The Power of Literacy in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*: The

Making/Unmaking of the World

by

Ann S. Beck

M.A., University of Saskatchewan, 2000

B.Ed., University of Saskatchewan, 1989

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University of Victoria

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Abstract

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels continue to be at the centre of debate

regarding the value of the series with respect to children's literacy. Informing this debate

are two perspectives: on one hand is the argument that *Harry Potter* encourages children

to read and write; on the other hand is the position that the novels possess little inherent

literary quality. Neither side has investigated the novels' messages about literacy itself.

To investigate these messages, this study applies a critical text analysis to the

series' depictions of literacy practices, defined here according to a sociocultural model

encompassing reading and writing, speaking and listening, and viewing and representing.

Critical perspectives form the theoretical foundation to this study. Critical social theory

frames literacy practices within their social contexts; thus, this study organizes literacy

practices according to their primary functions for characters in the novels: exchange,

notification, domination /empowerment, and restriction. Poststructuralism, informed by

Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, highlights the relationship between social practices

and power. This study thus considers how characters undergo or exercise different kinds

of power when they engage in literacy practices.

This examination of literacy and power exposes the ideological assumptions

behind literacy, revealing literacy practices to be sites for characters to experience and

contest power. The novels also show that power over literacy is power over access to information, knowledge, and self-expression, and thus, over individuals and the world around them. The series suggests the importance of ownership of literacy, as well as encourages readers to be aware of the ways in which literacy practices can be tools of both oppression and empowerment.

Arising from the study are implications regarding the nature of literacy and its relationship with power. *Harry Potter* shows that literacies are contextual, multiple, and value-laden social practices that participate in the making and unmaking of our social world. This dynamic mediation occurs through the operation of different kinds of power accompanying literacies: individuals experience passive socializing power through their exposure to literacy practices; individuals exercise active power on the world around them through literacies; and potential power residing in all forms of literacy makes other forms of power possible.

For educators facing the decision whether or not to include the *Harry Potter* series in classrooms, understanding the novels' messages about literacy is a beginning. Awareness of how characters in the series use literacy in the production and exercise of power will give teachers insight into the complexity of the role and function of literacy for children. Adopting a critical literacy approach in the classroom will help teachers encourage children to participate in discussions that specifically address the nature of literacy, its relationship with power, and the ideological assumptions that accompany its participation in society. This study also recommends that teachers specifically increase the presence of viewing/representing literacies in the classroom so as to highlight individuals as active agents of social reform.

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Acknowledgments

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Dedication

To Audrey Filion Clarke for her model of courage and grace.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between literacy

practices and power in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels according to a critical

perspective. Investigating this relationship will encourage educators to consider how this

popular children's series conveys messages to readers about the nature and role of

literacy, as well as suggests the importance of bringing ideological assumptions about

literacy, and the implications of those assumptions, to a prominent role in the classroom.

Statement of Problem and Rationale

The enormous popularity of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series[1] has generated

considerable debate about the value and appropriateness of the novels for children.

Translated into over 60 languages, Rowling's series about an orphaned boy's experiences

attending a privileged institution of learning for witches and wizards has currently sold an

estimated 325 million copies across 200 countries (*J.K. Rowling Official Site*). Arising

from the popularity of the series are concerns, particularly for educators, regarding the

presence of the novels in school classrooms and libraries.[2] Two perspectives largely

inform this issue. On one hand, the *Harry Potter* series is widely credited as promoting

---

[1] *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Rowling, 1997); *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1998); *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999); *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Rowling, 2000); *Harry Potter and the Order of the* Phoenix (Rowling, 2003); *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (Rowling, 2005); and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007).

[2] In the Durham District School Board in Ontario, teachers are required to obtain unanimous parental consent in writing before the *Harry Potter* books can be read in class (Dabrowski, 2000). Similarly, a Texas School District requires written permission to check out the *Harry Potter* novels from the school library (*Texas school district*, 2000).

literacy. Supporters of this position cite long line ups of parents and children waiting to

purchase the novels (Whited, 2002), and the series' domination of the *New York Times*

bestseller list (Anatol, 2003b), as evidence of children's readership. In a survey

conducted by the Federation of Children's Book Groups (2005), 84% of teachers

expressed the belief that *Harry Potter* improved child literacy "by turning non-readers

into readers" (Macmillan, 2005)[3]. *The Kids and Family Reading Report* (2005) similarly

reported that both parents and children believe the *Harry Potter* books responsible for

promoting reading enjoyment and improving school performance (Yankelovich, 2006).

Bond and Michelson (2003) also note the presence of internet fan sites and discussion

boards as evidence that "in their free time, students are actively creating and extending

histories, characters, and storylines, which arise out of the world of Hogwarts but which

then take on lives of their own" (p.109). Borah (2002) agrees that the popularity of

Harry Potter electronic forums, in which children "ask questions, exchange information,

debate, …[and] critique various aspects of the novels" (p. 359), shows that the series is

inspiring children around the world to communicate with each other through writing.

Thus, supporters of the position that *Harry Potter* promotes literacy in young children

argue that the series encourages reading and writing.

       Other critics, however, maintain that the series does not encourage literacy except

at the most functional or basic level. Bristow (2003) argues that the books' "readability,

not their quality, is what made them popular with children," and explains that the

tendency to herald the popularity of the books as answers to the literacy crisis show that

"our expectations of children, and of the books that they should read, have plummeted".

---

[3] Survey methodology consisted of 100 teachers across the United Kingdom, and 1,000 children between the
   ages of 8-16 years (*Waterstone's Booksellers Ltd: Harry Potter improves children's reading*, 2008).

Bloom (2000) states that the books offer no redeeming educational value to children

because they will not encourage children to "advance from Rowling to more difficult

pleasures," a progression that he deems the purpose of literacy: "Why read, if what you

read will not enrich mind or spirit or personality?" Zipes (2001) contests whether or not

children's literacy is even the issue. Observing that "the experience of reading for the

young is mediated through the mass media and marketing" (p. 172), Zipes argues that the

publishers of children's literature have transformed readers into consumers who are

encouraged not to read books, but to purchase merchandise associated with the

phenomena:[4] describing the *Harry Potter* novels as predictable triumphs of good over

evil, Zipes adds that while the series "will certainly help children become functionally

literate" (p. 188), he nevertheless also worries whether publishers' claims of enthusiastic

readership are evidence of any actual readership:

> Given the purchasing tendencies of Americans, we can assume that adults
>
> are buying the books for children *and* themselves…Since the books are
>
> very long, the attention span of most youngsters is short, and since
>
> children watch on the average of three hours of television a day, we may
>
> also assume that a very small minority of children (and adults) is actually
>
> reading the books and reflecting on them. (p. 186)

Thus, challenges to the argument that *Harry Potter* encourages children's literacy cite the

poor literary quality of the novels and refute claims of its popular readership among

children.

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[4] For discussion into the phenomenon of *Harry Potter*, including the intense marketing behind the related films, merchandise, and product spin-offs, and the implications of that marketing campaign on childhood culture, see "Pottermania: Good, clean fun or cultural hegemony?" (Turner-Vorbeck, 2003), and "Harry Potter's World: Magic, technoculture, and becoming human" (Appelbaum, 2003).

Research Questions

For teachers wanting to make informed decisions as to the value and appropriateness of the *Harry Potter* books in classroom lessons and school libraries, understanding the nature of the relationship between the series and children's literacy is an important one; however, discussion into the issue has centreed on reading attitudes and the inherent literariness of the novels, while no research has addressed the books' *messages* about literacy. This omission leaves some unanswered questions: What literacy practices are depicted in the novels? How do the characters use literacy practices within their communities, and for what purposes? What messages do the novels convey about the function and importance of literacy for children?

Historically used to transmit explicit socializing norms and moral lessons to young readers (Norton & Norton, 1995; Zipes, 1983), children's stories, like all texts, also contain implicit messages. Stephens (1992) argues that these implicit messages are potentially powerfully persuasive because "invisible … ideological positions are invested with legitimacy through the implications that things are simply 'so'" (p. 3). Janks (2000) claims that studying these hidden messages exposes the ideological assumptions behind the text, the result of which is that the legitimacy of the ideological position can be held up to scrutiny and resisted or accepted. Examining messages contained within popular children's novels encourages children to think critically about how texts are implicated in the construction of ideologies; examining specific messages about literacy within these novels begins the positioning of ideological assumptions about literacy, as well as the implications of those assumptions, at the centre of classroom discussions.

What is Literacy?

The notion of what specifically constitutes literacy has undergone a profound shift in recent history. Only a few decades ago, literacy was defined as a context-independent and neutral set of skills, the acquisition of which was deemed largely responsible for human progress (Eisenstein, 1979; Goody & Watt, 1963; McLuhan, 1962; Olson, 1977). Beginning around the 1980s, however, objections arose to this autonomous model (Graff, 1979; Heath, 1983, Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). Observing that "any concern with reading, writing, literacy inevitably ends up at social practices which integrate talk, action, interactions, values, beliefs, goals, purposes, aspirations, ideals, ways of behaving and so on" (Lankshear & Knobel, 1998), critics of the autonomous model / literacy thesis argued that a definition of literacy must include context: "literacy is better understood not as an isolated skill, as something one can do on demand, but as a social process in the daily landscape; one works with someone else's writing or writes for another under a roof of one sort or another in building something that will be of use to yourself or others" (Willinsky, 1990, p. 6). Further, because context widely varies, critics of the autonomous model argued that literacy practices take many forms, including speech utterances and any "symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group" (Gee, 1996, p. 131). Today, the replacing of the term literacy with multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) reflects the wide range of forms of representation brought about by technological advancements in the information industry, and testifies to the widespread acceptance of the sociocultural model of literacy.

The Common Curriculum Framework

An application of this sociocultural model of multiliteracies can be seen in the Western Canada Curriculum. Acknowledging that "changes in society have affected and will continue to affect the ways in which students use language to think, to communicate, and to learn" (Governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, and Yukon Territory, 1998), the Ministers of Education in these provinces and territories developed the Common Curriculum Framework for Basic Education in English Language Arts in 1998 as part of the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education. In a clear rejection of the traditional privileging of reading and writing over other language arts, the Common Curriculum Framework lists *six* language arts that form the foundation of literacy: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and representing (pp. 2-3). The Common Curriculum Framework's general learning outcomes are also consistent with the belief that the language arts are "interrelated and interdependent" (p. 2): Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent "to explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences" (p. 8); "to comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print, and other media texts" (p. 18); "to manage ideas and information" (p. 32); "to enhance the clarity and artistry of communication" (p. 46); and "to celebrate and build community" (pp. 64). Thus, learning outcomes within western Canada's language arts curriculum show the direct application of the six dimensions of literacy according to a sociocultural definition[5].

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[5] Similar views of literacy education as encompassing the six interrelated language arts inform American (International Reading Association, 2008) and Australian curricula (Sawyer, 2002).

Literacy and Power

Accompanying the sociocultural definition of literacy in the Common Curriculum

Framework is an implied relationship between literacy and power. This relationship

largely derives from the context-dependent, and thus, value-laden nature, of literacy as

social practices, and it takes the form of power *over* or power *through* literacy (Bowman

& Woolf, 1994, p. 6). When dominant societal groups exercise power over marginalized

groups by granting and/or withholding access to literacy practices, they are exercising

power over literacy. Denied access to tools of communication, these marginalized groups

and individuals cannot fully participate in their communities and thus exist as silenced

voices on the periphery, inadvertently reinforcing the very conditions that render them

non-contributory. Power through literacy may be *explicit*, such as when individuals use

literacy practices as communicative tools; and *implicit*, such as when the models forming

the foundation of literacy themselves contain subtle messages about cultural values: "If

agencies and educational institutions could convince others that the only model of

literacy was theirs … then the particular cultural values that underpinned this surface

neutrality could be sustained whilst not appearing to be so" (Collins & Blot, 2003, p.

xiii). In this way, the endorsement of particular written texts, speech patterns, or visual

symbols may represent the hidden interests of a dominant ideology (Comber & Nixon,

1999, p. 319). Importantly, Lankshear (1987) also ties power through literacy to social

reform and resistance to political oppression: "Literacy has a potential role within

attempts by subordinate groups to engage in political action aimed at resisting present

inequalities of structural power … and bringing about structural change" (p. 28). Thus,

regardless whether the mechanism of action is over or through literacy, literacy acts are

inherently charged with power in their capacity to maintain and reproduce, but also to resist, relations of domination (Fairclough, 2001; Janks, 2000; Luke, 2000).

Importance of Study

The persistent debate regarding the value and appropriateness of the *Harry Potter* novels for children is an important one for educators. By offering an interpretation of the novels' messages about literacy, this study will offer educators a rationale for including or excluding the series as a classroom resource.

This study will also contribute to scholarly investigations into the intersection between literacy and power in the *Harry Potter* series. Although power in the novels is a continuing site of much investigation, no research currently exists that addresses the nature of the relationship between power and literacy practices. Awareness of how characters in the series use literacy in the production and exercise of power will give teachers insight into the complexity of the role and function of literacy for children.

This study shifts the research field in two ways. Methodologically, this study contributes a Foucault-based model for studying the relationship between literacy and power. Although the site of this study is a fictional children's series, this study's framework for analyzing power relations and literacy practices could be readily applied to school settings, such as classrooms, so as to reveal how both students and teachers use power through and over literacy as part of teaching and learning.

This study further shifts the research field by positioning messages about literacy at the forefront of study for educators, and focusing on the intersection between literacy and power as a topic for classroom discussion and debate for students. Encouraging educators to examine fictional messages about literacy will expose the implicit

ideological assumptions behind different dimensions of literacy practices. Making

students aware of these assumptions will encourage them to reflect on the complexity of

the relationship between literacy and power, as well as expose them to the highly

politicized nature of access to and control of literacy in today's world.

Review of the Literature

The majority of research into the *Harry Potter* series seeks to explain its

popularity (Alton, 2003; Grimes, 2002; Nikolajeva, 2003; Ostry, 2003), determine its

literary influences (Grimes, 2002; Nikolajeva, 2003; K. M. Smith, 2003; Steege, 2002),

and consider issues of gender, class, and race (Anatol, 2003a; Gallardo-C & Smith, 2003;

Heilman, 2003; Ostry, 2003). Literary analysis specifically dealing with the novels'

depictions of literacy or the implications of those depictions has been absent. Research

dealing with the general topic of language in *Harry Potter* has similarly been conducted

in only a limited and peripheral way, with language positioned as a secondary topic of

study and defined according to only a few dimensions of literacy: reading and writing,

and speaking and listening.

In the most detailed treatment of representations of language and literacy in *Harry*

Potter to date, "Cruel heroes and treacherous texts: Educating the reader in moral

complexity in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books," Schanoes (2003) explores how

reading and writing practices in the novels are linked to Rowling's construction of good

and evil. Pointing out how characters in the series suffer as a result of the duplicity of

text-based maps (p. 136), the unreliability of official narratives (p. 138), and the dangers

of enchanted books (p. 139), Schanoes argues that the novels suggest "the

untrustworthiness of the written word and the power of writing to undermine belief in

reality" (p. 142). Schanoes concludes that the message arising from the novels'

representations of reading and writing does not speak to the importance of literacy for

children, but encourages readers to be both alert and questioning regarding the

implications of written texts:

> [M]ost importantly, they must not rely complacently on the written
>
> word—magazines, advertisements, comic strips, history books, diaries, or
>
> newspaper articles—especially when it purports to tell the truth. The
>
> benefits of reading in Rowling's wizarding world lie in the reader's ability
>
> to understand the machinations of text and author, to understand how
>
> writing works. (p. 143)

Schanoes' work also fails to extend its analysis to any treatment of dimensions of literacy

beyond reading and writing.

Other researchers studying aspects of language and literacy in *Harry Potter*

consider literacy practices only as peripheral to how characters in the novels acquire

knowledge. In "The seeker of secrets: Images of learning, knowing, and schooling,"

Elster (2003) argues that the novels represent learning in two contexts: "school learning

and life learning" (p. 205). While school learning is the learning associated with

teachers, books, and formal exams, life learning, is, in contrast, "learner-directed, with

very little involvement of adults, and applied to critical, real-life problems" (p. 205), such

as defeating enemies and saving the world.   Although school learning associated with

traditional reading and writing is "often an annoying distraction from [Harry's] true

concerns" (p. 206), Elster argues that both forms of knowledge are necessary: "For

Harry, life knowledge and book knowledge come together: he puts to use school

knowledge, nonschool knowledge, and magical devices to advance the cause of good

magic" (p. 216). Elster thus implies that the *Harry Potter* novels uphold the importance

of reading and writing for children, but he does not address the novels' position on

speaking, listening, viewing or representing practices.

In "Harry Potter and the acquisition of knowledge" Hopkins (2003) also deals

with reading and writing practices as a part of a general focus on the conflict presented in

the novels between innate and acquired knowledge. Observing that the success of

Harry's adventures is linked to information obtained from library books and classroom

lessons, Hopkins argues that the novels celebrate "the slow, steady, cumulative

acquisition of knowledge" (p. 28). Hopkins also explains that in addition to providing

information, books in the *Harry Potter* series function to give both pleasure and power

(p. 29). By concluding that the novels promote the importance of school-based learning,

Hopkins implicates literacy practices as an aspect of her analysis, but again focuses on

the novels' messages about reading and writing: "It is . . . admirable and necessary—

indeed, essential, to work hard, read books, and spend long hours in the library, because

the things you learn there may just save the world" (p. 33).   Hopkins' work thus also

neglects to address other dimensions of literacy beyond reading and writing.

Research into speaking and listening dimensions of literacy in Harry Potter is

similarly limited. In "The civic leadership of *Harry Potter*: Agency, ritual, and

schooling" Skulnick and Goodman (2003) discuss the significance of speech acts in

Harry Potter in their examination of how schooling uses ritual to cultivate leadership.

Explaining language as a ritual, they argue, "civic heroes perform their strength in their

institution not only through action but also through the act of speech and names" (p. 270).

Accordingly, Harry's insistence on calling his enemy Voldemort by name is both an act of ritual and heroic strength: "this ritual act of speaking demonstrates Harry's willingness to act against the de-facto ritual of his friends and uphold his own civic heroism" (pp. 271-272). Implied by this study is the potential of spoken language to represent and express power; not addressed, however, is how power manifests across other dimensions of literacy practices.

Similar studies dealing with speech acts in *Harry Potter* only begin to address the novels' messages around literacy practices. In "Hermione Granger and the heritage of gender," Dresang (2002) comments that the language describing Hermione's behaviour effectively constructs her role. In the early novels, Hermione repeatedly shrieks, squeaks, wails, squeals, and whimpers, but as her character changes, so does the language to reflect her empowerment: "Hermione cries less readily and is described less frequently using the weak verbs and adjectives in book four than in any of the previous three books" (pp. 224). Park (2003) deals even more peripherally with speech acts as literacy practices in "Class and socioeconomic identity in Harry Potter's England." Observing that the character Hagrid speaks "complete with fractured grammar, muttered expletives, and a deafeningly loud voice" (p. 185), Park suggests that speech practices in the novel essentially construct the class standing of characters. Neither of these studies explicitly investigates speech or language acts as dimensions of literacy, focusing instead on gender and class.

Currently research into *Harry Potter's* messages about literacy is severely limited in range and scope. Schanoes' (2003) work on reading and writing practices deals exclusively with only that single dimension of literacy and does not consider the

relationship between written literacy and power. Elster (2003) and Hopkins (2003)

similarly address reading and writing, but only as part of a larger discussion of how

characters in the series acquire different kinds of knowledge and to what value. Although

Skulnick and Goodman (2003), Dresang (2002) and Park (2003) consider speaking and

listening practices in the novels, this consideration is peripheral to their respective

attention to ritual, gender, and class construction. A study to extend and expand the

range of current research into literacy in *Harry Potter* by placing representations of

literacy and their implications at the centre of study will fill some of the current gaps in

the research. In addition to defining literacy as encompassing reading and writing,

speaking and listening, and viewing and representing, this study will identify how

characters in the *Harry Potter* novels use literacy, thus highlighting how language and

literacy practices are sites for undergoing, exercising, and contesting power.

Methodology

This study applies a critical text analysis to representations of literary practices in

the first three *Harry Potter* novels: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Rowling,

1997), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1998), and *Harry Potter and

the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999)[6]. Less a research method than a perspective,

critical text analysis is an interpretive reading practice for the social sciences comparable

to literary interpretation/analysis in the humanities (Thornborrow & Wareing, 1998, p.

213). Critical text analysis assumes that written texts, both fictional/nonfictional and

literary/popular, are interpreted in social contexts; thus, the meaning of any particular

literary work "is derived from a combination of factors, including the formal structure of

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[6] See Appendix A for individual plot summaries of *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone* (Rowling, 1997),
Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets (Rowling, 1998), and *Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban*
(Rowling, 1999).

the text, and the contextual circumstances in which it is read" (p. 212-213). Most often

applied in feminist criticism, critical text analysis attempts to expose how written texts

participate in social constructions of identity, as well as show how awareness of these

social constructions can powerfully contribute to social reform (Mills, 1995).

       Critical text analysis is a close relative to content analysis and critical discourse

analysis. Characteristics of the latter two methodologies, however, suggest their

inappropriateness for this study. While both critical text analysis and content analysis

share an interest in the interpretation of language, the focus of content analysis on

decontextualized units of meaning, such as grammar and syntax, and the objective coding

of data, suggest that it is best suited for empirical studies (Roberts, 1997). Similarly,

critical discourse analysis shares with critical textual analysis the goal of investigating

communication use in-context so as to reveal "connections between language, power, and

ideology" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 4); critical discourse analysis, however, also highlights

factors influencing the social production of 'texts', and widely broadens the definition of

'text' to include spoken, and visual modes of discourse (Blommaert, 2005, p. 12). This

study, on the other hand, deals exclusively with the *Harry Potter* novels and defines texts

as referring to written documents consisting of words arranged into sentences and

paragraphs. Critical discourse analysis would therefore be more applicable to a historical

study of depictions of literacy across cinematic and other forms of representation arising

from the phenomena of *Harry Potter* than to analysis of literacy and power within a

written novel series.

Theoretical Traditions

Critical text analysis is grounded in two theoretical traditions: critical social theory and poststructuralism. Critical social theory argues for a connection between language, discourse, and power. Poststructuralism situates the reader as a producer of knowledge and also offers a useful framework for analyzing the role of power accompanying literacy practices. Both traditions share the general belief that the world is socially constructed through interactions with language and highlight the importance of examining the power dynamics underlying these interactions so that underlying assumptions about the social world can be held up to scrutiny. While poststructuralism may be seen as paradigmatically contradictory to critical social theory's goal of equitable social reform, however, understanding critical social theory as postpositivist largely reconciles this apparent contradiction: postpositivism, like poststructuralism, acknowledges the multiplicity and complexity of humanity and upholds the value of interpretative approaches to meaning-making (Ryan, 2007, p. 16). A critical perspective, informed by elements of both critical social theory and poststructuralism, is thus well suited for this study because it foregrounds the relationship between power and a broad range of language and literacy practices.

Critical Social Theory

Critical social theory concerns itself with the relationship between language, discourse, and power. Influenced by the Frankfurt School[7] of Critical Social Theory that maintained the transformation of social inequalities and injustices as its objective (Kellner, 1993), social critical theorists today begin from the position that people are

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[7] The Frankfurt School refers to individuals associated with the Institute for Social Research of the University of Frankfurt am Main in Germany in 1930 under the leadership of Max Horkheimer (Kellner, 1993).

never free but "inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and

privilege" (McLaren, 1988). These unequal power relationships are perpetuated through

the legitimizing of particular forms of knowledge that serve the interests of a dominant

culture of ideology. These forms of knowledge, or ideologies, are closely linked to

language because "using language is the commonest form of social behaviour, and the

form of social behaviour where we rely most on 'common-sense' assumptions"

(Fairclough, 2001, p. 2).   Although the term 'language' is used in a number of different

ways[8], social critical theorists argue that it should be conceptualized as a form of social

practice, or discourse, because "language is a part of society, and not somehow external

to it" (p. 18):

> Linguistic phenomena are social in the sense that whenever people speak
>
> or listen or write or read, they do so in ways which are determined socially
>
> and have social effects…Social phenomena are linguistic, on the other
>
> hand, in the sense that the language activity which goes on in social
>
> contexts (as all language activity does) is not merely a reflection or
>
> expression of social processes and practices, it is a part of those processes
>
> and practices. (p. 19)

Critical social theory thus conceptualizes discourse as social practices that participate in

reinforcing ideological assumptions and unequal power relationships.

An application of this "internal and dialectical" (p. 19) relationship between

society and language appears in the work of Paulo Freire, an educator and critical theorist

who developed adult literacy programs in low socioeconomic communities across Brazil

---

[8] Linguists generally understand language according to two distinctions: *langue,* which refers to the social
system of rules and conventions which pre-exists and is independent of usage; and *parole*, which refers to
its particular and individual use (de Saussure, 1988).

based on literacy as social practices. According to Freire (1970), "the literacy process

must include the relationships of men with their world" (p. 212) because meaning-

making is dependent on context: "the word is not something static or disconnected from

men's existential experience, but a dimension of their thought-language about the world"

(p. 215). The implication of understanding literacy as embedded in the world means

taking up "the relations and fields of social, cultural and economic power where people

actually use texts" (p. 205). Freire theorized that through the process of analyzing these

complex relationships, individuals become critically aware about the conditions of their

existence. This critical awareness is accompanied by an ethical and social responsibility

to humanely act on the world in which we live; therefore, embedded in literacy practices

is both "word-and-action" (p. 210). For these reasons, Freire's work situates literacy as

an act of knowing that empowers individuals; through literacy, individuals both discover

their voices as well as their ethical responsibilities to use those voices for the betterment

of their world.

   Critical social theory forms an important theoretical foundation to this critical text

analysis of depictions of literacy practices in *Harry Potter*. By emphasizing the

relationship between language, discourse, and power, critical social theory suggests that

literacy practices participate in the production and exercise of power. By situating

literacy as social practices or discourses, critical social theory also highlights the social

conditions in which power is exercised; thus, literacy practices, such as reading and

writing, speaking and listening, and viewing and representing, should not be understood

as neutral or isolated practices, but must be investigated in context.

Poststructuralism

Although categorizing poststructuralism as a tradition assumes a stability and

unified nature that contradicts its fluid and dynamic qualities, poststructuralism is

generally understood as a site for the bringing together of various perspectives that share

similar ideas about reality and truth (Peters & Burbles, 2004). Poststructuralism first

appeared in Jacques Derrida's (1978) "Structure, sign, and play." In this article, Derrida

argues that language is a system built on arbitrary and conventional relationships between

words and meanings, and goes on to question the existence of a transcendental signified,

an external point of reference outside the system under investigation that guarantees its

intelligibility:

> … it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no centre, that the
>
> centre could not be thought in the form of a present being, that the centre
>
> had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of
>
> nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play.
>
> (p. 110)

A consequence of this logocentric thinking--the tendency to establish terms that

function as centres such as God, truth, or humanity--is the ordering of concepts according

to binary oppositions. Because defining a concept by its opposition privileges one

element over another, Derrida suggests that reversing the hierarchies will reveal how the

meaning of terms arises not from their relationship to a transcendental signified, but from

their differences. Without a transcendental signified, Derrida argues that there can be no

ultimate reality or stable meaning residing in either the individual, society, or a text; all

truths and understandings are partial and relative.

Applied to a textual study of any work of literature, the absence of a transcendental signified means that just as language is referential and incapable of expressing self-contained meaning, written texts too must be understood as fragmented and incomplete. Because all knowledge is context related, texts necessarily contain multiple interpretations, all of which are both legitimate and transitory, arising from the dynamic relationship between reader and text; importantly, post structuralists assume that readers' involvement with the text is productive; that is, readers actively produce meaning, rather than uncover it, through their interactions with the text (Lee, 1992).   The significance of these interactions, according to Derrida (1978), is that they permit "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation" (p. 121).

Poststructuralism forms an important theoretical foundation for this study. By replacing the modernist ideal of obtaining absolute truth and certainty with an every-changing vision of knowing that is within "a complex, pluralistic, unpredictable system or network . . . [that] will, like life itself, always be in transition, in process" (Doll, 1993, p. 3), poststructuralism emphasizes how knowledge is neither objective nor stable, but a site of continual exchange and transformation. The significance of this concept of knowledge is that written works, such as the *Harry Potter* novels, can be understood to give rise to an infinite number of interpretations; thus, poststructuralism informs this study by highlighting researcher subjectivity and the role of the researcher as an active producer of knowledge.

Forms of Power

Poststructuralism also contributes to this study by offering a theoretical

framework through which the relationship between power and literacy in *Harry Potter*

can be identified and examined. Although Michel Foucault's focus was on the macro

level of organizational systems, the extension of his work to multiliteracies is a logical

application, particularly given Foucault's admission of the connection between

communication and power: "relationships of communication imply finalized activities

(even if only the correct putting into operation of elements of meaning) and, by virtue of

modifying the field of information between partners, produce effects of power"

(Foucault, 1983, p. 218). According to Foucault, power itself should be understood not

as a commodity which may be acquired or seized, but as a network of complex

relationships: "Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as

something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or

there…Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization" (Foucault,

1977, p. 98). Further, Foucault explains that the role of individuals is that of vehicles of

power, "always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power"

(p. 98).   In other words, according to Foucault, power occurs as a result of social

relationships.

Foucault explicitly identifies two different kinds of power: sovereign power and

disciplinary power. According to Foucault, sovereign power arose in the Middle Ages

with the arrival of institutions, such as the monarchy and the state, which "presented

themselves as agencies of regulation, arbitration, and demarcation" (Foucault, 1980, pp.

86-87). Although it is always enacted through a visible agent of power, such as a ruling

king, sovereign power should be understood as not necessarily deployed from any

specific political location:

> Whether one attributes to it the form of the prince who formulates rights,
>
> of the father who forbids, of the censor who enforces silence, or the master
>
> who states the law, in any case one schematizes power in a juridical form,
>
> and one defines its effects as obedience. (p. 85)

For these reasons, sovereign power can also be understood as active power, or power that

manifests as domination or seizure "of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself" (p.

85). Accordingly, active power operates from an external source and is always explicit:

"when sovereign power operates, we know that we have been acted upon, in what ways,

and by whom" (Covaleskie, 1993); that is, the exercise of active power is always by

people.

In contrast to sovereign power, disciplinary power is a passive, internalized form

of surveillance organized around socializing norms that both control, as well as

participate in constructing, individuals and society. Foucault argues that disciplinary

power, an invention of the bourgeois society, arose in the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries, replacing the sovereign power of church and monarchy (Foucault, 1977, pp.

104-5): "Power as 'visible coercion' was supplanted by detailed disciplinary practices and

sustained observation and monitoring of conduct" (Dandeker, 1990, p. 25). Disciplinary

power is thus an internal motivation that encourages people to behave in particular ways

because those ways are accepted as 'normal' by a dominant discourse:

> Using the 'normal' as a goal and an ideal, disciplinary power acts in the
>
> world to normalize those selves subject to it. This process of

normalization defines for us the way we are supposed to be. And the

invisibility and lightness of the operation of this form of power leads the

subjects to confuse the 'normal' with the 'natural.' That is, the defined and

desired 'normality' is not seen as a product of power's operation; it is seen

as a 'true' measurement of the way the world 'is.' (Covaleskie, 1993)

Because of its invisibility, disciplinary power is at once both passive and extremely

powerful: "it operates continually [and] its effects are theoretically limitless"

(Covaleskie, 1993). Normalizing or passive power thus differs from sovereign or active

power in its range and effectiveness, as well as its action on, rather than by, the

individual. Further, individuals do not exercise passive power; rather, they undergo its

effects.

       Although Foucault (1980) argues that power only exists in action, his insistence

that one kind of power may be converted into another kind nevertheless implies the

existence of a third kind of power that makes possible this transformation. Since not all

forms of one kind of power will necessarily be converted into a second kind of power,

this third form of power must represent the *capacity* for action or the *potential* to act;

thus, it may be understood as a form of potential power.

       How this potential power operates is best understood as a function of the

relationship between discourse, knowledge, and power. Discourse, according to

Foucault, is not a purely linguistic concept, but a system of representation that bridges the

distance between language and practice: "[discourse is] a group of statements which

provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a

particular topic at a particular historical moment" (Hall, 1997, p. 44). Discourse

effectively constructs knowledge because what counts as knowledge is defined by social

rules governing ways of talking about and assigning meaning to a topic: "physical things

and actions exist, but they only take on meaning and become objects of knowledge within

discourse…since we can only have a knowledge of things if they have a meaning, it is

discourse – not the things-in-themselves – which produces knowledge" (p. 45). Most

importantly, Foucault explains that discourse is associated with power:

> … in any society, there are manifold relations of power that permeate,
>
> characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power
>
> cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without
>
> the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse.
>
> (Foucault, 1977, p. 93)

Because discourse transmits and produces power as a result of its capacity to

produce knowledge, "the struggle for power in any setting is really a struggle for the

control of discourses" (Corson, 1999, p. 15). Importantly, power is thus embedded not

simply in discourse, but also in knowledge: "it is impossible for knowledge not to

engender power" (Sarup, 1993, p. 74). The privileging of particular forms of knowledge,

such as scientific knowledge, over others, such as religious or ethical knowledge, is one

example of how sovereign knowledge may be converted into disciplinary knowledge:

when a particular form of knowledge becomes accepted as 'truth,' the implications of that

knowledge become internalized as socializing norms.

Importantly, the presence of potential power suggests powerful consequences.

When individuals and members of communities interact, they effectively also begin the

process of shaping their society to reflect their values and beliefs; that is, the

communication of knowledge/information is the beginning of social transformation. In

this way, potential power is an important form because it makes possible both other

forms of power.

Method

This study investigates the relationship between literacy and power in the *Harry*

Potter series by applying a critical text analysis to depictions of literacy practices in the

novels. Because critical text analysis is an interpretative reading practice borrowed from

the humanities, the process by which analysis proceeds should be understood as largely

inductive; that is, while predetermined guidelines determine the selection of what parts of

the novels will be the subject for analysis, the organization and subsequent analysis of

this data arise inductively from the reading of the scenes within the larger context of the

novels themselves so as to yield an interpretation of the novels' messages about literacy.

Importantly, as an interpretation is also an argument, this study is more an attempt to

persuade the reader to think about the novels' relationship with children's literacy in a

new way, than to prove, through deductive logic and irrefutable evidence, of the

inescapable certainty of a single conclusion (Barrett, 1994, pp. 8-10).

The first step of the study requires selecting individual scenes from the novels to

be the subjects of analysis. For the purposes of this study, scenes refer to all specific

examples of characters in the novels using literacy across its three dimensions:

reading/writing, speaking/listening, and viewing/representing.   The scene is the

fundamental subject of analysis for this study primarily because of its stability: although

Foucault insists that power circulates, it is necessary to stabilize or freeze the movement

of power in time in order to show not merely whether or not power merely flows through

or accompanies literacy practices, but *how* it specifically operates to advantage and disadvantage characters who use literacy practices for different purposes.

After selecting the scenes of analysis, the next step is to study the scenes in order to identify the different purposes for which characters engage in literacy practices. The goal in this process is to determine the common functions of literacy across each dimension. Again, this is an inductive process arising from the interaction between the reader and the text. Once these common functions of literacy are identified, the next step is to organize the scenes according to their respective functions.   Within these categories, scenes may be further organized according to form for purposes of clarity.

Analysis of the scenes consists of a number of elements: description of how characters use each function of literacy; explanation of the operation of power in each function; discussion of the ideological assumptions of literacy underpinning the operation of power in each function; and, comment on the conclusions about the role and importance of literacy that can be drawn from each function of literacy.

Overview

Chapter one explains the study's purpose, importance, methodology, theoretical foundations, and method, as well as briefly summarizes relevant research into the Harry *Potter* series.

Chapters two through four begin with a short literature review showing the historical development of a dimension of literacy – reading/writing, speaking/listening, and viewing/representing – and its relationship with power. The second part of each body chapter consists of an analysis of the scenes from the novels pertaining to that dimension of literacy. These chapters conclude with a summary of findings.

Chapter five summarizes the study and considers the implications of the findings regarding the novels' messages about the relationship between literacy and power.   The chapter ends with recommendations for research and practice.

Scope and Delimitations

This study includes only the first three novels in the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling: *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone* (1997)[9]*, Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets* (1998), and *Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban* (1999). Although there are seven novels in the complete series, the later novels shift setting from a primarily school-based environment to one outside the institution; thus, the earlier novels are best suited for an examination of how literacy practices function both within and beyond formal educational situations. Since this study targets educators making decisions as to the appropriateness of the novels for use in their classrooms and libraries, it excludes film adaptations of the books and popular merchandise arising from the phenomenon of *Harry Potter*.

This study is interpretive and constructivist in nature; as such, the researcher assumes that the meaning of a text resides neither in the written text itself nor in the reader, but in the negotiated interaction between text and reader (Rosenblatt, 1984); thus, while this study's interpretations arise from a particular perspective, other perspectives may result in other possible interpretations.

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[9] Originally published in the United Kingdom as *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone.*

Chapter Two

PRINT LITERACIES: READING AND WRITING

"Properly, we should read for power … The book should be a ball of light

in one's hand" (Pound, 1968, p. 7).

Historical Context

Reading and writing maintain a central position in language arts educational

curricula. This centrality derives from both the wealth of evidence showing the historical

importance of written language to individuals and societies, as well as the persistence of

an autonomous model of literacy that saw reading and writing as synonymous with

literacy itself. Advocates of the autonomous model of literacy cited extensive studies

into the origins of written language as evidence of the polarized relationship between

oral/preliterate and written/literate cultures. Further, because this research named reading

and writing as the necessary conditions for cultural advancement - a stance that is called

the literacy thesis -many of these studies privileged written literacy over other forms.

The historical functions of reading and writing, however, show that while written literacy

played an important role in human development, it did so largely in partnership with oral

as well as other forms of literacy; thus, reading and writing should be understood as a

major contributor to, but not solely responsible for, social progress.

A Second-Order Symbolic System

While many early world cultures used representational marks such as pictograms,

to stand for objects, and ideograms, to stand for ideas, the chief distinction between such

representations and a written language system was the use of marks to specifically

represent oral language. First appearing on clay tablets in Mesopotamia around 3400 BC

(Martin, 1994), these marks signalled an awareness of writing as a second-order symbolic

system: instead of representing the world directly, marks represented language, and

language represented the world (Vygotsky, 1962). The first phonetic writing system,

developed by the Phoenicians approximately 3000 years ago, relied on a consonant-based

alphabet; the ancient Greeks later expanded on the Phoenician model, creating the first

true phonographic alphabet (Martin, 1994). Our English language alphabet derives from

that of the ancient Greeks, and is, thus, also a second-order symbolic system: "[our

alphabet] has lost all connection with things as things. It represents sound as a thing,

transforming the evanescent world of sound to the quiescent, quasi-permanent world of

space" (Ong, 1982, p. 91). The disadvantage of a second-order symbolic system is that

such a system can be initially difficult to learn, consisting as it does of marks that do not

pictorially resemble the item being represented; the advantage, however, is that a limited

number of specialized marks can be combined in various ways to represent a wide variety

of different words and different meanings (Hannon, 2000).

The Literacy Thesis

The general perception that proficiency in reading and writing is synonymous

with literacy has its origins in works by many scholars over the last 50 years. These

scholars generally agree that there are basic differences between oral and written cultures,

particularly regarding social, cultural, and cognitive development, and that written/literate

cultures are more civilized, advanced, and rational than primarily oral cultures. By

privileging writing over speech, and written language over oral communication, these

works thus both position the relationship between oral/preliterate and written/literate

cultures as a binary opposition, as well as attribute major human and social developments

to the arrival of writing/print.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The making of typographic man* (1962), McLuhan

argued for a shift from an auditory to a visual bias in Western thought arising from the

introduction of the phonetic alphabet and the later invention of the Gutenberg printing

press. According to McLuhan, the phonetic alphabet was a new technology that

transferred perception "from the magical world of the ear to the neutral visual world" (p.

18). The effect of this transfer was the newfound ability to visualize functions and

processes, the result of which was logical thinking and a developmental evolution: "Only

the phonetic alphabet makes a break between eye and ear, between semantic meaning and

visual code; and thus only phonetic writing has the power to translate man from the tribal

to the civilized sphere" (p. 27). The arrival of the printing press, argued McLuhan,

further conditioned the public toward visual tendencies, paving the way for such

movements as the rise of scientific inquiry, the Protestant Reformation, capitalism,

democracy, and even individuality. McLuhan's position, then, is one that implied the

superiority of the visual mode by attributing human progress to the development of the

alphabet: "by the meaningless sign linked to the meaningless sound we have build the

shape and meaning of Western man" (p. 50).

Social anthropologists Goody and Watt likewise contended that written literacy

was responsible for changes in thinking that made possible cultural advances. In "The

Consequences of Literacy"(1963), Goody and Watt argued that oral culture encouraged

cultural homeostasis and conformity while written culture fostered logic and

individuality. Reporting that logic arose only within an alphabetic culture, Goody and

Watt suggested that logical thinking was due in part to the "more general and more

abstract" (p. 321) relationship established by the written word and its referent. Similarly,

the authors explained that homeostasis and conformity were features of oral cultures

because "every social situation cannot but bring the individual into contact with the

group's pattern of thought, feeling and action" (p. 336); in contrast, the private and

solitary nature of behaviours within a written culture permitted the avoidance of the

dominant cultural tradition (p. 337). In a later work, *The logic of writing and the*

organization of society (1986), Goody compared a non-literate society with a literate

society in order to show the effects of writing on the organization of society. According

to Goody, writing technology led to economic development via record keeping and

banking; thus, Goody documented the improvements to society as a result of the advent

of writing and showed how literate cultures had advantages over primarily oral cultures.

Goody therefore implied that the presence of literacy/writing led to evolutionary progress

and development, in contrast to oral, less evolved cultures.

Eisenstein's *The printing press as an agent of change* (1979) similarly argued that

the Gutenberg printing press exerted a powerful influence on cultural and intellectual

development in Western Europe. Eisenstein's stated concern was not with the transition

from an oral to a written mode, but on "the shift from one kind of literate culture [the

scribal script] to another [print]" (p. xii). Specifically, Eisenstein laid claim to the

influence of the printing press on three major historical movements: the European

Renaissance, made possible in part by the increased circulation of texts; the Protestant

Reformation, in which the written text was endowed with legitimacy and authority; and

the beginning of modern scientific methods of inquiry, facilitated by the skepticism

raised by the availability of comparative texts. Importantly, Eisenstein was careful to insist that her argument was not monocausal: "[the title] refers to *an* agent not to *the* agent, let alone to *the only* agent of change in Western Europe" (p. xv). Despite this distinction, however, Eisenstein's analysis nevertheless attributed monumental historical transformations to written literacy, thus implying a dichotomy between oral and written literacy and supporting the literacy thesis.

Olson's writings also detailed the changes in thinking brought about by the alphabet and printing. In "From utterance to text: the bias of language in speech and writing" (1977), Olson concerned himself with the cognitive changes to the Greek mind brought about by the alphabet, arguing that written language created an awareness of language that eventually led to modern, scientific thinking. Olson's later works, including *The world on paper* (1994) somewhat modified this position, arguing not that the alphabet specifically transformed thinking, but that all textual representations encourage readers to become aware of the form and function of written language, in contrast to speech (Olson, 1994). According to Olson, the awareness of the text as an object invited literal interpretation, (as compared to the expressive nature and contextual interpretations of oral discourse), which led to the development of logic: "For any statement to follow from any other statement requires a particular kind of discourse, a discourse of literal meanings, of texts taken as closed. This is the link between logic and writing" (Olson & Bialystok, 1983, p. 174). Olson himself later admitted that the relationship between writing and speech might be more complex than his former theories acknowledged: "Writing may play more of a cosmetic than a formative role—tidying up, formalizing, and making public and open to scrutiny what is said—more than it allows

for the possibility of saying new things" (Taylor & Olson, 1995, p. 287). The overall

effect of Olson's work, however, was to contribute to the perception of a great divide

between the literate and non-literate, in which the literate was characterized as modern

and capable of abstraction and the non-literate as primitive, unaware and concrete.

Ong's *Orality and literacy* (1982) also examined characteristics of oral and

literate cultures. Declaring the subject of his study "literate thought and expression in

terms of their emergence from and relation to orality" (p. 1), Ong described writing as a

technology that restructured consciousness: "by separating the knower from the known,

writing makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity, opening the psyche as

never before not only to the external objective world quite distinct from itself but also to

the interior self against whom the objective world is set" (p. 105). This restructuring,

Ong explained, made possible sacred texts, which in turn led to the development of

introspective religions, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (p. 105). Ong

took care to suggest that the term 'oral' be used in place of 'illiterate,' citing the negative

connotations of the term and its associations with 'primitive' and 'savage' cultures;

however, his insistence that "both orality and the growth of literacy out of orality are

necessary for the evolution of consciousness" (p. 175) positioned literacy as a

developmental outcome, again essentially privileging writing over orality. Ong's work,

therefore, reinforced the perception that print cultures were superior to the less

sophisticated oral cultures.

A Relationship With Power

The belief that literacy, defined as reading and writing, is responsible for a wide

range of cognitive and social developments in the Western world is a persistent one, as

evidenced by, among other examples, the continuing popularity of governmental

initiatives to bring literacy to underdeveloped nations in the effort to promote

development (Graff, 1995a, p. xxv). One reason for this persistence is the historical

record testifying to the many powerful functions of reading and writing on both

individual and societal levels. The historical record thus suggests that reading and

writing should be understood as important partners in the social development of

humankind because of their capacity to advantage both individuals and organizations.

One example of the early relationship between reading/writing and power appears

in the use of the written word to legitimize the authority of the state. Thomas (1994)

observed that although ancient Greek society was primarily oral, written records

increasingly began to make appearances between the fourth and fifth centuries BC,

largely in the form of stone inscriptions of city-state's decisions or laws. Thomas

explained that these inscriptions "embodi[ed] the law, and gave permanence to the

enactment" (p. 30), but also reinforced oral traditions: monuments were displayed in

public arenas and inscriptions were typically read aloud. Evidence of the city-state's

investment in this physical embodiment of their authority was the penalty of heavy fines

for anyone caught defacing the stones or intentionally misrepresenting the inscription to

an audience (p. 38). Classical Athenian society also erected inscribed decrees on stone

monuments in allied territory, the function of which was not simply to convey

information, but also to serve as a visible reminder of city-state's authority. Thomas

similarly noted that a dramatic rise in the use of written lists in classical Greece showed

that the written word was used to publicly enforce and extend the city-state's authority:

lists of traitors, murderers, and several kinds of debtors were inscribed on either stones or

wooden tablets and made publicly visible (p. 41). Thomas concluded that the overall

function of writing in ancient Greece was to "confirm, publicise and protect the values of

the community" (p. 40); her work thus supports the early roots of the relationship

between written literacy and power.

Although reading and writing in the early medieval period were largely confined

to the clergy, Parkes (1991) argued that the later Middle Ages saw the spread of written

literacy in vernacular languages to the expanding middle class, primarily because of the

benefits it conferred in commerce, administration, and the legal profession (p. 279).

Beginning in the 12th century, commercial transactions increasingly depended on written

letters, bonds, and vouchers to settle business disputes between bankers and property

owners (p. 279); and literate laypersons, such as stewards and bailiffs, drew up accounts

of financial activity for monasteries and estates (pp. 279-280). Although oral

proceedings still dominated the legal profession, the late 13th century saw an increasing

number of legal reference books, written court reports, and statutes in which both

lawyers, as well as non-professional readers, might seek information (p. 283). Clancy

(1981) agreed that although the courts of law of the Middle Ages relied primarily on oral

testimony, written evidence gradually became accepted *alongside* oral evidence (p. 37).

Similarly, although proclamations were the customary way of publishing new laws, the

Magna Carta was an important piece of written legislation, copies of which were sent out

to communities to be publicly read aloud four times each year (p. 39). Medieval society

thus increased the presence of written texts, although these texts were still primarily read

aloud rather than visually scrutinized.

Oral and written literacy continued to coexist in the Renaissance period (1450-1600); however, although the era was marked by a dramatic rise in the range of power conferred by proficiency in reading and writing. Until the Protestant Reformation, reading and writing were skills belonging mostly to a privileged elite, and written documents were largely religious texts composed in Latin. During the Reformation, however, reading and writing became instruments of power for disseminating information, transforming thinking, and helping the government control the social body. A movement of protest against the corruptive practices of the Catholic Church regarding the granting of indulgences, the Reformation began with Martin Luther nailing his *95 Theses* to a church door in 1517 (Johnson, 2001). Privately printed and distributed first in Germany and later throughout Europe, Luther's text led to widespread support for his beliefs and the eventual formation of new religious denominations. Importantly, Protestantism differed from orthodox Catholicism in its insistence that the religious authority for the Christian lay not in the hands of the priests, but in Scripture; thus, the Reformation provided a strong incentive for both the development of reading and writing skills, and the production of Biblical translations in vernacular languages (Martin, 1994). Cressy (1983) argued that Elizabethan reformists used public interest in written literacy to exercise control over a literate population and achieve a measure of social cohesion. Reformists achieved these goals by first, warning that the inability to read and write would result in a society of immoral criminals with spiritual deficiencies and barbaric tendencies; and second, by strongly encouraging the reading of specific, "godly texts" (p. 25) that reinforced reformist beliefs. Cressy also noted that the benefits of written literacy to husbandmen, yeomen, and copyholders extended to commercial advantages,

independence, and self-improvement (p. 29). Therefore, both state and individuals thus

benefited from proficiencies in reading and writing within the Renaissance era.

In the industrial period, a surge in the number of texts available to the public, and

the increasing awareness of the usefulness of these texts in socializing the population,

revealed the way written literacy could be an instrument of authority for the state.

Martin (1994) described the industrial era as the age of the newspaper, with the

proliferation of periodicals, pamphlets, and journals (p. 414), noting that these papers not

only disseminated information, but also served to strongly influence public opinion: state

recognition of the power of propaganda led to the seizing of books, the suspension of the

publication of religious books, and the closure of public reading rooms during the French

Revolution (p. 437). Graff (1981) agreed that the industrial era established written

literacy as a form of social control, but suggests that this control was administered chiefly

through the implementation of formal public education; Graff argued that the teaching of

literacy was not about the acquisition of cognitive skills, but really about the

"transmission of moral, discipline, and social values" (p. 258). This indirect coercion

was actively supported by the manufacturing industry because new social habits were

perceived as essential in easing the transition of the population from a pre-industrial to a

modern work force (p. 259). Literacy, via formal schooling, was thus the vehicle "for the

promotion of the values, attitudes, and habits considered essential to the maintenance of

social order and the persistence of integration and cohesion" (Graff, 1995b, p. 24).

Importantly, however, the influence of public education on literacy was not without its

benefits to the individual: the rise of an increasingly literate public saw an increase in

written texts of all kinds, many of which explored social issues and class tensions, and

also encouraged the development of communities of readers committed to critique of the

effects of industrialization (Martin, 1994, p. 420). Literacy in the Victorian period was

thus characterized by considerable complexity with respect to the relationship between

the individual and the state.

Struggles around power and written literacy did not end with the beginning of the

twentieth century, but continue in today's society. One ongoing and current concern

highlights the influence of authority around issues of language, literacy, and identity.

Public education's goal of cultural assimilation, in particular, has been hotly contested.

Collins & Blot (2003) argue that government projects to spread literacy, defined by

reading and writing, in Western languages to other countries were increasingly perceived

as comparable to colonization attempts to re-educate populations into acquiring the habits

and beliefs of the imperial power:

> The language of the colonizer carried with it the ideological framework
>
> and ideological judgments which were part and parcel of the language
>
> itself and of its uses. The purposes and functions of literacy for the
>
> colonizer subsumed the uses of language . . . of the indigenous populations
>
> with little or no recognition of the power of the traditions inherent in the
>
> uses and functions of native modes of communication. (p. 122)

Importantly, although the intent was to produce a shared national identity through

literacy's socializing/passive power, Collins & Blot explain that the imposition of a

particular notion of literacy led to resistance against the imposition of its accompanying

cultural values and the struggle for a new, hybrid identity "born of struggle with and

against imperial powers" (p. 122). Literacy can thus be seen as mediating identity along

a continuum of power in the modern and post-modern era.

The historical record is clear on how written literacy was a powerful tool for both

the individual and the state. Individuals with the ability to read and write were able to

manage their business affairs, access legal information, and receive scriptural guidance.

For the state, writing was an instrument for reinforcing the authority behind laws and

decrees, but also subtly shaping social morals and values so as to encourage some

behaviours while discouraging others. By testifying to the many ways that

reading/writing can function as instruments of power, the historical record thus links

power and written literacy, and allows for an appreciation of the complex nature of their

relationship.

Written Literacy Practices in *Harry Potter*

Studying the way a society uses the written word gives information about the

importance of written literacy to that society; investigating fictional depictions of

reading/writing similarly gives information regarding the novels' position about the role

and importance of written literacy. Reading and writing feature prominently in J.K.

Rowling's *Harry Potter* series in many different forms: letters and notes, public notices

and announcements, books, and periodicals. These written documents include private

notes, intended for a single recipient; semi-private letters, intended for a limited number

of recipients; or public notices, intended for a general audience. The style of the written

documents also ranges from formal letters from institutional representatives of

institutions, to informal correspondence between peers. Similarly, some written

materials, such as published books in libraries and bookstores, target a wide audience,

while other materials, such as notebooks and journals, are private documents. The *Harry*

Potter novels thus include a wide variety of written materials.

Characters in the series also use reading and writing to advantage and

disadvantage themselves and other characters in many different ways; thus, power

accompanies written literacy practices in *Harry Potter*.   When the mechanism of power

is *through* texts, characters use written documents for several purposes: e*xchange* refers

to reciprocated communication between sender and receiver; *notification* encompasses

unidirectional communication from the sender to the receiver; and *domination/*

empowerment refers to communication by the sender to a recipient that either controls

another character or overcomes circumstances. When the mechanism of power is *over*

texts, characters deny other characters access to reading or writing: in these instances,

the purpose is simply *restriction*. All the forms and functions of written literacy

discussed in the following section cohere to the preceding description.

Exchange

Notes and Letters

Characters in the fictional world of *Harry Potter* commonly use written

documents to exchange information. Notes and letters are the primary forms through

which this exchange takes place in the novels. A letter from Ron Weasley to Harry on

Harry's 13th birthday is an example how characters use written documents primarily to

exchange information because the content of the letter both releases and requests

information from the recipient: "We'll be back about a week before the term starts and

we'll be going up to London to get my wand and our new books. Any chance of meeting

you there?" (Rowling, 1999, p. 13). Hermione Granger's letters to Harry similarly

update Harry about her recent activities and request his response: "Ron says he's going

to be in London in the last week of the holidays. Can you make it?" (Rowling, 1999, p.

14). Other members of Harry's community also use letters to communicate information:

Charlie Weasley sends a short note to his brother Ron proposing a method of secretly

removing a dragon from the school (Rowling, 1997, p. 237), and Hagrid invites Harry to

tea (pp. 135-6). While Hagrid is not strictly Harry's peer in that he occupies a

professional position at Harry's school, his relationship with Harry is personal, and the

style of their written correspondence corresponds to that of informal, peer-to-peer

communication.

Institutional representatives also use letters to formally exchange information in

the *Harry Potter* novels. One example of this form of communication is the first letter

from *Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry* to Harry Potter inviting him to attend:

"We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of

Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and

equipment. Term begins on September 1. We await your owl by no later than July 31"

(Rowling, 1997, p. 51). Because it specifically requests a reply in writing from the

recipient, the Hogwarts letter is an example of bidirectional communication, and thus

implies an exchange between Harry and the educational institution.

Different kinds of power characterize the use of notes and letters to exchange

information illustrate different kinds of power. Letters have potential power because they

contain knowledge and information, the importance and applicability of which may or

may not be realized by the recipients. The *Hogwarts'* letter, for example, tells Harry

when the school term begins, what the necessary supplies are, and how to indicate

acceptance via return correspondence should be (Rowling, 1997, p. 51). Since he accepts

the offer to attend Hogwarts, presumably by an accepted mode of delivery, and makes an

appearance at the appropriate time and location with the necessary supplies, Harry

effectively both realizes and acts on the potential of the information in the letter. Because

realizing this potential essentially empowers Harry in that attendance at the school helps

him to discover his innate talents and abilities, his character converts the potential power

in the letter to active power. Importantly, this example shows that the realization/

conversion of potential power may be deferred to a later time or space than that of its

original appearance. Letters and notes within *Harry Potter* thus have potential power

because of the information residing within them, information on which characters may or

may not act to their advantage.

In contrast, most characters neglect to convert the full potential power inherent in

a written document to its active form. For example, Ron's birthday letter to Harry

includes both the gift of a Pocket Sneakoscope and an explanation of its usage: "If

there's someone untrustworthy around, it's supposed to light up and spin" (Rowling,

1999, p. 13). Although Ron's letter cautions that the device may merely be a novelty

item, the content of the letter includes information that testifies to the accuracy of this

particular device: "Bill says it's rubbish sold for wizard tourists and isn't reliable

because it kept lighting up at dinner last night. But he didn't realize Fred and George had

put beetles in his soup" (p. 13). This information about the accuracy of the Sneakoscope

has potential power because had Harry realized its importance, he would have gained

useful information that he could have used to his advantage. In this case, however, Harry

neither realizes its significance nor acts on it when the device is later triggered on

Christmas Day (pp. 167-168) by the presence of what is later determined to be Peter

Pettigrew, betrayer of his parents and ally of Lord Voldemort (pp. 268-274). This

example also shows that the total conversion of potential into another form of power is

unlikely because no single character is ever able to recognize the sum total of all the

potential of the information contained within a letter; such recognition is usually

available only in hindsight. Harry's failure to convert the potential power of the

information in Ron's letter to active power is therefore neither a blameworthy act nor an

indication of his weakness or his unintelligence.

Letters and notes used to exchange information also convey subtle information to

the recipient about implied beliefs and values of the sender. Ron's note, for example,

includes information about his father's valued advice, his brother's hospitality in a

foreign country, his mother's protectiveness over the youngest child, and ends with the

information that his family intends to use a financial windfall to purchase for him a

replacement magic wand (Rowling, 1999, pp. 12-13). Ron's note thus suggests his belief

that fathers are wise, mothers are protective, and families are mutually supportive.

Further, because Ron is both an individual as well as a member of a community, his

letters imply socializing information about his community's beliefs. For example, Ron's

written apology for improperly using the telephone to try and speak with Harry reveals a

disconnection between magical and non-magical communities. This disconnection

between communities also appears in Hermione's letter; although new to the wizard

community, Hermione notes the difficulty of using regular mail to deliver magical items

(p. 14), thus implying the incompatibility of the two societies. Charlie Weasley's letter

similarly suggests the community's values: Weasley's worry about being caught with an

"illegal dragon" (Rowling, 1997, p. 237) reveals that the magical community is governed

by laws, the breaking of which will have unpleasant consequences; however, his plan to

elude discovery suggests that moral law is not always reflected in formal wizarding

statutes, and implies that morality, not law, should be the basis for truly important

decision-making. *Hogwarts'* invitational letter to Harry also gives information about the

wizard world. The appearance of the letter itself suggests the community's adherence to

ritual and ceremony: "The envelope was thick and heavy, made of yellowish parchment,

and the address was written in emerald-green ink. There was no stamp" (Rowling, 1997,

p. 34). The inclusion of Professor Dumbledore's professional titles and memberships

also suggests the community's expectation of community service by professional figures

and role models, as well as testifies to a general belief in the importance of education (p.

51). Characters within the *Harry Potter* novels thus undergo passive power as they

exchange information with each other in the form of letters and notes.

Several ideological assumptions about literacy underpin the use of written literacy

by characters to exchange information in *Harry Potter*. The presence of a formal

delivery system to distribute written letters and notes acting as exchange suggests the

importance of written literacy as a tool of communication within a community. The high

degree of individual disclosure in the personal content of the informal letters used in

exchange also implies the trustworthiness of the written text. *Hogwarts'* formal letter of

invitation to Harry similarly conveys the community's beliefs regarding the value and

function of the written word: the heavy envelope confers weight and importance to its

contents, suggesting the appropriateness of writing in representing authority; the

specificity of address implies that the community sees a need for a high level of precision

and detail in written communication; and the persistence of the invitational letter to Harry

from Hogwarts implies the tenacity and permanence of the written document and its use

as a vehicle for communicating authority.   The letter's exchange function thus suggests

the importance, trustworthiness, and tenaciousness of the written word.

Notification

Notes and Letters

In addition to exchanging information, characters in the *Harry Potter* series also

use written documents to inform or notify other characters of important information. The

use of documents to notify occurs largely through notes and letters, public notices and

announcements, and periodicals. One example of a character using a letter to notify is

when Hagrid successfully delivers *Hogwarts'* first message to Harry and sends off a short

letter to Dumbledore informing him of the success of the mission: "Given Harry his

letter. Taking him to buy his things tomorrow" (p. 52). Although Hagrid writes to a

specific recipient, his note does not request or expect a response; thus, Hagrid's purpose

in sending the note is not to exchange information, but simply to notify.   Similarly, when

Harry receives an anonymous note accompanying an unexpected Christmas gift, the

unidentified sender uses the written word without expectation of a response: "Your

father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you" (p.

202).[10] Characters in the series thus send information to other characters via informal

notes and letters.

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[10] The howler letters sent to Ron Weasley (Rowling, 1998, pp. 68-9) and Neville Longbottom (Rowling, 1999, p. 200) from their respective parents and guardians notify the recipients of information, but because this information is orally communicated, the letters are forms of oral, rather than written, communication, and will be taken up in a later chapter.

Institutional representatives also use formal letters to both individual characters and groups to notify them of important details. For example, Hogwarts sends letters to students regarding their academic progress and their school supply requirements (Rowling, 1997, pp. 66-7). The Ministry of Magic also sends Harry an official letter explaining the Ministry's position regarding an act of magic against Aunt Petunia's pudding: "We would also ask you to remember that any magical activity which risks notice by members of the non-magical community (Muggles) is a serious offense, under Section 13 of the International Confederation of Warlocks' Statute of Secrecy" (Rowling, 1998, p. 21). In a similar way, Professor McGonagall's notes to Harry, Ron, and Hermione inform them of the details of their impending detention (Rowling, 1997, p. 247). Other examples of formal letters from official representatives acting to notify recipients include the following: Nearly Headless Nick learns by letter from a Hunt official that he cannot participate in the Headless Hunt because he does not meet the requirements (Rowling, 1998, p. 95); and Hagrid learns of Buckbeak the Hippogriff's hearing before the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures via a formal letter from the School Board of Governors (Rowling, 1999, p. 162). Institutional representatives thus commonly use formal notes and letters within the novels to notify other characters of important information.

Several forms of power accompany the use of letters to notify by characters in the series. Letters that report student grades or give information about required school supplies have potential power because they are sources of knowledge on which the recipients may or may not choose to act; characters who receive their progress reports may realize the potential of the information and take steps to address their weaknesses or

ignore the information, leaving the power in its potential, unrealized form. Passive power

too operates in the subtle socializing information conveyed through the various written

notes and letters: Hagrid's informal note to Dumbledore takes the time to observe

niceties, implying that that good manners are an important aspect of social interactions:

"Weather's horrible. Hope you're well" (Rowling, 1997, p. 52). The anonymous letter

accompanying the gift of Harry's father's invisibility cloak similarly concludes with a

polite wish for the recipient's future and a festive greeting: "Use it well. A Very Merry

Christmas to you" (p. 202). Formal letters, too, reinforce the appropriateness of polite

language for written correspondence: the Ministry of Magic's letter to Harry includes a

wish for him to have a good vacation (Rowling, 1998, p. 21). While some efforts are

mere pretense, as in Nearly Headless Nick's rejection letter's declaration that the bad

news is conveyed "with the greatest regret" (p. 95), and Hagrid's letter about Buckbeak's

impending execution is signed "yours in fellowship" (Rowling, 1999, p. 162), the

courteous language of the letters nevertheless reveals the community's expectation of

polite, respectful written communication. Letters that notify characters of important

information thus have potential in the content of the letters themselves, as well as passive

power, which characters in the series undergo as subtle information about what

constitutes acceptable behaviour for members of the wizarding community.

Several ideological assumptions about literacy underpin the notification function

in *Harry Potter*. The use of letters to notify implies the written word's capacity to

convey authority; letters and notes that notify, however, do not participate in the exercise

of active power in that the text is not the instrument of authority, but the vehicle for

communicating it. This understanding of the text as the message, rather than the rule

itself, is evident in the lack of resistance by the recipient to the information in the letters;

although Hagrid, for example, is deeply attached to Buckbeak, he neither attempts to

destroy the letter announcing the hippogriff's fate, nor question its contents. In addition,

the abundance of examples of formal, as compared to informal, letters functioning as

notification within the text suggests the appropriateness of the written word to

communicate particularly important, serious information. The notification function of

letters thus implies that the written literacy is a powerful means for communicating

authority.

Notices and Announcements

Characters in *Harry Potter* also use public notices and announcements to inform

other characters and audiences. Gringott's Bank prominently displays a warning to the

public of the dire consequences of attempted robbery on the front door of the

establishment: "Thief, you have been warned, beware/Of finding more than treasure

there" (Rowling, 1997, pp. 72-3). Borgin and Burkes, a shop that sells magical relics in

dangerous Knockturn Alley, notifies the public of the hazards of touching a cursed

necklace through a written card accompanying the displayed item: The card advises that

the necklace is cursed, having "claimed the lives of nineteen Muggle owners to date"

(Rowling, 1998, p. 44), and recommends that admirers "Do Not Touch" (p. 44). A

similar warning appears in the mysterious writing on the walls of Hogwarts: "The

Chamber of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the Heir, beware" (p. 106). Again, the

notice sends unidirectional information from Voldemort to the public, alerting the

community that a specific event has occurred, as well as implying a general threat against

non-supporters. The Ministry of Magic also posts a public notice in Hogsmeade advising

the community of the presence of a security force (Dementors) and encouraging people

not to be out after dark (Rowling, 1999, p. 148). This notice informs the public, as well

as hints at the potential consequences of ignoring the information. It, like the other

examples, illustrates how characters and institutional representatives use public written

notices to notify large groups of people of important information.

Different kinds of power also accompany the use of public notices by characters

to notify audiences of information. Public announcements that warn of particular

consequences to specific actions have potential power because while the information is

important, characters are under no compulsion to act on or realize the significance of the

information conveyed in the written notice. For example, a would-be robber who

attempts to steal from Gringott's Bank, despite its warning of ominous penalties against

unlawful behaviour, essentially ignores the possible consequences of misbehaviour

conveyed in the written notice; the significance of the written information thus remains

potential in form, regardless of any actual outcome arising from the action. In contrast,

an admirer of the cursed jewelry in Borgin and Burkes who elects not to touch the

necklace after reading the accompanying warning realizes the value of the information by

allowing it to determine his or her course of action. Again, although the explicitly stated

consequences of violating the warning are not realized, the potential power of the written

threat is sufficient to deter behaviour; thus, when characters conform to prescriptions of

behaviour on the basis of possible consequences, they enact the conversion of the

potential in the written information to active power. Importantly, it is the characters,

rather than any qualities inherent in the written notices themselves, that enable this

transformation; without the compliance of the characters, the power of the information

remains potential and unrealized.

Public notices and announcements also convey subtle information about the

community's norms and values; thus, characters who read these notices undergo passive

power. First, the presence of a dire warning at the local financial institution itself shows

that the community places a high worth on monetary assets, entrusting its assets to the

formidable and frightening Goblin race. The formal language and poetic style of the

Gringott's message also suggests the gravity and seriousness of the Gringott's banking

institution, a seriousness that is reinforced by the permanence of the engraving and its

prominent location just above the entrance doors (Rowling, 1997, pp. 72-3). The written

warning that the consequences of attempting to violate Gringott's exceed legal measures

suggests that the community endorses non-legal authority in protecting its assets, again

reinforcing the suggestion that it is important to protect personal property. Futher, the

notice implies that the community's legal system is less effective at deterring/controlling

unwanted behaviour than other forms of authority, operating outside legality. The

Hogwarts' announcement notifying of the return of Voldemort reinforces the suggestion

of the autonomy of unsanctioned sects within the community, while the very existence of

these sect shows that the magical community values freedom of expression. These

notices thus reveal a complex social structure in which monetary possessions are held in

high value, and unofficial divisions within the population are at worst, tolerated, but at

best, tacitly endorsed by a legal authority.

The operation of power in notices and announcements also suggests ideological

assumptions regarding written literacy.   The use of written notices to inform the public

indicates the usefulness and versatility of writing for public communications. The

notification function also shows that writing confers significant authority on a message in

that it is able to encourage or discourage particular forms of behaviour, as well as confer

legitimacy on the actions of unofficial subgroups within the population. Writing is thus

an effective way of communicating information and warnings to the general public, and

lending credibility to marginalized groups.

Periodicals

In *Harry Potter*, *The Daily Prophet* also commonly informs its readers of

important happenings in the wizarding community[11]. These happenings include reports

of recent criminal activity, such as the attempted break-in of Gringott's Bank (p. 141-2)

and the escape of criminal Sirius Black from the Azkaban prison (Rowling, 1999, p. 33-

4); upcoming book signings by Professor Gilderoy Lockhart (Rowling, 1998, p. 49); and

government employee infractions, such as the imposition of a fine on Arthur Weasley

after an inquiry (p. 165-6). As well, *The Daily Prophet* advertises employment

opportunities, such as a school posting for a Defence Against the Dark Arts teaching

position (p. 246) and objects for sale, such as a Broomstick Servicing Kit (Rowling,

1999, p. 14).   In these examples, the newspaper thus passes information about the

community to the general public.

Two kinds of power characterize the notification function of *The Daily Prophet*.

The content of the newspaper articles themselves have potential power; this knowledge

may or may not be acted on by the reader, and thus resides exclusively in the written text.

Again, readers undergo the effects of passive power in the form of subtle socializing

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[11] A second periodical, *Transfiguration Today*, only merits one brief mention over the three novels (Rowling, 1999, p. 42).

information transmitted through the written documents themselves. The focus on

criminal activity in newspaper articles suggests that the community has laws restricting

behaviour, and that criminal transgressions are of a serious nature and pose a threat to the

community. The report on celebrity book signings suggests that authors are celebrated,

and that entertainment is an important element of society. Further, news of government

employee activity suggests that government occasionally misuses its authority; scrutiny,

in the form of enquiry, shows one way that the public maintains the integrity of its

legislative and political body. Finally, the use of advertisements to facilitate the

exchange of goods and services between members of the community suggests the

community values communication between its members. Thus, *The Daily Prophet* is a

rich source of passive power by influencing the readers of the periodical to adopt

particular values and beliefs.

The use of the local newspaper to notify the public similarly suggests some

messages about literacy. First, the strong presence of a regularly published periodical

indicates the high level of written literacy among the members of the community, and

thus suggests the importance of reading and writing to the wizard world. In addition, the

absence of challenges or resistance to the monopolization of the reading market by *The*

Daily Prophet suggests a belief in the integrity of the published, written word; this belief

is reinforced by Hermione's decision to send a gift to Harry originating from an

advertisement in the periodical (Rowling, 1999, p. 14).   Finally, the use of the paper by

all members of the community, including those from different social and economic

background, suggests the degree to which the written word can keep a community

together. Under the notification function, the newspaper is a celebration of literacy in

community.

<div align="center">***Domination/Empowerment***</div>

Notes and Letters

In *Harry Potter,* characters also use written materials to control other characters

and to overcome difficult circumstances. Not as common in the series as exchange and

notification, characters use letters to dominate/empower in only a few examples. One

case appears in a letter from Professor Dumbledore to Gringott's Bank authorizing

Hagrid to retrieve the contents of a particular vault (Rowling, 1997, p. 73); after reading

the letter, a bank representative assigns Hagrid an official escort to the vault from which

Hagrid retrieves an object (p. 76). In a second example, a note from Professor Snape to

the Gryffindor team gives the Slytherin team permission to practice on the Quidditch

pitch; again, after reading the letter, the Gryffindors yield the field (Rowling, 1998, p.

85). In addition, a note from Professor Gilderoy Lockhart to Madam Pince, the librarian,

allows Hermione to access a restricted book: "*Moste potente potions*" (pp. 123-4).

Finally, Professor McGonagall's letters to the Ministry of Magic grant Hermione access

to the Time-Turner, a magical hourglass that allows her to time travel to the past and

change the future (Rowling, 1999, pp. 289-90). These four examples represent the only

cases of characters using letters and notes to dominate or empower in the first three books

of the series.

All three forms of power are evident when characters use letters to control

characters and circumstances in *Harry Potter.* The explicit knowledge residing in the

letters themselves has potential power. Characters who read these letters also undergo

socializing or passive power. Snape's note, for example, uses the first-person pronoun 'I'

to strongly signal the sender's identity, and also includes his professional title (Rowling,

1998, p. 85). These features suggest the importance of individual ownership of decision-

making, as well as show that professional designations reinforce the sender's authority.

Further, because the note includes a reason behind or justification of his request, Snape's

letter implies the importance of judiciously applied authority; authority figures must have

explanations behind their decision-making. Although only Snape's letter to the

Gryffindor team is directly represented in the text, Hermione describes McGonagall's

letters to the Ministry of Magic as including details that justify the request: "She had to

tell them that I was a model student, and that I'd never, ever use it for anything except my

studies" (Rowling, 1999, p. 289). All letters used by characters to dominate or empower

thus have both potential and passive power.

The use of letters and notes by characters to directly and explicitly control

characters and circumstances is also an exercise of active power. Snape's letter to the

Gryffindor team is a direct order from a visible agent of authority; because the letter itself

is the instrument of Snape's authority, rather than simply the vehicle for notification, the

result is that the Gryffindors know that they have been dominated and by whom. Other

characters that use letters to overcome their adverse circumstances also exercise active

power. For example, Dumbledore's letter of access to Hagrid grants privilege without

disadvantaging the Goblin bankers or any other character. Similarly, both McGonagall's

and Lockhart's letters advantage specific characters, but do so by controlling and

manipulating circumstances: Hermione's use of the Time-Turner and withdrawal of the

restricted book occur without penalty to others, excluding the villains against whom the

information will be eventually applied. Thus, characters who dominate other characters

or empower themselves through letters and notes in *Harry Potter* do so through the

exercise of active power.

The use of notes and letters to dominate and empower characters in the series also

implies assumptions about written literacy.   First, the use of the written word to control

characters and circumstances suggests its capacity to exemplify authority and powerfully

influence others. This influence is reinforced by the complete absence of resistance in

the novels to the authority of the letter. Finally, using written language as an instrument

to overcome circumstances and access previously unavailable resources suggests a

richness of opportunity presented by written literacy. The power to control through

written literacy in *Harry Potter* thus suggests the considerable authority and usefulness of

reading and writing.

Books

Books in the *Harry Potter* series also possess formidable power that can be used

to dominate others:

> Some of the books the Ministry's confiscated … there was one that burned
>
> your eyes out. And everyone who read *Sonnets of a Sorcerer* spoke in
>
> limericks for the rest of their lives. And some old witch in Bath had a
>
> book that you could *never stop reading*! You just had to wander around
>
> with your nose in it, trying to do everything one-handed. (Rowling, 1998,
>
> p. 172)

The school library stores dangerous books in its Restricted Section, books that are stained

with blood and whisper malevolently, or let out bloodcurdling screams when antagonized

(Rowling, 1997, p. 206).   Hagrid's birthday gift to Harry of *The monster book of*

monsters convincingly demonstrates the dangers of books. When the book arrives in the

mail, it bites and attacks Harry who then has to wrestle it into submission (Rowling,

1999, p. 15-6). When Harry later sees other copies of the book at Flourish and Blotts, the

books are being spectacularly confined: "there was a large iron cage behind the glass

which held about a hundred copies of *The monster book of monsters*. Torn pages were

flying everywhere as the books grappled with each other, locked together in furious

wrestling matches and snapping aggressively" (p. 44).   The local bookstore is also

stocked with other texts whose titles testify to their power to dominate others: "*Curses*

and countercurses (Bewitch your friends and befuddle your enemies with the latest

revenges: Hair loss, jelly legs, tongue-tying, and much much more)" (Rowling, 1997, p.

80).   Books in the series are thus aggressive, powerful entities, regardless of who wields

them as instruments of control.

One important example illustrating how characters use books to dominate others

in *Harry Potter* involves Tom Riddle's diary.   Riddle's diary is a blank collection of

pages that Harry finds in the girl's bathroom in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

(Rowling, 1997). Unknown to Harry, the diary is a vehicle for the exercise of power by

Lord Voldemort/Tom Riddle who uses the book to control his victims. Riddle's

domination of Ginny Weasley begins when he encourages her to interact with him via the

book:

> So Ginny poured out her soul to me, and her soul happened to be exactly
>
> what I wanted. I grew stronger and stronger on a diet of her deepest fears,
>
> her darkest secrets. I grew powerful, far more powerful than little Miss

Weasley. Powerful enough to start feeding Miss Weasley a few of *my*

secrets, to start pouring a little of *my* soul back into *her*…(p. 228)

Riddle then uses the diary to influence Ginny to commit atrocities, including strangling

roosters, writing threatening messages on the school walls, and terrorizing other students

(p. 229). Riddle's diary thus illustrates the power of books at their most dangerous as a

way to dominate others.

Conversely, characters in *Harry Potter* also commonly use books to empower

themselves to overcome adversity. Importantly, although Riddle's diary is the instrument

of his domination, it is also a tool for his own empowerment in that he describes himself

as "a memory … preserved in a diary for fifty years" (Rowling, 1998, p. 227). In other

examples, characters use books as a resource for problem solving information: Hermione

finds the secret of Nicolas Flamel's identity in a book (Rowling, 1997, pp. 219-22), as

well as the recipe for polyjuice potion, a potion that allows Harry and his friends to

assume different identities and overhear important information about their rivals

(Rowling, 1998, p. 124); Hermione also finds information about the basilisk in an old

library book, leaving a torn page from it in her fist as a clue for Ron and Harry to read (p.

215); and Ron and Hermione find grounds for helping Hagrid appeal Buckbeak the

Hippogriff's pending execution in library books (Rowling, 1999, p. 164). Accessing

books, then, advantages characters by helping them solve practical problems.

Characters also empower themselves by using books to enhance their reputations

amongst the community, although this empowerment is limited in scope and range. For

example, Professor Gilderoy Lockhart's many acclaimed published works testify to his

purported intelligence and authority in that he is received with adulation, particularly by

female fans: Mrs. Weasley owns a copy of *Gilderoy Lockhart's Guide to Household*

Pests (Rowling, 1998, p. 32) and requests his autograph at a public book signing (p. 49);

and Hermione, too, an avid reader, is among his strongest supporters (p. 80). Lockhart's

over-reliance on books, however, also exposes his true nature: when Lockhart replaces

practical, hands-on classroom experiences with book-based lessons in which his students

reenact dramatic scenes from his published works, his cowardice and incompetence

quickly become apparent (p. 122); thus, while his association with books empowers him

with regard to his social standing, the overuse of books weakens his credibility and

undercuts his social capital.

   Hermione's relationship with books is similarly conflicted: while her reliance on

and enjoyment of books enhances her status by suggesting her considerable intelligence

(Rowling, 1997, p. 105), it also discloses her practical inexperience: "Hermione Granger

was almost as nervous about flying as Neville was. That was something you couldn't

learn by heart out of a book – not that she hadn't tried" (p. 144); that is, Hermione's

reliance on books as sources of knowledge reinforces her reputation as intelligent, but

when her reliance masks important deficits, her social capital erodes. Importantly,

although Hermione is a skilled witch, particularly adept at such practical subjects as

charms (p. 171) and transfiguration (p. 134), she betrays her lack of confidence during

confrontations, yielding authority to her closest friends: during a crisis with a troll,

Hermione responds by "shrinking against the wall opposite, looking as if she was about

to faint" (p. 175), leaving Harry to attack the beast; and while she procures the means

necessary to turn back time, it is Harry who both frees the Hippogryff (Rowling, 1999, p.

293) and later casts the life - and soul - saving Patronus charm (pp. 300-301).

Hermione's general role throughout the series, then, is one of a supporting character rich in book-knowledge, but lacking the courage to perform in times of crisis.

Different forms of power characterize the use of books to dominate/empower. The information contained in the books themselves has potential power, such as the recipe for polyjuice potion (Rowling, 1998, p. 124), Nicolas Flamel's connection to the Sorcerer's Stone (Rowling, 1997, pp. 219-22), and the description of a basilisk (Rowling, 1998, p. 215). Riddle's diary, too, contains potential power in that it holds Riddle's memories, including Riddle's version of the night the Chamber of Secrets was first opened many years before (Rowling, 1998, p. 180). Library books and other general reading texts, such as *Quidditch Through the Ages* (Rowling, 1997, p. 181), similarly possess potential power in that they contain information and knowledge that may or may not be applied or found useful by the readers.

Characters in the series also undergo passive power through the books' implied information about the values and beliefs of the community. For example, Professor Gilderoy Lockhart's prestige as a result of his authorship suggests the susceptibility of specific members of the community to public claims of accomplishment and appearances; this example also implies that women, more than men, are either undiscerning or easily distracted by appearances. Hermione's over reliance on books as compensation for her weaknesses similarly reinforces the suggestion that women, more than men, need and invest in book knowledge as an alternative to direct confrontation; this example suggests that women are more passive than men, preferring to gain power through books rather than acting directly and learning through experience. Further, the possession of books as an indicator of wealth shows that the wizarding community has

class distinctions; the shame experienced by Ron and his family at the exposing of their

lack of monetary assets further suggests that lower socioeconomic classes are judged by

the community to be inferior to more affluent classes.

Active power also operates through the use of books to control individuals or

circumstances. Although in many cases the power of dangerous books resides

exclusively in the books and is not a manifestation of another character's intention to

dominate, the books themselves nevertheless exercise active power in that they set limits

and impose standards on characters' actions. Such is the case with *The monster book of

monsters*, a mindlessly aggressive text that mimics the monstrous content contained

within. Characters too exercise active power through books, such as in the case of

Riddle's diary; just as Riddle uses the text to dictate actions to Ginny Weasley, it is the

diary itself that empowers Riddle to overcome his circumstances and makes possible his

plan for revenge. Active power, then, is an aspect of domination and empowerment

when characters use books to advantage and disadvantage themselves and others in the

series.

The domination/empowerment function of books in *Harry Potter* further suggests

several ideological assumptions regarding literacy.   First, the use of books to solve

problems suggests the genuine value of books as resources. Secondly, the use of books

to dominate others implies the inherent danger of books, a quality reinforced by both the

large number of harmful texts afflicted with gratuitous aggression, such as *The monster

book of monsters* (Rowling, 1999, pp. 15-16), as well as the use of Riddle's diary as an

instrument of domination over Ginny Weasley (Rowling, 1998, pp. 228-231). Lockhart's

prestige and implied competence as a result of his many authored works similarly shows

the importance of books to the community; however, while the public acknowledges the

importance of books, their use is not held to be a substitute for direct experience. Book

usefulness, thus, has limits in the eyes of the community.   Finally, the use of books to

empower characters suggests their potential for use as a tool for emancipation: just as

Hermione finds answers to difficult challenges such as the key to the basilisk's identity

(p. 215), so too does Riddle maintain his secret identity in the blank pages of a diary (p.

227).   Books, in other words, should be respected and valued, but not entirely trusted

because to rely too much on a book is inherently unwise.

Restriction

        When letters and notes are the medium through which power in any form

operates, the mechanism of operation is *through* texts; when letters, notes, and books are

the target of power, the mechanism of operation is *over* texts, and the function is

restriction. Restrictions over written literacy in *Harry Potter* take two forms: restrictions

over reading, and restrictions over writing.

Reading

        The *Harry Potter* series contains many examples of restrictions over reading. In

one early example, Uncle Vernon tries repeatedly to block *Hogwarts*' first invitational

letter from reaching Harry: Uncle Vernon's efforts include sleeping by the front door

(Rowling, 1997, p. 39), sealing access to the family home (p. 40), complaining to the

postal service (p. 40), and relocating the family to a remote island (p. 44). In another

instance, Dobby the House Elf withholds letters intended for Harry from his school

friends. Harry learns that Dobby intercepted the letters so as to persuade Harry not to

return to Hogwarts for the school term: "Dobby hoped … if Harry Potter thought his

friends had forgotten him … Harry Potter might not want to go back to school" (Rowling,

1998, p. 19). Restrictions over access to books also commonly appear the series. The

Dursleys habitually separate Harry from his schoolbooks over the duration of the summer

holidays. In *Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets* (Rowling, 1998), this separation is

lamented but uncontested; Harry complains but does not act to challenge the restriction

(p. 8). In *Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999), however, Harry

resists the edict: "Harry had crept downstairs, picked the lock on the cupboard under the

stairs, grabbed some of his books and hidden them in his bedroom" (p. 8).   In addition,

Hogwarts' teachers and administrators store dangerous books in the Restricted section of

the library, and require permission notes for students to gain the right to read them

(Rowling, 1997, p. 198). Again, despite this restriction, Harry and his friends

nonetheless access the texts through the use of Harry's invisibility cloak (p. 205-206) and

through a note obtained under false pretenses from a careless teacher (Rowling, 1998, p.

123-4). Thus, characters and institutional representatives restrict other characters from

reading materials with varying degrees of success.

When characters restrict access to reading in *Harry Potter*, they exercise active

power over another individual. Dobby's attempt to exert control over Harry's decision-

making by refusing him access to his friends' letters is an explicit act of domination

against another character. Uncle Vernon's attempt to block Harry's letter is also an act of

active power in which he acts as an agent of authority over Harry and explicitly denies

Harry access to both reading and through it, to the wizarding community itself; it is only

the stronger magical power over texts exercised by *Hogwarts* that gives rise to Harry's

eventual receipt of the letter. Uncle Vernon's restriction of Harry's ability to read his

schoolbooks is similarly an act of active power; accompanying the order is the locking of

the books in an area of the house to which Harry has been explicitly denied entry.

Importantly, characters that exercise the active power of restriction over other characters

also disadvantage their target victims by blocking them from the potential power of the

information residing in the written material; thus, accompanying this exercise of active

power is a denial of access to potential power.

The implications of power over reading suggest some important implications.

The restrictions over reading isolate Harry emotionally from his community, suggesting

that reading and writing are important elements of social membership and

communication; without written communication to connect them, Harry's connection to

his community is fragmented. In addition, Harry's failure to successfully resist the active

power restricting his letters implies harsh consequences for being unable to control

written texts. Further, since restrictions over reading deny characters access to the

potential power of texts, characters that control reading essentially limit other characters'

opportunities for self-empowerment. The *Harry Potter* novels thus suggest the

importance of claiming power over written texts.

Writing

The *Harry Potter* series contains only a few instances in which characters

explicitly exercise restrictions over writing. One example of the restriction function over

writing of letters occurs when the Dursleys permit Harry to release his owl at night on the

condition that he not send any letters to his school friends (Rowling, 1999, p. 10); in

contrast to the restriction over reading, Harry does not attempt to resist the imperative

against writing letters. A second example in which the restriction function over writing

appears in *Harry Potter* occurs at the end of the second book: *Harry Potter and the*

chamber of secrets (Rowling, 1998). After Harry is attacked by Riddle, he calls for help,

and Fawkes the phoenix drops Riddle's diary into Harry's lap. Harry's quick response is

to plunge a poisonous basilisk fang into the book itself: "There was a long, dreadful

piercing scream. Ink spurted out of the diary in torrents, streaming over Harry's hand,

flooding the floor. Riddle was writhing and twisting, screaming and flailing and then …

He had gone (p. 237). Because Riddle exercises his power through writing in the diary,

Harry's destruction of the written text effectively constitutes a restriction of Riddle's

ability to write. These two examples are the only two instances in the series in which

characters specifically exercise power over writing.

Like restrictions over reading, restrictions over writing are acts of active power

that seek to directly and explicitly dominate other characters as well as deny them access

to the potential power residing in the written documents themselves. When the Dursleys

act as agents of authority and block Harry from writing letters to his friends, they impede

his ability to exchange information with other characters and to notify them of

information; the Dursleys thus dominate Harry by imposing limits on his behaviour and

his membership within the community. Harry's destruction of Riddle's diary,

Voldemort's primary vehicle for dominating other characters, is similarly an act of active

power against his enemy in that it both denies Riddle his ability to write as well as use

this writing to exercise power over others. Since Harry's countermeasure destroys

Riddle's ability to dominate, and restricts Riddle's access to the potential of the

information in the text itself, Harry's control over the diary is both to Riddle's

disadvantage as well as to his own empowerment. Thus, characters who exercise the

active power accompanying the restricting of writing dominate others, while empowering

themselves in the process.

Like restrictions over reading, restrictions over writing have profound

implications for the characters in the *Harry Potter* novels. By denying Harry the ability

to correspond with his friends, the Dursleys effectively block him from forming

relationships in his community, which isolates him from social memberships; thus, the

novels imply that writing, like reading, is a social practice that brings people together.

More disturbing, however, is the domination/empowerment aspect of power over writing

that appears in the example of Riddle's diary. Just as Riddle's diary holds both his

memories and his identity, so too does the series show that writing is an expression of

individual empowerment. Further, because Harry destroys Riddle's diary to destroy

Riddle's power and identity, the series shows that controlling writing is an act of

domination over the individual. Thus, the novels suggest the importance of power over

writing above other aspects of print literacy.

Conclusions

Power pervades written literacy practices in both the real world and the fictional

Harry Potter. Beginning in the Middle Ages and extending through to current day,

bankers, businessmen, and other merchants used written documents to record and

exchange information pertaining to financial accounting and other related transactions

(Cressy, 1983; Martin, 1994; Parkes, 1991). Within *Harry Potter*, characters commonly

use notes and letters of an informal nature, for communications with peers, and of a

formal nature, for communications between institutional representatives and clients. In

all instances when written documents are used to exchange information, considerable

potential power resides in the written materials themselves because of their capacity to

serve as resources that people and characters may or may not choose to access. In

addition, these materials also possess passive power which readers undergo as subtle

socializing information in the form of both style and content that conveys the values and

beliefs of the community in which the written materials were produced. For example, a

letter from Hogwarts to Harry suggests the community's respect for ritual and ceremony

(Rowling, 1997, p. 34), and a letter from Charlie Weasley to his brother Ron suggests

that morality, rather than legal statute, be the basis for good decision-making (Rowling,

1997, p. 237). Noticeably absent in the exchange function, however, is the exercise of

active power. Thus, although individuals and characters exchange information to their

advantage, they do not use this power to explicitly dominate others or to overcome

hardship. Power in the exchange function is, therefore, primarily in potential and passive

forms, suggesting that the ability to use written materials to communicate information

between people is a useful skill that also subtly participates in socialization and the

construction of group membership.

A second common function of written literacy practices, notification figures

prominently across history as well as throughout the *Harry Potter* novels. Early

civilizations adopted written materials to notify subjects of the state's authority (Thomas,

1994), and, more frequently, to strongly shape public opinion toward the adoption of

particular values (Johnson, 2001; Martin, 1994). Similarly, characters in Harry Potter

often rely on written materials to notify an audience of important information through

letters/notes, public notices and announcements, and periodicals, as well as to covertly

socialize readers into norms and values of the community. Written materials that inform

or notify readers of the writer's authority and imply the consequences of transgressions

possess potential power in that readers still maintain the option of acting or ignoring the

information; because the document merely conveys authority rather than directly

represents the authority itself, the sender of the document does not exercise active power

through the use of it in the notification function. More importantly, however, is the

wealth of passive power characterizing this function of written literacy. This passive

power works as Foucault's disciplinary power, conveying much information about the

community's beliefs and encouraging readers to adopt implicit values. For example,

characters in *Harry Potter* use public notices and announcements to encourage scepticism

regarding government accountability (Rowling, 1997, pp. 72-73). In this way, the use of

written materials to notify an audience of information is also a powerful, covert means of

influencing both individuals and groups to adopt beliefs and values consistent with the

author behind the written notice. The analysis thus shows that when written literacy is

used to notify, it also powerfully contributes to maintaining cohesive social group

identity.

A third function of written literacy, domination/ empowerment appears when

people (or characters) use written materials to explicitly control the actions of others or to

overcome restrictive circumstances. The domination aspect of this function appears

historically in the use of written inscriptions on stone monuments in ancient Greece to

embody the law; harsh penalties for defacing the tablets reveal that the inscriptions were

not merely vehicles for *conveying* authority, but *representative* of state authority itself

(Thomas, 1994). The Protestant insistence of Scripture as the ultimate religious authority

similarly illustrates the embodiment of authority in the written word (Martin, 1994).

Within *Harry Potter*, characters also commonly use written materials, occasionally in the

form of letters but more often through books, to dominate others. This domination,

always an act of active/sovereign power because the act of domination is explicit and at

the hands of a visible agent of authority, commonly appears in the series when characters

use books to advantage themselves as the expense of others. One important example of

the use of books to dominate appears when Riddle controls Ginny Weasley's actions

through the use of his diary, a written text into which he has stored a vital part of his

identity (Rowling, 1998, p. 227).

The use of written literacy to dominate, however, exists alongside the use of

written literacy to empower both individuals and characters over conflicts and adversity.

Historically, individuals with proficiency in reading and writing gained the tools

necessary to access the potential power in books and other written sources of information

about their society, thus yielding personal and financial benefits (Cressy, 1983; Parkes,

1991). In *Harry Potter*, characters similarly use written materials to their advantage:

Harry and his friends discover the solutions to challenges in books (Rowling, 1997, pp.

219-222; Rowling, 1998, p. 125), and while Riddle uses his diary to dominate others, it is

also the instrument of his rise to power, and his ultimate triumph over death itself (p.

227).   Because written literacy practices that participate in domination also participate in

self-empowerment, the active power of reading and writing can be used as either tools of

oppression or self-actualization; since balancing these twin functions is an aspect of

mediating individual desires within a social context, the domination/empowerment

functions of written literacy encourage the development of responsible citizenship.

In a final function, restriction, the mechanism of power is over, rather than through literacy. Historically, the exercise of power over written literacy practices has led to restrictive, oppressive circumstances: the powerful influence of propaganda in shaping public opinion in Victorian times led to the state seizure of books and the elimination of public reading rooms (Martin, 1994); government decision-making over what specifically constituted written literacy practices in formal public education was a form of social control to encourage specific work habits in a transitioning population (Graff, 1981); and, Elizabethan reformists encouraged the literate public to read only those written materials that reinforced their beliefs (Cressy, 1983). The *Harry Potter* novels, too, show the profound consequences arising from restricting access to reading and writing, and suggest the importance of claiming power over written literacy practices. Restricting characters from reading and writing in the series are always acts of active power that effectively dominate others because power *over* literacy essentially blocks characters from experiencing, undergoing, or exercising power *through* literacy. The results of this block are that characters are isolated from forming relationships and identities within the community, and thus denied the opportunity to participate in, act on, and construct the social world around them. Power over written literacy is thus, power over people and relationships.

Historically speaking, written literacy practices have shown themselves to be social practices permeated with power. In *Harry Potter*, characters use written literacy in similar ways: to exchange information; to notify an audience; to dominate others; and to overcome circumstances. While considerable power can be exercised through written literacy, however, the novels show that it is power over reading and writing that most

importantly must be claimed and responsibly exercised. The novels therefore situate

reading and writing not as a set of discrete, autonomous skills, but practices by which the

social world develops, changes, and evolves to meet the changing needs of its citizens.

Showing that restricting access to written literacy is a form of social control, the novels

thus locate reading and writing as sites for contesting power relations, as well as insist on

power over reading and writing as the democratic right of each individual resident of this

social world.

Chapter Three

ORAL LITERACIES: SPEAKING AND LISTENING

"…to speak a word is to transform the world" (Freire, 1990, p. 75).

Historical Context

Despite the historical prominence of the oral tradition, the pervasiveness and popularity of an autonomous model of literacy led to the general belief that there was a great divide between written and oral language practices, with reading and writing heralded as responsible for major acts of human progress and speaking and listening relegated to the margins of primitive societies. Shifting the climate were two movements. First, several studies in the United Kingdom during the 1960s showed the importance of oral language as a tool of learning (Barnes, Britton & Rosen, 1969; Wilkinson, 1965), suggesting the need for speaking and listening as subjects of study within the classroom. Secondly, later ethnographic studies from the fields of psychology and anthropology directly attacked the claim that literacy was an isolated set of skills, divorced from context, and suggested that plural approaches more accurately addressed the complexity of literacy. The presence of speaking and listening as *full and equal partners* alongside reading and writing as dimensions of literacy in the Western Canadian Language Arts curriculum can thus be understood as a consequence of studies into the importance of oral literacy practices in learning, and the redefining and conceptualizing of literacy according to plural, situated models.

Oracy

Andrew Wilkinson's *Spoken English* (1965) established a foundation to the

teaching of speaking and listening in the United Kingdom. Lamenting what he perceived

as the neglect of oral language by educators in English schools (Wilkinson, 1965, p. 11),

Wilkinson recommended including speaking and listening in the school curriculum

alongside literacy and numeracy, insisting that speech is "a central factor in the

development of the personality and closely related to human happiness and well being"

(p. 13). Coining the term 'oracy' to refer to "general ability in the oral skills" (p. 14),

Wilkinson argued that "oracy is not a 'subject'; it is a condition of learning in all

subjects; it is not a 'frill' but a state of being in which the whole school must operate" (p.

58). Further, Wilkinson advised that the teaching of oracy should not take the form of

"formal speech training" (p. 62), but should simulate authentic speech situations, such as

discussions, panel debates, public speaking, reading aloud, role-playing (pp. 64-70) in

which the student is an active participant: "This basically is how oracy grows: it is to be

taught by the creation of many and varied circumstances to which both speech and

listening are the natural responses" (p. 59). Wilkinson ended with recommendations that

speaking and listening tests too should emphasize authentic speech patterns (pp. 72-110).

Taking up the nature of talk within the classroom was the work of Douglas

Barnes, James Britton, and Harold Rosen. In *Language, the learner, and the school*

(1969), Barnes described language interactions between teachers and students in a

secondary school. Observing that the majority of questions asked by the teacher were

factual, rather than open-ended or speculative (pp. 23-24), Barnes concluded that teachers

dominated classroom discussions, the result of which was that language was "not

fulfilling its functions as an instrument of learning…but seen as an instrument of

teaching" (p. 66):

> It is not enough for pupils to imitate the forms of teachers' language as if
>
> they were models to be copied; it is only when they 'try it out' in
>
> reciprocal exchanges so that they can modify the way they use language to
>
> organize reality that they are able to find new functions for language in
>
> thinking and feeling. (pp. 61-2)

In a similar investigation, James Britton (1969) studied the way talk functioned in

small informal groups to both solve problems and learn. In his analysis of transcripts of

teenagers working through a Latin translation exercise, Britton observed that in the

absence of a teacher, the students eagerly engaged in expressive, reflective talk that

explored the implications of the issue at hand while seeking a solution (p. 96). By way of

comparison, Britton also studied transcripts of a science lesson in which the teacher led

classroom discussion, observing that open questioning encouraged students to use talk to

learn for themselves. Britton concluded with the following explanation of the importance

of spoken language, and the teacher's role, in learning: "A child's language is the means:

in the process of meeting new demands – and being helped to meet them – his language

takes on new forms that correspond to the new powers as he achieves them" (p. 115).

A subsequent work by Britton, *Language and Learning* (1970) further argued the

importance of talk by presenting a theory on the role of speech in cognitive development.

Claiming that "the primary task for speech is to symbolize reality: we symbolize reality

in order to handle it" (p. 20), Britton explained that the function of verbal language is to

represent experience:

…by various means of representation, and with the aid of language as an

organizing principle, we construct each for himself a world representation:

that we modify this representation in light of further experience in order

that our predictions may be better: and that we improvise upon it for a

variety of reasons (p. 31).

By positing the influence of reciprocal exchange on development, Britton's work

effectively identified "social functions of speech" (p. 234), and thus suggested a

relationship between context and the use of oral language. Importantly, this early work

by Britton maintained the role of oracy as an instrument of knowing, rather than as a

specific site of development.

The Bullock Report (1975), a survey of 2,000 schools in England, confirmed the

importance of oracy in both home and school environments. Declaring that "it is the role

that language plays in *generating* knowledge and *producing new forms* of behaviour that

typifies human existence and distinguishes it from that of all other creatures," the Bullock

Report suggested that oral and written skills were both necessary for cognitive

development: "a child can learn by talking and writing as certainly as he can by listening

and reading." Based on this theoretical foundation, the Bullock Report outlined

suggestions for encouraging talk in the early years: parents of preschoolers were advised

that "When you give your child a bath, bathe him in language," and preschool teachers

were counselled to use nursery rhymes and singing games to stimulate language

awareness and practice. For teachers of older students, the Bullock Report recommended

open-ended questioning and exploratory talk in order to promote "genuine thinking."

Further, the Bullock Report stressed the importance of natural, rather than formal or

contrived, contexts: "the kind of language development under discussion will be more likely to take effect the more it uses as its medium the daily experiences of the classroom and the home." To summarize, the overall effect of the Bullock Report was to reinforce studies in language that argued for encouraging both written and oral language development in children, and to suggest recommendations for encouraging oral language practice in classrooms.

From Literacy to Literacies

While the Bullock Report made a strong case for the presence of oral language in school curricula, the Report represented speaking and listening skills primarily as a means by which students progressed in other subjects; thus, there persisted a great divide between oral and written literacy, with literacy itself generally conceptualized as an isolated, context-independent set of skills synonymous with reading and writing. Several challenges to the autonomous model of literacy arose in the 1980s, however, one of which was Graff's *The Literacy myth: Cultural integration and social structure in the nineteenth century* (1979). In his book, Graff argued that "common understanding of literacy is inadequate and incomplete" (p. 3), pointing to vague definitions surrounding literacy and a scarcity of evidence showing literacy's assumed social and cultural benefits for both individuals and society. Insisting that a definition of literacy as a mere tool or skill did not do justice to its complexity, Graff asked an important question: "What kind of tool and for what uses?" (p. 5). In his historical analysis of literacy in a series of Ontario communities, Graff noted that not only was the role of literacy interpreted in different ways by different people, but that the acquisition of literacy did not support the assumption that literacy was responsible for social progress:

…systemic patterns of inequality and stratification – by origins, class, sex,

race, and age – were deep and pervasive, and relatively unaltered by the

influence of literacy. The social hierarchy … was ordered more by the

dominance of social ascription than by the acquisition of new, achieved

characteristics. (p. xi)

Further, Graff objected to the characterization of the relationship between print and oral

communication as dichotomized, arguing that "oral culture and its fundamental

significance do not simply vanish under the attack of print, schooling, and modernization;

rather, it dialectically accommodates the impact of them, one neither assimilating nor

replacing the other" (p. 306). The significance of Graff's study was thus the positioning

of literacy within its social context, as well as the encouraging of more studies into the

historical role of oral communication.

Following up on Graff's work were other challenges to the position that literacy

was a set of context-independent skills consisting exclusively of reading and writing. In

The psychology of literacy (1981), Scribner and Cole took up the contention that the

influence of written literacy is "not only the content of thought but also the processes of

thinking – how we classify, reason, remember" (p. 5). Noting that previous research

investigating this contention did so in the context of formal schooling, Scribner and Cole

focused their five-year study on the uses and functions of literacy in the Vai people of

Liberia, a people with a writing system that was taught in the home, rather than in the

school, in order to separate the effects of schooling from the effects of literacy (p. 15).

Among the results of the study were the observations that both preliterates and literates

within Vai society demonstrated the capacity for abstraction, taxonomic categorization,

classification, memory, and logic (p. 132), and that home and schooled literacies differed

with regard to cognitive performance (p. 134); thus, their study showed that literacy

should be understood as related to context:

> Instead of focusing exclusively on the technology of a writing system and
>
> its reputed consequences…we approach literacy as a set of socially
>
> organized practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology
>
> for producing and disseminating it. Literacy is not simply knowing how
>
> to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for
>
> specific purposes in specific contexts of use. (p. 236)

In *Ways with words* (1983), Heath agreed with Scribner and Cole, and showed the

impossibility of divorcing language use from circumstances. In her nine-year

ethnographic study of three racially and economically contrasting Appalachian

communities, Heath observed that each community socialized its children into different

patterns of interaction and language use: "the different ways children learned to use

language were dependent on the ways in which [members of] each community structured

their families, defined the roles that community members could assume, and played out

their concepts of childhood that guided child socialization" (p. 11). When these home

community patterns of interaction were similar to the kinds of language use demanded by

the school community, the children were largely successful in meeting classroom

demands: "it is the kind of talk, not the quantity of talk, that sets townspeople children

on their way in school" (p. 351). Heath thus explained that it was the disconnection

between school and home language use, rather than deficiencies in language skills, which

led to student failure. More importantly, her study's emphasis on the many ways in

which literacy practices manifest within different contexts showed the limitations of the

autonomous model of literacy, summarized by Heath herself in a later work: "the

generally assumed functions and uses of literacy … do not correspond to the social

meanings … across either time periods, cultures, or the contexts of use" (Heath, 1986, pp.

15-16). Heath presented a strong case for plural approaches to literacy, as well as the

importance of speaking and listening to any study of literacy practices.

New Literacy Studies

The growing movement to redefine literacy as socially bound and context-

dependent practices including reading and writing, as well as other forms of

representation, came to be labelled the New Literacy Studies (NLS). Street's *Literacy in*

theory and practice (1984) specifically narrowed the gap between reading/writing and

speaking/listening by suggesting their coexistence in a social world of language use:

"what the particular practices and concepts of [literacy] are for a given society depends

upon the context; that they are already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or

treated as 'neutral' or merely 'technical'" (p. 1). Rejecting the autonomous model of

literacy, Street suggested its replacement with an ideological model stressing "the

significance of the socialization process in the construction of the meaning of literacy for

participants" (p. 2). Street's work also made clear that a consequence of the redefining of

literacy as social practices was the weakening of the theory positing a great divide

between oral and written modes of communication: "The reality of social uses of varying

modes of communication is that oral and literate modes are 'mixed' in each society" (p.

4). Street's work thus argued for the social nature of literacy practices, as well as the

relationship between reading/writing and speaking/listening.

Another contributor to NLS, Gee (1996) elaborated on the relationship between literacy and social context by arguing for the role played by literacies as social practices in constructing individual identity. Defining 'Discourses' as "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles by specific groups of people" (Gee, 1996, p. viii), Gee argued that "language makes no sense outside of Discourses, and the same is true of literacy" (p. viii). Noting that "there are many different 'social languages' connected in complex ways with different Discourses" (p. viii), Gee insisted, "there are many different sorts of literacy – many literacies – connected in complex ways with different Discourses" (p. viii). By reinforcing that individuals used different forms of communication practices in different situations for different purposes, Gee's work on social Discourses argued that literacies could not be a single set of skills consisting of reading and writing, but encompassed a wide array of social practices; Gee's work thus suggested the place of speaking/ listening as partners to other dimensions of literacy.

Picking up on Gee's work, the New London Group (1996) developed a theory of multiliteracies that attempted to negotiate "a multiplicity of discourses" (p. 61) that abound in "our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies" (p. 61). Acknowledging the impact of new communication technologies on language use, the New London Group insisted that multiliteracies addressed "modes of representation much broader than language alone" (p. 64), including the linguistic, visual, audio, and spatial (p. 65). In its development of pedagogy for the teaching of these multiliteracies, the New London Group thus reinforced the importance of oral literacies, as well as other forms of representing experience, in educational curricula.

The influence of the New Literacy Studies was to pave the way for major

developments around the positioning of speaking and listening in schools. In the United

Kingdom, the National Oracy Project (1987-1991) investigated and promoted talk in the

classroom (Johnson, 1993), and the National Literacy Strategy (1998) legitimized talk as

itself a site of learning[12] (Hewitt & Inghilleri, 1993). In Canada, the presence of speaking

and listening in the Language Arts Common Curriculum Framework testifies to the

recognition that communicative practices are embedded in social contexts (Governments

of Alberta et al., 1998). Recent studies into the role and nature of oral communication

practices in the classroom also suggest the widespread influence of these plural models of

literacies (Connolly & Smith, 2002; Hunter, Gambell, & Randhawa, 2005; Many, 2002).

The Oral Tradition

Despite struggling to be represented as an equal partner with written literacy in

educational curricula, speaking and listening have a relationship with power, primarily

through the functions of rhetoric. Although generally defined as the art or techniques of

argument and persuasion, rhetoric has a variety of lesser-known functions. Among

ancient Greek orators, rhetoric was an important mode of inquiry, a pathway to truth, and

an instrument for the protection of both the individual and society from corruptive

influences. More contemporary rhetorical studies identify the power of rhetoric in

identifying and naming social norms, thus permitting the transformation of social

conditions. Because the functions of rhetoric suggest the continuing power of the spoken

word to influence and shape thought and action, oral language use should thus be

understood as integrally bound to issues of power.

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[12] Despite this legitimatization, the uses of talk in classrooms widely varies, suggesting that speaking and listening in practice are often used as instruments of learning; that is, speaking and listening are not yet in full partnership with reading and writing in the classroom (Haworth, 2001; Skidmore, 2000)

Classical Rhetoric

Although rhetoric today encompasses both speeches and written texts, classical rhetoric, originating in ancient Greece, focused on public speaking in order to persuade an audience (Brummett, 2006, p. 46). Persuasive speech was important because it "could depose or empower tyrants, determine public policy, and administer laws" (Bizzell & Herzberg, 1990, p. 2). Among the first rhetoricians, the Sophists were professional orators who taught youth the techniques of oral persuasion, thus establishing speech as a valuable mode of inquiry about the role of humankind in the world. Arguing that knowledge was bound by human context, the Sophists rejected the existence of a single 'truth,' proposing instead that "the assignment of a particular value depends on social and historical circumstances" (p. 23); thus, the Sophists encouraged a philosophical movement from empiricism to skepticism.

Rejecting the cultural and moral relativism of the Sophists, Plato advocated rhetoric as a method of discovering knowledge:

> ...nobler far is the serious pursuit of the dialectician, who, finding a congenial soul, by the help of science sows and plants therein words which are able to help themselves and him who planted them, and are not unfruitful, but have in them a seed which others brought up in different soils render immortal, making the possessors of it happy to the utmost extent of human happiness. (Jowett, 1990, 276c-277a)

According to Plato, the functions of rhetoric could be conceptualized in two ways: when used to persuade, rhetoric was a self-serving and deceptive practice; when used to seek pure truth and knowledge, speech was both noble and powerful.

Plato's student Aristotle expanded Plato's views and blended them with Sophist

thought. Rejecting the notion that rhetoric was necessarily manipulative and deceptive,

Aristotle argued that it was a technique of persuasion that could be used in the support of

truth and knowledge, defining rhetoric as the art of seeking "the available means of

persuasion in each case" (Rapp, 2002a). Although he admitted the potential for its

misuse, Aristotle claimed that rhetoric essentially leveled the playing field for battles

between good and evil, effectively encouraging the triumph of good because "it is easier

to convince of the just and good than of their opposites" (Rapp, 2002). Aristotle also

identified reasons for the continued formal study of rhetoric, including the challenges

involved in teaching what may be an uneducated or distracted audience to make

responsible decisions (Rapp, 2002b). Aristole's position on rhetoric may thus be

understood as advocating oral speech as a skill that could be used to ensure fairness and

equality.

Contemporary Rhetoric

While classical rhetoric focused on speech as a tool of inquiry, manipulation, and

justice, contemporary rhetoric concerns itself less with language as a tool and more with

its influence on conditions of society.   Contemporary approaches to rhetoric converge on

the belief that language is not neutral or value-independent, but plays a role in "shaping

attitudes, values, and perceptions of reality" (Steiner, 2006, p. 28). This linking of

rhetoric and social communication appears in Kenneth Burke's *A rhetoric of motives*

(1969), in which he argued that the function of rhetoric should be expanded from

persuasion to include the broader function of identification. Observing the presence of

violent imagery in literature, Burke explained that rhetoric is founded on the principle of

division: "If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (p. 22). According to Burke, this division is important because the rhetorical identification asks the audience to consider the ways in which they are "both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (p. 21):

> A is not identical with his colleague B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A *is identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. (p. 20)

Burke thus defined the power of rhetoric as influencing patterns of identification and social membership.

Rod Hart's *The Functions of Rhetoric* (1990) similarly linked oral language to power by describing rhetoric's lesser known functions in society, among which include unburdening the speaker struggling with conscience; enlarging the audience's perspectives with other viewpoints; encouraging flexibility and growth by showing a wealth of alternate possibilities; and naming the world. According to Hart, the naming function is of particular importance as a practice that gives people a vocabulary for articulating issues and disseminating information, thus helping people gain power over their surroundings.

Ong (1982) agreed that the naming function, which also appears in Christian creation stories of the world, has several important implications regarding the role of oral language and authority: "Oral peoples commonly think of names … as conveying power over things" (p. 33). Ong explained that in the Old Testament, God confers Adam with

the power of naming the animals; through this naming practices, Adam demonstrates his

mastery over them through language (p. 33). Ong tied the naming practice to the belief

of oral peoples that the spoken word has a "magical potency" (p. 32) because it is

"necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence, power-driven" (p. 32). Naming, then, like

identifying, is a powerful means of using oral speech to control and empower.

Oral literacy and power come together largely through the function of rhetoric.

For the Sophists, rhetoric was a powerful tool for learning about knowledge within a

contextual framework. Plato insisted that rhetoric would help uncover absolute truths,

and Aristotle argued for rhetoric's ability to further responsible citizenship.

Contemporary rhetoricians concerned themselves with the role of oral language on

identity and social membership. Oral literacy thus has, and continues to exert, a strong

influence on both individual and social levels.

Oral Literacy Practices in *Harry Potter*

In the *Harry Potter* series, speaking and listening appear in a wide variety of

forms: *dialogue* consists of conversational speech between two or more characters;

lectures are instructional speeches from a single speaker, usually an authority figure, to

an intended listener; *announcements* are informational speeches to an intended audience

of either a single character or a wider group of individuals; *reprimands* are talks that

censure behaviour; *magic spells* refer to utterances that invoke supernatural forces; and

naming is the oral conferring of designations. The style of these forms of oral

communication in the novels varies from informal, as in the talk between peers, to

formal, as in speeches from an authority figure. In addition, speaking and listening in the

series are of both private and public nature, depending on the setting in which the oral

communication takes place and the nature of its content.

Characters in the *Harry Potter* series use these different forms of oral language as

tools and instruments of power in many ways: *exchange* refers to reciprocated oral

interaction; *notification* is unidirectional communication from speaker to receiver;

domination/empowerment is when characters use oral language practices to either control

another character or overcome a situation; and *restriction* is when characters exercise

power over speaking. The kinds of power involved in character usage of these different

functions of oral literacy will reveal the ideological assumptions behind the oral literacy

practices and suggest the novels' messages about the role and value of speaking and

listening.

Exchange

One function of oral language in the *Harry Potter* novels is to exchange

information between characters. Given that it is impossible for individuals (or

characters) to use speech and not in some way both directly and indirectly communicate

information, this function loosely appears in all forms of oral communication within the

novels. Dialogues between characters, however, most clearly show both the nature of the

exchange function, as well as the mechanism by which it operates in the exercise of

power. Importantly, the exchange function of oral language draws a distinction between

speaking and listening: because exchange requires reciprocity, when characters

surreptitiously listen to, but do not themselves participate in, conversations, these

dialogues are not examples of the interactive exchange of information.

Dialogue

Many characters in the novels use dialogue and conversation to exchange

information with other characters. In Harry's dialogues with authority figures, such as

Professor Dumbledore, and partial authority figures, such as Hagrid, both parties

communicate personal information to one another.   For example, when Harry encounters

Dumbledore before the Mirror of Erised, the subsequent conversation is an exchange

because the nature of the talk is reciprocal: "'So – back again, Harry?' … 'I – I didn't

see you, sir'" (Rowling, 1997, p. 212). Although Dumbledore's explanation of the

Mirror resembles a one-sided lecture, Dumbledore's gentle questioning of Harry's

motives, as well as his own reply to Harry's "personal question" (p. 214) is evidence of

shared communication. Similarly, although Hagrid is serving in an official capacity as

Hogwart's messenger at their first encounter, the conversation becomes personal as both

participants share detailed information. Hagrid reveals to Harry his suspension from

performing magic, some details regarding the instigating incident, and his gratitude to

Dumbledore for permitting him to remain at Hogwarts as gamekeeper (Rowling, 1997, p.

59); and Harry confides in Hagrid his apprehension regarding his status in the wizarding

community: "Everyone thinks I'm special…but I don't know anything about magic at all.

How can they expect great things?" (p. 86). A later dialogue between Hagrid, Harry,

Hermione, and Ron shows how the exchange function is not limited to only two

participants. In response to the expectation of an impending investigation into a

classroom incident, Hagrid shares his misery with his young friends who reciprocate with

their reassurances and assertions about his innocence: "'You haven't been sacked,

Hagrid!'… 'Not yet … But 'sonly a matter of time, I'nt it'…'Yeah, don't worry, Hagrid,

we'll back you up'" (Rowling, 1999, p. 92). Because the characters share knowledge

between parties, this dialogue is also an example of using oral language to exchange

information.

Dialogue between peers also illustrates how the nature of the exchange function

varies according to the specific nature of the relationships involved. When Harry first

meets and speaks with Draco Malfoy while purchasing school robes, Malfoy

communicates his resentment about Hogwarts' rules, his family's long-standing

affiliation with Slytherin House, and his view of Hagrid as a drunken savage: "I heard

he's a sort of *savage* – lives in a hut on the school grounds and every now and then he

gets drunk, tries to do magic, and ends up setting fire to his bed" (Rowling, 1997, pp. 77-

78). As Malfoy expresses his strong beliefs about the importance of pedigree, Harry's

participation in the exchange is reduced to short, terse replies that reveal his growing

dislike for Malfoy. A similar conversational exchange between Harry and Malfoy occurs

later when they meet on the Hogwart's Express and Malfoy makes open his contempt for

those he perceives inferior: "You'll soon find out that some wizarding families are much

better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort" (p.

108). Following Malfoy's offer to help him discriminate between the right and wrong

associates, Harry rejects Malfoy's advice, again with a cool, succinct reply: "I think I can

tell who the wrong sort are for myself, thanks" (p. 109). In contrast, the exchange of

personal information between Harry and Ron Weasley is characterized by a more

equitable discussion with both parties contributing to the conversation:

> 'Are all your family wizards?'… 'Er – yes, I think so … I think Mom's
>
> got a second cousin who's an accountant, but we never talk about him …

I heard you went to live with Muggles … what are they like?' … 'Horrible

– well, not all of them. My aunt and uncle and cousin are, though. Wish

I'd had three wizard brothers.' (p. 99)

Many other conversations between Harry, Ron, and Hermione similarly illustrate

how characters in the novels commonly use oral speech to exchange information. In their

first encounter, Hermione dominates the discussion with her criticism of their skills and

her summary of her academic preparations, all delivered in a "bossy sort of voice" (p.

105). Her questioning of the boys to elicit their personal histories, and their subsequent

replies to her inquiries, establishes the conversation as an exchange: "I'm Hermione

Granger, by the way, who are you?" (p. 106). Later dialogues occurring after a bonding

incident with a troll, for which Hermione claims responsibility, are characterized by more

even-handed sharing of information: when the group discusses Ron's fear of spiders, all

speakers contribute both questions and answers: "'Have you ever seen spiders act like

that?' …'No, have you, Ron? Ron? … What's up?' … 'I – don't – like spiders' … 'I

never knew that'" (Rowling, 1998, p. 117). Later, when the group reunites just prior to

the start of school, the children similarly exchange information about their summer

activities and new school requirements: "'So have you got all your new books and

stuff?' … 'Look at this … brand new wand. Fourteen inches, willow, containing one

unicorn hair'" (Rowling, 1999, p. 47). The primary function of these dialogues is thus to

share information.

Two kinds of power characterize the use of dialogue to exchange information.

Potential power resides in the actual content of the conversation because the information

may or may not be applied to use by one of the participants.   In Dumbledore's

conversation with Harry, the headmaster gives him information about the Mirror of

Erised, explaining why Harry and Ron saw different images in its reflection and the

dangers behind its appeal: "The happiest man would be able to use the Mirror of Esired

like a normal mirror, that is, he would look into it and see himself exactly as he is"

(Rowling, 1997, p. 213). Because he accepts the implications of this information, later

applying it to his confrontation with Quirrell/Voldemort to find the image of the

sorcerer's stone in the mirror, Harry makes use of this original information and acts on its

potential, converting it into active power (pp. 291-292). Dumbledore's part of their

dialogue, however, also gives additional information to Harry on which Harry does not

explicitly act: when Dumbledore reveals his knowledge of both Harry's and Ron's secret

desires, he reveals both his interest in, as well as his capacity to oversee, Harry's welfare

(p. 213). Because Harry does not realize the implications of this information, he

experiences his later battle with Voldemort as a fearful event, rather than being reassured

by the awareness that a powerful protector is watching (p. 293); the power of

Dumbledore's information thus remains potential in form. In contrast, Harry's

realization that Dumbledore's reply to a personal question "might not have been quite

truthful" (p. 214) anticipates his later, fuller understanding of Dumbledore's character,

and thus represents another example of the conversion of potential into active power.

Hagrid's conversations with Harry and his friends similarly have potential power.

Hagrid's spirited defense of Dumbledore to Uncle Vernon reveals Dumbledore's high

ranking in the wizarding community, and implies Dumbledore's ability to evoke loyalty

from his followers: "NEVER – INSULT – ALBUS – DUMBLEDORE – IN – FRONT –

OF – ME!" (p. 59). Hagrid's gratitude to Dumbledore for defying the expulsion and

offering him continuing employment also implies Dumbledore's authority within the community (p. 59); thus, Hagrid's conversation with Harry speaks to Dumbledore's character. Further, Hagrid's style of speech also suggests his lack of education and therefore low social standing: "Best be off, Harry, lots ter do today, gotta get up ter London an' buy all yer stuff for school" (p. 62). Again, these conversations offer much information about different characters in the novel, but when the characters involved do not realize or act on the importance of this information, the power of the dialogues remains potential in form.

Characters in the series also undergo passive power through their participation in dialogue in which the primary function is to exchange information. Malfoy's talk with Harry reveals a great deal about both the structure of the wizarding community and the kinds of conflicts arising within it. Malfoy's revelations include the existence of rules governing appropriate student behaviour at educational institutions: "…I'm going to drag them off to look at racing brooms. I don't see why first years can't have their own. I think I'll bully father into getting me one and I'll smuggle it in somehow" (p. 77), and the presence of a distinct social hierarchy among some citizens of the wizarding world, with those individuals of mixed ancestry ranking lower than those of fully magical parents:

> I really don't think they should let the other sort in, do you? They're just not the same, they've never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letters. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families. What's your surname, anyway? (p. 78)

When Ron speaks with Harry, information about the community is similarly implied: according to Ron's dialogue, wizarding families have similar concerns as non-magical families, such as financial tensions, and wizard children worry about competing with siblings, achieving academic success, and meeting parental expectations: "I'm the sixth in our family to go to Hogwarts. You could say I've got a lot to live up to" (p. 99). Ron's part of their dialogue also suggests the importance of entertainment to the community; describing Quidditch as "the best game in the world" (p. 107), Ron implies its widespread prominence. Hermione's conversation similarly suggests the broad scope, both historically and geographically, of the wizarding world, as well as shows that the wizarding community is composed of both individuals from wizarding families, as well as students from non-magical parents: "Nobody in my family's magic at all, it was ever such a surprise when I got my letter, but I was ever so pleased, of course, I mean, it's the very best school of witchcraft there is, I've heard --"(p. 105). Conversations between characters in *Harry Potter* thus communicate much about the social structure and values of the wizarding community.

Underpinning the many functions of oral language in Harry Potter are ideological assumptions about oral literacy. The abundance of dialogues between characters testifies to the importance of talk to the community; talk is arguably the primary medium by which information of all kinds is exchanged between characters. In addition, the wealth of specific conversations in which characters exchange personal information suggests that the novels endorse talk as an instrument for facilitating relationships across boundaries of age and class; talk is thus a vital element of community cohesion. Further, because the nature of conversations and dialogues between peers varies, with more equitable sharing

of speech associated with the development of real friendships, the novels suggest that it is

not merely the quantity, but the quality of talk, that contributes to relationships. The

exchange function of dialogue in *Harry Potter* thus suggests the central role of talk in

influencing both individual and community structure and function in many ways.

Notification

Dialogue

When speech is used to notify or announce information to either a single character

or a wider audience, the function of oral language is notification. In *Harry Potter*,

characters use speech to notify through dialogue, lectures, and announcements. Most

commonly, characters use dialogue to exchange information; however, when a character

surreptitiously eavesdrops on or overhears a conversation, he or she is made aware of

information; thus, the effect is actually notification of the unintended recipient/listener.

There are several instances of characters using dialogue to notify other characters

of information in the *Harry Potter* novels, all of which are characterized by the presence

of a character listening to, rather than participating in, the conversation. Many of these

instances are made possible by Harry's invisibility cloak, a garment that allows him

almost unlimited license to conceal his presence and thus listen in to conversations

between other characters: Filch's chat with his cat notifies Harry about Malfoy's plan to

get Harry into trouble (Rowling, 1997, pp. 157-159); Draco and Lucius' conversation

with Mr. Borgin in Knockturn Alley reveals to Harry the Malfoy family's continued

association with Voldemort (Rowling, 1998, pp. 43-44); a disagreement between Mr. and

Mrs. Weasley informs Harry that his life is in danger from escaped convict Sirius Black

(Rowling, 1999, pp. 53-55); and Dumbledore's final words to Lucius Malfoy in response

to an Order of Suspension notifies Harry of Dumbledore's deep connection to the school:

"…I will have only truly left this school when none here are loyal to me. You will also find that help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it" (Rowling, 1998, p. 195). Harry's invisibility cloak, therefore, greatly contributes to his ability to overhear conversations and receive notification of important information.

Harry, however, also has access to other means for surreptitious eavesdropping on conversations. Polyjuice potion, a magical elixir that transforms the drinker into another character, permits Harry and Ron to spy on conversations between Malfoy and other students in Slytherin House (p. 65); while this covert listening does not yield them the particular information they seek, Harry and Ron are nevertheless made aware of previously unknown information, including the location of the Slytherin common room (p. 165), the weekly password (p. 165), and Malfoy's innocence with regard to the attacks on their fellow students: "I wish I knew who it was, … I could help them" (p. 166). Another means for listening to other characters' dialogues appears in a quality particular to Harry himself: his unique status as sole survivor of Voldemort's deadly attack on his parents bestows on him the ability to overhear unusual conversations between Voldemort's allies across great distances in both space and time. Thanks to this special status, Harry is able to listen in to the basilisk's dialogues with its prey (Rowling, 1998, pp. 104-105), as well as his parents' final desperate speech just before their executions: "Lily, take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off –" (Rowling, 1999, p. 178). In all these cases, the conversations inform Harry of previously unknown information; thus, these conversations are examples of characters using dialogue primarily to notify listeners of information.

Different kinds of power characterize the notification function of listening by an

unintended recipient. The content of the conversations has potential power because the

value of the dialogue may or may not be realized by the listener. For example, the

importance to Harry of Filch's conversation with his cat is that it reveals that Malfoy's

instigation of a midnight duel between himself and Harry was actually a ruse to lure

Harry from his room and get him into trouble with his teachers. This is knowledge on

which Harry can, and does, act to preserve his interests (Rowling, 1997, pp. 158-160);

thus, Harry coverts the potential power of the content of the conversation into the active

power of empowerment.   Similarly, Dumbledore's final dialogue with Lucius Malfoy

contains potentially useful information in Dumbledore's insistence that assistance will be

offered to loyal followers; because Harry later asserts his belief in Dumbledore, help

comes to him in the form of a phoenix and sword that ultimately save his life (Rowling,

1998, pp. 232-237). In contrast, some information in other conversations remains

potential in form in that the listener is unable to recognize or act on its significance. This

potential power appears in the Malfoy dialogue with Mr. Borgin; while the conversation

reveals Malfoy's continued association with the Dark Lord, Harry does not realize that

the nature of Malfoy's business is itself important: only at the end of the novel does

Harry overhear another conversation between Dumbledore and Lucius Malfoy that

informs him that Malfoy was the prior owner of Riddle's diary, and thus, remains

Voldemort's ally (Rowling, 1998, pp. 246-247). Importantly, this example also shows

how the conversion of potential into active power may occur at a later time beyond the

original dialogue. Similarly, Harry's awareness of both the significance of Malfoy's

innocence in the attacks on his fellow students, and his father's final words, remains

deferred until later developments in the storyline reveal the importance of the original

information.

There is also passive power in the use of dialogue to notify an unintended listener.

The Weasley family argument reveals the inherent danger in the wizarding community in

the expressed worry about Harry's safety in the face of a determined criminal with intent

to harm him (Rowling, 1999, pp. 53-54). The revelation of government control over the

press release regarding Black's escape also suggests the overarching authority of

government and its capacity to oversee and direct information flow to the public (p. 54).

Further, the resolution of Mr. and Mrs. Weasley's argument also suggests that successful

marriages in the wizard community are characterized by equitable exchanges: while Mr.

Weasley agrees with Mrs. Weasley's decision not to inform Harry of the impending

threat, Mrs. Weasley eventually defers to Mr. Weasley's judgment about Black's

intentions to pursue Harry: "Well, Arthur, you must do what you think is right" (p. 54).

In contrast, the overheard sound bite of the short-lived marriage between James and Lily

Potter implies a more traditional family structure with the husband defending his wife

and child who are instructed to flee to safety (Rowling, 1999, p. 178). These contrasting

marriages reveal that men and women play different roles in partnerships within the

wizarding community. Thus, the characters that listen to conversations undergo passive

power in the form of socializing information about the community's values and beliefs.

The notification function of conversation also implies assumptions about listening

and its relationship to power. First, the many means for eavesdropping, such as Harry's

invisibility cloak, polyjuice potion, and Harry's unique status as sole survivor of

Voldemort's deadly attack against Harry's parents, suggest the importance of careful

listening, as does the wealth of potential power residing in the dialogues themselves.

Secondly, the widespread availability of the majority of these means to any determined

character effectively shows the benefits of listening to other people's conversations;

indeed, although characters risk punishment if discovered in the act of covert listening,

the rewards for engaging in the behaviour far outweigh the risks. Finally, the deferred

quality of potential power in the notification function also suggests the usefulness and

versatility of the information obtained from listening, as this knowledge may be later

applied to an appropriate situation; thus, the notification function implies that careful

listening is also an important aspect of oral literacy practices.

Lectures

Characters in the Harry Potter series also use instructional lectures to inform

recipients of information. For example, Snape introduces potions with a short lecture on

the subject's complexity and allure (Rowling, 1997, pp. 136-137) and Sprout instructs

students in the correct procedure for repotting Mandrakes (Rowling, 1998, pp. 73-74).

As a method of instruction, the lecture has potential power because of the knowledge

inherent in the content, such as the particular methods to be employed when confronted

with a shape-shifter: "You see, the thing that really finishes a Boggart is *laughter*. What

you need to do is force it to assume a shape that you find amusing" (Rowling, 1999, p.

101). This information has potential power because it may or may not be acted on by the

listener; that is, students are not required to use the information from the lecture in future

confrontations with a Boggart, although doing so would certainly be in their best

interests. Characters also undergo passive power that influences them to adopt the values

and beliefs of the community as they listen to instructional lectures. For example,

because Snape's lecture describing potions as "a subtle science and exact art" (Rowling, 1997, p. 136) essentially describes potions as superior to other disciplines requiring "foolish wand-waving" (p. 137), Snape suggests the community's lack of appreciation for subtlety and implies the superficiality of other fields of magical study. Further, his declaration that potions could "bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death" (p. 137) openly identifies potions as an instrument for pursuing celebrity, grandeur, and immortality; thus, Snape suggests the community's desire for control and public acclamation. Teacher-directed instructional lectures in the notification function thus possess potential and passive power.

Classroom lectures by teachers to instruct students also suggest a relationship between oral literacy and power. The predominance of the lecture method of classroom instruction positions both speaking and listening as integral aspects of learning. Because these lectures are primarily the domain of teachers and other authority figures, talk as notification is useful as a tool for reinforcing hierarchical distinctions; that is, control of speech is an indication of who holds power in a relationship. The public nature of the classroom lecture similarly suggests that talk also participates in the construction of social hierarchies; that is, the inequality of the teacher-student relationship is both evident in, and reinforced by, the teacher's use of the oral lecture method.

Announcements

Teachers commonly use announcements to notify their students of information in the *Harry Potter* series. When Harry and his friends first arrive at Hogwarts, they hear speeches from Professor McGonagall, explaining the ceremony for sorting students into houses (Rowling, 1997, p. 114); the Sorting Hat, outlining the different characteristics

valued by each house (pp. 117-118); and Professor Dumbledore, giving information

regarding school rules and sports trials (p. 126). Announcements to smaller, private

audiences also appear later in the novels, such as when Professor Trelawny delivers her

prophecies about the impending death of a student (p. 80) and the rise of the Dark Lord

(Rowling, 1999, p. 238). Announcements that notify audiences are, thus, largely the

domain of teachers in the *Harry Potter* novels.

Although teachers are authorized to use announcements to notify students of

important information, other characters in the series, unauthorized to do so, nevertheless

occasionally announce/divulge private information, often with tragic consequences.

Secret-Keeper Peter Pettigrew is entrusted with the location of the Potter family's hiding

place, but this information is accessible only if the Secret-Keeper himself chooses to

reveal it: "As long as the Secret-Keeper refused to speak, You-Know-Who could search

the village where Lily and James were staying for years and never find them, not even if

he had his nose pressed against their sitting-room window" (Rowling, 1999, p. 152).

When Pettigrew announces his secret, notifying Voldemort of the Potter family's

whereabouts, this information leads to the subsequent deaths of Harry's parents (p. 268).

The disclosing of other secrets similarly leads to serious repercussions: in a conversation

with Harry, Hermione, and Ron, Hagrid accidentally lets slip the existence of the

mysterious Nicolas Flamel (Rowling, 1997, pp. 192-193), the result of which is that

Harry continues his quest in grave danger. In a later conversation with a stranger, Hagrid

also discloses the secret to dominating the three-headed dog guarding the chamber of

secrets: "So I told him, Fluffy's a piece o'cake if yeh know how to calm him down, jus'

play him a bit o' music an' he'll go straight off ter sleep—" (p. 266); again, the result of

this disclosure is that Voldemort's ally is able to penetrate the defenses guarding the

Chamber of Secrets. Hogwart's teachers also treat the announcing of false information as

a serious offense: McGonagall punishes Malfoy with both a detention and a loss of

house points when she perceives that his explanation for breaking school rules is a

fabrication: "How dare you tell such lies!" (p. 240). The community, then, authorizes

the use of announcements to notify community members of information, but discourages

the disclosing of secret information.

Announcements acting in the notification function possess several kinds of power.

The potential power of the information held by Secret-Keepers and other less official

holders, is most clearly visible in the severity of the consequences of making public the

information: Pettigrew's disclosure leads to the death of Harry's parents, and Hagrid's

breaches of trust are followed by profound risks to the personal safety of those affected

by the breach. Trelawny's prophecies are other announcements that similarly contain

potential power; her prediction about the rise of Voldemort to power should be of

considerable importance to both Harry and Dumbledore, but other events, such as the

impending execution of Buckbeak (Rowling, 1999, p. 240), the emotional reunion with

Sirius Black (p. 262), the news of Pettigrew's treachery (pp. 270-275), and an attack by

the dementors (pp. 280-282) distract Harry from acting on the potential of the prophecy,

and the potential remains unrealized.

Because oral announcements that notify characters also implicitly transmit

information about the community's values, characters that hear them undergo passive

power. McGonagall's speech about the Sorting ceremony tells the students that social

relationships form a part of the educational process: "The Sorting is a very important

ceremony because, while you are here, your house will be something like your family

within Hogwarts" (Rowling, 1997, p. 114).   The Sorting Hat also conveys the

importance of social membership; its speech about the different characteristics of each

house further indicates that the community perceives personality as innate and fixed:

Gryffindor is for the courageous; Slytherin is for the cunning; Ravenclaw is for the

intelligent; and Hufflepuff is for the hard working (p. 118).   Dumbledore's series of

announcements warn of the consequences of rule breaking: "the third-floor corridor on

the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful

death" (p. 127). This announcement shows that some rules are neither arbitrary nor a

show of power; in addition, this announcement reveals faith in children' abilities to make

decisions in their best interests when informed of the reasons behind particular rules.

Trelawny's prophecies similarly have passive power; her prophecy regarding Lord

Voldemort reveals that the community punishes transgressions with ostracism and

isolation: "The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers"

(Rowling, 1999, p. 238).   Her prophecy also reveals a weakness in the community's

decision-making because the community's process fails to prevent Voldemort's eventual

return to power: "The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant's aid, greater and more

terrible than ever before" (p. 238). Announcements that notify the public of information

thus imply the community's values and attitudes.

Announcements serving the notification function also suggest assumptions behind

speaking/listening as oral literacy. The severe consequences of disclosing secrets suggest

that speech is a tool of considerable power and authority; because the oral

communicating of the secret effectively constitutes a personal betrayal of trust, oral

language is effectively a medium for constituting relationships. Accordingly, the

punishment of Malfoy for giving false testimony shows that speech holds a profound

potential to influence an audience; thus, the disclosing of information must be exercised

with a high degree of due care and judiciousness, lest the consequences of using language

inaccurately and inappropriately be accompanied by harsh unintended consequences.

The strong involvement of passive power in the use of oral language to announce

information also suggests that speech is strongly implicated in the transmission of social

values. Importantly, the Sorting Hat has two functions: one, to determine the character

of each student; and two, to communicate that information to an audience. The Sorting

Hat thus shows the importance of acquiring, as well as communicating, information; that

is, the information is of little use to characters until it has been shared. Trelawny's

prophecies reinforce this conclusion: her unpredictable gift of prediction, when accurate,

consists of both acquiring the information, as well as announcing it to relevant recipients;

thus, the search for knowledge is an integral aspect of the use of speech as a vehicle for

notifying the public of information.

Domination/Empowerment

Dialogue

Characters in the *Harry Potter* series also use oral literacy practices to dominate

characters and empower themselves. Although characters commonly use dialogue to

both exchange and notify other characters of information, the novels also show several of

characters using conversation to dominate. Dudley's Aunt Marge engages in dialogue

with her brother for the explicit purpose of maligning Harry, who is spoken about as if he

were unable to hear the conversation: "It's one of the basic rules of breeding…You see it

all the time with dogs. If there's something wrong with the bitch, there'll be something

wrong with the pup - " (Rowling, 1999, p. 24). Harry's response to this and another

dialogue of similar inflammatory purpose between Aunt Marge and his Uncle Vernon is

to cause her serious injury (p. 27). Lucius Malfoy similarly uses speech to provoke

Arthur Weasley: in an unexpected meeting in Diagon Alley before the start of the school

term, Malfoy insults Weasley regarding his income and the quality of his friendships:

"The company you keep, Weasley … and I thought your family could sink no lower--"

(Rowling, 1998, p. 51). Weasley responds with a physical attack on Malfoy. In another

instance, the well-meaning house elf Dobby uses dialogue to threaten Harry against

returning to Hogwarts; this attempt, however, is unsuccessful, the result of which is that

Dobby reinforces his threat with a demonstration of magic for which Harry must accept

responsibility (pp. 16-20). Violence thus often accompanies the use of dialogue to

intimidate, provoke, and dominate other characters.

Characters also use dialogue to solve problems in *Harry Potter*. Harry and Ron

resolve the frozen barrier of platform nine and three quarters through conversation:

"We're stuck, right? And we've got to get to school, haven't we? And even under-age

wizards are allowed to use magic if it's a real emergency, section nineteen or something

of the Restriction of Thingy…" (Rowling, 1998, p. 56). It is also through dialogue with

Hermione that polyjuice comes up as a solution to the children's wish to covertly observe

and overhear the activities of Slytherin house student Draco Malfoy: "There might be a

way, …of course, it would be difficult. And dangerous, very dangerous" (p. 120).

Dialogue also gives the students the tools to overcome the formidable challenges

guarding the Sorcerer's Stone: through their dialogue with each other, Harry, Ron, and

Hermione work out the solutions necessary to triumph over three-headed guard dog

(Rowling, 1997, p. 275), an aggressive plant (pp. 277-278), winged keys (pp. 279-280), a

deadly game of chess (pp. 282-284), and a logic puzzle (pp. 285-287). Importantly, the

tone and quality of speech also play an important role in problem solving. For example,

Ron and Harry discover the entrance to the chamber of secrets through their conversation

with Moaning Myrtle, a ghost, who reveals the information because she is politely asked

about the circumstances of her death: "Myrtle's whole aspect changed at once. She

looked as though she had never been asked such a flattering question" (Rowling, 1998, p.

221). Harry's polite speech contrasts with the conversations between Moaning Myrtle

and other characters that have teased and harassed her (pp. 172-173), and he is rewarded

for his good manners by the availability of new information. Kindly worded speech and

polite conversation thus helps characters work out problems in the *Harry Potter* series.

Different kinds of power characterize the use of speech to dominate/empower in

the novels. The information residing in the content of the dialogues has potential power.

Moaning Myrtle's history, for example, has only potential power until Harry realizes its

importance and uses it to further his quest. Conversations that characters use to dominate

others and empower themselves also have passive power in the subtle information they

convey about the values of the respective communities: Aunt Marge's talk about bad

breeding suggests her belief that pedigree is to be taken quite seriously, and that nature

triumphs over nurture. While she should not be understood as a representative of the

entire non-magical world, her beliefs, nevertheless, represent one existing perspective.

The Malfoy-Weasley conversation in which Malfoy attacks Weasley's social standing

similarly suggests the importance of social class and the stigma surrounding low income

earners, at least in Malfoy's eyes. Again, while Malfoy should not be understood as

standing in for the entire wizarding population, his views should be considered one

possible perspective; thus, their conversation suggests that some members of the

community identify class with income, and that there are distinctions between class based

on income. Weasley's violent response reveals his discomfort with the attack, and his

defensiveness regarding his role as a family provider. Characters in the novels who

participate in dialogue, either as speaker or listener, thus undergo the effects of passive

power.

Active power too manifests in the domination/empowerment function of dialogue.

When Aunt Marge uses loud, offensive speech to antagonize Harry, Harry knows exactly

who has acted on him and in what way (Rowling, 1999, p. 26). Similarly, Malfoy's

verbal confrontation with Arthur Weasley occurs via a visible agent of power: Malfoy is

the clear aggressor, disparaging Weasley's ability to provide for his family (Rowling,

1998, p. 51). When Dobby threatens Harry, and follows through on his threat with a

show of power explicitly meant to intimidate Harry into a specific course of action, he

too is using speech as active power (pp. 16-20). Conversely, dialogue also manifests

active power as empowerment when characters use information gained in oral interaction

with other characters to overcome situations and solve problems. As Harry, Ron, and

Hermione discuss their problems with each other, they arrive at possible solutions, such

as ways to defeat a predatory plant blocking access to the stone passageway.

Importantly, Hermione identifies the plant and its characteristics, but it is Harry who

suggests a solution, and Ron who spurs Hermione to take action: "Have you gone

mad…Are you a witch or not?" (Rowling, 1997, p. 278). Similarly, when confronted

with the mystery of the flying birds, only through dialogue do the characters arrive at an

answer to the puzzle: "They're not birds, … They're keys! Winged keys – look

carefully…We've got to catch the key to the door!" (pp. 279-280). Dialogue thus

advantages characters by giving them the ability to overcome obstacles, as well as to

dominate other characters in the series.

The operation of active power in dialogue used to dominate and empower

characters also suggests assumptions about the role of oral literacy practices. By showing

characters frequently using conversation to provoke and intimidate other characters, the

series implies oral language's capacity to serve as a powerful instrument of oppression.

The victims' common responses to these intimidating, dominating attacks testify to the

power of speech as a weapon, as well as suggest that the resort to violence may be an

attempt to compensate for the vulnerability of speechlessness; in other words, talk equals

power, while silence is akin to helplessness. Oral language, however, also empowers

characters, consistently helping them arrive at solutions to complex problems through

group discussion. In this way, the novels reinforce the power of group talk as a learning

tool that can be applied to various situations. The effectiveness of this power in problem

solving, however, is directly proportional to the skill of the speaker.

Reprimands

Another form of oral language through which characters exercise active power in

the *Harry Potter* series is the reprimand. Teachers and other authority figures commonly

use reprimanding speech to censure students for inappropriate behaviour. By following

his introductory talk in Potions class with a targeted questioning of Harry that publicly

magnifies the boy's lack of preparedness, Professor Snape humiliates Harry before his

peers (Rowling, 1997, pp. 138-139). When Neville, a classmate, fails to successfully

complete a classroom assignment, Snape publicly scolds Harry: "You – Potter – why

didn't you tell him not to add the quills? Thought he'd make you look good if he got it

wrong, did you? That's another point you've lost for Gryffindor" (p. 139). Professor

McGonagall similarly reprimands Hermione for risking her life by confronting a troll

(Rowling, 1997, p. 178), and Dumbledore and Snape reprimand Harry and Ron for using

an unauthorized vehicle to fly to school: "So, … the train isn't good enough for the

famous Harry Potter and his faithful sidekick Weasley. Wanted to arrive with a bang, did

we, boys?" (Rowling, 1998, p. 62).   In addition to teachers, parents, too, admonish their

children regarding unacceptable behaviour: in response to taking a car without

permission, Ron receives a Howler, an oral scolding contained in a red envelope, from

his mother (p. 69), and Neville later receives a similar message from his grandmother for

a transgression: "Neville's grandmother's voice, magically magnified to a hundred times

its usual volume, shrieking about how he had brought shame on the whole family"

(Rowling, 1999, p. 201). Authority figures thus commonly resort to oral reprimands to

censure behaviour in *Harry Potter*.

Many forms of power similarly characterize oral reprimands by authority figures.

Passive power resides in the censuring speech's implications regarding the community's

norms and values. For example, McGonagall's lecture of Hermione for Hermione's rule

breaking emphasizes the dire consequences of Hermione's actions: "You're lucky you

weren't killed" (Rowling, 1997, p. 177). This emphasis suggests that the community

establishes rules for important reasons, one of which is the safety of children.

McGonagall's rhetorical question, "What on earth were you thinking of?" (p. 177), as

well as her description of Hermione as "foolish" (p. 178), also shows the belief that

children lack the wisdom of adults. McGonagall's word choice and tone also suggest the

nature of the relationship between students/children and teachers/adults, with the former

ranking below the latter in the social hierarchy. This social hierarchy also informs the

active power of the censuring lecture, as McGonagall dominates Hermione through both

her content and her delivery. Similar exercises of active power appear in Snape's

scolding of Harry and Ron regarding their appropriation of a flying car to travel to

Hogwarts (Rowling, 1998, p. 62-64). Ron Weasley's Howler, a verbal reprimand from

his mother for car theft, is similarly an exercise of active power because Mrs. Weasley

uses a combination of threats, angry tone, and high volume to publicly admonish her son

and humiliate him into silence: "Ron sank so low in his chair that only his crimson

forehead could be seen" (Rowling, 1998, p. 69).   Because characters in the series use

oral reprimands to intimidate/dominate other characters, the oral reprimand is a strong

expression of active power.

The exercise of active power by authority figures using the oral reprimand to

intimidate children speaks to the profound influence of oral language as an instrument of

public control. Snape's domination of Harry in the classroom lecture is a highly public

demonstration of a teacher's power over a student. The lecture gives the student

information deemed as important by the teacher, as well as socially communicates the

hierarchy of classroom dynamics; thus, the lecture shows the important role of oral

literacy practices in constructing hierarchies and communicating social expectations. The

active power of the public censuring function similarly reveals the huge influence of oral

language on individual behaviour; because it embeds itself in social context, the effect of

the reprimand is heightened by the presence of an observing audience. Oral censuring

thus takes some of its power from the strength of social expectations that surround it.

Magic Spells

In the *Harry Potter* novels, characters also use oral literacy practices to perform

magic and summon supernatural forces that permit them to both dominate other

characters and objects, and overcome obstacles and access resources. For example, when

Neville attempts to block Harry, Ron, and Hermione from leaving the dormitory,

Hermione utters a phrase that immobilizes him: "Petrificus Totalus!" (Rowling, 1997, p.

273). A similar result, the disarming of Professor Lockhart, occurs when Snape uses

"Expelliarmus!" in a dueling exhibition (Rowling, 1998, p. 142). Other examples of

spells used to dominate include "serpentsortia" (the conjuring of an aggressive snake)

(Rowling, 1998, p. 145), "obliviate" (the removing of human memories) (p. 224), and

"mobilicorpus" (the controlling of another's body) (Rowling, 1999, p. 276).

Importantly, the mere threat of magic words also has an occasional power to dominate

others: Harry frightens his adopted family into silence when he carelessly responds to a

command by Dudley with what they perceive is an implied threat: "You've forgotten the

magic word" (Rowling, 1998, p. 7). Later, Harry intimidates Dudley into running away

by uttering nonsense words that Dudley interprets as powerful magic: "'Jiggery pokery!'

said Harry in a fierce voice. 'Hocus pocus …squiggly wiggly…'" (p. 13).   Magic

speech is also used to dominate evil apparitions and other magical monsters:

"Riddikulus" (Rowling, 1999, p. 104) helps the magic user overcome the power of the

Boggart, a magical creature that assumes the shape of the viewer's most terrifying fear;

and "Expecto Patronum" (Rowling, 1999, pp. 176-179) banishes dementors, ghostly

guards of Azkaban prison that bring despair and darkness to those they encounter,

although there is an accompanying gestural component to these and most other conjuring.

Domination of other characters through magical oral literacy practices is thus a common

feature in the *Harry Potter* series.

Magic words and phrases also empower characters in the novels by helping them

overcome obstacles and granting them access to guarded resources: "Alohomora"

(Rowling, 1997, p. 160) opens locked doors for Hermione, allowing the children to evade

Filch and avoid punishment; "lumos" (Rowling, 1998, p. 201) lights dark paths for Harry

and Ron; and "Ferrula" (Rowling, 1999, p. 276) splints Ron's wounded leg with

bandages. In addition, the magic of the Marauder's Map, a document that reveals both

the details of Hogwarts school as well as the whereabouts of its inhabitants, activates via

a spoken oath: "I swear that I am up to no good" (Rowling, 1999, p. 143). Access to this

map advantages Harry by granting him access to Hogsmeade and other restricted

territory. Gryffindor students also gain entrance to their dormitory through a series of

weekly changing passwords, such as "Caput Draconis" (Rowling, 1997, p. 130),

"wattlebird" (Rowling, 1998, p. 66), and "Fortuna Major" (Rowling, 1999, p. 74). These

passwords are magical oral literacy practices because it is through them that the paintings

guarding the passages enable access to the dormitories. Importantly, Neville's inability

to remember passwords (p. 74), and his subsequent commitment of them to writing (p.

184) results in Sirius Black's entrance into the Gryffindor common room; because Black

gives the correct password, he is able to enter at will (p. 198). Finally, parseltongue, the

language of snakes, is another form of magical speech in that through it Harry is able to

both communicate with serpents as well as gain access to the Chamber of Secrets where

the basilisk resides (Rowling, 1998, p. 222). Power thus accompanies magical speech in

Harry Potter.

The mere act of oral invocation, however, is insufficient for characters seeking to

dominate others or empower themselves through magical spell-casting: "There was a lot

more to magic than waving your wand and saying a few funny words" (Rowling, 1997, p.

133). When Harry first meets Ron, Ron unsuccessfully attempts to transform his pet rat

with a short, rhyming poem: "Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow,/ Turn this stupid, fat rat

yellow" (p. 105). In a lesson on magic, Professor Flitwick reiterates the need for careful

speech: "And saying the magic words properly is very important, too – never forget

Wizard Barruffio, who said 's' instead of 'f' and found himself on the floor with a water

buffalo on his chest" (p. 171). Ron struggles with proper intonation, failing to levitate a

feather with the phrase "Wingardium Leviosa" (p. 171), and Harry fails to clearly

enunciate his destination when using the magical floo powder, arriving in Knockturn

Alley, instead of in the targeted Diagon Alley (Rowling, 1998, p. 41). Authority figures,

such as teachers, also struggle with performing magic through oral literacy practices:

Professor Lockhart is unable to corral his freshly caught Cornish pixies with "Peskipiksi

Persternomi" (Rowling, 1998, p. 79), and the secrets of the Marauder's Map remain

hidden from Snape, despite his formidable presence and authority: "Professor Severus

Snape, master of this school, commands you to yield the information you conceal"

(Rowling, 1999, p. 211). The efficacy of magic words, according to the novels, is thus

due in part to the skill and care of the speaker.

Several kinds of power accompany the use of magic speech to dominate and

empower characters within the series. Potential power resides in the capacity of the

information contained within the speech to help the speaker perform an action, such as the accessing of a secret area in the castle through the speaking of a magic password to a guardian of the portal. Importantly, however, this latency only becomes manifest in magic spells when the words are spoken in a particular manner befitting the circumstances: Ron must master the latent power of "Wingardium Leviosa" (Rowling, 1997, p. 171) by placing proper emphasis on the words themselves and accompanying the words with a perfectly performed gesture. In contrast, the potential of magical passwords does not depend on the speaker's precision or emphasis; by simply delivering the words in a clear manner, the portrait guardian grants the speaker access to the secret domain. Harry's ability to suggest the ability of non-magical words to evoke magic creates the appearance of potential power where none truly exists; in this case, it is the potential power that has an actual influence, as the words themselves are devoid of any real supernatural force.

The many examples in the series of the successful use of magic words and spells show that when characters successfully perform magic, they convert potential into active power. Just as Hermione immobilizes Neville through her explicit incantation, so too do the children use specific language with the intention of conquering supernatural creatures, such as Boggarts and Dementors. Active power through empowerment is similarly highly visible. The uttering of passwords acts directly on a specific target, and results in a clear consequence: the granting of access. Harry's command of parseltongue similarly gives him admittance to a specific location, and the Marauder's Oath opens the potential power of the Map for the speaker's privilege. Active power, then, is an aspect of using magic language to dominate or empower in the *Harry Potter* series.

The common use of oral literacy practices by characters in the casting of magical spells to dominate characters and overcome obstacles has profound implications regarding the importance of speech. First, the vast majority of magic in the novels is conducted orally, thus showing that oral communication is an extremely powerful and versatile tool for both domination and empowerment. Further, the success of even parodies of magic spells, as employed by Harry against his non-magical cousin, shows a high level of general respect for the potential power of oral literacy. Importantly, however, the realization of the full power of oral language is again highly dependent on the skill and care of the speaker; precision of language, and a clear sense of purpose are necessary if the speaker is to convert the potential of oral literacy practices into active power. The novels also show the relative trustworthiness of oral, as compared to written, language; when Neville entrusts the Gryffindor passwords to writing, he compromises the safety of the entire community. The novels thus highlight the importance of saying the right words at the right time as keys to successful control over others, and the overcoming of personal obstacles.

Naming

Characters in the series also dominate other characters and empower themselves through the practice of naming, defined here as the oral designating of identifying words or titles on other characters or objects. Domination through naming appears in the novels in a wide variety of instances. For example, Draco Malfoy attempts to dominate Hermione when he refers to her as a "filthy little Mudblood" (Rowling, 1998, p. 86), a name that implies "dirty blood…common blood" (p. 89). This name-calling in turn provokes a physical attack on him by the entire Gryffindor Quidditch team. Malfoy

similarly insults Harry and Ron by calling them "Potty and the Weasel" (Rowling, 1999, p. 63). Moaning Myrtle also lists the names called about her behind her back: "Fat Myrtle! Ugly Myrtle! Miserable, moaning, moping Myrtle" (Rowling, 1998, p. 103). Speaking the name of a powerful being in *Harry Potter* also evokes its dominance. For example, Aragog, a leader of the Spiders, refuses to name the basilisk in the chamber of secrets in an attempt to avoid its influence: "We do not speak of it!…We do not name it! I never even told Hagrid the name of that dread creature, though he asked me, many times" (p. 206). Similarly, the name 'Voldemort' invokes terror throughout the community. When Hagrid explains Harry's history, he is careful to avoid speaking the name of Voldemort: "You-Know-Who killed 'em. An' then – and this is the real myst'ry of the thing – he tried to kill you, too" (Rowling, 1997, p. 55). Storeowner Mr. Ollivander refers to Voldemort as "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named" (p. 85), and even respected teachers, such as Professor McGonagall, admit to being frightened of the name and reluctant to use it (p. 11). Invoking Voldemort's name thus invites his power because of the fear surrounding its utterance.

Importantly, naming is also an act of empowerment. The Dark Lord's name represents Voldemort's empowerment in that through the act of renaming himself, Voldemort breaks his connection to an unhappy past and constructs a new, powerful identity, as he explains to Harry during their encounter deep in the Chamber of Secrets: "I fashioned myself a new name, a name I knew wizards everywhere would one day fear to speak, when I had become the greatest sorcerer in the world! (Rowling, 1998, p. 231). In this way, Voldemort's renaming of himself liberates himself from his father's shameful, non-magical legacy, and re-establishes his connection to Salazar Slytherin

from whom Voldemort proudly descends on his mother's side. Voldemort's naming thus

represents the overcoming of his background and his rise to power. Similarly, although

most characters in the series refer to Voldemort indirectly by his title or through an

acronym, Harry and Dumbledore call Voldemort by his true name: Harry uses

Voldemort's name in conversations with Ron (Rowling, 1997, p. 100) and Hermione (p.

260), and Dobby, who implores him to "speak not the name, sir! Speak not the name!"

(Rowling, 1998, p. 17); and Dumbledore insists to McGonagall that speaking

Voldemort's name is not an invocation of power:

> My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like yourself can call him by
>
> his name? All this 'You-Know-Who' nonsense – for eleven years I have
>
> been trying to persuade people to call him by his proper name:
>
> *Voldemort*…It all gets so confusing if we keep saying 'You-Know-Who.'
>
> I have never seen any reason to be frightened of saying Voldemort's
>
> name. (Rowling, 1997, p. 11)

Speaking Voldemort's name is a demonstration of empowerment because through it,

Harry and Dumbledore display their resistance to and independence from Voldemort's

attempted domination of the wizard world.

Harry's name too empowers the community by representing the overcoming of

obstacles and the triumph of good over evil. After surviving the attack of Voldemort that

killed his parents, Harry is known throughout the wizard community as "the boy who

lived" (Rowling, 1997, p. 17). Although Harry himself lives in relative obscurity with his

non-magical relatives, his future legendary status is intimated by Professor McGonagall:

"He'll be famous – a legend – I wouldn't be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter

day in the future" (p. 13). When encountering wizards familiar with his legend, they

respond to him with the reverence and awe accorded to celebrities: "always wanted to

shake your hand – I'm all of a flutter" (p. 69). Even his classmates at Hogwarts

recognize his name (p. 95): Ron questions Harry about his past (p. 98), Hermione reads

about him in her schoolbooks (p. 106), Draco Malfoy makes a determined offer of

friendship after hearing of Harry's identity (p. 108), and Colin Creevey seeks Harry's

autograph (Rowling, 1998, p. 75). Teachers, too, give Harry special attention because of

his famous name: Gilderoy Lockhart asks to be photographed with Harry (p. 76), and

Sybill Trelawny, knowing of his triumph over Voldemort, boldly predicts his death at the

hands of a deadly enemy (Rowling, 1999, p. 82). Importantly, Harry's name also

participates in constructing his heroic nature; that is, it is the legend of his unique

standing as sole survivor of Voldemort's power that positions him as leader of the

resistance, rather than any particular qualities of his personality or special inherent

abilities.

Several different kinds of power characterize the oral practice of naming in the

Harry Potter series. Potential power resides in the implied threat accompanying the

uttering of a powerful enemy's name; while the novels do not show any tangible

repercussions of speaking Voldemort's name, the vast majority of characters nevertheless

refrain out of fear. Since that fear is of what might happen, but never does, the name

itself has impressive potential power. Characters also experience passive power when

they participate in naming practices. Malfoy's insulting "mudblood" (Rowling, 1998, p.

86) implies the community's tension around the issue of bloodlines, and draws a

distinction between pure and mixed ancestry; that Malfoy's views are not shared by the

Gryffindor Quidditch team does not suggest that the views do not pervade the rest of the

community or that this issue has not been contested at length.

Because names are a form of oral speech commonly used to dominate other

characters, the act of naming is also an exercise of active power. Name-calling, in which

the speaker essentially forces an unflattering identifying designation on another character

is intentionally provocative, inciting often violent responses from listeners. Conversely,

characters use naming as empowerment because it is through the name that the

designated character constructs an identity that positions him or her to overcome

obstacles and solve problems: Just as Voldemort's new name marks the beginning of his

rise to power, so too do other names create new powers and responsibilities. For

example, after Voldemort explains his name change and shows off his power to Harry,

Harry negates Voldemort's position with a simple declaration that names the power of

Voldemort's true adversary: "Not the greatest sorcerer in the world…sorry to disappoint

you, and all that, but the greatest wizard in the world is Albus Dumbledore. Everyone

says so" (Rowling, 1998, p. 232). Again, the effect of naming Dumbledore as the more

powerful wizard is an act of active power because through this act, Harry confirms

Dumbledore's presence at the confrontation and triumphs over Voldemort, temporarily

banishing him again from the community (pp. 234-237).

The domination/empowerment function of naming also shows the close

relationship between oral language and power, and the ability of oral language practices

to both construct and shape identity in important ways. As a tool of domination, name-

calling is highly provocative, again inviting violence as a response. This responsiveness

suggests that the power of naming is essentially one of forcing an identity onto an

unwilling recipient; that is, orally designating someone as possessing particular qualities

is a powerful way of influencing both private and public perceptions of the victim.

Perception, then, rather than any inborn or innate quality, constructs identity. Similarly,

the empowerment function of renaming oneself also shapes perception, allowing the

newly baptized character to develop in new ways beyond what has been prescribed by

nature. Oral language practices thus are powerful instruments for individual self-

improvement and betterment.

Restriction

When oral literacy practices are the targets, rather than the instruments, of power,

the action is over speech. In *Harry Potter*, restrictions over speaking/listening take two

forms: characters or circumstances may silence other characters; or characters may

coerce other characters to speak against their will.

Silencing

Restrictions over speaking are common in the novels. For example, Harry's

relatives often attempt to silence his voice. In addition to forbidding questions pertaining

to James and Lily Potter (Rowling, 1997, p. 30), Harry's relatives discourage him from

even casually speaking to them or making general conversation: "If there was one thing

the Dursleys hated even more than his asking questions, it was his talking about anything

acting in a way it shouldn't…" (p. 26). When Uncle Vernon plans to conduct business

with a client at his home, Harry acknowledges his Uncle's total ban on any oral

communication from Harry: "I'll be in my room, making no noise, and pretending I'm

not there" (Rowling, 1998, p. 11). Harry's relatives also ban him from speaking to

neighbors (Rowling, 1999, p. 8) or school friends who try to make contact via the

telephone (p. 9). Accordingly, violating the ban against making sound imposes an even

higher degree of silence: "While Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon didn't shut Harry in his

cupboard, force him to do anything, or shout at him – in fact, they didn't speak to him at

all" (Rowling, 1997, p. 88). Harry's relatives thus commonly take steps to restrict his

speech.

Other examples of characters using the silencing function in *Harry Potter* appear

in a variety of instances. Professor Snape calls for silence from Harry after confronting

his appearance at Hogwarts with the highly visible flying car (Rowling, 1998, p. 62) and

following Harry's insults during an unpleasant encounter with Sirius Black: "SILENCE!

I WILL NOT BE SPOKEN TO LIKE THAT" (Rowling, 1999, p. 265). Snape also

regularly silences Hermione Granger during potions class: when Hermione raises her

hand to indicate her desire to speak, Snape ignores her and refuses to let her participate in

the discussion (Rowling, 1997, p. 138). McGonagall threatens to silence Lee Jordan for

what she perceives is overly prejudicial commentary of a Quidditch match (pp. 186-

1888), and Hermione herself asks for silence from Harry and Ron while she investigates

the details surrounding the mysterious Nicolas Flamel: "…Hermione told [Ron] to be

quiet until she'd looked something up, and started flicking frantically through the pages,

muttering to herself" (p. 219). Silencing, then, is a frequent occurrence in the *Harry*

Potter series.

Active power accompanies restrictions over speech by characters. When the

Dursleys block Harry's oral communication with other characters in his environment,

their intention is to control his interactions, and thus, is an act of domination.

Accordingly, violations of the ban are accompanied by such harsh consequences that

Harry does not challenge the restriction. Professor Snape's management of his students

is similarly an exercise of active power; by demanding their silence, Snape controls his

students' behaviour and establishes himself as the authority in the classroom. His

silencing of Hermione is highly visible; as she raises her hand in a traditional gesture of

her intent to speak, Snape ignores her, demanding her subservience to his authority. In

contrast, Professor McGonagall's displeasure with Lee Jordan's commentary appears as a

warning, rather than a direct act of silencing; thus, her threat contains potential power

because although Lee is made aware of the likelihood of consequences for speaking

inappropriately, he is ultimately left with the decision whether or not to comply with her

wishes. The restricting of speech by authority figures is thus an exercise of active power.

In other instances, characters in the series restrict their own speech or choose

silence for different reasons. In some instances, this restriction derives from an external

authority. When first meeting Harry, Dobby reveals that speaking ill of his family must

be accompanied by punishment: "…he leapt up and started banging his head furiously on

the window, shouting, 'Bad Dobby! Bad Dobby!' (Rowling, 1998, p. 16). In other

instances, however, the inability to speak derives from internal pressures. Hagrid reveals

the consequences of self-inflicted restriction of speech when he announces himself

responsible for the execution order against Buckbeak: "S'all my fault. Got all tongue-

tied. They were all sittin' there in black robes an' I kep' droppin' me notes and forgettin'

all them dates" (Rowling, 1999, p. 216). Ginny Weasley similarly wants to confess her

relationship with Riddle's diary to Harry but cannot bring herself to speak the necessary

words: "Harry – oh, Harry – I tried to tell you at b-breakfast, but I c-couldn't say it in

front of Percy" (Rowling, 1998, p. 237). Some characters, however, deliberately choose

silence over speech when it is in their best interests to do so. For example, when Harry

elects not to respond to Aunt Petunia's goading and retreats into silence, he avoids a

confrontation (Rowling, 1997, p. 19). Harry's later decision not to verbally engage with

Aunt Marge when she disparages his parents is another example of self-restraint that

similarly benefits his character by maintaining his bargaining position with his Uncle

Vernon (Rowling, 1999, pp. 23-24). While these retreats into silence restrict

participation, Harry nevertheless acts in their best interests; thus, silencing, when an act

of choice, may also be empowering.

The silencing function has active power, but the mechanism of action is a

restriction of empowerment, rather than an exercise of dominance or control over other

characters. Dobby's inability to speak ill of his family derives from a binding contract of

unknown nature between house elf and the family for whom he is employed; however,

Dobby imposes the consequences for violating the contract by self inflicting injury.

Importantly, if Dobby could overcome the ban and orally communicate his considerable

information, this information would be self-empowering because disclosure would allow

Dobby to achieve his goal of protecting the safety of Harry Potter; his inability to speak

thus represents a denial of this potential power. Hagrid's inability to speak at Buckbeak's

hearing similarly appears as an internal inability to use speech to overcome a situation:

because Hagrid cannot conquer his fears and offer convincing testimony, the power of his

speech remains potential. Ginny, too, is not able to overcome her reluctance to speak to

Harry of her experiences with Riddle's diary; her inability also represents a failure to use

speech to empower herself and change the direction of events. Self-imposed restriction

of oral language is thus a denial of empowerment or the failed conversion of potential

into active power.

The power accompanying restrictions over speaking imply some assumptions

regarding oral literacy. The banning of oral language as a method of controlling a

character's behaviour suggests that power over speech is power over an individual;

silenced characters, cut off from their community, are vulnerable and powerless.

Importantly, the power over language in *Harry Potter* extends to the power over sound

itself; when Harry's relatives warn him to stay silent in his room, they essentially prevent

him from making noise that even hints at the presence of a living, breathing individual.

This profound level of silencing, then, is also a denial of life itself, and suggests that

speaking practices are an affirmation of both identity and belonging. Harry does not

challenge this restriction or resist it in any way, suggesting that the control of individuals

through control over oral language use is a long-engrained practice. Because Harry also

agrees with his relations that lack of oral interaction is a punishment, oral language is a

site for contesting power.

The silencing of language by authority figures also shows the close connections

between control over oral literacy practices and power. In the *Harry Potter* novels,

teachers, in particular, exercise their authority over students by controlling their right to

orally communicate, and students accept that speaking and listening in classroom

situations is subject to the discretion of the classroom authority figure. Although the

novels do not show the punishment for speaking out of turn in class, the implied

consequence is of sufficient severity that students only rarely interject without permission

during classes or engage in oral confrontations with teachers. This widespread

acceptance of the role of speaking/listening in participating in the construction of

classroom hierarchy also shows the importance of oral language in reinforcing social

norms and accepted ways of behaving.

When power over speech is not seized, and restriction to speech is self-imposed,

the consequences are a loss of power, and a failure to self-actualize. Hagrid never

becomes the advocate of the animal he cherishes and wants to protect because he does

not possess the skills to do so. In other words, it is not that Hagrid cannot speak, but that

he cannot speak well; this lack of skill means that Hagrid is silent when it comes to using

his voice to influence others. In this case, the novels show that the inability to use oral

language effectively silences and thus disadvantages the individual. Effective speech,

then, is a powerful medium for overcoming obstacles and fostering self-improvement.

Coercion

A second kind of restriction over speech appears in the novels as the coercing of

specific oral responses. Dobby himself attempts to influence Harry into speaking his

promise against returning to Hogwarts: "Harry Potter must say he's not going back to

school" (p. 20). When Harry does not utter the requested oath, Dobby punishes him by

creating a disturbance for which both his family and the magical community will hold

Harry responsible. Later, Harry attempts to force Dobby into revealing information about

the Chamber of Secrets, but Dobby resists: "Dobby can't, sir, Dobby can't, Dobby

mustn't tell!" (p. 134). Snape too tries to get Harry to explain his whereabouts during the

time period that Mrs. Norris was attacked, threatening the loss of privileges if Harry does

not cooperate (p. 109), and later, demands the identity of the student who sabotaged a

class experiment (p. 141). Again, both attempts at coercion are unsuccessful, as Harry

chooses silence over speech and does not comply with Snape's requests.

The coercing of a specific oral response is another exercise of active power

because of the high visibility of the agent of domination. When Dobby tries to elicit a

particular oral speech, an oath, from Harry, it is entirely clear that Dobby himself is

attempting to control Harry's actions by controlling his speech. Harry's later attempt to

get Dobby to reveal his secret knowledge similarly attempts to control Dobby, and

Snape's interrogation of Harry, are both exercises of active power over an individual

character. Importantly, however, the targets of domination successfully resist the

exercise of active power against them; thus, the attempt to coerce an oral response speech

is a failed conversion of potential into active power with respect to the aggressor as well

as an act of empowerment on the part of the would-be victim.

The text's depiction of the importance of oral oaths between characters also

shows the force and longevity behind oral language as a binding contract; in this way,

speech constructs both identity as well as the roles of individuals within relationships and

communities. Importantly, characters in the novels are unable to break their oaths, even

when punishment is only self-inflicted; this internal restraint suggests the power of the

spoken word to act beyond the point in time of its utterance. In the same way, characters

in the text successfully resist coercion, their resistance suggesting the permanence of

spoken words; because words, once spoken, cannot be taken back, speech must be

carefully chosen, above all else.

Conclusions

Power infuses all aspects of oral literacy practices historically and in the fictional

Harry Potter. From a historical perspective, citizens of every culture have used dialogue

to exchange information, settle disputes, and consider new ideas and bring about changes

to their community (Bizzell & Herzberg, 1990). The process of using oral literacy as

exchange also socialized citizens into adopting the values and attitudes of the general

community and so contributed to the development and maintenance of cohesive social

groups (Burke, 1969; Steiner, 2006). Characters in *Harry Potter* similarly use dialogue

to exchange and share information with other characters. Throughout the novels, this

form of speech has potential power as valuable knowledge on which the characters may

or may not choose to act, both in the present as well as the future. Characters in the

novels also undergo passive power as their dialogue subtly socializes both speakers and

listeners into the norms of the community; that is, through exchange, characters learn

about themselves and their world (Britton, 1969). Through conversations, Harry learns,

for example, of class tensions that preoccupy some members of the wizard world and

how his own family history informs his specific standing in the community (Rowling,

1997, pp. 77-78). In addition, the novels show that the nature of the conversational

exchange helps construct social ties and relationships between individuals; that is,

equitable sharing of speaking and listening roles establishes friendships (Rowling, 1997,

p. 99), while unequal dialogue launches enmity (pp. 108-109). The importance of talk to

exchanging and sharing information is thus that speaking and listening are useful

resources for individuals, as well as an integral part of helping individuals construct

relationships of both a personal and a more general nature within the wider community

(Britton, 1970). The novels thus show that power through oral literacy functioning as exchange is primarily in influencing the nature and formation of social relationships.

A second function of oral literacy is to notify or inform an audience of information without expectation of response; notification thus requires the presence of a listener who may or may not be authorized by the speaker. Characters in *Harry Potter* use oral literacy practices to notify in a variety of ways. When characters overhear dialogue between others, for example, they gain access to a wealth of potential power residing in the information, as well as undergo the effects of passive power in the form of socializing information underlying the content. Because characters benefit in many ways from recognizing and acting on the potential power in dialogue, the series thus shows the importance of careful listening as an oral literacy practice.

For the most part, teachers and other authority figures use speech to notify students and other audiences of information through instructional lectures and announcements. These lectures have considerable potential power because listeners may or may not choose to realize the value of the content and act on it; again, the series suggests the value of listening. Lectures and other announcements also possess a wealth of passive power. These socialization messages operate as disciplinary/passive power that students undergo as part of their learning process. For example, because notification is always unidirectional, the relationship between teacher/speaker and student/listener is not truly reciprocal; that is, implied by the speaker's role is considerable influence and authority that could be used to manipulate and sway the listener (Jowett, 1990). This rhetorical authority appears in the series when teachers and other authority figures use instructional lectures to reinforce social hierarchies within the classroom (Rowling, 1997,

p. 136). The public forum in which these hierarchal messages are transmitted deters

resistance, thus making the messages more authoritative. The importance of this wealth

of passive power associated with oral literacy practices in the novels is that oral

communication practices are shown to be extremely effective at influencing listeners into

adopting particular kinds of values, attitudes, and behaviour, and thus, are powerful

instruments for constructing relationships and controlling both individuals and groups.

Characters also practice domination/empowerment through a wide variety of

forms or oral literacy within the *Harry Potter* series. Always a form of active power,

domination and empowerment occur when characters use speech to oppress another

character or to overcome circumstances. Specifically, when characters in the novels use

antagonistic speech to dominate others through dialogue, their victims often respond with

violence (Rowling, 1999, p. 24); these extreme responses to oral literacy practices as

domination thus suggests the tremendous power of speech to incite strong reactions and

feelings of helplessness in the victims. In contrast, however, the series also shows many

examples of speakers and listeners using dialogue to solve problems. The effectiveness

of this tool, whether to dominate or empower, always depends on the speaker's skill; that

is, the potency of dialogue, reprimands, and magic spells to control characters and

circumstances is linked to the speaker's ability to speak correctly and appropriately, in

the right manner and at the right time. Speaking and listening are thus extremely

powerful tools of persuasion that take their power from both the speaker, as well as the

social context (Bizzell & Herzberg, 1990); in this way, the series situates speaking and

listening as social practices (Graff, 1979; Heath, 1983).

Naming is another important form of domination and empowerment used by characters to triumph over adversity. For example, just as Voldemort's name visits fear on the community, so too does his self-naming empower him to reconstruct his identity and an accompanying rise to power (Rowling, 1998, p. 231). Throughout the series, naming is always an act of active power over others as well as over circumstances because it is through this naming that a character creates a vocabulary for the world and thus mastery over it (Britton, 1970; Hart, 1990; Ong, 1982). When used to dominate, naming functions by forcing an unwelcome identity onto the listener; when used to empower, naming functions by baptizing the speaker with a desirable new identity. In the case of the latter, mastery over the world is achieved as the speaker renames and reconfigures his or her position in relation to it. The series shows that the power of naming the world is thus also the power of making and remaking the individuals' identity and relative position within the social world.

Although the novels position power through oral literacies as considerable, power over speaking and listening carries even more profound consequences. Power over speaking, whether as silencing or coercion to produce specific speech responses, is always active power and an attempt to dominate a speaker. Restrictions over speaking block characters from both participating in and acting on their communities; denied the ability to engage with other characters, these silenced speakers essentially disengage from the social world, and thus disengage from life. When Harry's relatives, for example, warn him to remain silent in his room, they not only deny him communicative privileges, but also refute his humanity by denying him any membership into what is undeniably a social world (Rowling, 1998, p. 11). Implied by the profound consequences of power

over speaking and listening therefore is the necessity of encouraging individuals faced

with these restrictions to resist these dehumanizing conditions and claim for themselves

their basic right to live a human, social existence.

Depictions of oral literacies in the *Harry Potter* series insist on its connections to

power, pointing to the importance of speaking and listening as resources for helping

children learn about themselves and the world in which they live. In particular, oral

literacy practices in the novels are embedded in all aspects of mediating the relationship

between the individual and society. As the primary means by which characters exchange

information with each other and notify audiences of important information, oral literacy

practices form the very fabric of the communicative process in which individuals

construct their identities within a shifting social context. The profound consequences of

power over those practices shows that power over speaking and listening is the power

over individuals themselves and their struggle to affirm the very right to a social

existence. The relationship between oral literacies and power thus shows that speaking

and listening, like reading and writing, are complex practices of making and unmaking

the world, permeated by power relations.

Chapter Four

VISUAL LITERACIES: VIEWING AND REPRESENTING

"Science states meanings; art expresses them" (Dewey, 1934, p. 84)

Historical Context

The shift from an autonomous model of literacy as a set of isolated, neutral skills

to plural approaches accompanied the conceptualizing of other dimensions of literacy

beyond reading and writing. The increasing presence of visual media and popular culture

in Western society, however, specifically informed the partnering of viewing and

representing with print and oral forms of literacy. Concerns about the influence of visual

media, such as advertising, on children, led to general agreement that education should

play a role in helping students understand and cope with new technologies; the exact

nature of that role, however, was the subject of debate: protectionist perspectives sought

to inoculate children against the dangerous effects of the media; arts-based, or media arts,

approaches encouraged children to produce, as well as aesthetically respond to, art and

other visual media; visual literacy approaches proposed teaching children the skills for

analyzing and decoding visual media; and, critical perspectives argued that children

analyze media/visual culture regarding its complex relationship with power. Importantly,

while the vast quantity of theory and research today implies the dominance of the critical

media literacy approach, much of this research includes encouraging aesthetic responses

to media, as well as teaching the skills demanded by information technologies

(Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Begoray, 2000; Gardner, 2006; Messaris, 2001).

Thus, despite arising from different theoretical traditions, the presence of viewing and

representing in the Western Canadian language arts curricula suggests an attempt at

integrating various perspectives on visual media.[13]

Protectionist Approaches

Protectionist approaches to media studies argue that the influence of the media is

dangerous to society because of its potential to manipulate viewers into adopting

superficial, pleasure-seeking values over the more refined and valuable contributions of

serious literature and high culture. First describing the protectionist paradigm were

cultural critics F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson (1933) who worried about the effect of

popular culture on reading habits and high culture. They proposed that teachers

incorporate elements of media into the classroom only as necessary to expose the media's

manipulative nature and to teach children to resist its corruptive influence. While this

approach led to the implementation of media studies programs into schools, underpinning

these programs was an elitist ideology championing the superiority of literature and other

representations of high culture over popular reading materials, and a transmission model

of education in which the flow of information was unidirectional from teacher to passive

student (Kelly, 2005, p. 738). The presence of viewing and representing in educational

curricula therefore owes its origins to a model that saw media studies primarily as a

movement to resist the influence of popular culture.[14]

Arts-Based Teaching and Learning

Arts-based approaches to media studies argue for the central role of visual media

in encouraging new forms of experience and self-expression. Drawing from an

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[13] Some advocates of arts-based approaches (e.g. Eisner, 1999) maintain that integration between arts-based and, in particular, media/visual literacy is impossible, arguing that there is no research to suggest that transferability takes place between arts-based learning and other academic subjects.

[14] In Canada, the protectionist approach appears in the form of Canadian content requirements for television programming.

expressivist ideology, the arts-based approach is grounded in John Dewey's child-centreed model of education, as well as his argument for the importance of aesthetic, art-based experiences in encouraging individual growth. Explaining that "the individual who is to be educated is a social individual, and that society is an organic union of individuals," Dewey (1897) proposed embedding schools in communities, and integrating learning into children's real lives and experiences. Defining the truly educational moment as "a growth-inducing experience that grants the capacity for having even richer experiences in the future" (Dewey, 1963, p. 25), Dewey proposed that the dynamic activity of both producing and responding to works of art were themselves powerful transformative experiences: "art itself is the best proof of the existence of a realized and therefore realizable, union of material and ideal" (Dewey, 1934, p. 27). In this way, Dewey implied that individuals learned about themselves and their surroundings through encounters with art. Dewey's work thus contributed a theoretical foundation to the movement to bring art to the classroom as an object of study through which children would grow and develop in meaningful ways.

Applications of Dewey's ideas appear in the work of Elliot Eisner and Maxine Greene. An art educator concerned with what he described as a disturbing movement toward increased standardization in public schools, Eisner proposed guiding curricular reform according to specific biological features of humankind: the desire and capacity to represent experience through symbols (Eisner, 1994, p. 17). Arguing that feeling and thinking are "not independent processes; nor are they processes that can be separated. They interpenetrate just as mass and weight do. They are part of the same reality in human experience" (p. 21), Eisner insisted that the aesthetic response was a necessary

condition of learning (p. 29). The implication for educational reform, then, was a

curriculum in which aesthetic experiences, as mediated through creating and responding

to art, was the focus:

> Education … ought to enable the young to learn how to access the
>
> meanings that have been created through … forms of representation. But
>
> access to meanings others have created is not enough. Education ought to
>
> help the young learn how to create their own meanings through these
>
> forms. (p. 19)

Eisner's work thus highlighted the value of viewing and representing experiences for

children through arts-based forms of knowing.

Like Eisner, Greene held up the aesthetic response to art as an important means of

active learning, emphasizing the role of the imagination in encouraging self-awareness

and personal development: "Encounters with the arts nurture and sometimes provoke the

growth of individuals who reach out to one another as they seek clearings in their

experience and try to live more ardently in the world" (Greene, 1995a). Arguing that the

use of the arts in schools as a mere tool for technological mastery dehumanized students

by preparing them for unsatisfying jobs, Greene insisted that making the arts, in their

various forms, the specific objects of study in classrooms would both "release the

imaginative capacity and give it play" (Greene, 1995a). This release, she argued, made

the individual aware of a dizzying array of perspectives and an accompanying wealth of

individual choices and possibilities: "It is as if a world opens through the reading of a

work of art: readers may see their worlds through it in such a way that horizons broaden

and the world seems new, ready to be questioned and explored" (Greene, 1997, p. 391).

Greene also emphasized the responsibility of the enlightened, reflective teacher in

bringing about this individual transformation:

> …if I and other teachers truly want to provoke our students to break
>
> through the limits of the conventional and the taken for granted, we
>
> ourselves have to experience breaks with what we have established in our
>
> own lives; we have to keep arousing ourselves to begin again. (Greene,
>
> 1995b, p. 109)

Greene thus contributed to the arts-based movement to bring visual dimensions of study

to the classroom by arguing for the role of art in making possible new meanings and ways

of thinking about the world for both teachers and students.

Visual literacy

A third research tradition, visual literacy, also influenced the arrival of viewing

and representing in educational curricula. Visual literacy approaches concerned

themselves with the influence of visual technologies, such as television and computers,

and argued that studying these technologies fostered useful thinking skills that could be

readily transferred to other disciplines. In this way, visual literacy was conceptualized as

a set of tools for students to both manage their new visual environment and to achieve

proficiency in other related areas; students thus needed to learn the skills necessary to

analyze and decode visual language. Visual literacy approaches therefore proposed a

skills-based pedagogy.

John Debes first coined the term 'visual literacy' in *The loom of visual literacy*

(1969). Describing visual literacy as "a group of vision-competencies a human being can

develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences"

(p. 27), Debes explained how these skills were essential for human cognitive

development and communication:

> When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and
>
> interpret the visible actions, objects, symbols, natural or man-made, that
>
> he encounters in his environment. Through the creative use of these
>
> competencies, he is able to communicate with others. Through the
>
> appreciative use of these competencies, he is able to comprehend and
>
> enjoy the masterworks of visual communication. (p. 27)

To encourage the development of these skills, Debes recommended that teachers

bring visual literacy aids and activities, such as photography and picture making, to the

classroom. The benefits of these activities, he argued, would be improvements in both

oral and written communication skills (Fransecky & Debes, 1972, p. 11), as well as the

honouring of the experiences of young people of the "television generation" (p. 7) who

grew up surrounded by visual stimuli from television, film, and other audiovisual media:

"visual literacy activities draw on a multi-language model – a model totally grounded in

the total experience of children" (p. 13). Thus, Debes suggested that teachers use visual

materials and activities to teach students skills that could be applied to other fields of

study.

Also endorsing the visual literacy approach was Dondis who agreed with Debes

regarding the nature of visual literacy but endorsed centralizing the study of visual

language in the classroom. Citing the influence of technological innovation, particularly

the camera, Dondis (1973) argued that "if the invention of moveable type created a

mandate for universal verbal literacy, surely the invention of the camera makes the

development of universal visual literacy an educational necessity long overdue" (p. ix).

To teach this new form of literacy, Dondis recommended that the study of visual

language parallel the study of non-visual language by beginning with the basic elements

of form, including texture, proportion, and dimension, before advancing to an

examination of how these elements of visual language come together and function as a

whole (p. 15). Although Dondis did not specifically address the transferability of visual

literacy to other subject areas, her insistence that visual literacy would give students both

a thorough understanding of new forms of communication, and the tools necessary to

manage their environment (p. 18) nevertheless located visual literacy as a set of acquired

skills. Dondis thus expanded on Debes' conception of visual literacy by emphasizing the

importance of studying the form and function of visual images as part of a program of

study to give students the skills to address the influence of new visual technologies:

"[developing visual literacy] is as vital as our teaching of the modern media as reading

and writing was to print" (p. 18).

Gardner's (1983) work on multiple intelligences also positioned visual literacy as

a set of skills with transferability to other disciplines. Defining intelligence as "the

ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued within one or more cultural

settings" (p. x), Gardner developed a model of learning encompassing musical, bodily-

kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal

dimensions[15]. Although Gardner's list did not specifically include visual intelligence,

Gardner's description of spatial intelligence supported the existence of a visual

dimension to learning (Lazear, 1991; Samples, 1987). Further, by arguing that students

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[15] In his most current overview of multiple intelligence theory, Gardner includes naturalist and existential among his list of intelligences (Gardner, 2006, pp. 18-21).

learn according to different learning styles, and recommending that teachers incorporate

different materials and methods into lessons to try to address these differences, Gardner's

work suggested that skills gained in one subject could be applied to different fields of

study. Arts-based researchers often cite Gardner's model as a foundation for integrating

visual arts into classroom activities (Eisner, 1993); however, Gardner's suggestion that

teachers include visual and other materials to help students learn in general, rather than

learn specifically about art, is consistent with a visual literacy perspective[16].

Sinatra's *Visual connections to thinking, reading and writing* (1986) similarly

located visual literacy as another dimension of literacy by proposing a model of learning

in which in visual learning formed an important foundation. Citing the influence of Jean

Piaget's (1963) theory of cognitive development, Sinatra proposed that children learn in

stages, the first of which is dominated by nonverbal activity such as exploration (pp. 5-6).

Because this exploration is dependent on a child's perception of the environment, and

perception is a visual mode, Sinatra named the first stage 'visual literacy' (p. 7).

According to Sinatra, giving children a solid foundation in this first stage of literacy was

essential if children were to progress to higher learning: "visual literacy is primary in

human learning, and, as such, lays the foundation for the more 'literary' literacies that

follow" (p. ix). Sinatra's model also made clear a distinction between viewing and

representing, arguing that while viewing characterized the first stage of development, the

drawings of very young children lacked the critical insight offered by the contribution of

oral language to the composing process (p. 30); thus, Sinatra argued for representational

communication as the fourth stage of literacy. Sinatra ended with a strong endorsement

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[16] In a later work, *Multiple intelligences: New horizons* (2006) Gardner explicitly endorses arts-based
   education, insisting that the intelligences involved in both artistic expression and response include elements
   of linguistic, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, and logical-mathematical intelligences (pp. 150-151).

of the presence of visual activities in the classroom, particularly for early childhood

education programs: "visual, artistic and media literacies are means of engaging global,

holistic mind sets in learning tasks" (p. 59). Sinatra thus conceptualized visual literacy as

a set of cognitive skills, the acquisition of which led to an enrichment of thinking

capabilities (p. 28).

Like Sinatra, Messaris highlighted the importance of skills in managing the

influence of visual technologies. In *Visual literacy: Image, mind and reality* (1994),

Messaris argued against seeing visual media as representative of reality because images

can be "cropped, edited, or selectively framed in such a way as to omit information

contradicting the intended message" (p. 167). Citing film as an example, Messaris

explained that visual images were explicitly selected in order to manipulate the viewer

toward a particular response or set of expectations; thus, the visual image was the tool for

expressing the image-maker's intent (p. 138). Messaris (2001) insisted that although

repeated exposure to visual media did not, in itself, elicit in the viewer awareness of how

the media is manipulating the viewer, teaching students how to express themselves

visually would, in fact, encourage this consciousness. Messaris thus identified skills in

representing, and the accompanying enhancement of spatial and analogical thinking, as

essential to both managing the influence of visual media and becoming more proficient at

other cognitive tasks.

Critical Media Literacy

While all perspectives note the power of visual media to influence an audience,

only the critical media literacy tradition explicitly attends to the complex nature of this

influence and its relationship to the audience. Arising from the critical theory and critical

pedagogy paradigms, critical media literacy assumes that the media are not neutral

vehicles for disseminating information and that visual images are not value-free, but arise

out of particular contexts, interests, and supporting ideologies. Critical media literacy

theorists argue that the media's influence subtly shapes our perceptions and values,

helping us construct our understanding of the world in ways that often extends to social

inequalities around race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Importantly, however, in the

critical paradigm, the audience is not a passive receiver of messages; critical study of the

media's relationship with power empowers students by giving them the opportunity to

develop sensitivity to the politics behind representation, and to act on those politics in

ways that will promote social justice.   In summary, the critical media literacy paradigm

locates the responsible, conscious use of the media as instruments of individual and social

transformation.

One example of the critical media literacy tradition is Masterman's *Teaching the*

media (1985). In this text, Masterman argued that media messages are not neutral, but

deliberately constructed to influence the audience into adopting particular points of view

and perceptions. According to Masterman, visual images that purport to capture or

present reality suggest objectivity; however, the production of media texts is governed by

specific decision-making: "Everything we see in the media, however seemingly natural,

is the end product of innumerable, filtering processes, and frequently, implicit human

choices" (p. 137). These choices, Masterman maintained, influence viewers by

essentially "pinning down one preferred meaning from the many which are potentially

available" (p. 144); thus, captioning, contextualizing, or serializing images in a particular

order effectively legitimates some interpretations over others. Insisting that the audience

was not a passive recipient of the media's message, and that meaning resided in the

interaction between viewer and visual text, Masterman recommended that media

education include examining how the media employ these techniques to influence the

audience, but further, questioning both the ideology behind the message as well as the

viewer's world view, so as to encourage individual awareness of social inequalities:

> Simply by problematising media representations, by simply refusing to
>
> accept the naturalness of an image, or the neutrality of a particular point of
>
> view, each student is undercutting the potency and influence of dominant
>
> ideologies as they are naturalized by the media. (p. 198)

Masterman's focus was thus both on the specific nature of the media's power to influence

ideas and perceptions, and the importance of studying this influence: "media education is

also an essential step in the long march towards a truly participatory democracy, and the

democratization of our society" (p. 13).

Kellner's work on advertising imagery similarly extended from the critical media

literacy paradigm, locating power in the both the media's influence as well as its

audience's response. According to Kellner (1988), a wealth of new technologies

incorporating visual symbols characterize our postmodern society: "image machines

generate a panoply of print, sound, environmental and diverse aesthetic artifacts within

which we wander, trying to make our way through this forest of symbols" (p. 34).

Although he noted the powerful influence of advertisements on consumer activity,

Kellner's focus was on the way that visual images were social/cultural texts that

expressed a particular world view: capitalism (p. 37). Arguing that advertising images

"are the vehicles of … symbolic meanings and messages" (p. 43), Kellner, like

Masterman, proposed that studying visual images to determine the connections to their

context would lead to individual awareness of how media constructions shape value

systems; on the basis of this awareness, individuals could participate in progressive social

change (p. 48). Kellner's later work (1998), however, extended Masterman's broad

principles of critical media literacy into a framework of multicultural education.

Declaring that conceptions of gender, race, class, and ethnicity are, in part, determined by

media images, Kellner argued for the benefits of critical media literacy in increasing

student sensitivity to the politics of representation[17]. In short, Kellner's work suggested

the use of critical media literacy to empower individuals toward social consciousness and

democratic participation in an egalitarian multicultural society.

　　　Like Kellner and Masterman, David Sholle and Stan Denski (1995) encouraged

critical media literacy in the classroom; however, their work strongly argued for

combining visual text and audience analysis in an educational program. Declaring the

goal of critical media study as "the opening up of new spaces from within which

traditionally marginalized and excluded voice may speak" (p. 7), Sholle and Denski

defined media production as a set of social practices, and suggested subjecting those

practices to ideological critique. Importantly, they explained that this critique is not of

the text as an "isolated object" (p. 21) of study, but within a cultural, historical, and

personal context; in this way, ideological critique includes "the relationship of the reader

to the text and the manner in which multiple-identities are produced and reworked in the

reader/text relationship" (p. 23). This emphasis on audience analysis also appeared in

Sholle and Denski's second recommendation of encouraging affective reflexivity, in

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[17] See Carmen Luke's "Feminist pedagogy and critical media literacy" (1994) for detailed discussion into how gender is constructed in the media.

which students consider "their own modes of affective investment and consumption of

the media" (p. 25). Finally, Sholle and Denski argued that critical media literacy requires

students to actively rewrite, or "invent counterrepresentations and counter forms of

organization and evaluation" (p. 28) if they are to transform both their consciousness and

that of the world around them. Sholle and Denski thus located the power of critical

media literacy primarily in the relationship between media and audience.

Critical media literacy approaches converge on the insistence that visual images

are associated with power in several ways. First, the power of the media to shape images,

and through that shaping, encourage particular interpretations about both the image and

the world, testifies to its profound influence. However, because visual images are neither

produced nor interpreted in a vacuum, critical media literacy theorists argue that the

influence of the media is mitigated and itself shaped by the experiences of the audience;

thus, the audience too has power over the media, and potentially, may use the media as a

tool for profound social transformation. For these reasons, the power behind viewing and

representing may be understood as arising from the relationship between media and

audience, and thus, shared along a continuum, rather than owned by a single aspect of

that relationship.

Visual Literacy Practices in *Harry Potter*

The *Harry Potter* series includes many examples of viewing and representing

across a wide variety of forms: fine arts, such as paintings and drawings; photography,

including both still and moving recorded images; cartography; symbols, such as logos

and badges; technology, in the form of devices of either a magical or non magical nature;

and conjurations/supernatural images produced by a magic-user. These forms of viewing

and representing are both tools and objects of power for characters. When the

mechanism of power is *through* viewing and representing, these forms have several

functions: exchange is communication between two or more parties; notification refers to

the unreciprocated flow of information from sender to receiver; and domination/

empowerment is the use of the image to advantage or disadvantage a character over

another character or a situation. When the mechanism of power is *over* viewing and

representing, such as when characters are denied the opportunity to witness or blocked

from producing visual images, the function is restriction. Because ideological

assumptions underpin these functions, studying how characters actually use viewing and

representing in the exercise of power suggests the novels' messages about the role and

value of visual dimensions of literacy.

Exchange

Paintings

While the exchange of information between characters is a common function of

reading/writing and speaking/representing in the *Harry Potter* series, it appears only

rarely with respect to viewing and representing. Although all forms of

viewing/representing contain an implicit interactive element because the act of viewing is

itself a response to a representation, this response does not necessarily constitute an

exchange of information in that the visual representation may itself be non-reactive. The

only forms of visual images that participate in the exchange of information in the series

are the formal portraits that monitor the dormitories at Hogwarts School. A portrait of "a

very fat woman in a pink silk dress" (Rowling, 1997, p. 129) guards the entrance to the

Gryffindor common room, the subject of which, the Fat Lady, demands the correct

password before granting access. More than a mere guardian, however, the image of the

Fat Lady is an active presence: when threatened by Sirius Black, she vanishes into

another painting (Rowling, 1999, pp. 121-124). Her replacement, a portrait of a

nobleman with his horse, is similarly more than a still representation: "Sir Cadogan spent

half his time challenging people to duels, and the rest thinking up ridiculously

complicated passwords, which he changed at least twice a day" (p. 125). The Fat Lady's

delayed return to duty also reveals her human nature: "She had been expertly restored,

but was still extremely nervous, and had only agreed to return to her job on condition that

she was given extra protection" (p. 199). Other subjects of portraits that act as characters

include the former Headmasters of Hogwarts who occupy the walls of Dumbledore's

study; "[s]noozing gently in their frames" (Rowling, 1998, p. 154), the subjects of these

portraits are characters who require rest after a busy day's consulting work with the

Headmaster. Painted portraits thus exchange information between themselves and other

characters in the Harry Potter series; however, because part of this communication is

actually in the form of oral communication between a speaker and a listener, language

mediates the exchange function in visual literacy.

Different kinds of power characterize the exchange of information through

painted portraits at Hogwarts. The portraits have potential power because the subjects of

the paintings possess considerable knowledge about their surroundings; because these

subjects are rarely questioned regarding their knowledge, this information remains, in

most cases, potential. Presumably this knowledge derives from several qualities inherent

in the subjects themselves. First, painting characters have the ability to travel throughout

the castle to other paintings on other walls, and to share information with the subjects of

other portraits, as well as with ghosts and other residents of the castle. For instance, it is

the subject of the Fat Lady portrait who reveals Sirius Black's attempt to penetrate the

Gryffindor common room to Peeves the poltergeist, who himself later discloses that

information to Dumbledore (Rowling, 1999, p. 121). Because the subjects of portraits

are also characters, they also display many useful, human qualities. In particular, portrait

subjects show some capacity to observe and to interpret characters' actions: the Fat Lady

describes Black's rage at being denied entry, and his accompanying show of temper in

slashing her canvas (p. 120). The portrait subjects' emotional responses similarly convey

important information: the Fat Lady's severe distress around Black's behaviour mirrors

the Hogwarts' community's mistaken understanding of Black as a dangerous enemy.

The subjects of paintings, however, differ from true characters in one important way:

they are bound by rules and regulations governing their role as guardians, and insensitive

to events beyond their scope. When the subject of Sir Cadogan's portrait identifies Black

as the menacing presence in Ron's bedroom, he also explains why he allowed Black

access without any indication of the potential gravity of the consequences of his actions:

"He had [the passwords]…Had the whole week's, my lady! Read 'em off a little piece of

paper" (p. 198). Although their stores of knowledge are limited, the subjects of paintings

hold information that is potentially useful to other characters; thus, paintings have

prospective power.

      In addition to potential power, the painted portraits in Hogwarts Castle also

convey socializing information about the norms and values of the community in which

they exist. For example, the numerous depictions of historic persons and landscapes

testify to the rich cultural history of the wizarding community, as well as the

community's belief in the importance of preserving a record of this culture in art. In

addition, the presence of a nobleman, Sir Cadogan, and his accompanying horse, suggests

that early wizarding society had a clearly defined class system, characterized by titles and

accompanying privileges and responsibilities. Sir Cadogan's speech, mode of address,

and costume reinforce these class differences, as well as show that styles of language and

clothing in the wizarding world gradually evolved toward informality. The paintings thus

subtly communicate information about the values and structure of the society in which

they were produced.

The relationship between paintings and power in *Harry Potter* suggests the role

and value of viewing and representing as dimensions of literacy.   The vast number of

paintings in the hallways of the castle suggests that art itself is important to the members

of the community. Because art has a particular role in guarding access, the novels also

suggest that the importance of art is not around aesthetics, but usefulness; thus, art serves

not the producer, but the viewer. Because the subjects of portraits can be manipulated,

the power of art is limited, and the usefulness of art must be upheld and defended by

others around it that recognize both its value and its vulnerability.

Notification

Illustrations

Forms of viewing and representing also function in the series to notify and inform

other characters of information. Although appearing only twice in the novels,

illustrations/drawings are one form of fine arts that serve this purpose. When Harry

opens the restricted book *Moste potente potions*, he observes "some very unpleasant

illustrations, which included a man who seemed to have been turned inside out and a

witch sprouting several extra pairs of arms out of her head" (Rowling, 1998, p. 124).

Soon after, Hermione locates the recipe for polyjuice potion which itself contains

disturbing images: "It was decorated with drawings of people halfway through

transforming into other people" (p. 124). Because both sets of images communicate the

dangers of engaging in the high-risk activity of potion making to the viewing audience,

the function of these illustrations is notification.

Illustrations that notify viewers of possible outcomes have different kinds of

power. Illustrations that suggest dire consequences involved in engaging in dangerous

activity have potential power because their threat may or may not be acted on by the

viewer who is under no compulsion to act in ways that obey the warning. For example,

Harry and his friends persist in their efforts to concoct the polyjuice potion despite their

awareness of its dangers; thus, the illustrated warning remains potential in form.

Arguably, however, if it could be shown that the characters exercised great caution and

care as a result of the warning, then the illustration indeed influenced not what the

characters did, but how they decided to proceed. In this scenario, the characters convert

the potential of the information into active power.

Characters who view drawn illustrations also undergo passive power. First, the

mere appearance of drawings showing the dramatic effects of bad magic-making on the

incompetent or careless practitioner implies the community's belief in individual

responsibility because nowhere in the illustrations is the suggestion of any governmental

legislation or sanction for engaging in such high-risk activity; individuals thus bear the

consequences. Because the illustrations show the dangerous effects of improper magic

on both a witch and a wizard, the text also suggests the equal fallibility of men and

women, with neither sex positioned as superior to the other in either judgment or skill.

These drawings thus speak to the community's belief in individual agency.

The use of gruesome illustrations to warn the individuals of the consequences of high-risk activity also suggests some assumptions about the role and importance of viewing and representing. The use of suffering individuals as subjects of art again locates the image as an accurate representation of reality: "Harry sincerely hoped the artist had imagined the looks of intense pain on their faces" (p. 124). In addition, the use of the illustration as a warning reinforces the function of art to persuade or educate the viewer, rather than to encourage an aesthetic response. Importantly, while Harry's emotional reaction to the drawings shows the effectiveness of the image as a tool of persuasion, Hermione's excitement over the project and lack of attention to the illustrated warnings, suggests that the influence of the image varies according to the experience of the viewer.

Photographs

A second form of viewing and representing, photographic images of characters appear to function as exchange, but the nature of the relationship between subject and viewer indicates that the function of these images is primarily that of notification. For example, the cover of one of Gilderoy Lockhart's book shows an animated photograph of him smiling (Rowling, 1998, p. 32), and posters that cover the walls of Ron's bedroom show pictures of the members of his favourite sports team "carrying broomsticks and waving energetically" (p. 35). The *Daily Prophet* also carries pictures of accused killer Sirius Black: "a large photograph of a sunken-faced man with long, matted hair blinked slowly at Harry from the front page" (Rowling, 1999, p. 33). While the subjects' actions

suggests their interactivity with the viewer, the role of the subject never extends beyond

the appearance of reciprocity: in the picture album of Harry's parents given to him by

Hagrid, the photographic images restrict themselves to general smiling and waving

(Rowling, 1997, p. 304); and in the *Daily Prophet's* photograph of the Weasley family,

the characters similarly only pose and gesture (Rowling, 1999, p. 12). In these and all

other pictures, the viewer receives visual information about the subject of the photograph,

but cannot, in turn, communicate information back to the subject because the subject is

but a moving depiction rather than a character in itself.   Further, Harry's awareness of

his presence in a photograph with Lockhart indicates that the photograph is a mere

representation, albeit one that acts in a way that is consistent with Harry's values:

> A moving, black and white Lockhart was tugging hard on an arm Harry
>
> recognized as his own. He was pleased to see that his photographic self
>
> was putting up a good fight and refusing to be dragged into view. As
>
> Harry watched, Lockhart gave up and slumped, panting, against the white
>
> edge of the picture. (Rowling, 1998, p. 82)

Photographs in *Harry Potter* thus convey visual information about the image to a viewing

audience.

     The potential power of the photographic image is largely a result of the style and

framing of the image itself. For example, all Gilderoy Lockhart's book cover

photographs emphasize the physical attractiveness of the man himself: "There was a big

photograph of a very good-looking wizard with wavy blond hair and bright blue eyes"

(Rowling, 1998, p. 32). Further, the photographs suggest a relationship between

Lockhart and the viewer by positioning Lockhart "winking cheekily up at them all" (p

32). This framing of Lockhart implies that he is a successful and accomplished man

whose advice is trustworthy; thus, the potential power of the photograph influences the

audience to see the subject in a particular, positive light. This power is potential because

viewers may or may not realize the subtle persuasive power of the framed photograph,

and may interpret its message (and subject) in other ways than were intended; that is, the

photograph's emphasis on Lockhart's attractive appearance may foster in some viewers

the appearance of superficiality rather than accomplishment. In contrast, the *Daily*

Prophet frames escaped convict Sirius Black in a negative light, highlighting features of

subject that suggest his resemblance to a deranged villain (Rowling, 1999, p. 33). In this

way, the photograph predisposes the viewer to see Black in a particular way. Again,

however, because the viewer is not required to accept this interpretation of the image, the

power of the photograph is potential.

Viewers of these photographic images also undergo passive power in the form of

socializing information about the community's values. The *Daily Prophet's* photograph

of the Weasley family's Egyptian vacation shows parents, children, and pet rat posing in

front of a pyramid (p. 12). The inclusion of all nine members of the family, framed to

stand close to one another, shows that close family ties are celebrated in wizarding

society. Because Ron poses with his arm around his little sister, the photograph suggests

that a good relationship between siblings is part of the structure of family life in the

wizarding community. Similarly, the photograph implies Ron's protectiveness: big

brothers are supposed to look after little sisters.   The inclusion of the family pet,

Scabbers, also suggests the important role of pets in family life, as well as the level of

responsibility demanded by pet ownership: not left behind in the care of a sitter,

Scabbers too enjoys a vacation with his adopted family. Thus, the subjects of a photograph, as well as their framing within the margins of the shot, suggest the community's beliefs about family structure and responsibilities.

Several ideological assumptions about visual literacy underpin the use of photographs to inform an audience of information. First, photographs in the series purport to show reality, and are largely heralded by the community as realistic; however, the deceptive framing of Lockhart and Black that miscasts their true character shows the inherent capacity of the image to manipulate an audience into particular ways of seeing and interpreting the world. The pervasiveness of these images, in the face of contradictory information, testifies to the power of the visual image to influence and persuade: Hermione persists in her infatuation with Lockhart despite firsthand knowledge of his cowardice and incompetence (Rowling, 1998, pp. 170-171); and the community refuses to consider Black's innocence, despite a wealth of witness testimony (Rowling, 1999, pp. 284-287).   The series shows photographic images, then, as false representations of reality that are possessed of considerable persuasive power.

Maps

Maps also appear in the *Harry Potter* series as a form of viewing and representing that notifies the viewer of information. While the books make mention of the existence of other maps (Rowling, 1997, p. 2), the Marauder's Map makes regular and frequent appearances within the series. Introduced to Harry by the Weasley twins, the Marauder's Map is a magical document composed by former students of Hogwarts, including Harry's father, that represents the location of every inhabitant of the school: "It was a map showing every detail of the Hogwarts castle and grounds. But the truly remarkable thing

was the tiny ink dots moving around it, each labeled with a name in minuscule writing"

(Rowling, 1999, p. 144). Unlike most maps, the Marauder's Map is dynamic, recording

the changing movements of other characters in and around school property. In addition,

the Marauder's Map identifies seven secret passages leading from the school to the local

town of Hogsmeade (p. 144), some of which Harry eventually utilizes under the cover of

his invisibility cloak. Requiring only an oath for activation, the map thus informs Harry

of the location of his classmates, teachers, and other visitors to Hogwarts School.

The Marauder's Map is an important source of potential power because it gives

Harry information on which he can act in a number of ways. By showing hidden

entrances and exits to the school, the Map offers Harry details that he can, and does,

convert to active power: Harry uses the Map to accompany his friends to Hogsmeade

(pp. 146-150) despite regulations prohibiting his departure from school without a signed

note of permission. Similarly, the map offers information to Professor Lupin, who,

noting that the map's special qualities of detection extends to revealing disguises,

eventually identifies Ron's rat Scabbers as Peter Pettigrew, animagus and betrayer of

James and Lily Potter (pp. 254-255). Acting on the potential power of the map, Lupin

attempts to capture Pettigrew and clear the name of Sirius Black; Lupin too thus converts

the potential of the map into active power.

The passive power of the Marauder's Map results from the information it conveys

about the community. The existence of such a document, invented by a group of young

students, suggests a widespread belief by the community in the value of surveillance as

an instrument of power. The secrecy surrounding the document, including the identity of

its original authors Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs (p. 144) also indicates that

while individual characters value the tool, the majority of the community does not

endorse its use, a community that almost certainly recognizes the potential for misuse of

the authority commanded by the wealth of information gained through the map.

Importantly, the map also suggests two important conclusions about the nature of the

power it offers: one, that it is relationships, such as the proximity of one character

relative to another, more than isolated individuals, that are significant and must be

managed; and that information about access and egress is among the most useful kind to

have.

The exercise of power by characters through the use of Marauder's Map also

suggests the valuable nature of visual literacy practices. A true representation of reality,

in the form of identifying every character's location, the map cannot be fooled, and is

thus, an authoritative means of representing experience. The realistic visual image, then,

is trustworthy and compelling; Peter Pettigrew's existence is confirmed only when the

map represents him. Use of the map is, however, limited to those characters who

understand how to activate it, and who swear an oath of mischief; implied by these

qualities is the importance of learning tools to view and interpret visual images, as well as

encouraging conscious awareness of the rules and responsibilities accompanying

conscientious viewing. Finally, the books suggest that simple possession of the image is

inadequate; true power comes from knowing how to use the image in important ways.

Symbols

Many visual symbols throughout the *Harry Potter* novels also act to notify the

viewer of information. One kind of visual symbol in the Harry Potter series includes

badges worn by students that identify special standing. Percy Weasley wears "a shiny

silver badge on his chest with a letter *P* on it" (Rowling, 1997, p. 96) to indicate his role

as a prefect, and later, pins a Head Boy badge to his hat when his status upgrades

(Rowling, 1999, p. 13). In addition, different animal symbols represent each of the

Hogwarts school houses: A lion stands for Gryffindor; an eagle represents Ravenclaw; a

badger is the Hufflepuff animal; and a snake is the symbol for Slytherin (Rowling, 1997,

p. 34). These animal symbols appear together in a coat of arms on school letterhead (p.

34), and separately on house crests, where they embody the characteristics of the various

houses. As the Hogwarts Sorting Hat explains, Gryffindors are courageous and daring,

Ravenclaws are intelligent and academic, Hufflepuffs are hard working and determined,

and Slytherins are cunning and ambitious (p. 118). The house with the highest overall

total of points at the end of the year retains the right to decorate the main hall in its

corresponding house colours (pp. 304-306). In addition, each house includes a magical

relic derived from its history, such as Godric Gryffindor's sword (Rowling, 1998, p.

235),[18] an exclusive item that Gryffindors are able to access in times of great need, as

when Harry asks and receives the weapon in a duel with Voldemort in the Chamber of

Secrets: "Only a true Gryffindor could have pulled that out of the hat" (p. 245). By

communicating information about both the character of the houses they represent and the

students who reside within them, these symbols thus notify characters that view them of

information.

　　　　Symbols that notify an audience have two kinds of power: potential and passive.

Because symbols identify the motivations of characters within the different houses, other

characters have the opportunity to use this information to make judgments about who is

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[18] Relics from other houses include Rowena Ravenclaw's diadem (Rowling, 2007), Helga Hufflepuff's cup (Rowling, 2005), and Salazar Slytherin's locket (Rowling, 2007), but these items only appear in later novels in the series.

and who is not trustworthy. Importantly, the relationship between a character and his or her house symbol is sufficient; the relationship does not require the continued display of the symbol itself in order that the character acquires the qualities of the symbol itself. For example, the Sorting Hat's decision to place Draco Malfoy within Slytherin house identifies Malfoy as deceitful and underhanded, traits that are later borne out by his responses to characters from other houses: in addition to attempting to cause Harry's suspension from Hogwarts (Rowling, 1997, p. 153), Malfoy steals Neville Longbottom's Remembrall, a gift from his grandmother (145-148), and repeatedly insults Ron (p. 109) and Hermione, even labeling her with the epithet "Mudblood" (Rowling, 1998, p. 87). Further, the entire Slytherin house supports his efforts, with other house members cheering Malfoy on (p. 86) and living up to the house's reputation for unscrupulous and unkind acts. In contrast, while fearful Neville initially appears a poor fit for Gryffindor House, he later lives up to the House's promise of bravery by standing up to his friends (Rowling, 1997, p. 272), an act acknowledged by Dumbledore as courageous: "It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends" (p. 306). Thus, simply knowing the qualities of each house gives characters in the series important information about who to trust and who to avoid; however, characters may or may not act on that information, in which case the power of the symbol's information remains potential.

Characters who view symbols undergo passive power. The passive power of symbols largely centres on the assumptions behind the existence of the Sorting Hat, a magical device that purports to read the character of students and make decisions about where to classify them. This device suggests the fixedness of personality, and the

inability of environment to influence basic temperament. While Dumbledore explains to

Harry that the Sorting Hat's decision was mitigated by Harry's own expressed desire to

avoid Slytherin House, asserting that "it is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly

are, far more than our abilities" (Rowling, 1998, p. 245), he nevertheless describes

Harry's similarities with Slytherin as though these qualities are inherent and static: "You

happen to have many qualities Salazar Slytherin prized in his hand-picked students. His

own very rare gift, Parseltongue … resourcefulness … determination … a certain

disregard for rules" (p. 245). Importantly, no characters challenge the Sorting Hat's

placements, reinforcing that the adolescent personality is fixed and determined toward

particular characteristics and values.

Another element of passive power centreing on the different school houses and

their accompanying traits is the implication of hierarchal differences. For example,

although students from Slytherin House are most certainly members of the community,

other characters generally interpret their shared characteristics as morally inferior to those

of the students from other houses in light of their capacity for deception and self-serving

behaviour. In addition, the hard-working Hufflepuffs appear to have no claim to fame

other than their determination; lacking inherent skills, the Hufflepuff students

compensate for this deficiency with their perseverance, but in a community that prizes

natural talents, this perseverance must surely be of less worth than the innate attributes of

other student houses; thus, Hufflepuff's qualities seem to rank lower on the hierarchal

scale of worth than those of the other houses. Reinforcing this hierarchal structure is the

entrance requirement for admission to Hogwarts: students must show a natural magical

ability in order to gain acceptance to the Academy (Rowling, 1997, p. 53). Thus, the

novels show a community with a distinct structural order around which the role of nature

is held to be greater than the role of the environment on shaping a character's personality.

Symbols in *Harry Potter* similarly imply statements about visual literacy.

Because symbols assigned to characters reveal their true nature and hidden motivations,

the series suggests that visual metaphor is a way of accurately representing the

complexity of personality or temperament; in other words, images are tools for

classifying and ordering even the most complicated subjects. In addition, because school

houses centre around shared qualities among its members, the texts imply the role of

visual imagery in encouraging identity formation; Gryffindors, arguably inherently brave,

possibly become even more courageous when made aware of the expectations

surrounding them to fit into particular groups. The image, then, is a powerful means of

both shaping individual identity as well as encouraging cohesiveness within large groups.

Technology

Technology also acts to notify a viewing audience of information. Technological

devices in the *Harry Potter* series include Neville Longbottom's Remembrall, a magic

object that glows red to remind its owner of something forgotten (Rowling, 1997, p, 145).

Harry's Pocket Sneakoscope is also an example of a technological instrument that

visually alerts the viewer to the presence of a threat: "If there's someone untrustworthy

around, it's supposed to light up and spin" (Rowling, 1999, p. 13). Importantly, however,

the action of both devices is non-specific. The Remembrall is but a general visual

reminder, and the Sneakoscope is similarly vague: it notifies Bill Weasley of treachery

around him but does not identify the perpetrators of the mischief (p. 13), and later, warns

Ron and Harry of duplicity but does not make clear that it is Peter Pettigrew, disguised as

Ron's rat Scabbers, who is the untrustworthy character (pp. 60-61).

Technology that notifies in Harry Potter has two kinds of power: potential, and

passive. The potential power of the various devices arises from the prospective

usefulness of the information it communicates to the viewers. For example, Neville's

Remembrall notifies Neville of his forgetfulness, but Neville has the choice whether or

not to act on or ignore this information. Similarly, when the Pocket Sneakoscope informs

Harry and Ron that they are in the presence of an untrustworthy character, they may

choose to investigate their surroundings and seek out the individual, or ignore the

information. Because they inevitably disregard the information offered by the

Sneakoscope, opting instead to "stick it back in the trunk" (Rowling, 1999, p. 61), Harry

and Ron do not realize the importance of information communicated by the device, and

its power thus remains potential.

The use of information technology in the series also suggests some of the values

behind the wizarding community in which such technology arose. First, the mere

existence of technological objects shows that the community itself is an advanced society

with sufficient time and resources to develop visual aids for its citizens. In addition, the

particular invention of a device specifically to assist in memory suggests the recognition

by society of human frailty; even magical wizards and witches are distractible beings.

The Sneakoscope, too, a device that specifically identifies treacherous individuals,

indicates that the wizard world too is a complex society made up of different characters

with different motives, both honourable and dishonourable. Harry's failure to take

advantage of the Sneakoscope's information, largely on the basis of Ron's disclosure that

such devices are "rubbish sold for wizard tourists" (Rowling, 1999, p. 13), also testifies

to the presence of unscrupulous vendors who aspire to take advantage of unwary

customers; in this way, wizard society appears to be capitalist and profit-driven.

Domination/empowerment

Technology

Characters in the series also use technology to dominate other characters and to

overcome circumstances. One example of this use of technology is the Mirror of Esired,

a magical looking glass that Harry encounters while searching for dangerous books in the

Restricted section of the Hogwarts Library (Rowling, 1997, p. 207). The Mirror of

Erised's function is to enlighten viewers in the form of self-knowledge by showing them

"the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts" (Rowling, 1997, p. 213): Harry thus

sees all the members of his extended family standing around him (p. 212) while Ron sees

himself awarded various academic and athletic honours (p. 211). Later, Professor

Quirrell, acting in the service of Lord Voldemort, attempts to use the Mirror to dominate

Harry Potter and to find the Sorcerer's stone by forcing Harry to look into the glass;

because Harry's greatest desire is to stop Quirrell, he concentrates on seeing himself

finding the Stone before Quirrell:

> He saw his reflection, pale and scared-looking at first. But a moment
>
> later, the reflection smiled at him. It put its hand into its pocket and pulled
>
> out a blood-red stone. It winked and put the Stone back in its pocket – and
>
> as it did so, Harry felt something heavy drop into his real pocket.
>
> Somehow – incredibly – he'd gotten the stone. (p. 292).

While Voldemort arguably engineers Harry's encounter with the Mirror, Harry uses the

Mirror to envision himself with the coveted Stone and later, withholds this information

from Voldemort; Harry, therefore, empowers himself through the Mirror and challenges

Voldemort's plan to return to power.

The Mirror of Erised has potential, active, and passive power. On one hand, the

Mirror of Esired has information about Harry's deep desires and motivations. This

information is potentially useful as self-knowledge on which a character may choose to

act. On the other hand, the Mirror is also inherently dangerous, seducing the viewer into

the false comfort offered by an image of what he or she craves: "Men have wasted away

before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it

shows is real or even possible" (p. 213). The Mirror's potential, then, is both

constructive as well as destructive. Characters exercise active power through the Mirror

by using it to dominate another character and to overcome circumstances. Voldemort's

attempt to force Harry to look into the Mirror and see himself finding the Sorcerer's

Stone is an exercise of active power because Voldemort directly uses the magical object

to coerce a particular response; however, Harry's use of the Mirror to both find and

conceal the coveted object is an act of empowerment because his imaginative

reconfiguring of the image allows him to protect his own interests.   Finally, characters

undergo the Mirror's passive power in its suggestions of the community's values and

beliefs. The Mirror's existence testifies to the wizard world's strong belief in the power

of self-knowledge, as well as the need to look externally to discover this information.

Technology, in the form of the Mirror of Esired, to dominate and empower

characters also suggests ideological assumptions behind visual literacy. First, the

seductive quality of the reflected image, unaccompanied by any operator or language, shows the inherent power of visual images to influence a viewer. In addition, while the novels position the viewing of the Mirror's images as a resource for self-awareness, they also locate the process of representing as simultaneously empowering and dangerous; just as Harry is able to re-configure his present by re-conceptualizing his image, so too does the act of re-imagining expose himself to manipulation by external forces, such as Voldemort. Therefore, it is representing, more than viewing, that teaches this self-awareness, but the risk of doing so is the loss of some aspect of the viewer in the reflected image.

Conjuring

Another form of viewing and representing used to dominate and empower characters is conjuring, defined here as the use of supernatural spells to produce images or magical manifestations. All conjuring in the series, however, contains an oral language component that accompanies representing. The Boggart, a supernatural shape-shifter, is one example of an image that dominates characters. Like the Mirror of Esired, the Boggart has the ability to sense the secret feelings of its audience; unlike the Mirror, however, the Boggart is sensitive to fears, instead of desires, and transforms itself into a visual representation of the viewer's nightmares (p. 101): the Boggart dominates Neville by assuming the frightening image of Professor Snape (p. 102); Ron, by representing a giant spider (p. 104); and Professor Lupin, by taking the shape of the full moon (p. 105). Importantly, also like the Mirror, the Boggart is susceptible to manipulation: "The charm that repels a Boggart is simple, yet it requires force of mind. You see, the thing that really finishes a Boggart is laughter. What you need to do is force it to assume a shape

that you find amusing" (p. 100). Accordingly, the conjuring of this Riddikulus charm

permits characters to change the shape of their enemy into something with a less

frightening form: Neville transforms his Boggart into an image of Snape wearing

women's clothing (p. 104), and another student forces her mummified Boggart to unravel

its bloodstained wrappings and comically stumble (p. 104). The Riddikulus charm thus

empowers the viewer by giving him or her agency over the Boggart's appearance and

influence over the viewer.

Another conjuration in the *Harry Potter* series that acts to empower the spell-

caster is the Patronus charm. A protective, positive force, the Patronus takes the form of

an ethereal projection in the shape of an animal representing the caster's spirit, and arises

from happy memories (p. 176). Harry relies on his Patronus, a stag, for resisting the

effects of the Dementors, soul-destroying guardians of the Azkaban Prison: "Dementors

are among the foulest creatures that walk the earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest

places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope and happiness out of the

air around them" (p. 140). When the Dementors attempt to steal the life of Harry's

godfather, Sirius Black, Harry conjures the Patronus charm:

> It was galloping silently away from him, across the black surface of the
>
> lake. He saw it lower its head and charge at the swarming Dementors …
>
> now it was galloping around and around the black shapes on the ground,
>
> and the Dementors were falling back, scattering, retreating into the
>
> darkness … and they were gone. (p. 300)

Because the Patronus permits Harry to triumph over the Dementors and save Sirius,

conjuration empowers characters to overcome circumstances.

Different kinds of power inform the domination/empowerment function of

conjuration. Because the spell caster's intent is to act on someone or something, every

act of magic transforms the powerful potential of the magic into active power:

"Riddikulus" (p. 102) transforms Boggarts, while "Expecto Patronum" (p. 176) generates

a protective animal shield to banish Dementors. Only when the magic act is partial or

unsuccessful, such as when Harry fails to repel the Boggart/Dementor in Lupin's office,

(p. 177-179) does the magic's power remain potential. The effectiveness of the

conjuration, however, depends largely on the skill and commitment of the caster; only

when sufficiently motivated by Sirius' impending execution by the Dementors does

Harry properly conjure a full-fledged Patronus and save his godfather (p. 300).

Importantly, it is the shape of the representation itself that reveals the spell-caster's

commitment and the accompanying strength of his conjuration: "And out of the end of

his wand burst, not a shapeless cloud of mist, but a blinding, dazzling, silver animal" (p.

300). Thus, the representation is not a mere indicator of the presence of the magic, but

the magic itself.

Passive power, too, appears in the domination and empowerment functions of

conjuration. The presence of the Boggart, a creature with the ability to discern and

represent the shape of a character's secret fears, implies the tangibility of individual

demons; in the series, characters' nightmares have a concrete, well-defined form,

information that characters can use to challenge their demons and overcome their fears.

Finally, the teachable Patronus charm, with its unique signature to the spell caster,

indicates the society's belief in the existence of a unified self from which the animal

manifestation derives, as well as the constructed nature of reality; characters are not tied

to the material boundaries of their world but free to act on it in ways that make possible

dramatic transformations in both individuals as well as society itself. The power to

conjure representations of an inner self that itself makes changes in the world thus shows

the range of power of self-aware characters within the series.

The ability to conjure images that both represent a character's deep self and act on

reality in dramatic transformative ways also suggests the profound power behind image

production. First, the novels support the role of images to reflect the individual self; the

image, then, is a tool for representing individuality. Secondly, the image's capacity to

give shape to imaginings that can then be manipulated by a viewer shows the importance

of visualization itself as a tool for personal growth and the overcoming of circumstances.

Finally, because the Boggart reflects a character's innermost fears; the Boggart then is a

representation of the character; thus, the series implies the responsibility of the character

in acknowledging his or her part in the creation of the world. Image production is thus a

part of the creation of both the self and the self's relationship to society.

Restriction

When characters restrict other characters from visual literacy practices, the target

of power is over visual literacy practices, and the function of power is restriction. In the

Harry Potter series, restrictions over viewing takes place through technology and

symbols.

Viewing

Dumbledore's Put-Outer is one example of a technological device with the ability

to restrict viewing by extinguishing streetlights: "It appeared to be a silver cigarette

lighter. He flicked it open, held it up in the air, and clicked it. The nearest street lamp

went out with a little pop" (Rowling, 1997, p. 9). Because the action of the Put-Outer is

to conceal Hagrid's arrival and the depositing of the infant Harry Potter on his relatives'

doorstep under cover of darkness, the device effectively obscures the events from a

prospective viewer. Harry's invisibility cloak similarly functions to conceal. The cloak,

a "shining, silvery cloth … strange to the touch, like water woven into material" (p. 201),

renders its wearer completely imperceptible to viewers. Harry uses his cloak to access

the restricted sections of the library (p. 205) and the village of Hogsmeade (Rowling,

1999, p. 203), as well as to escape detection by authority figures, such as Snape and Filch

(p. 207). He also uses the cloak to eavesdrop on private conversations (Rowling, 1998, p.

194), and in one instance, to launch a physical attack on Malfoy and his friends; an

unseen Harry pelts Malfoy's gang with mud until the victimized students eventually run

away (Rowling, 1994, pp. 206-207). In Harry's hands, the cloak thus functions to

obscure his appearance from would-be viewers.

       Different kinds of power characterize the restrictions over viewing through

technology. Because both devices, the Put-Outer and the invisibility cloak, have a

particular purpose to which they may each be applied, they necessarily possess potential

power in their prospective usefulness to a character in the story fortunate enough to own

the device in question. Because Dumbledore and Harry actually use each item for its

intended purpose, the potential power of viewing technology changes into active power.

Specifically, Dumbledore extinguishes the lights of Harry's street address and thus uses

the power of technology to advantage himself over circumstances. Harry, on the other

hand, uses his invisibility to overcome access restrictions and to gain information to

which he would otherwise be excluded (Rowling, 1998, p. 194), but also takes advantage

of his invisibility to dominate his enemies when he attacks Malfoy. In this way, the use

of technology to dominate and empower characters is an exercise of active power.

Characters who experience the effects of these technological devices also undergo

passive power. The devices themselves suggest a technologically advanced society that

recognizes the value of controlling access to activity within the visual realm. Further,

while both Dumbledore and Harry employ their respective technologies only in the

company of trusted friends and colleagues, their lack of reticence about activating the

devices suggests the tacit endorsement of the community in withholding information

from a general audience: both Professor McGonagall (Rowling, 1997, p. 9) and

Hermione (Rowling, 1999, p. 239) neglect to reprimand Dumbledore or Harry for their

continued reliance on these objects. The wizarding community, then, supports individual

decision-making, declining to create or support regulations surrounding the use of

technology that restricts viewing.

Symbols are another form in which characters in the series exercise power over

viewing. Professor Sybil Trelawney's divination class consists of lessons in which the

students attempt to interpret visual arrangements of tea leaves: "Swill these around the

cups three times with the left hand, then turn the cup upside-down on its saucer, wait for

the last of the tea to drain away, then give your cup to your partner to read" (Rowling,

1999, p. 81). Accordingly, the first step in correct divination is the identifying of

symbols in the dregs: Ron observes "a wonky sort of cross" (p. 81) and a bowler's hat in

Harry's cup, which Trelawney declares are actually a falcon and a skull (p. 82). Insisting

that the second step in the process is the interpretation of symbols, Trelawney overrides

Ron's speculation regarding the meaning of the patterns in Harry's cup with her own

understanding: "The Grim, my dear, the Grim! … The giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen – the worst omen – of death!" (pp. 82-83). In a similar lesson on the meaning of images within crystal balls, Trelawney also aspires to impose her interpretation on Harry's orb; when he invents an image of an intact and healthy Hippogriff, Trelawney pressures him toward a different conclusion: "Are you quite sure, my dear? You don't see it writhing on the ground, perhaps, and a shadowy figure raising an axe behind it?" (p. 237). Because divination lessons highlight the teacher's power to influence the viewing and interpreting of patterns within teacups and crystal balls, these lessons are an example of a teacher exercising power over viewing.

Different forms of power accompany characters exercising power over viewing through divination. The interpretation of the image has potential power because the viewer may use this information to influence a decision or course of action. For example, Trelawney's prediction of Harry's impending death is information that he may or may not use to guide his actions. Professor McGonagall's low estimation of the value of Trelawney's predictions, however, encourages him to disregard this information: "Divination is one of the most imprecise branches of magic. I shall not conceal from you that I have very little patience with it" (Rowling, 1999, p. 84). In this case, the potential of Trelawney's prophecy remains unrealized. Similarly, Trelawney's attempt to impose an interpretation on a pattern of images is another attempt to transform potential power into an active form in that she uses her authority to dominate her students, effectively shaping their responses along approved lines; despite her position of authority, however, these attempts are unsuccessful, largely because of her weak credibility and the low respect of her profession within the community.

The interpretive practices of divination, however, convey much information about the values of the wizard world and are thus, a rich source of passive power. First, the establishing of specific educational courses around divination betrays a desire to know the future, and a concern with security for both the individual and the larger community. The concept of prophecy itself also assumes a belief that the future is at the very least knowable depending on the skills of seers, those particular individuals who can interpret the visual patterns of the signs and symbols around them and reveal what must be a fixed, pre-determined outcome. The wizarding community thus accepts determinism over free will; however, offsetting this belief is the considerable resistance among the community to Trelawney's predictions. This resistance thus suggests that while some members of the community accept determinism, the majority accept that individuals make their own futures; thus, individual decisions must be informed by careful thought and sound judgment, rather than based on faith in a preexisting outcome.

Power over viewing via technology in *Harry Potter* implies the extensive range of power held by those who control access to images. For example, both Dumbledore's and Voldemort's powers to conceal their actions from view has far-ranging influence because it endows them with the capacity to limit the range and scope of the information available to other characters; thus, the power to control their viewing is essentially the power to control access to information. Since decision-making is arguably dependent on the ability to gather and process information, characters denied access to information are similarly restricted from the exercise of their individual power. Harry Potter's invisibility cloak is similarly empowering in that it permits him access to information that would be otherwise unavailable as well as to deny this information to characters around him;

access to information is thus the power behind restricting viewing. Further, Harry's use

of the cloak to launch an unseen, and thus, irresistible attack on his enemies suggests both

the considerable range of power and near omnipotence of the controller of information, as

well as the potential for misuse of this control to achieve personal goals. Control over

access to viewing, then, is control over information, and by extension, control over other

people.

Power over viewing in the form of divination of symbols also suggests some

implications regarding the nature of visual literacy. First, the locating of important

patterns of events and human behaviour within images shows the capacity of the image to

satisfyingly represent human complexity and relationships; while that complexity resides

in the image, however, the image itself must be interpreted. Trelawney's attempt to

impose a meaning onto her students' interpretations of tea leaves and crystal ball images

shows that the power of the image is not simply the image itself but its capacity to

represent a wealth of meanings. Control over meaning making, then, is the ultimate

control over individuals because the image itself is meaningless without interpretation.

Trelawney's failure to convince her students to adopt her interpretations also suggests

that making meaning of patterns is an inherent aspect of individual decision-making and

agency, and one that goes hand-in-hand with accepting individual responsibility for

decisions and consequences. Thus, the series links the power of characters over symbol

reading to individuality.

Representing

Like power over viewing, power over representing also appears in the *Harry*

Potter series. Because conjuring is one means by which characters express themselves

and their intentions, the banning of magic is effectively a ban on representing. One

restriction over conjuring appears in the Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Under-

Age Sorcery, a lawful order imposing limits on the performing of magic by students

outside of Hogwarts (Rowling, 1998, p. 21). Similar orders prohibit specific individuals

from performing magic: the community's mistaken belief that Hagrid opened the

Chamber of Secrets during his own term as a student results in his expulsion from the

school and the removal of his ability to do magic: "They snapped me wand in half an'

everything" (Rowling, 1997, p. 59). Tools for representing, wands themselves also

participate in restricting magic use. Ron Weasley's wand, badly damaged in a car

accident (Rowling, 1998, p. 59), is ineffective; Ron's attempts to use it to perform magic

end in disaster: "He had patched up his wand with some borrowed Spellotape, but it

seemed to be damaged beyond repair. It kept crackling and sparking at odd moments,

and every time Ron tried to transfigure his beetle it engulfed him in thick grey smoke

which smelled of rotten eggs" (p. 74). Similarly, when Ron targets Malfoy for casting

racial slurs against Hermione, his wand malfunctions, leaving Ron comically belching

slugs (p. 87). Gilderoy Lockhart's attempt to seize Ron's wand to perform magic

likewise fails, with the wand exploding and the spell rebounding: "The Memory Charm

backfired. Hit him instead of us. Hasn't got a clue who he is or where he is" (p. 239).

Restrictions over performing magic are thus common in the *Harry Potter* series.

        Restrictions over conjuring are primarily exercises of active power because the

restrictions originate from specific agents who attempt to control another character's

actions. The ban on under-age and out-of-school magic clearly arise from the Improper

Use of Magic Office in the Ministry of Magic (p. 21). Harry's respect for this authority

is clear in his reluctance to challenge the decree: "Countless times Harry had been on the

point of unlocking Hedwig's cage by magic and sending her to Ron and Hermione with a

letter, but it wasn't worth the risk. Under-age wizards weren't allowed to use magic

outside school" (p. 11). Similarly, despite Dudley's harassment, Harry resists the

impulse to perform punitive magic against him or his relatives (p. 13). On the other

hand, Hagrid shows definite resistance to his prohibition, performing magic with the

broken pieces of his wand in a show of temper:

> He brought the umbrella swishing down through the air to point at Dudley
>
> – there was a flash of violet light, a sound like a firecracker, a sharp
>
> squeal, and the next second, Dudley was dancing on the spot with his
>
> hands clasped over his fat bottom, howling in pain. When he turned his
>
> back on them, Harry saw a curly pig's tail poking through a hole in his
>
> trousers. (Rowling, 1997, p. 59)

Aware of his prohibition, Hagrid takes deliberate steps to conceal the wand fragments in

a pink umbrella; further, when questioned by wandmaker Mr. Ollivander, lies about using

the pieces to perform magic (p. 83). Hagrid's resistance to the ban, then, is also a show

of active power because Hagrid claims for himself the potential power inherent in the

wand.

Characters who experience restrictions over representing also undergo the effects

of passive power. By protecting the community from either inexperienced or

unscrupulous wizards, these restrictions suggest the greater value placed on community

safety over individual self-expression; while community members have the right to

perform magic by virtue of their natural talents, the use of these talents is prescribed by

the safety needs of the community. Further, the process by which community individuals

acquire wands reinforces their belief that natural knowledge is more important than

acquired knowledge: characters try out a wide range of different wands for

responsiveness because "it's really the wand that chooses the wizard" (p. 82).   Finally,

the community's attentiveness to monitoring underage magic, as compared to its laxity

around enforcing specific individual bans from using magic, suggests different treatments

for adults and children: adults may be trusted to self-monitor according to an honour

system, while children require active supervision lest they turn delinquent. Restrictions

over representing thus communicate the wizard world's underlying beliefs about the

different roles and responsibilities of individuals within the community.

Power over representing also suggests some assumptions behind visual literacy

practices. The existence of a supervising body to monitor and regulate representing

behaviour shows a belief in the inherent danger of unlimited personal expression; thus,

the series suggests the importance of boundaries and limits to self-expression that

acknowledge the delicate connection between the needs of the individual and the needs of

the community. Freedom of expression, then, must be tempered with individual

responsibility. Further, the texts also imply the importance of the specific nature of the

tool of self-expression; just as the wand is specific to the character, so too should the

instrument of expression be carefully chosen on the basis of its relationship to the subject.

Finally, Hagrid is never punished for his subversion of the rules governing his magic use;

this absence of consequences suggests the basic right of all adult individuals for self-

expression, regardless of the external pressures to desist. The *Harry Potter* series thus

shows the profound power of the symbol in the hands of the enlightened, responsible individual.

Conclusions

The presence of visual literacies today as dimensions of literacy in full partnership with written and oral literacies suggests the extent to which power accompanies the viewing and representing of images. In the *Harry Potter* series, characters commonly use visual literacies as social practices to their advantage through the functions of exchange, notification, and domination /empowerment. The use of visual literacy by characters to specifically exchange information, however, appears only rarely in the novels, always in the single form of painted portraits, and when present, is mediated by oral literacy practices; that is, speaking and listening practices accompany characters' interactions with art. These characteristics suggest that the series upholds the usefulness of visual art for the purposes of exchange, but only in a limited way. Further, although many artistic representations hang freely throughout the walls of the school, characters in the novels never reflect on their aesthetic beauty or consider their capacity to inspire reflection (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1994; Greene, 1995a). Instead, characters interact with art entirely for gain in the form of accessing the potential power residing in the artistic subjects' information about their surroundings; for this reason, art in the series is always primarily practical and directly *useful*. For example, characters that take the time to conscientiously engage with these works of art in the series gain valuable information about their enemies (Rowling, 1999, p. 120). The artistic subjects of portraits are not true characters, however, and their range of knowledge is somewhat restricted in range. The

series thus suggests that when used to exchange information, viewing and representing

practices are primarily practical resources to supplement speaking and listening.

Far more common in the series than exchange is the use of visual literacy

practices as notification. Characters in *Harry Potter* very often rely on illustrations,

maps, photographs, symbols, and technology to inform other characters and audiences of

information without expectation of response. Again, the series upholds the forms of

visual literacy used in notification primarily for their practical usefulness, rather than

their aesthetic appeal; that is, characters in the series neither comment on visual literacy

representations regarding their visual beauty, nor express the emotions they inspire in

viewers. Instead, characters interact with visual images regarding their wealth of

potential usefulness; for example, illustrations warn of the consequences of high-risk

activity (Rowling, 1998, p. 124), the Marauder's map contains previously unknown

information detailing the whereabouts of other characters (Rowling, 1999, p. 144), and

technological devices advise the viewer of unseen threats (Rowling, p. 13). The series

also links the accessing of this potential to the viewer's proficiency in both viewing and

representing; that is, characters must learn how to read the map and how to understand

the significance of the visual image/ representation if they are to realize the message in,

and value of, the image. This situating of viewing and representing as skilled practices

that can be learned – explicitly, through lessons, or implicitly, through experience – is

consistent with a visual literacy perspective arguing for the importance of teaching

children visual literacy tools to help them manage their responses to, and the influence of,

their increasingly visual environment (Debes, 1969; Dondis, 1973). Since the meaning

/usefulness of the image to the viewer, however, depends on understanding the image in a

particular set of circumstances, however, the series suggests that the tools of

interpretation are not isolated, neutral skills, but embedded in the relationship between

viewer, image, and context. *Harry Potter* thus situates visual literacies according to a

critical media literacy perspective, showing that power through viewing and representing

is really the power of knowing how to use the image, and understand its significance in-

context (Sholle & Denski, 1995).

Visual literacy practices serving the notification function are also rich in passive

power. In all examples of viewing and representing, the visual images themselves are

realistic, with the images appearing to accurately represent reality; that is, nowhere in the

novels do surrealistic or abstract representations of art appear. The importance of this

realism is that it encourages the viewer to accept the constructed image as natural or

truthful (Masterman, 1985). For example, photographs in the novels shape viewers'

opinions of the subject's character (Rowling, 1999, p. 33), and symbols, too, such as the

representative animals for each school house, encourage viewers to adopt the values

underlying the community in which they appear; that is, symbols representing different

personality qualities encourage characters to adopt these qualities and to identify others

around them as belonging to particular social groups. Again, this use of the symbol to

influence the viewer toward adopting the constructed, preferred image suggests the strong

role of visual media and symbols in shaping value systems (Kellner, 1988). Passive

power thus informs the notification function of visual literacy practices by shaping

individuals toward adopting particular socially constructed identities that participate in

the formation of social groups.

Characters in *Harry Potter* also use visual literacy practices around technology and conjuring to dominate others and empower themselves. Acts of active power, domination/empowerment commonly occur in the series paired together. One example of this pairing appears when Voldemort attempts to use the Mirror of Esired to force Harry to find a previously hidden magical object (Rowling, 1997, p. 292); Harry instead uses the mirror to his own advantage by making it show him concealing the object in his pocket (Rowling, 1997, p. 292). In this instance, *Harry Potter* shows how an adept student of viewing/representing may carefully and craftily manipulate or construct an image to his or her individual gain. Similar pairings of domination/ empowerment appear when the children are tested with a shape-shifter that assumes the shape of their darkest fears, or their most ridiculous whimsy (Rowling, 1998, pp. 101-104). In this example, the novels again show how the enlightened viewer can manipulate or reconstruct the nature of an image to considerable advantage. In this way, the series highlights the act of representing as an act of power, and also situates the viewer not as a passive entity, but as an active participant; that is, if the image represents reality, characters can construct or reconstruct reality through manipulation of the image. *Harry Potter* thus suggests a critical media literacy perspective regarding the relationship between media and audience (Sholle & Denski, 1995) that highlights the individual agency of the viewer to use the power of viewing and representing to self-empowerment.

Harry Potter also suggests the profoundly disturbing consequences of active power over visual literary practices, or restrictions over viewing and representing. When that active power is directly over viewing practices, the dominated victims are severely disadvantaged because characters that control viewing essentially block other characters

from the information necessary for making informed decisions; without this power, characters are unaware of the nature of their circumstances, and consequently, unable to act responsibly on those circumstances. This awareness of the individual's role within the world, arguably at the centre of critical media literacy, is absolutely necessary if people are to act in and on the world around them (Kellner, 1998). Power over viewing is thus also power over participating in the construction/reconstruction of the social world.

Harry Potter also suggests the importance of claiming power over representing practices. Throughout the series, the community enforces restrictions against the practice of magic, itself an act of representing, by young children. These restrictions are not inherently punitive though, but guided by the sensible notion that responsible self-expression is learned behaviour. In this way, the novels again situate viewing and representing as social practices, and imply that although the desire to self-express is inherently human, this individual desire must be balanced by the needs of the community. Most importantly, however, because representing shapes the nature of the image (and the world) to meet a character's need, representing is an act of self-expression that helps individuals re-form their reality and thus change the world around them. Blocking characters from this self-expression denies them the tools necessary to participate in social reform. *Harry Potter* therefore suggests that claiming ownership of representing practices is an individual responsibility for acting on the world and participating in social change (Sholle & Denski, 1995). Thus, the series identifies control over visual literacy as an important site for contesting power, and centralizes the role of the enlightened, responsible citizen in using self-expression to foster change.

Power accompanies visual literacy practices by characters in *Harry Potter*. Most commonly, characters in the series use viewing and representing to notify others of information, a function rich in potential and passive power. Importantly, however, while the series shows how characters use image to inform an audience, *Harry Potter* also locates control over the production and interpretation of images as an extremely powerful form of domination and empowerment. Because characters that exercise active power over viewing and representing also exercise power over access to information, the novels show that power over visual literacies is also power over individuals in their ability to acquire awareness of their place in the social world, and to act on that world in responsible ways. The series thus suggests the importance of awareness of how viewing/representing practices help individuals construct and reconstruct their social world, as well as implies how power over visual literacy practices can interfere with social reform and responsible citizenship.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"To be literate is not to be free, it is to be present and active in the struggle

for reclaiming one's voice, history, and future" (Giroux, 1988, p. 65).

The debate surrounding the *Harry Potter* series centres, as it should, around the

value and appropriateness of the popular novels for children. Accordingly, educators and

concerned parents facing the decision whether or not to include the books in classrooms,

lessons, and libraries, must address the novels' content and messages. While much

research into the *Harry Potter* series todate has focused on themes around gender, class,

and race, the increasing presence of information technologies in children's lives across

the globe suggests the importance of also attending to what constitutes literacy practices

and their responsible use around these technologies. Attending to the messages about

literacy in *Harry Potter* highlights literacy's relationship with power and encourages both

teachers and students to consider the ideological implications that accompany literacy

practices in this digital age.

Conclusions

In this study, critical text analysis, as informed by critical social theory and

poststructuralism, was the methodology for investigating the novels' depictions of

literacy practices. Specifically, this study sought to examine how characters in the

fictional series used and experienced literacy across its three dimensions (reading/writing,

speaking /listening, and viewing /representing). This study described four

purposes/functions for which characters commonly used literacy. For three of these

functions (exchange, notification, domination /empowerment), the study explained how

characters advantaged themselves through literacy; for the single remaining function,

(restriction), the study showed how characters exercised power over literacy. These

mechanisms of the operation of power are consistent with Foucault's theory of power as

continuously and simultaneously experienced and exercised by individuals (Foucault,

1983, p. 98). The study then showed how different forms of power accompany literacy

practices: potential power, passive power, and active power. The study next analyzed

the ideological assumptions underlying the operation of each function of literacy. This

analysis yielded a number of conclusions regarding the role and importance of literacy in

Harry Potter.

Literacy as Exchange

One common function of literacy in the *Harry Potter* series is to exchange

information between characters. Readers and writers share written correspondence, such

as notes and letters; speakers and listeners use speech as in conversation; and painted

portrait characters trade information with members of the viewing audience, although

oral language mediates much of this particular form of exchange. The style of exchange

also varies between dimensions of literacy: written literacy styles range from informal

notes between friends to formal letters between institutional representatives and their

intended recipients; the vast majority of dialogue between characters is casual

conversation; and visual communication between portrait and viewer too is reserved but

informal. The frequency of each dimension of literacy similarly differs, with oral

dialogue the most common, and visual exchange the least frequently occurring, mode of

exchange in the novels. Importantly, the nature of the relationship between the

participants strongly influences the quality of the interaction: For example, conversations

between friends are equitable, but conversations between antagonists, and written

exchanges between authority figures and students, are largely one-sided. Thus, while the

exchange of information is a common function of literacy in the series, the specific nature

of the form of this exchange varies according to the different dimensions of literacy.

Two kinds of power characterize the exchange function of literacy in the *Harry*

Potter novels. All communicative transactions between characters have potential power

because the information being shared contains prospective value that may or may not be

realized by the characters; and passive power, because behind each exchange is

information about the community in which the exchange takes place: as characters share

letters, participate in conversations, and interact with art, they both send and receive

information about themselves and the world around them. Noticeably absent, however,

in the exchange of information between characters in the *Harry Potter* series is the

exercise of active power.

The exchange function of literacy suggests the importance of literacy's three

dimensions as sites for communicating authority, constructing social relationships, and

encouraging cultural awareness. Because characters commonly use reading and writing

to exchange information between peers, the novels show the usefulness of written literacy

as a medium of communication. The use of written literacy to specifically communicate

information from official institutional representatives to their clients further shows the

written word's continued trustworthiness and authority as a vehicle for interaction. As

the primary means by which all characters communicate with one another and share

information, speaking and listening are indispensable practices for constructing

relationships and forming cohesive social bonds; speech thus serves many social

functions in the series. The abundance of visual art within the series, and its almost

limitless wealth of potential power, in particular, also locates visual literacy as a valuable

resource for gaining knowledge about the past and present of the society in which art

resides. The series thus shows that literacy practices serving the exchange function are

bound to social context.

Literacy as Notification

In the *Harry Potter* books, characters also commonly use written, oral, and visual

literacy practices to notify or inform other characters of information without expectation

of a response. Characters in the series use many different forms of literacy when engaged

in notification: forms of written literacy include formal letters and notes, public

announcements, and periodicals; forms of oral literacy consist of dialogue, lectures, and

announcements; and forms of visual literacy encompass illustrations, photographs, maps,

symbols, and some kinds of technology. Authority figures, such as teachers, parents, and

institutional representatives, constitute the majority of writers and speakers who use these

forms of literacy to notify. Importantly, the notification function makes a strong

distinction between speaking and listening in that the information may be directed to an

intended recipient or overheard by an unintended listener; in both instances, the effect is

notification. Forms of visual literacy that serve the notification function also occur more

frequently in the series than oral and written forms. This occurrence is due to the nature

of photographs and symbols: as inanimate representations, they necessarily send

information but do not themselves respond to viewers.

Different kinds of power accompany literacy practices that serve the notification function. All forms of reading/writing, speaking/listening, and viewing/representing have passive power, because they communicate information about the community around them; and potential power, because they possess information on which characters may or may not choose to act. Classroom lectures, oral announcements, and visual symbols, however, are particularly rich in passive power, communicating much information about the community's underlying value structure and social norms. Further, dialogue, (surreptitiously overheard by an unintended recipient), illustrations, and photographs are strong in potential: in several instances, characters convert this potential to active power by using the information to their gain. Power in the notification function is thus largely in potential and passive forms, but in some cases, may also permit characters to dominate others or overcome circumstances.

The notification function suggests the important role played by literacies in controlling individuals, constructing relationships, and encouraging group membership. When used to inform audiences, written documents communicate authority and influence readers to respond in specific ways. Reading and writing are therefore literacy practices through which authority figures may exercise power. The quality of talk between characters in the novels also determines the nature of their relationship both in and out of classrooms; this participation in building relationships means that talk can reinforce or challenge existing social hierarchies. Visual images similarly function to persuade viewers to see themselves as members of particular groups, and thus participate in constructing and maintaining social groups; however, the novels also suggest that knowing how to manipulate or use the image is, in fact, another form of empowerment

through which social inequities can be acted on and transformed. The *Harry Potter*

novels thus make a strong case for locating passive and potential power through literacy

practices acting in the notification function.

Literacy as Domination/Empowerment

Characters in the series also use different forms of reading and writing, speaking

and listening, and viewing and representing to dominate other characters and to overcome

circumstances. Characters of all ages, class, experience, and gender exercise

domination/empowerment across the three dimensions of literacy practices in *Harry*

Potter, although this function appears most frequently with regard to oral literacy. Many

forms of oral literacy, including dialogue, reprimands, magic, and naming, help

characters triumph over both opponents and adversity. In contrast, few forms of written

and visual literacy serve this function: only letters/notes, books, conjuring, and

technology participate in domination/ empowerment.   The series thus suggests the

particular appropriateness of oral literacy practices to domination and empowerment.

While all forms of literacy have both potential and passive power, characters that

use literacy practices to dominate others and/or empower exercise active power. Written

letters and notes acting not as the vehicle, but as the extension of authority, enable

characters to control the behaviour of those around them. When used to dominate,

speech, too, frequently appears as a tool of oppression in the hands of a skilled speaker;

the reprimand, the invocation of magic, and the naming of characters, are verbal acts

through which speakers impose their will on to listeners. The naming function is

particularly shot through with active power in that naming is a way in which characters

construct individual and social identity. Characters also use forms of technology and

conjuring explicitly to command the viewer toward acting in particular ways; that is,

individuals use visual literacy practices to manipulate others around them.   Each form of

literacy participating in domination, however, also participates in some form of

empowerment. For example, the series shows books as valuable resources for

overcoming adversity, and dialogue as a means for collaborative problem solving

(Britton, 1969). In the *Harry Potter* books, the empowerment function of visual literacy

is particularly strong; characters overcome adversity by producing powerful, authentic

representations. Characters that use forms of literacy to dominate and empower thus

exercise active power over their enemies and their circumstances.

The domination and empowerment functions in the *Harry Potter* series suggest

deep connections between literacies and power, locating literacy practices as instruments

of both oppression and individual resistance.   Characters that use letters and notes in the

exercise of authority show the authority behind the written word. In the hands of capable

readers, books are powerful sources of information that may be applied to problem

solving. Importantly, however, the series also suggests that book-knowledge is not a

substitute for direct experience; the power of reading and writing is thus limited in range.

In contrast, the series suggests that proficiency in speaking and representing endows

characters with almost limitless advantages. A tool for teachers and other authority

figures, the oral reprimand controls individuals and groups through intimidation. Oral

spell-casters exercise explicit power over their enemies, as well as act on and transform

their surroundings, in advantageous ways. Because the assigning of names is also the

imposing of identity, the naming of others is also an act of domination, while the

renaming of oneself is an empowering act of self-invention. Similarly, characters that

control the shape and form of their enemies effectively control them and subject them to

their will. In summary, the series strongly supports proficiency in speaking and

representing as tools to exercise power over both individuals and circumstances.

The many ways in which characters in the *Harry Potter* series both undergo and

exercise power through reading and writing, speaking and listening, and viewing and

representing suggest that literacies are never neutral or independent, but value-laden,

context-dependent social practices in which power is always present (Gee, 1992). In the

Harry Potter series, characters undergo, exercise, and dispute power as they engage in

literacy practices across the three dimensions posited in a sociocultural, contextual

definition: reading and writing, speaking and listening, and viewing and representing.   A

critical study of written literacy's relationship with power shows that the series locates

reading and writing as particularly useful in accessing resources to solve problems and

communicating authority. Although the series shows oral literacy as similarly influential

on individuals and groups, the high frequency of speaking and listening in the novels as

tools of domination and empowerment suggests the series' endorsement of proficiency

with oral language as of great importance in contesting and resisting unequal power

relations. The series also identifies visual literacy as a persuasive instrument for

empowering individuals to act on their social conditions. The novels thus suggest that

there is considerable power through literacies for the proficient individual.

Restrictions Over Literacy

The *Harry Potter* novels also contain many examples of restrictions over literacy

practices across their three dimensions. Characters in positions of authority block weaker

characters from access to reading and writing materials. Some characters deny others the

right to communicate with other members of the community, and still others attempt to

coerce particular oral responses from reluctant respondents. The most frequently

occurring restriction to literacy in the series, however, appears around visual practices.

Characters use technology to restrict other characters from viewing/seeing aspects of

their community and they attempt to impose specific interpretations of visual

representations on viewers. Characters also place restrictions on conjuring, essentially

limiting where and when other characters can visually represent, express, or respond to,

their experiences.   The novels thus show many ways in which access to literacy can be

restricted.

Restrictions over literacy in the series are always acts of active power by visible

agents of authority. Harry's Uncle Vernon takes away Harry's schoolbooks by locking

them away, forbids the sending or receiving of letters and telephone calls, and silences

Harry from participation in household conversations. Other authority figures, such as

teachers, limit both the quality and quantity of student speech within their classrooms,

restrict the witnessing of characters and events, impose interpretations of visual

representations on students, and set limits on representational magic outside the

community. Restrictions around oral literacy, however, are rarely effective exercises of

active power: attempts by characters in the novels to coerce listeners into disclosing

information or producing particular responses generally fail; in this case, characters do

not successfully convert the potential power over literacy into its active form. Self-

inflicted silencing within the series is similarly the failed conversion of potential to active

power; the inability to overcome internal obstacles to speech is a denial of the potential

empowerment that accompanies using speech to meet one's needs. Successful

restrictions to literacy are thus acts of active power, while failed efforts to restrict speech

or to resist silencing thus remain in the form of potential power.

Restrictions over literacy practices in the *Harry Potter* books suggest the

magnitude of the importance of having power over literacy. Denied access to reading,

writing, speaking, and listening, characters are adrift without social ties and isolated from

participation in their community; thus, the books support literacies as practices through

which individuals and communities develop identities and memberships (Burke, 1969;

Steiner, 2006), and show that control over language is a powerful method of controlling

people. The novels also show that the inability to use oral language is essentially a

failure to self-actualize; speech is thus a powerful instrument for constructing identity,

resisting oppression, and overcoming obstacles. The series highlights the particular

importance of control over visual literacy. Because images represent multiple

interpretations, power over viewing is also power over making meaning, and thus, power

over individuals. Just as characters overcome adversity through their ability to make

authentic and meaningful representations, so too does the series suggest that self-

expression is one of the most fundamental rights of the individual, the exercising of

which may lead to profound social reform.

The *Harry Potter* books show while individuals gain many benefits through

reading/ writing, speaking/ listening, and viewing/ representing, control over these

literacies is necessary if individuals are to resist oppression and become empowered

citizens. The power of literacy in the *Harry Potter* series is, then, both the power

through, but more importantly, *ownership over*, the literacies fostered by new information

technologies so as to empower all individuals to participate in the making and remaking of the world.

Implications

Arising from the analysis of the *Harry Potter* books' depictions of literacy practices are implications beyond the series regarding the nature of literacy and its relationship with power. This power derives from the different ways in which literacies influence the individual characters and the community in which they appear; that is, as characters in the series use literacy practices for different purposes, they also undergo, experience, and exercise different kinds of power. Analysis of the operation of power and its consequences for the characters in the series suggests the integral role of literacy in mediating individual and community identity and thus participating in the constructing/deconstructing of the social world.

Social Practices

One of the central messages in the *Harry Potter* novels regarding literacy is that reading and writing, speaking and listening, and viewing and representing should be understood as social practices. This message is consistent with the current sociocultural definition of literacy informing the Common Curriculum Framework for Basic Education in English Language Arts (Governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, and Yukon Territory, 1998). The series communicates this conceptualization of literacy through its depictions of characters using different kinds of literacy practices not as discreet, isolated, or neutral skills, but for specific purposes bound to social contexts; that is, characters use written, oral, and visual literacies to

exchange and notify others of information, and to control both the world around them and the people in it. In this way, the series supports an understanding of literacy as context-specific practices that both appear in and draw meaning from the social communities in which they are used (Gee, 1999).

This embedding of literacy in social contexts carries important implications regarding the relationship between the individual and society. Arising as they do in specific circumstances and for social purposes, written, spoken, and visual literacies may be understood as processes by which society shapes individuals into particular ways of thinking, feeling, and acting: that is, through these literacies, the social world effectively *constructs* its citizens. This influence, however, is not unidirectional because individuals use these literacy practices in society and, thus, influence the world around them; that is, through literacy practices, individuals also act on, or construct, their social world. Importantly, awareness of this socially constructed nature of the relationship between the individual and society, and the role of literacy practices in mediating this relationship, suggests the opportunity to act on, or unmake, the world so as to foster positive change and improve social conditions: "once [we] recognize that … representations of reality are social constructions, [we] have a greater opportunity to take a powerful position…- to reject them or reconstruct them" (Cervetti, Pardales & Damico, 2001). The contextual nature of literacy in *Harry Potter* thus suggests the value of literacy as social practices through which marginalized and other subordinate groups can participate in the equitable reform of society (Giroux, 1993).

Literacies

A second finding from the analysis of literacy practices in the *Harry Potter* series is the situating of literacy as multiliteracies. The books express this message by showing characters developing and using literacy practices in specialized ways arising from a unique and particular context: an alternative, magical community. Literacies, then, are not fixed or independent, but fluid and mutable, evolving and shifting to meet new demands and purposes within a constantly changing context; that is, new literacies arise when individuals require them to interact with and manage new demands arising from their social communities (Wilinsky, 1990). In this way, *Harry Potter* shows that there must be many literacies, or multiliteracies, the natures of which may only become clear at some future time and place (New London Group, 1996). Just as information technologies drive individuals to develop new multiliteracies though, so too do multiliteracies lead to new ways for individuals to interact with their world, which further develops and drives new information technologies. In other words, multiliteracies permit individuals to act both in and on their circumstances, and so, again, help construct the nature of the social world. This view of the world as socially constructed through literacy practices is a hopeful message on several levels. First, technological innovations occurring in the world can never outstrip the adaptation and development of new forms of literacy for individuals to interact with and on the world around them; literacies, thus, become "part of students' tool kits for understanding, critiquing, and engaging with the global flows of images and texts that they confront daily" (Luke, 2003, p. 20). In addition, the presence of multiple literacies arising from multiple social contexts echoes Derrida's (1978) notion of 'play of the world' and the multiplicity of meanings that become available through

active interpretation of the interaction between individual and world. Understanding

literacies as multiple, contextual practices thus makes space for new forms of literacy

accompanied by infinitely expansive definitions of text, culture, and language.

Power Through Literacies

The operation of power through literacy practices in the *Harry Potter* series

suggests how literacies mediate the relationship between the individual and the social

world. Power in the series appears in passive, active, and potential forms, the operation

of each deriving from the contextual, situated nature of literacies. One form of power,

passive/socializing power, accompanies all literacy practices and strongly influences or

participates in the construction of individual identity; in this way, it is through the

operation of passive power that the world constructs its citizens. Passive power is an

integral partner with literacies as social practices because the social world is not

independent of political, historical, and cultural values but bound to and constructed by

human principles: "literacies are foregrounded in relations of meaning making specific to

social institutions and are ideologically charged" (Hagood, 2000, p. 312). The result of

this contextual nature and deep ideological core is that the kinds of literacy practices used

by individuals within a community imply the values and beliefs of the community itself.

As characters in the *Harry Potter* series use literacy practices across its many forms, they

undergo exposure to the values underlying its production and existence, and thus,

passively undergo socializing influences. Passive power, however, should not be

confused with weak power; it is an extremely powerful form of influence, relying on

internal surveillance and operating by covertly conditioning individuals to see social

constructions as normal and natural (Foucault, 1977). Importantly, then, the operation of

passive power through literacies implies how individuals are shaped by the literacies they

use and encounter (Shor, 1999).

Like the operation of passive power, the operation of active power through

literacies in *Harry Potter* suggests another aspect of how literacies mediate the

relationship between individuals and society. Unlike the passive power that individuals

undergo, however, active power is the exercise of power by individuals over the

conditions of their society; thus, individuals use active power to act on, or construct, their

social contexts. Active power, too, derives from the contextual, situated nature of

literacies because the purposes for which characters use literacy practices are necessarily

social/interactive in nature; that is, characters in the series do not use literacies to

dominate or empower in a vacuum, but always in particular contexts.

The role of active power in the use of literacies to dominate/empower suggests

some important implications beyond *Harry Potter*. First, the empowerment of

individuals through literacies highlights the enlightened, responsible individual as a

powerful agent of social reform who, after reflecting on the socially constructed world, is

ready to transform it (Freire, 1990; Janks, 2000); in this way, individuals do not merely

passively undergo the socializing effects accompanying literacy practices in social

contexts, but themselves actively participate in determining and shaping the nature of

those contexts. The important role of literacies in the transformation of social conditions

is, however, not an endorsement of the original Literacy Thesis, the tenacious claim that

literacy (defined as reading/writing) was largely responsible for sweeping human and

cultural advancements (Goody & Watt, 1963; Olson, 1977). To accept the literacy thesis

is thus to argue exclusively for the empowering effects of literacy. This argument,

however, ignores the uses of literacy to dominate or oppress subordinate groups, an

oppression that arguably does much less to advance society than it does to encourage its

regression (Comber & Nixon, 1999). In addition, the literacy thesis isolates

reading/writing practices as the specific agents through which individuals were able to

achieve cognitive and cultural advancements (Eisenstein, 1979; Ong, 1982). This focus

on written literacy practices ignores the many ways in which speaking and listening, as

well as viewing and representing, mediate individual acts of domination/empowerment

and are just as, if not more, powerful than reading and writing as instruments of active

power. Given the rapid proliferation of new multimedia technologies arising in our

globalized society, this centralizing of written literacies seems especially shortsighted.

Because acting in the world is also acting on it, the operation of active power shows that

literacy practices are extremely powerful instruments for individuals to reconstruct social

inequalities and initiate the process of social reform.

A third form of power, potential, also shows how literacies participate in shaping

the nature of the relationship between the individual and society. Potential power, unlike

active or passive power, is neither experienced nor exercised by individuals, but exists as

resources that reside in different forms of literacy, such as books, speeches, or

photographs, etc. The importance of this potential power is that it is through this

potential that the opportunity for passive and active power through literacies originates,

because *awareness* of this potential is what guides the conversion of potential into active

or passive kinds of power. One way of understanding the important role of potential is to

conceptualize it not as an operation or process, but as a seed, the animation of which

makes possible other activities and mechanisms of action. Importantly, this potential

power of literacies arises again from social context; that is, the value of the resource as knowledge is bound to historical and social conventions around the definition of knowledge itself and the discourses available for representing that knowledge and giving it meaning in-context (Hall, 1997).

The realization of potential power, or its conversion to another form of power, is an integral element of how literacy practices participate in constructing and shaping both the world and its citizens. To activate the seeds of potential inherent in literacy resources, characters in the *Harry Potter* series engage in literacy practices around these resources: they read and write, speak and listen, and view and represent ideas and opinions. These acts of communicating and disseminating information constitute the first steps through which they, as individuals, make decisions about their position in the social world. In turn, because this communication and discussion are social activities, different social groups take some of the ideas up in different ways and at different times. When these ideas are accepted as natural and normal within the community, the potential power in the original seed may be understood as converted to passive power; when individuals take up these ideas and try to act on their social conditions, this original potential is converted to active power. In both instances, it is the potential inherent in literacy resources that suggest the unlimited range of influence of literacy practices on the relationship between individuals and society.

The operation of passive, active, and potential power through literacies in and out of the *Harry Potter* series suggests the many ways in which literacy practices participate in the constructing of the social world. Making visible the invisible operation of socializing power through literacy practices encourages awareness of the socially

constructed nature of literacies as multiple, contextualized social practices, and creates a

space for active resistance to oppressive conditions. Art critic Suzi Gablik (1994) best

sums up the role of potential power in this relationship in planting the seeds of social

reform; although she specifies 'writing' in this quotation, her argument equally applies to

speaking and representing practices:

> … writing, I've found, has some effect in the world; it does the one thing I
>
> think it is possible to do, which is to influence people towards a change of
>
> heart, or a change in consciousness. And once that happens, then the
>
> system – and the values it embodies – begins to look different to you. You
>
> haven't necessarily changed anything about it, but it does become harder
>
> to muster up the same enthusiasm for being part of it. (p. 47)

The *Harry Potter* series shows the considerable potential power of literacy in shaping

constructions of individual and community identity, but also highlights the enlightened,

aware individual as an agent of social change.

Power Over Literacies

The exercise of power over literacies by characters in the *Harry Potter* books

suggests some disturbing implications. First, power over literacies in the series is not the

active power of empowerment but always appears as domination; that is, characters that

exercise this power do so exclusively to manipulate and control others around them. The

operation of active power over literacies thus shows how control over literacies is always

the oppression of subordinate groups. Bowman and Woolf (1994) identify several ways

in which this power over literacies (texts) can appear: "restrictions placed on writing, on

access to and possession of texts, on the legitimate uses to which the written word might

be put, and perhaps most importantly, restrictions on reading texts" (p. 7). The

consequences of these and other restrictions over texts as domination are considerable,

impacting the individual, society, and the nature of their relationship. Because literacies

are social practices, restrictions over literacies, both in the *Harry Potter* novels and

beyond, isolate individuals from both acting in and on their social contexts. Denied

access to their communities and the influences that otherwise would shape individual

identity and action, these individuals are essentially unmade as social beings who depend

on social context and interaction for identity. The consequences of restrictions to literacy

are thus profound; that is, power over literacies, then, is the power over the very nature of

the social world itself.

Recommendations

If an analysis of depictions of literacy practices in *Harry Potter* suggests the

importance of power through and over literacies in this socially constructed world, what

are the implications of these conclusions for educators? Teachers today face enormous

pressures around the influence of new multimedia and information technologies on

children. Ignoring these technologies and clinging to traditional definitions of literacy

marginalizes teachers and widens the gulf between the classroom and its place in the

community beyond school borders. Further, in this digital sea, children have

unprecedented opportunities to experience and participate in many different kinds of

literacy events, but supervision and guidance increase the likelihood that they will

navigate this sea both safely and responsibly. Teachers then must rise to this challenge

and meet this important need.

Critical Literacy

To help children meet the demands of current and emerging information technologies, educators must understand literacy as context-based, multiple, and evolving social practices. A critical literacy, or critical media, perspective helps teachers guide children to think about how their individual actions impact on society, and how the underlying values of society impact on the construction of individual identity. Questioning why some constructions of knowledge are legitimated in particular societies while others are not encourages individuals to develop critical awareness into the social conditions of their existence. That awareness can then be applied to challenging the status quo and exploring social reform. Critical literacy thus highlights the critically conscious individual as the agent of social transformation:

> We are what we say and do. The way we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become. Through words and other actions, we build ourselves in a world that is building us…Yet, though language is fateful in teaching us what kind of people to become and what kind of society to make, discourse is not destiny. We can redefine ourselves and remake society, if we choose…. This is where critical literacy begins, for questioning power relations, discourses, and identities in a world not yet finished, just, or humane. (Shor, 1999, p. 1)

In the classroom, teachers can implement critical literacy in a number of ways. They can emphasize student-centreed voices as tools with which students can reflect on and construct meanings from texts and discourses: "critical teachers promote classrooms that value student voices, experiences and histories as part of the course content"

(Cadiero-Kaplan, 2002, p. 379). Reflection is important because when accompanied by

rich dialogue, it encourages students "to understand experiences and texts from our own

perspectives and the viewpoints of others and to consider these various perspectives

concurrently" (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 383). In this way, students can

begin to see themselves not as passive recipients of information, but as powerful, active

agents within the larger social context. This empowerment is particularly important for

marginalized individual and groups, including at-risk youth and cultural minorities,

striving to adopt more powerful roles in their discourse community (McGuirk, 2001).

Critical literacy teachers also invite students to consider how language can serve different

interests. This awareness will encourage students to address the social implications of

language use. Although it is challenging to commit to student-centreed discussions about

provocative power-laden issues in the classroom, critical literacy offers educators a solid

foundation from which to guide children to explore issues of identity and social reform.

Critical literacy is particularly warranted for helping children manage the deluge

of information now readily available. As the number of home computers with internet

access subscriptions rises, the challenge is not how to get meaning from the World Wide

Web, but how "to make meaning from the array of multimedia, complex visual imagery,

music and sound, even visual worlds that confront us each day" (Tasmanian Office for

Curriculum, 2003). Halpern (1998) warns that if children are not taught how to deal with

the deluge of data that must be "selected, interpreted, digested, evaluated, learned, and

applied …they are in danger of having all the answers but not knowing what the answers

mean" (p. 450). Fischer (2006) observes that children more readily acquire facility with

new technologies than adults: "We navigate [the cyberworld's] surface, but our children

frolic in it like dolphins" (p. 253). This easy navigation, however, does not teach

children how to understand the assumptions behind new media forms or to use it

responsibly. For these reasons, the role of critical literacy teachers is crucial.

Critical Media Literacy

A close relative to critical literacy, critical media literacy addresses the particular

influence of popular culture. As previously discussed, critical media literacy encourages

children to gain awareness of the complex nature of the media and to take an active,

critical stance with regard to interpreting its influence within various cultural and social

contexts (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999). Despite its centrality in the lives of most

children, however, popular culture appears only peripherally in many schools. Giroux

and Simon (1989b) explain that this omission is in some part a result of the

uncomfortable relationship between popular culture and traditional classroom pedagogy:

> At first glance, the relationship between popular culture and classroom
>
> pedagogy may seem remote. Popular culture is organized around the
>
> investments of pleasure and fun, while pedagogy is defined largely in
>
> instrumental terms. Popular culture is located in the terrain of the
>
> everyday, while pedagogy generally legitimates and transmits the
>
> language, codes, and values of the dominant culture. (p. 221)

Similarly, while popular culture is usually aimed at and appropriated by students,

pedagogy "authorizes the voices of the adult world of teachers, and school

administrators" (p. 221). The ignoring of popular texts in our classrooms is therefore

based on what appear to be mutually opposing goals and values of traditional pedagogy

and popular culture.

Despite these differences, students respond with high levels of interest and engagement when popular culture is the subject of classroom study (Grace & Tobin, 1998). Carmen Luke (1997) argues that beyond promoting student motivation on the basis of pleasure, studying popular culture in the classroom is a necessary part of making the curriculum relevant and fostering healthy relationships between teachers and students: "if schooling refuses to deal with the texts of everyday life . . . then educators will indeed widen, not bridge, the experiential and knowledge gap between both teacher and student" (p. 47). Giroux and Simon (1989a) add that because popular culture is associated with students' voices, educators who refuse to acknowledge students' choices effectively disrespect their students:

> By ignoring the cultural and social forms that are authorized by youth and simultaneously empower or disempower them, educators risk complicitly silencing and negating their students. This is unwittingly accomplished by refusing to recognize the importance of those sites and social practices outside of school that actively shape student experiences and through which students often define and construct their sense of identity, politics, and culture. The issue at stake is not one of relevance but of empowerment. (p. 3)

In addition to promoting student engagement, popular culture products can be the vehicle for encouraging classroom discussion into the relationship between emerging information technologies, literacy practices around these technologies, and power. This discussion is important in light of the wealth of information technologies regularly used by children, including video games, the Internet, and text messaging. Investigating

fictional depictions of literacy practices across various kinds of popular fiction will

stimulate students to consider their own relationship with information technologies and

the role of literacies in mediating this relationship.

A View of Representing

One aspect of critical media literacy and popular culture for teachers and students

concerns the increasingly important role of viewing and representing practices in

children's lives. Textual analysis of depictions of literacy in *Harry Potter* show that

more than any other practices, viewing and representing possess potential power that may

be converted to active power and empowerment. This empowerment appears in the use

of Mirror of Esired (Rowling, 1997), the transformation of the shape-shifter Boggart

(Rowling, 1999) and the summons of the formidable Patronus charm (Rowling, 1999).

The powerful potential inherent in representation as a literacy practice is considerable;

acting on and changing the images before them, characters in the series reconstruct the

shape of their desires and fears, allowing them to overcome their circumstances.

Beyond the pages of *Harry Potter*, the profound potential for self-empowerment

can be realized in many forms of visual literacy, among which is television and film, two

media that are highly visual in nature. Giroux (2001) argues that although it is tempting

to categorize popular films as superficial treatments, they should be understood as

powerful educational tools:

> Films do more than entertain, they offer us subject positions, mobilize
>
> desires, influence us unconsciously, and help to construct the landscape of
>
> … culture. Deeply imbricated within material and symbolic relations of
>
> power, movies produce and incorporate ideologies that represent the

outcomes of struggles marked by the historical ideologies that represent

the deep anxieties of the time … Put simply, films both entertain and

educate. (p. 3)

Giroux identifies the source of films' educational potential not simply in its social

commentary, but in its capacity to put forth alternative perspectives on the world "in

order to create the possibilities for people to be educated about how to act, speak, think,

feel, desire, and behave" (p. 3). In this way, film is a form of representing that

encourages viewers to actively reflect and act on the world.   For these reasons, it is

important for teachers to increase the role of viewing and representing literacy practices

in classrooms as accompaniments to conversations about the nature of literacy and its

relationship with power.

        Children intuitively understand many of the empowering consequences of

viewing and representing practices. Their play is their work: they construct avatars to be

characters in video games and they imagine new identities for themselves for instant

messaging as they work and play to make meaning of their world and their position in it.

When educators ignore the role of visual literacy practices, whether through video games,

television, film, or online role-playing, in our children's lives, we not only ignore an

opportunity to enter their lives, but we dishonour the unique experiences that they bring

to learning and growing both in and beyond our classroom walls.

        In the end, our decisions as educators come down, as they should, to the value and

appropriateness of our pedagogical materials and practices to children. In truth, we are in

children's lives for only a very brief time; they streak through our classrooms on their

way to places we have not been and likely will never visit – cyberspace, digital worlds,

and imaginative elsewheres, the shapes of which are still unformed and nebulous. In

another popular novel appealing to both children and adults alike, author Gregory

Maguire suggests the power of art and other human representations to profoundly

influence individuals and communities. In *Confessions of an ugly stepsister* (1999),

Maguire draws, in words, a picture of a picture. This picture heartbreakingly captures

our relationship to the children we teach and help raise, and, in doing so, explains why

we teachers must remain powerfully committed to guiding our children toward awareness

of their own responsibilities in the making and unmaking of the world they will surely

inherit:

> It would have made a nice painting, were someone to choose something as
>
> lowly as that to study. Another story, a story written in oils rather than
>
> one painted on porcelain. But to be most effective, the faces of the
>
> children would need to be painted in a blur, the way all children's faces
>
> truly are. For they blur as they run; they blur as they grow and change so
>
> fast; and they blur to keep us from loving them too deeply, for their
>
> protection, and also for ours. (p. 368)

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Appendix A

Summaries:

Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone (Rowling, 1997)

The first book in the series begins with the placement of infant Harry Potter on the doorstep of the home of his relatives. Orphaned and scarred in an attack on his parents that also culminated in the death of their attacker, Harry lives with his adoptive family until the occasion of his 11th birthday, when he learns of his inherited talent for magic and receives an invitation to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Leaving his uncaring relatives, Harry journeys to the school and in the process, meets other children, some of whom, such as Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, will be his friends, and others, such as Draco Malfoy, who will be his rivals.

Arriving at the school, Harry and the other students are magically sorted into school houses that reflect their strongest character traits. Harry, Ron, and Hermione become members of Gryffindor, a house that celebrates bravery. As the children attend classes and learn how to perform different kinds of magic, they also develop suspicions that the evil Lord Voldemort, murderer of Harry's parents, has returned to life and is seeking the Sorcerer's Stone, an object that grants eternal life to the holder. After conquering a series of challenges, Harry confronts Voldemort who has possessed Professor Quirrell, the current teacher of Defense Against the Dark Arts. Voldemort commands Harry to look for the stone in the Mirror of Esired, a magical device that reveals to the viewer his or her deepest longings, but Harry tricks Voldemort, and keeps the stone in his own pocket. An attempt to physically attack Harry leaves Quirrell burned

from the contact and Harry unconscious. When Harry awakens in the hospital, Professor

Dumbledore, Headmaster of the School, explains to him the details of his parents' death

at the hands of Voldemort, and the reason why Harry himself was uninjured, save for a

scar, in the attack: Harry's mother's sacrifice left him magically protected from evil.

Finally, at the end of term banquet, Dumbledore awards the coveted House Cup to

Gryffindor, largely due to the efforts of Harry and his friends.

Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets (Rowling, 1998)

The second book in the series begins with Harry back with his relatives for the

summer holidays where he eventually encounters Dobby, a house elf, who tries to

prevent Harry from returning to Hogwarts in the fall. Dobby's efforts reveal to Harry's

uncle the existence of a ban on students from performing magic outside the school; this

information inspires Harry's uncle to lock him into his room. Increasingly concerned by

Harry's unresponsiveness to his letters, Ron Weasley appears at Harry's window in a

flying car and frees Harry, who then escapes with him to spend the rest of his holidays

with the Weasley family.

The school term begins with challenges for Harry and Ron who finally arrive at

the school via the flying car, an act for which they are punished. While at the school,

Harry begins hearing threatening voices in his head; accompanying these voices are

mysterious attacks on fellow students by a monster from the Chamber of Secrets, a

hidden room that, according to legend, lay closed until the heir of Slytherin returned to

free the monster within who would purge the community of mixed-blood ancestry. By

virtue of his newly discovered ability to speak the language of snakes, Harry is suspected

of culpability in the attacks, and with his friends, begins to investigate the matter. After

the monster attacks Hermione, she leaves a clue to its identity in a torn page from a book,

and Harry realizes that the creature is a basilisk and that entrance to the Chamber of

Secrets lies within a girl's bathroom. Just as Harry and Ron prepare to share the

information with their teachers, they learn that Ron's sister, Ginny, has been kidnapped

by the basilisk and taken into the Chamber itself. Accompanied by an unwilling and

confused Professor Gilderoy Lockhart, the boys access the Chamber where Harry meets

Voldemort again, this time in the form of Tom Riddle, his former identity as a student

himself at Hogwarts. Riddle reveals to Harry that Ginny, under Riddle's control via an

interactive diary, both opened the chamber and committed the attacks on the students.

Finally, Riddle himself calls the basilisk to kill Harry, but Harry receives help from both

Fawkes, Dumbledore's phoenix, and a silver sword, eventually destroying Riddle by

piercing the diary with the basilisk's fang.

Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban (Rowling, 1999)

        After another unpleasant summer with his relatives, Harry performs an illegal act

of magic against a visitor and runs away to London on the Knight bus, an emergency

transit system for wizards. Arriving at his destination, Harry discovers that the

authorities are more interested in protecting than punishing him. Apparently, Sirius

Black, betrayer of Harry's parents, has escaped from Azkaban prison, and is seeking

Harry.

        School begins with the arrival of the Dementors, ghostly guards that drain

happiness from others. Particularly responsive to their ill effects, Harry takes private

lessons from Professor Lupin, the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, who tries

to instruct him in the very difficult Patronus charm. Meanwhile, Harry uses his

invisibility cloak and the Marauder's Map to access the village of Hogsmeade where he

overhears the details about Black's betrayal and learns that Black is his godfather and

legal guardian.

Eventually, a large dog attacks Ron and drags him to the Whomping Willow.

When Harry and Hermione follow, they find Black, who they discover is an Animagus,

with the ability to transform into a dog. Bursting in is Lupin, who reveals his own

werewolf status, as well as the truth about Ron's rat Scabbers, who is actually the

Animagus Peter Pettigrew and the true betrayer of Harry's parents. Before they can share

the truth with Dumbledore, however, Lupin transforms in the light of the moon, and in

the accompanying scuffle, Pettigrew disappears and Sirius is captured by the Dementors.

Unable to save his godfather, Harry is despondent until Hermione reveals the time-turner,

drawing them back in time where Harry is able to rescue Black by performing the

Patronus charm. While Black's innocence cannot be proved, and he must remain in

hiding, he nevertheless sends a note granting Harry permission to visit the village of

Hogsmeade that begins their new relationship together.