant academic and "literate" discourses as a primary goal for teaching. The argument for this is that Indigenous students come to school with little understanding of the discourses needed for successful learning. He draws on Gee's (1991, p. 33) definition of Discourse as "a socio-culturally distinctive and integrated way of thinking, acting, interacting, talking, and valuing connected with particular social identity or role, with its own unique history, and often with its own distinctive "props" (building, objects, spaces, schedules, books, etc)." Yet, Gray (2007) evacuates any critical, cultural or historical dimension from such a definition by re-presenting literate discourses as appropriate ways of thinking or "decontextualised rationality", which the Aboriginal students should be able to predict, read and respond to. This constitutes, in Gray's view, "the fundamental block of human communication" (Gray, 2007, p. 12). As such, this view of communication not only legitimises particular Western discourses and SAE, which are secondary discourses to Aboriginal students, but also presents them as the only appropriate way of communication and, hence, as something that can change their thinking.

In advocating this approach, Gray (2007) is specific about which "bits" of language to teach and in what order by saying that particular attention should be paid to vocabulary and grammar that are used in the production of various text-types. A critical factor in teaching academic and literate discourses, in his view, is the provision of linguistic recourses and concepts (for example, nominalisation, grammatical metaphor) that would enable students to see and understand how "abstraction of concepts and images are built in as properties of the texts themselves through careful manipulation of word and grammar choices" (Gray, 2007, p. 8). Through access to these resources, he argues, students will be able to construct a different perspective on their experiences and represent them in a way that is different from oral accounts – that is, in ways that come to be associated with valued forms of textual representations in the Western literate society. Even if one recognises that such a position might have value from the point of view of redistributive justice and empowerment, there are a number of serious problems that arise from the recognitive perspective on justice in education and, particularly, from an ethical standpoint on teaching the Other.

It is important to mention here, that the design of the NALP can be justified only as a form of abstract (deontological) morality that enables one to make judgments about the rightness or wrongness of actions on the basis of a universal norm. In this regard, accessing the "decontextualised rationality" of Western discourses can be only considered morally justified and the right thing to do, if this would enable the equal participation of all in social practices, presupposing in turn that all people have an equal moral worth. However, even though one might argue from this position that a decontextualised literacy is the right literacy for all, this leaves the issue of social justice open. Specifically, this opens up the questions of power relations between a supposedly universal literacy and particular or situated literacies (Street, 1995; Barton & Hamilton, 1998) and the relationship between the normative core in decontextualised literacy and the misrecognition of other ways of meaning- and identity-making in teaching and learning. This is not only a matter of acknowledging the primary Discourses (Gee, 1996) of Indigenous students – that is, the ways of talking and meaning-making privileged in their families and communities and through which they come to know their first language (and associated dialects) and develop a complex understanding of their natural environment and social relationships. This is first and foremost an issue of misrecognition as a form of oppression that, in Charles Taylor's words, imprisons people in a false, distorted, reduced mode of being:

> Beyond simply lack of respect, it can inflict a grievous wound, saddling people with crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy but a vital human need. (Taylor, 1992, p. 25)

The denial of recognition is particularly visible in Gray's distortion of sociocultural and Vygotskian traditions in literacy research and pedagogy; traditions that have focused centrally on cultural practices and their role in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). These traditions have made a significant contribution to democratic education by promoting classrooms as learning environments in which diversity is seen as a resource rather than a liability. Diversity here encompasses not only racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and linguistic difference, but also diversity in the mediational tools and learning contexts themselves.

Equally, if the value of diversity is misrecognised, the NALP misrepresents the concepts of the ZPD and "scaffolding" as the organising pedagogical principles of literacy education. Instead of providing a context for rich, dialogical and collaborative learning, Gray (2007) uses these principles to position teachers as the keepers of the norm who apprentice the learners into the so-called "intentionalities" of literate/academic discourse. He argues that "the intentionalities involved in reading, writing and classroom learning negotiation are invisible to the uninitiated observer" (Gray, 2007, p. 18). This explains his perspective on the role of the teacher as a master in apprenticing students to the literate discourse; someone who is "tuning" them into the intentionalities of the text. This is evident in how some practitioners understand this pedagogical approach:

> Gray and Cowey have developed a new way of inviting students into literate ways of thinking, by performing questions in a way that lets students know what is inside the teacher's head. (Dillon, Hayes & Parkin, n.d., p. 1)

This philosophy of teaching in the NALP has been justified on the basis of teachers' heightened sense of responsibility to intervene in the learning process so that students can succeed (Delpit, 1995; Derewianka, 1990; Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987). However, this is done without any critical perspective on how knowledge and power are produced and circulate in society through discourses (Foucault, 1980).

As Kamler (1994), Freedman and Medway (1994), Luke (1996), Norton and Toohey (2003) point out, there is always a danger in reifying discourses with a text-intensive teaching; some teachers may fail to acknowledge changes and variations or address the workings of power in discourse and how this positions readers and writers; some teachers may see the explicit teaching of literate discourse as just a "how-to-do" list (Hyland, 2003), thereby reinforcing the status quo rather than empowering students (Luke, 1996). All this criticism is warranted because the key principles of scaffolding in the NALP have been built around an assumption that common knowledge can be established unproblematically. The teacher is presented as a carrier of common knowledge that enacts a particular script, scaffolding the students into what is "inside her head". Compounding the effects of enforcing a scripted pedagogy on teachers is the rigid accountability regime that comprises tests related to the program, as well as a suite of state and national literacy tests.

As a result, authoritative, scripted pedagogy and accountability pressures in and around the NALP alienate teachers from their work by stripping it of its professional richness and reducing it to a set of teaching steps and performance indicators (cf. Sachs, 2002, 2003). Making the teachers' work transparent through observations, inspections and reporting of test results for some may appear to be a legitimate form of accountability, but for others it is a way of demoralising the profession, increasing attrition rates and negatively affecting teacher professional identity (Ingersoll, 2003). Similarly, misrecognition and regular testing can alienate Indigenous students by stripping the process of learning of its situatedness in the world. These forms of alienation in conditions of neo-liberal accountability erode relationships of responsibility and, in general, relational ethics between teachers and students (Biesta, 2004). The neoliberal conditions of reification, in which teachers, their practices and students are treated as measurable, instrumentalised objects of scrutiny (to be rewarded or punished), deflect attention from ethics in literacy education and from moral dilemmas that teachers face. The point here is then, as Herbert et al. (1999)

argue, that what is seen as poor educational outcomes and poor attendance from a non-Indigenous perspective could be seen from another perspective as a failure of the school system to draw on the students' rich semiotic world and, in turn, as a rejection by the students themselves of that school system.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: (RE)TURNING TO ETHICS

How, then, can we think about social justice in neoliberal conditions of literacy education differently? How can we speak back to the politics of unethical literacy interventions in Indigenous schools? In my view, it is important in such conditions to (re)turn to ethics, acknowledging that any political project, including education, is blind without ethics. In the noble, professional pursuit to educate, to empower and to make a difference, ethics haunts us with the demand for a more scrupulous criticism of what literacy education currently is and what it ought to be. In the pursuit of social justice, ethics haunts us with an obligation to respond to the demand that comes from others (difference). Ethics, in this sense, is about opening up spaces for socially just relations. Thinking about justice as the relation to others, Derrida (2000) equates ethics to hospitality as a practice in counteracting violence and exclusion. In his view *ethics is hospitality* that one offers to others. It is a gift that consists in the "opening without horizon, without horizon of expectation, an opening to the newcomer whoever that may be" (Derrida, 1999, p. 70). This view of ethics encompasses both the redistributive and the recognitive dimension of social justice. It also invites us to ask yet another question: Can English language and literacy education be ethical if it is not open to cultural and linguistic differences?

If literacy education is to be hospitable, it should be open to the multiplicity of identities, knowledges, texts, languages and meanings that students bring with them into the classroom. Hospitable or welcoming education is what education is called to be in multicultural conditions. However, schooling in its current configuration includes all kinds of discourses and practices that marginalise and exclude, discipline and punish, homogenise and normalise. These discourses inject the "rules of engagement" into social relations with others, ascribe one's responsibility, as well as define the limits of one's hospitality as a set of conditions to be met by others and upon meeting which we are prepared to extend our welcome. While the current neo-liberal frameworks of teaching English literacy recognise and even celebrate difference, their understanding of how to relate to others and pedagogical responsibility for others are limited by universalising and assimilative practices, even though these may be presented as a pedagogy of empowerment. It is then a project for us to offer hospitality beyond our current practices, as a way of grappling with the tensions between decontextualised literacy and particular literacy events, between the moralism of empowerment and the situated ethics of responsibility to our students that we encounter every day. Experiencing these tensions, in effect, keeps the idea of hospitable education alive.

It is probably at this point that we may make a distinction between pedagogical practice (that is, teaching the Other) and ethics (that is, response-ability to the Other). In doing so, we might then argue the primacy of the ethical in teaching. It is only then we can say that being hospitable to and responsible for the Other is the very possibility of justice in and through pedagogical practice. (Re)turning to ethics as hospitality injects a primordial dimension into how we can relate to cultural and

linguistic differences; before these relations have become mediated by curriculum frameworks and rationalised as teaching targets and learning outcomes. The key issue here is shifting the focus away from the politically meditated ways of relating to Indigenous students to the primacy of ethics in everyday classroom events, as a responsibility for their welfare, their futures and, in turn, for the future of multicultural society in which we live. This is a question of shifting away from learning how to live *side-by-side* with others and to learning how to live with them *face-to-face*. Needless to say that the possibility of interrupting the cultural, linguistic or epistemological violence towards cultural-linguistic diversity in current educational reforms will depend on the possibility of engaging all students in dialogical learning from and with difference. More specifically, this ethical-political project should be transformative, restoring a sense of the agency of those "others" who have been excluded, marginalised or demonised in the process of inhospitable education.

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