

Distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation in the  
context of adult literacies education:  
Understanding power and enacting equality

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### **Declaration**

I declare that I have composed this thesis by myself and that it embodies the results of my own research. Where appropriate, I have acknowledged the nature and extent of work carried out in collaboration with others included in the thesis.

Sarah Galloway

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## **Abstract**

This thesis considers a theoretical tradition which is concerned with how adult literacies education might not always serve to socialise students into existing society, instead encouraging possibilities for desirable alternatives to it. Without this possibility, adult literacies education might only be understood as a socialising machine that slots students into society as it stands and where the role of research is to describe its operation. My research describes a long-standing refusal by educators, researchers and students to accept this possibility and my thesis continues this tradition.

Through the analysis and interplay of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, James Paul Gee, Paulo Freire, Jacques Rancière, I distinguish between empowerment and emancipation in the context of literacies education. I set out the assumptions that Bourdieu and Gee make, how they understand power, identity, discourse and oppression, and what this means for the practice of an empowering adult literacies education. I also present assumptions made by Freire and Rancière, how they understand equality and oppression, and how an emancipatory literacies education might be understood and practiced. In particular, I describe how education for ‘empowerment’ encourages practices underpinned by the assumption that ideological processes prevent students from understanding how oppression is manifested. In contrast, I describe how an emancipatory education implies enacting educational relationships that are *not* reliant on this assumption, whilst exerting a social response to societal oppression.

I make three claims. Firstly, that the idea of an emancipatory literacies education has come to be neglected or conflated with the idea that literacies education might empower, which has come to hold great sway. In so doing, I critique Freire’s work

whilst reclaiming it as an emancipatory project. Secondly, that the educational practices associated with adult literacies for empowerment can be understood to encourage the socialisation of students into society as it stands. This emphasises the importance of distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation in the context of adult literacies education. Finally, that emancipation is a notion that must continue to be questioned and explored if educators, students and academics are to take responsibility for the practice of adult literacies education and its consequences. An emancipatory literacies education *cannot* be reliant upon the assumption that discourse is inherently ideological. Instead, it is predicated upon teachers and students assuming that emancipation is possible and acting on that assumption.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 *Summary of research*

This research considers theory and ideas associated with the understanding and practice of adult literacies education with attention given to a tradition that links education to notions of empowerment or emancipation. This tradition aims to describe an adult literacies education that might create possibilities *other* than training adults in literate skills and practices in order to assimilate them into society as it stands. Or to put it another way, it is a literacies education orientated towards the possibility of emancipation from the current social order and the creation of desirable alternatives to it.

This idea is particularly associated with the educational ideas and practices of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (e.g. 1970, 1972, 1986) who theorised how education might encourage ‘emancipation’. It is also associated with some of the educational practitioners and theorists of education who are broadly associated with what has become known as the ‘social practice’ model of adult literacies education. Here education is associated with the notion of ‘empowerment’ (e.g. New London Group, 1996, Gee, 1996; Lankshear; 1999, Lankshear and McLaren; 1993a, 1993b, Crowther, Tett and Hamilton, 2003; Janks 2010). My research draws upon all of these ideas.

If the possibility of an empowering or emancipatory education could not be assumed, adult literacies education might only be understood as a form of socialisation that slots students into society as it stands. Education would be part of a socialising machine that could be described and understood but with no prospect of any alternative to it. The ‘emancipatory’ or ‘empowering’ tradition in adult literacies education refuses to accept



this, instead assuming that either an ‘emancipatory’ or ‘empowering’ education is possible. Working in this tradition my research also makes this assumption.

The idea of ‘empowerment’ and ‘emancipation’ seem to draw upon contrasting conceptualisations, suggesting different educational purposes and practices, implying that a distinction might be made between the two notions. Exploring this distinction is a main aim of my research. In addition I explore a range of issues and problems that have previously been set out by educators and researchers who have given attention to the possibility of an empowering or emancipatory adult literacies education. For example there is a wide body of discussion that has criticised Freire’s ideas and educational practices for ‘emancipation’. There is also a range of debate amongst ‘social practice’ researchers that raises unresolved problems associated with adult literacies and ‘empowerment’.

Having this body of criticism and debate to draw upon means that the problems and issues that my project seeks to explore have arisen from an existing tradition that has questioned the purpose of adult literacies education; they do not originate with me. The purpose of my research is to encourage the continuance of this questioning by exploring old routes that have been neglected or new ones that bring alternative ways of understanding unresolved problems that have already been described. The purpose is not to arrive at definitive conclusions as to how an emancipatory literacies education should be understood or practised. Instead I make three claims that point towards the importance of questioning and exploring the emancipatory potential of adult literacies education by educators, students and researchers. Firstly I argue that the idea of an emancipatory literacies education has come to be neglected or conflated with the idea of

a literacies education that might empower, which has come to hold great sway. Secondly, I claim the possibility that educational practices associated with understandings of adult literacies for ‘empowerment’ might encourage the socialisation of students. This suggests that a distinction between empowerment and emancipation *must* be made if literacies education is to be understood to serve anything other than a socialising function. I go on to consider ways that theorists of education have attempted to explore the possibility of emancipation. Contextualising this discussion within the practice of adult literacies education encourages my final claim, which is that emancipation is a notion that must continue to be questioned and explored if educators, students and academics are to take responsibility for the practices associated with adult literacies education and their consequences.

To make the case for these claims my research takes the form of setting up and initiating an exploration that questions ideas about emancipation or empowerment in the context of adult literacies education, whilst still assuming that emancipatory alternatives are possible. To contextualise the exploration with reference points that might enable a meaningful discussion, I describe, define and detail some ways in which empowerment and emancipation have been understood previously. I do this by selecting theorists who have been influential in the context of adult literacies education and exploring and comparing their ideas in the fashion of setting up a conversation. I then introduce the ideas of theorists who have not yet been influential into the discussion in order to further explore the emancipatory potential for adult literacies education. This takes the conversation into new or perhaps forgotten territory. My intention is not to reach definitive conclusions about how an emancipatory literacies education should be understood. Instead, the intention is to argue the need for the discussion to continue by

initiating a conversation that might have the potential to continue beyond the confines of my research project.

I have already alluded to how the prospect of distinguishing between adult literacies education for empowerment and adult literacies education for emancipation is integral to the main aim of my research and the associated objectives. I have also mentioned how this arose from the existing discussions and ideas of educators, students and researchers who have given attention to the purpose of adult literacies education. In this chapter I introduce my project by summarising some of the history of understandings about adult literacies education (which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2), and how this links with the aim and objectives of my research. I then go on to introduce the research design that serves to meet these objectives. Finally I summarise the findings of my research and the claims that I make. But I start by outlining a brief history from which I contextualise my aims and objectives.

## ***1.2 Background***

Historically, literacy education has been associated with the idea that being able to read and write has wide-reaching and predetermined consequences for both individuals and society as a whole, which is an old notion with unknown origins. Gee (1996) speculates that the idea may have arisen amongst the first writers to write about writing, such as Plato. The idea is associated with what academics would describe as ‘functional’ understandings of literacies education (e.g. see Street, 1984), where it is assumed that learning to read and write has repercussions beyond enabling someone to function more effectively in a particular situation. For example the research of classics scholars and

anthropologists backed up the idea that learning to read and write promoted different ways of thinking about and understanding the physical and social world (e.g. Havelock, 1986; Goody and Watt, 1988; Ong, 1988). An ‘illiterate’ was presumed to be incapable of understanding abstract ideas, ordering information or constructing arguments. ‘Illiteracy’ was even linked directly to criminal activity and literacy education, which was defined as reading and writing only, was thought to promote desirable ways of behaving to the benefit of society as whole (see Hamilton, 1996, pp. 146-47, Webb, 1955, p. 15, Lankshear and Knobel, 2003, p. 4).

These ideas continued to be prevalent amongst academics and educators until the 1970s when they were countered and discredited by empirical researchers such as Scribner and Cole (1981) and Graff (1979). In the UK context they were also countered by educators and students (see Street 1984, or Frost and Hoy, 1980) with some influence from Paulo Freire (e.g. 1972, 1970, 1986) and perhaps Raymond Williams (e.g. 1993, 1993a, 1993b).

The academic work of Scribner and Cole and Graff demonstrated empirically that there were no wide-ranging or predetermined consequences of learning to read and write in terms of the psychological development of individuals, opening the way for wider definitions of literacy. Understandings of literacy education moved away from psychological theory that placed emphasis on the cognitive development of individuals and towards sociological theory and linguistics (Lankshear, 1999), described by Gee (2000) as the ‘social turn’. This gave rise to ‘social practice’ understandings of literacies education alongside an orientation in academic research which became known as New Literacies Studies (e.g. Street, 1984; Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; Crowther, Tett &

Hamilton, 2003). The ‘social practice’ understanding of literacies assumed there were no predetermined consequences of reading and writing. Rather, any consequence was assumed to be rooted in the social contexts in which literacies are used, including contexts of power, with some (but by no means all) researchers giving particular attention to how power and empowerment might be understood (e.g. Crowther, Tett & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996).

The ‘social practice’ understanding of adult literacies education raised the question of the purpose of adult literacies education. Educators and researchers holding to ‘functional’ understandings assumed that the purpose of adult literacies education was to achieve the predetermined and predictable outcomes of being able to think abstractly, construct arguments, to categorise etc. as well as being able to function effectively in specific roles in work or family life. However, as this notion had been discredited there was some level of discussion as to what the purpose of adult literacies education might be (e.g. Scribner, 1988; Lankshear, 1999; Hamilton and Hillier, 2006).

Those who have given attention to adult literacies education and the question of purpose (e.g. Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Scribner, 1988; Gee, 1996; Lankshear, 1999) have generally described three overlapping domains or dimensions. Firstly literacies education aimed at giving people skills required for everyday life including the workplace; secondly the literacies skills required for the continuation of cultural traditions such as the arts or religious ritual where the written word might be given intrinsic value. Thirdly, the idea of a ‘critical’, ‘powerful’, ‘emancipatory’ or ‘radical’ literacies, described in terms of ‘empowerment’ or ‘emancipation’. It is this third domain or dimension that attempts to describe a literacies education that might not serve

to socialise students, instead raising the possibility of more desirable ‘emancipatory’ or ‘empowering’ alternatives. It is this third strand that my research seeks to explore in the context of adult literacies education.

As I have already mentioned, the ‘emancipatory’ notions of adult literacies education are strongly associated with the work and ideas of Paulo Freire (see Scribner, 1988; Gee, 1996; Hamilton & Hillier; 2006). Understandings about the possibility of an ‘empowering’ literacies education have been developed amongst researchers whose work can be associated with the ‘social practice’ tradition (e.g. Crowther, Hamilton & Tett, 2003; Gee, 1996; NLG, 1996; Janks, 2010; Lankshear, 1997).

Taking the latter first, literacies education for ‘empowerment’ tends to be associated with understandings about how relationships of power are reproduced and replicated in society. Power is defined with reference to inherently undetectable processes by which people’s identities are formed through the production of ‘discourse’, where the assumption is that discourse is inherently ideological in character. This leads to the idea that students might alter existing power hierarchies by authoring new identities. An empowering literacies education would involve teachers equipping students for this task by delivering the correct knowledge about how discourse operates and orchestrating situations where proficiencies in a given discourse might be picked up. In the first instance this raises questions as to what is meant by the terms ‘discourse’, ‘identity’ and ‘power’, suggesting that understanding these concepts might be necessary to a meaningful discussion about the possibilities for an empowering literacies education.

In contrast, adult literacies education for ‘emancipation’ relies upon different understandings and is not reliant upon defining power in relation to identity or discourse, or understanding how power operates ideologically. Instead, emphasis is placed upon the character of the relationship between teachers and students and their relationship to symbolic human artefacts such as writing or photographs (e.g. see Freire, 1972, or Rancière, 1991). For example, Freire (1970, 1972) conceptualises how educational relationships might enact emancipation, promoting social ways of reflecting and acting upon the ‘world’ that allow people to be ‘free’, where the idea of freedom is rests upon the assumptions he makes about the qualities that contribute to the expression of what it means to be human. This raises questions as to what is meant by ‘freedom’, ‘equality’, ‘oppression’ and being ‘human’ (or a ‘human subject’), where again, understanding and defining these concepts is necessary if literacies education for ‘emancipation’ to be discussed meaningfully.

I will show that the idea of literacies education for empowerment is distinctively different from education for emancipation, suggesting a demarcation might be made between the two. My arguments will centre on understanding this distinction, in the context of adult literacies education, with the potential to initiate a discussion that might continue beyond the confines of my research project. This is the main aim of my project and in the next section I demonstrate the link between this main aim and the associated objectives as well as how these sit with the research design which I set out in Chapter 3.

### *1.3 Aim and objectives*

As I have already mentioned, all the issues and problems that I explore in my research have already been raised by educators, students or academic researchers who have given

attention to the idea that adult literacies education need not always serve to socialise students into society as it stands. In other words, I have drawn from the ideas of those who assume that an emancipatory or empowering adult literacies education might be possible. This means that the assertions emerging from the literature review are integral to the emergence of the main aim of my project, the objectives, the research questions and the strategies employed to meet them. As with many PhD projects the first objective was to undertake a literature review that maps out understandings and issues relating to adult literacies education, which I set out in Chapter 2. Given the importance of the literature review to my research I will discuss its design along with other design aspects below. But first I contextualise and describe the other objectives associated with the main aim of my research.

As described in the previous section, the main aim is to explore whether it is possible to distinguish meaningfully between adult literacies education that might contribute towards empowerment and adult literacies education that might create possibilities for emancipation. This aim emerged my reading of my academics and educators who refuse to accept that adult literacies education can only lead to the socialisation of students. Instead their work assumes that an ‘empowering’ or ‘emancipatory’ purpose is possible and so my research aims to continue this tradition by furthering an exploration of this possibility. At the same time I have raised the issue that unless or until the concepts of ‘identity’, ‘discourse’, ‘power’, ‘oppression’, ‘equality’, ‘human subject’ etc. are described in more detail, it would be difficult to sustain a meaningful discussion that further explores ‘empowering’ or ‘emancipatory’ purposes for adult literacies education. The second and third objectives of my research are designed to address this issue so that some reference points might be created to inform a meaningful further



exploration. To do this, I set the objective of undertaking and analysis of the work of theorists who are particularly associated with defining assumptions and concepts upon which the notions of empowerment and emancipation are understood. I consider what one theorist's work implies for the theory of another, setting then against and within each other. In particular I consider the theorists' work in the context of the educational problems that I identify in the literature review.

Considering literature from the 'social practice' tradition that has given attention to the idea of empowerment as a purpose for adult literacies education, two theorists hold great sway. Firstly, there is *James Paul Gee*, who has influenced Lankshear (1997), Crowther, Hamilton and Tett (2001), NLG (1996) and Janks (2010). Secondly, the theory of *Pierre Bourdieu*, whose influence can be found amongst Luke and Freebody (1997b), Janks (2010), Fairclough (2000), Heath (1983) and Gee (1996). This lays the basis of the second objective of my research which is to analyse and explore the work of Bourdieu and Gee in relation to how the notion of literacies education for empowerment might be understood and practised and what the implications might be for defining literacies. The results of this analysis are set out in Chapter 4.

The idea of adult literacies education for 'emancipation' is influenced most strongly by the ideas of Paulo Freire (e.g. 1970, 1986, 1972), as suggested by Scribner (1988), Hamilton and Hillier (2006) or Gee (1996). His influence is found in education projects associated with movements of political liberation in Latin America (Archer and Costello, 1990) or in approaches to teaching writing to adults in the England (see Frost and Hoy, 1980). There is also a wide body of criticism of Freire's ideas (e.g. Taylor, 1993; Ellsworth; 1989, Coben, 1997; Gee, 1996; Luke, 1992; Gur-Ze'ev, 1998), again

indicating the scale of his influence. Given this context it would be strange not to include Freire in any exploration of the ideas that have influenced adult literacies education and emancipation.

However, Freire's work is typically cited in relation to discussions about empowerment or resisting power as a purpose for education (e.g. see Scribner, 1988; Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Oughton, 2007; Rocha-Schmidt, 2010; Tagoe, 2008; Stromquist, 2006; Brookfield, 2005; Barton, 1994; Luke, 1991; Ellsworth, 1989; Archer and Costello, 1990; Biesta, 2010a; Inglis, 1997<sup>1</sup>), where the idea of emancipation is either lost or conflated with the idea of empowerment. This thesis can be understood, in part, as serving to rediscover Freire's work as an endeavour to understand and practice education as emancipation rather than empowerment, simultaneously disentangling the conflation of the two notions.

Alongside Freire, I bring a theorist of emancipatory education with little influence in the context of literacies education into the analysis. Like Freire, Jacques Rancière (1991, 1999, 2007, 2010) theorises 'emancipation' as an educational process and I claim that he attempts to discuss and explore very similar problems to those set out by Freire. I demonstrate this by reconstructing the ideas of both theorists and the results of this analysis are set out in Chapter 5. This lays the basis of the third objective of my research which is to reconstruct and explore the work of Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière in relation to how the notion of literacies education for emancipation might be understood and practised and what the implications might be for defining literacies.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed Inglis goes further by defining the resistance or transgression of power as 'emancipation'. However, my research suggests that that the 'emancipatory' educational practices that Inglis associates with this aim would effect socialising outcomes. I make this argument in Chapter 4, where I describe Inglis's 'emancipation' as 'empowering' rather than 'emancipatory'.

I read the theories of Gee, Bourdieu, Freire and Rancière describing the assumptions that they make and what this means for educational practices and purposes. Also, whilst reading, I make the assumption that an emancipatory education is possible (and I engage with what I mean by this in Chapters 3, 6 and 7). My reading allows me to offer a more detailed setting out of how adult literacies education for ‘empowerment’ or ‘emancipation’ might be understood and practised and I discuss how I undertook the analysis below. My reading of the theories demonstrate how terms such as ‘identity’, ‘discourse’, ‘equality’ or ‘oppression’ might be defined in different ways. This creates reference points that can inform a continuing discussion that might bring in the ideas of other theorists and educators who have given attention to the possibility of emancipation or empowerment in the context of education. My detailed analysis of Gee, Bourdieu, Freire and Rancière also brings to the fore criticisms, issues and concerns that have been raised about the ways that adult literacies education for empowerment or emancipation has been conceptualised and practised.

This sets the scene for the meeting of the fourth and final objective of my research, which I set out in Chapters 6 and 7. This is to draw upon the discussions I have set out in order to develop an argument that has the potential to continue beyond the bounds of the research, exploring how adult literacies education might serve emancipatory purposes. In Chapter 6 I explore how education for empowerment might be distinguished from education from emancipation, addressing the central aim of the project. In doing so, I describe how a literacies education for empowerment can be understood to be inherently problematic as it implies practices that serve to socialise students. This highlights the importance of making a distinction between empowerment

and emancipation in the context of existing discussions amongst researchers and educators where the two notions are often conflated.

As well as distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation in terms of what they imply for educational practice, I also consider their implications for the criticism of the theory and practice of education. There are implications here for the methodology that underpins this research including questions about the extent to which research activities might reinforce inequalities (e.g. as raised by Schostak and Schostak, 2008). I discuss this in Chapter 7 alongside an exploration of the emancipatory potential of adult literacies education.

Before going on to outline how the design of my research sits with the emergence, description and meeting of the aim and objectives, I summarise them again:

### **Aims**

To explore whether it is possible to distinguish meaningfully between adult literacies education that might contribute towards empowerment and adult literacies education that might create possibilities for emancipation.

This is a theoretical study with no empirical element and such the research activity consisted of writing a series of interconnected essays. I did not start out with three or four overarching questions, rather I commenced with an aim and strategised how to meet it through a series of essays, each answering a different question. This means that the questions were identified as the study evolved, each informed by the findings of

essays that preceded it, though they are not presented chronologically in this text. It also means that the literature review was significant to the emergence of the research aim, as well as the design and methodology, and so I make explicit the questions that drove the literature review here in this section. I discuss the design and methodology in detail in Chapter 3.

## **Objectives**

1. To conduct a literature review that maps out the ideas, problems and issues that have arisen from those who have given attention to the purpose of adult literacies education.

### **Associated research questions:**

- i. What are the ideas that have informed and defined adult literacies education historically?
- ii. What was the context in which adult literacies education evolved as a formal part of the education system in the UK?
- iii. How has the purpose of adult literacies education been understood by academics, educators and students?
- iv. How has the possibility of non-socialising purposes for adult literacies education been understood or practiced by academics, educators and students?
- v. What problems have been raised by academics, educators and students about the understanding and practice of adult literacies education?

2. To consider the work of Pierre Bourdieu and John Paul Gee in relation to how the notion of literacies education for empowerment might be understood and practised, and what the implications might be for defining literacies.

**Associated research questions**

- vi. How do Bourdieu and Gee conceptualise an empowering literacies education?
  - vii. How are the notions of ‘power’, ‘identity’ and ‘discourse’ understood in the context of literacies education?
  - viii. How do the problems and issues associated with the practice of an empowering literacies education arise from the assumptions that the theorists make?
3. To consider the work of Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière in relation to how an adult literacies education for emancipation might be understood and practised, and what this implies for defining literacies.

**Associated research questions**

- ix. What are the assumptions that Freire and Rancière make?
  - x. How do Freire and Rancière conceptualise ‘equality’ and ‘oppression’?
  - xi. How do Freire and Rancière conceptualise an emancipatory education?
4. To draw upon discussions amongst academics, educators and students, as well as the ideas of theorists of education including Bourdieu, Gee, Freire, Rancière and Gur-Ze’ev, to distinguish education for empowerment from education for emancipation and describe why this distinction matters.

**Associated Research Questions**

- xii. What do the ideas of Bourdieu, Gee, Freire and Rancière imply for how an empowering education might be distinguished from education that creates possibilities for emancipation?
  - xiii. How can criticism of Freire's ideas taken from an empowerment perspective be contrasted with criticism raised by those who attempt to describe an emancipatory education?
  - xiv. How might education as a process of *subjectification* be understood and how does this sit with understandings of education for empowerment?
5. To develop an argument that has the potential to continue beyond the bounds of the research, that considers how adult literacies education might serve emancipatory purposes.

**Associated research questions**

- xv. What do understandings about the possibility of an emancipatory education imply for research methodology?
- xvi. How can an adult literacies education for emancipation be understood?

#### ***1.4 Design***

As I have already mentioned, the issues and problems that this research seeks to explore have already been raised by those who have given attention to the idea of an adult literacies education for 'empowerment' or 'emancipation' and the design of the literature review was integral to both the emergence of the aim, as well as the objectives of my research and the strategies employed to meet them.

### *Selection and analysis of literature*

I have also mentioned that where attention has been given to the possible purposes of adult literacies education, three overlapping dimensions of purpose have been described (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006; Scribner, 1988). The first two dimensions refer to literacies for employment or for participation in cultural traditions, both of which might be understood as forms of socialisation. The third dimension of purpose is the idea of ‘critical’, ‘powerful’, ‘emancipatory’ or ‘radical’ literacies, described in terms of ‘empowerment’ or ‘emancipation’. I utilise three-dimensional conceptualisations of purpose to structure the literature review in three ways. Firstly, I use the three-dimensions to situate the history of the practice of adult literacies education in the UK and its associated ideas in its historical context. To do this I utilise Raymond Williams’ three-dimensional conceptualisation of the history of adult education in Britain. I use his strands of ‘Industrial Training’, ‘Old Humanism’ and ‘Public Education’ to select and structure literature that describes the history of the emergence of adult literacies education as a formal part of the education system in Britain. This also encourages emphasis to be placed upon the activity and ideas of educators and students who have given attention to the possibility of adult literacies education as empowerment or emancipation.

Secondly, the three-dimensional conceptualisations orientate me towards literature that questions the purpose of adult literacies education and its emancipatory or empowering potential and suggested routes to me for drilling down into it. I commenced with no prejudgements as to how an empowering or emancipatory education might be recognised or understood and had no way of selecting literature on these grounds. The three-dimensional conceptualisations of purpose afforded me a strategy for selecting



literature for review. In the first instance I selected on the basis that the literature gave attention to the broad idea that adult literacies education need *not* always socialise students. This raised a range of literature which I could examine to gain an impression of how these ‘non-socialising’ alternatives were understood. It was from this analysis that the orientations of ‘empowerment’ and ‘emancipation’ were identified and so the main aim of the research project emerged.

At this point, terms such as ‘oppression’, ‘equality’, ‘the human subject’, ‘discourse’ and ‘power’ were raised as did the necessity for these to be defined and understood in more detail for any further exploration to be meaningfully described and discussed. It was from this need that the objectives of the research emerged. But what’s important here is that the three-dimensional conceptualisations were key in enabling the judgements that I made in selecting literature for review and so determining the aim and objectives of my research. The three-dimensional conceptualisations were themselves raised by researchers and educators associated with adult education, which is significant in demonstrating again that it is issues raised by other researchers that have influenced the formulation of my research.

Biesta’s (2010, p. 5, p. 21) three-dimensional conceptualisation was influential in developing strategies for drilling down into the literature that had given attention to questions of empowerment or emancipation so that the two might be distinguished. Biesta, who has given attention to the possibility that education might emancipate (e.g. 2006, 2010; Biesta and Bingham, 2010) describes three overlapping domains that might inform discussion about educational purpose or function. The three domains are *qualification* which is education aimed at being able to do something, be it cooking or

passing examinations; secondly, *socialisation*, where the purpose is to incorporate students into existing cultural traditions; and thirdly, *subjectification* which is not about slotting students into existing society, but rather education orientated towards a notion of freedom that raises possibilities for emancipatory alternatives to existing society. Whilst Biesta's first two domains are broadly congruent with those described by Scribner, Freebody and Lo Bianco, Hamilton & Hillier and Williams, the third domain is concerned with *subjectification*, as a process of being and becoming a human subject, which he associates with the notion of emancipation.

Of course this raises questions as to how *subjectification* might be understood and why the notion of *subjectification* is important or necessary to understanding education as emancipation. For the purposes of this research exploring these questions whilst assuming that an emancipatory education is possible has influenced my approach to analysing the ideas of Gee, Bourdieu, Freire, Rancière and to a lesser extent Gur-Ze'ev. It has obliged me to undertake a deep level of engagement with ideas and concepts without which 'empowerment' and 'emancipation' could not have been distinguished meaningfully in the context of education. In this sense, exploring emancipation as *subjectification* has been key to my undertaking of this thesis and meeting its central aim.

The strategy that I employed to analyse the literature, particular that of Gee, Bourdieu, Freire and Rancière, needed to furnish me with reference points to allow a more meaningful exploration of the issues. It also needed to initiate a developing process of argument and conversation that might have the potential to gain momentum and

continue beyond the bounds of the research. To accomplish this I examined the theories in pairs; Bourdieu and Gee and then Freire and Rancière.

For both pairs I consider the theories in parallel, detailing the assumptions that each theorist makes. I then describe how the assumptions inform each theorist's understanding of oppression. Finally I describe how each theorist's understanding of oppression informs their conceptualisation of a literacies education that might overcome oppression, either through processes understood to empower (as with Gee) or through a process of emancipation (as with Freire or Rancière). This approach is justifiable on various counts. Firstly, it emphasises the assumptions that theorists make about human beings, demonstrating that these are just assumptions and cannot be taken as immovable certainties. It also demonstrates how assumptions are linked to how empowerment or emancipation can be understood and ultimately related to understandings about how literacies education might be practised, showing how the practices teachers employ might be associated with the assumptions that they make about people.

Whilst my approach to analysis shows there is no definitive way of understanding education, it does demonstrate how empowerment or emancipation might be understood, creating some reference points for the continuance of meaningful discussions. It also foregrounds the problems that have been raised historically about understandings of empowerment or emancipation, including those identified in the literature review and in the critique of Freire's work. Again this shows how these issues might be connected to the assumptions that the theorists have made.

Considering the theories in pairs and in stages also demonstrates that understandings of empowerment and emancipation inform different approaches to criticism. Empowerment and emancipation can be distinguished by what they imply for the critique of ideas and practices pertaining to education and this enables me to set up a conversation between the theories, encourages opportunities for raising further issues and problems. As the aim of my project implies, the purpose is not to come up with a definitive understanding of an emancipatory literacies education, rather to commence an exploration about the potential of emancipatory literacies education, driven by a refusal to accept that education can only serve to socialise students into society, with a momentum that could enable its continuance beyond the confines of my project.

### *1.5 Discussion and claims*

My analysis of the work of Gee and Bourdieu (in Chapter 4) results in a more detailed description of how an adult literacies education for ‘empowerment’ might be understood. Both theorists define power in relation to processes by which people are identified or labelled. They both argue that the ways that people write, speak or create other symbols such as facial expressions contributes to the reproduction of power hierarchies in society. Importantly, they argue that these processes are not recognisable to people who engage in them. This means that teachers and students might engage in educational activity that reproduces power hierarchies without being able to understand their own part in it and against their best intentions, through processes that are understood to be ideological in character (see Eagleton, 1991; 2-3, 198). Bourdieu and Gee also link power reproduction to people’s ability to access ‘goods’, so that literacies education can be seen to influence issues of fairness in how goods are distributed amongst people. Whilst Bourdieu seems to offer no way out of this situation, Gee

suggests the possibility of an empowering literacies education that might counter these processes. This is reliant upon teachers giving students skills and knowledge about how discourse operates so that they may deliberately intervene in its production and alter existing hierarchies of power, perhaps even influencing access to ‘goods’ in society.

In my analysis I claim that Gee and Bourdieu’s definition of power reproduction as being inherently undetectable by the people who participate in it has problematic repercussions for how an ‘empowering’ literacies education is understood. Most importantly, the conceptualisation of empowerment seems to necessitate educational practices that encourage students to be dependent upon teachers for their own empowerment. The assumption is that students cannot understand the power relationships that they are a part of and must always be reliant on experts, be they teachers or researchers, to pass them knowledge about this. The result is a paradox where empowerment rests upon students remaining dependent upon teachers, seemingly replicating existing power hierarchies rather than altering them. It is also a notion which implies that revealing how power operates might contribute to changing its operation for once processes of power replication are detected, they are weakened. But this is entirely reliant upon experts from the outside where empowerment might be delivered through improved programs and policies. A second issue is that empowering literacies education is predicated upon the idea that students might identify or label themselves in different ways. However, there seems to be no adequate way to decide whether any new identifications and new power relationships are more desirable than those they replace. Thirdly, literacies for empowerment relies upon understandings that are underpinned by a definition of inequality, where equality is yet to be. This makes empowerment a

situation to be worked towards and achieved in the future the concern being that it might be forever over the horizon, never to be realised.

Taken together, the issues I described above suggest that the understandings upon which the idea of an empowering literacies education are predicated imply educational activity that serves to socialise students into society as it stands, whilst neglecting or denying the idea that emancipation is possible. In response, I don't accept that understandings about the sociological reproduction of power, identity and discourse must be taken as the starting point for discussions about the possibilities for creating educational alternatives. Instead I take theories of education as a starting point, such as those of Freire and Rancière, which might describe possibilities for an emancipatory literacies education. This re-orientates the discussion away from 'identity', 'discourse' and 'power' and towards 'equality', 'the human subject' and 'emancipation', where *subjectification* might be considered as an educational process that does not map onto the domain of socialisation (Biesta, 2010).

Distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation, my analysis of the work of Freire and Rancière (in Chapter 5) describes how, unlike empowerment perspectives, emancipation isn't a state to be worked towards in the future, but an assumption to be taken and enacted in the present. This suggests that emancipation is temporary and fleeting, described by the quality of active relationships between teachers, students and the educational materials that they use. Whilst the idea of literacies for empowerment is underpinned by a definition of inequality, emancipation as an educational process relies upon a definition of equality, where oppression is understood as the enactment of relationships between teachers and students that undermine equality. Such oppressive

relationships are understood to encourage knowledge transmission between teachers and students, whilst an emancipatory educational relationship encourages equality by dismantling this process.

The very possibility of an emancipatory education relies upon the assumption that there can be a release or break from the current social order, as there might be new ways of being and doing that have yet to be identified. This links understandings of education as emancipation to questions about what it means to be an active and speaking human subject, described as a process of *subjectification*, which I describe in Chapter 6. Unlike Bourdieu and Gee, Rancière and Freire do not rely upon notions of identity and discourse. Drawing upon Rancière and also Gur-Ze'ev, in Chapter 6 I attempt to describe *subjectification* as a process of 'dis-identification' or 'anti-identification' with repercussions for how an emancipatory literacies education might be understood, which I set out in Chapter 7<sup>2</sup>.

I explore Freire as a theorist who has given much attention to literacies education and the possibility of emancipation. In Chapter 5 I claim that both Freire and Rancière attempt to describe emancipatory education, providing a basis for making judgements about whether the outcomes of education are desirable whilst avoiding the problem of creating dependency between students and teachers for knowledge. However, as I have already mentioned, there is a large body of criticism of Freire's theory and its practical repercussions for teachers and students. I detail this discussion in Chapter 6 where I distinguish criticism of Freire taken from the perspective of empowerment from

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction I make between empowerment and emancipation, in the context of education, contrasts with other attempts to demarcate the two notions (e.g Inglis, 1997; Wildemeersch and Olesen, 2012) which I critique in Chapters 4 and 6.

criticism raised through assuming the possibility of emancipation as a purpose of education, drawing upon the work of Biesta, Rancière and Gur-Ze'ev. This encourages my claim that empowerment perspectives tend to limit criticism to questions about how power has been accounted for in the context of ideas and understandings of education and its associated activity. However, taking the possibility of emancipation as a starting point raises a depth and breadth of discussion which question the grounds that make education possible and expresses concern for the continuance of human qualities that are integral to being and becoming an active human subject, such as responsibility, intellectual freedom, human love or trust. Exploring education for emancipation doesn't mean giving attention to an impossible and therefore irrelevant notion, rather, it could expand and give depth to discussions and debates whilst firmly rooting them in the problems and concerns of students, educators and researchers.

In my concluding chapter I discuss what understandings of education as emancipation imply for the research methodology underpinning this project as well as addressing the title of my project by exploring the emancipatory potential of adult literacies education. I claim that research activity designed on the basis of assumptions about the ideological character of discourse and power might be understood to replicate inequality and I attempt to describe how my own project gets around this problem. I also reflect upon how my own research has consisted largely of analysing literature, be it the writings of educators, students and researchers, or the seminal works of theorists and philosophers, demonstrating that there are limits to what this type of research activity might achieve in the context of a project that seeks to understand emancipatory education.



In exploring the emancipatory potential of adult literacies education, firstly I claim that it cannot be enacted through educational programs or improvements in policy which means that my conclusions cannot take the form of instructions to teachers and students that they might follow to achieve emancipation. I also claim that an emancipatory literacies education cannot be predicated upon students gaining a particular literate skill, or take the form of students' story telling or exerting a cultural identity. I claim that an emancipatory literacies education *cannot* be reliant upon the assumption that discourse is inherently ideological, rather that it is predicated upon teachers and students assuming that emancipation is possible and acting on that assumption. It seems that a distinction *must* be made between empowerment and emancipation if the possibility of an adult literacies education that does *not* serve to socialise students is to assumed and enacted. This means that possibility of an emancipatory education must continue to be assumed and discussed if teachers, students and researchers are to continue to take responsibility for the purpose and function of adult literacies education.

## ***1.6 Summary***

In this chapter I have described how the main aim of this research has arisen from historical discussions amongst researchers, educators and students who have questioned the purpose of adult literacies education. I described their ideas, including the idea of there being three dimensions or domains of purpose for adult literacies education which I utilised to structure a literature review from which the objectives of my research emerged. I have described the objectives and the main strategies employed to meet them and I have briefly outlined the discussion and claims which are integral to my exploration. I now commence describing all of this in more detail as I embark upon

meeting the first objective of my research, which is to set out the issues and problems associated with adult literacies education as part of a review of literature.

## **2 Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Introduction***

In this chapter I meet the first aim of this thesis, which is to map out the issues and problems that have been raised by academics, educators and students who have given attention to how adult literacies education might be understood and practised. In so doing I address the first five research questions. Firstly I present the ideas that have informed and defined adult literacies education historically. Secondly, I consider the historical context of the development of adult literacies education as a formal part of the education system in the UK. I then outline the purpose of adult literacies education as it has been understood historically by academics, educators and students, introducing the idea that education might have a purpose other than socialising students into existing society. I examine the purpose of adult literacies education in more detail, considering the work of researchers who have given attention to this question. Here I describe the possibility of non-socialising purposes for adult literacies education as they have been understood or practiced by academics, educators and students. Finally, I map out the problems have been raised by academics, educators and students about the understanding and practice of an adult literacies education.

To address the topics outlined above, I explore three areas of literature. I commence by describing the ‘functional’ and ‘social practice’ models around which understandings about adult literacies education tend to orientate. I discuss how the development of the ‘social practice’ model has drawn from a range of academic disciplines, in particular sociological understandings which allow the power contexts of literacies education to be considered. This approach allows readers new to research in adult literacies education to become familiarised with how the field is typically presented by researchers, before I

take it into different territory. It also allows readers already familiar with this context to start their journey through my research and its arguments from a place of common understanding. Secondly, I utilise a three-dimensional conceptualisation of adult literacies education informed by Raymond Williams. This allows me to introduce the idea of there being distinct purposes for education, including the possibility of education for emancipation or empowerment. It is also an approach which contextualises ideas about education which have arisen from educators and students as well as academics, drawing out their pertinence to my research and so justifying their inclusion. Finally, I employ several three-dimensional conceptualisations of education, allowing the question of education purpose to be considered in more detail, raising the idea that empowerment and emancipation are associated with distinct understandings and educational practices in the context of adult literacies education.

My strategy enables the articulation of problems and issues as raised by researchers, educators and students so that they might be explored in later chapters, giving rise to the main aim, objectives and research questions. It also contextualises these discussions within understandings about the possible purposes of adult literacies education.

Broadly, the issues raised are of two types. Firstly there is the issue of whether it is possible to distinguish between education that socialises students into the existing social order and education that might encourage the creation of alternative and more desirable social formations. The review of the literature suggests that this issue is closely linked to the idea that literacies education for empowerment must be demarcated from literacies education for emancipation, an idea that shapes and informs the main aim of my research and the objectives explored in subsequent chapters (see Sections 1.5 and

3.1). Secondly, there are issues relating to how the terms empowerment or emancipation are used by educators, students and academics. Notions such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘emancipation’ are linked to other concepts such as ‘power’, ‘identity’, ‘discourse’, ‘oppression’, ‘equality’, ‘socialisation’, ‘justice’ and the notion of the ‘human subject’, raising questions about how these might be understood. Again, raising and seeking to address this issue informs the formulation of my research objectives.

The design of this literature review is instrumental to the design and justification of the research project itself and I discuss this in Chapter 3, when I consider the methodological underpinning of this thesis. But first I set out the literature review that I outlined above.

## ***2.2 Ideas that have informed adult literacies education historically***

In this section I describe the ‘functional’ and ‘social practice’ models of understanding adult literacies education around which academic discussions tend to orientate. The terminology of ‘functional’ and ‘social practice’ models of literacies was developed in the 1980s and 1990s as part of the emergence of a strand of scholarship now known as New Literacies Studies (NLS). However ideas that correspond with these two models can be dated back to earlier decades. For example, a ‘functional’ understanding of literacies can be found in the United States’s army’s definition of literacies for soldiers in the 1940s (Harman, 1970). Similarly, understandings associated with the ‘social practice’ model could be found in the work of literacies educators and students in England in the 1970s and early 1980s (Street, 1984), before New Literacies Studies was established. This section describes the emergence of the understandings associated with

how the two models emerged historically, including the development of New Literacies Studies itself.

### *‘Functional’ Literacies*

The concept of functional literacy is associated with the reading and writing skills required for people to function effectively within society, perhaps in relation to specific forms of employment or particular social functions such as parenthood. The notion of functional literacy also incorporates the idea that there are predetermined and wide reaching consequences of learning to read and write with predictable repercussions for individuals, social groups and society at large. In this section I explore these ideas in historical context, starting with the first formal definition of functional literacy which states that:

*‘A person is functionally literate when he [sic] has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group’*

(Gray, 1956, p. 24)

This definition was produced after consideration of the ideas of fieldworkers engaged in literacies projects around the world in the 1950s, who Gray had researched under the auspices of UNESCO. UNESCO has promoted adult literacy campaigns in ‘developing’ countries since 1948. ‘Developed’ nations were not included because countries with compulsory schooling, as in Western Europe, automatically returned statistics to UNESCO recording a zero for illiteracy rates (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006).

Gray described a prevalent notion at that time, where the ability to read and write was directly linked with being able to acquire an understanding of the world where ‘Only as such understanding develops will they [the students] be able to acquire keener insight, more rational attitudes and improved behaviour patterns’ (Gray, 1956, p. 19). Here the purpose of adult literacies education, which refers to reading and writing only, is to encourage people’s chances of slotting into what was considered to be a well-functioning society. The first students tended to be people who were regarded as dysfunctional, such as teenage mothers, prisoners and those with ‘inferior psychic health’ (see Lankshear and Knobel, 2003, p. 4).

This sits with the British history of literacies education where the earliest contexts for teaching adults were the army and prisons. Army tutoring commenced on an *ad hoc* basis in 1846, undertaken by a teaching corps set up to educate the children of higher ranking career soldiers. Reading and writing was also a focus for nineteenth century prison reformers, such as Elizabeth Fry, where crime was linked directly to lack of education and illiteracy in particular (see Hamilton, 1996, pp. 146-47, Webb, 1955, p. 15).

Literacy rates (i.e. for reading and writing) amongst the working class population as a whole in Britain had grown during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century though varying greatly across the country with reading rates ranging from less than 10% in areas of high rural or urban poverty to almost 100% in lowland Scotland (Webb, 1955, pp. 15-20). There was a mushrooming of popular reading matter from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, from gossip sheets through to political philosophy. For example, Thomas Paine’s’ *The Rights of Man* sold 200 000 copies in 1793, with abridged versions selling for less than

a shilling (ibid, p. 38). In England working people placed value on paying school fees so that their children might attend a wide variety of mainly charitable provision including Sunday schools (ibid, p. 15-20) and school attendance in England doubled between 1833 and 1853. In Scotland during the same period literacy rates were lowest in the towns and cities where the rapidity of industrialisation had created extremes of poverty and squalor, whilst in the Highlands the oppression of the Gaelic language, mass emigration and neglect made for a similar but more complex situation. However, in the lowland and borders areas of Scotland there was a strong system of parish schooling and almost universal literacy rates (ibid).

The main influences that encouraged participation in schooling in England during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the role of religion in the creation of church funded schools, coupled with state intervention coinciding with the enactment of legal restraints on child labour (Mitch, 1992, p. 1). But there was also the idea that the gaining of ‘knowledge’ through reading might be crucial to political struggles based around class consciousness (see Webb, 1955, p. 15). There is debate amongst historians about the extent to which working people’s literacy influenced both the gaining of political enfranchisement of working men in 1867 and the introduction of compulsory and universal primary school education in 1870 (see Hamilton, 1996, p. 143). For example, Webb (1955, p. 63) argues that compulsory education was legislated primarily to control and tame working class literacies that were understood to promote assertive political struggle. Webb claims that thinkers such as J.S. Mill held some sway, as they emphasised the need for education to support industrial production rather than ‘free enquiry’ (ibid). But the general point here is that reading and writing was assumed to have wide reaching consequences, desirable or otherwise, by many working people, government authorities,



industrialists, church people and perhaps even amongst some historians of literate practices.

An early formal definition of what academics refer to as ‘functional literacy’ was produced by the US army during World War II to describe specifically the literacies needed for soldiers to function effectively in the carrying out of basic military tasks (Harman, 1970). Again, the important notion here is that learning to read and write was expected to have consequences beyond gaining the ability to function in a particular circumstance. Though the primary purpose of teaching a soldier to read was to improve their ability to function as a follower of military orders, it was assumed that there might be other predetermined repercussions influencing behaviours and ways of thinking that were taken to be necessary to a well-functioning society. For example, learning to read and write was associated directly with being able to understand abstract concepts, to think sequentially and to construct arguments, where the purpose of literacies education was also to achieve such outcomes.

These understandings backed up the idea of their being a strong causal link between reading and writing and economic and societal progress with a 40% literacy rate quoted as a ‘critical mass’ necessary to developing a nation state out of poverty (Barton, 1994, p. 192; Lankshear and Knobel, 2003, p. 4) and where literacies education has been deemed necessary to the creation of modern states (see Hamilton and Pitt, 2009). These ideas may also be indicative of colonialist intentions for literacies programs, reminiscent of when Britain extended territorial control through the three ‘R’s of ‘Rifles, railways and writing’ (see Archer, p. 2003; p. 33).

The idea that universal and predetermined consequences of reading and writing allows literate societies to be differentiated from those that are non-literate, with the latter understood to be primitive, underdeveloped, or lacking in progress, is described by Street as the 'Great Divide' theory (1984). Graff (1979) and Gee (1996) discuss this notion as a 'literacy myth', which is often accepted as an undisputed fact in contexts which are always political and never neutral. The origins of the myth are unknown. Gee surmises that it might date back as far as the invention of writing itself and to writers such as Plato, as one of the first to write about writing (ibid). Havelock (1986) describes how academic discussion about the consequences of literacy has continued since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, but in 1963 there was a watershed when several authors from the anthropological tradition published in the same year. These were Levi-Strauss, Goody and Watt, McLuhan, Mayr as well as Havelock himself and collectively they made literacy into a live issue for academics. This research tended towards backing up the Great Divide theory and focussed on two main areas; firstly, the anthropological study of societies where people generally do not read and write (e.g. Colwell, 2003; Goody and Watt, 1988) and secondly, the scholarship of ancient writings (e.g. Havelock, 1986; Ong, 1988).

One of the earliest anthropological studies was undertaken by Luria who was associated with large scale literacies campaigns in the USSR in the 1930s (see Lankshear and Knobel, 2003, p.7; Colwell, 2003). Schooled and non-schooled peoples in Siberia and Uzbekistan were tested for cognitive abilities, producing arguments that the unschooled and 'illiterate' lacked the ability to reason, think logically and to categorise. Goody and Watt's anthropological studies in Western Africa came to similar conclusions backing

arguments that the consequences of reading and writing were wide sweeping for both individuals and society (Goody and Watt, 1988).

In the scholarship of ancient writings (e.g. by Havelock, 1986 and Ong, 1988) particular attention was given to Homeric poems assumed to have been composed before the invention of alphabetic scripts, but transcribed by scribes through a process of oral dictation. These writings were assumed to hold clues about people's thought processes and ways of understanding the world in pre-literate times. Speculations were made that literacy had wide reaching consequences where it was key to the development of the modern epoch of science and philosophy. As with the anthropological studies this included the idea that reading and writing had facilitated the development of rational thought, forms of reasoning and people's ability to separate themselves from the consequences of their actions. Other surmised consequences included the ability to order and catalogue information, to think abstractly and to construct arguments such as syllogisms.

However the study of ancient texts can produce alternative understandings about how modern society might have developed. Needham (1969) speculated about why scientific and technological discovery had progressed at different rates during different epochs when comparing China with Europe. He drew upon the thesis of Edgar Zilsel (2003) who, like Havelock, was informed by the scholarship of ancient Greek texts. The argument was that the emergence of modern science was a consequence of the bringing together of the inductive thought of philosophers and the empirical practices of craftspeople. A similar argument is also made by Sagan (1980) when explaining the historical rise and demise of scientific activity in ancient Ionia. Sagan explains how an

early atomic theory arose from studying the workings of a vacuum operated water carrier; an example of scientific thought arising from familiarisation with every day tools. Here the invention of the alphabet is not pivotal in the development of society. If anything the opposite argument could be made, that modern scientific activity resulted in the invention of alphabetic scripts.

Havelock (1986) claims that his assumed consequences of literacy are attributes of all people within literate societies. For example, though he argues that the capacity to think abstractly arose as a consequence of the invention of alphabetic scripts, he also assumes that this ability is now universal, even amongst individuals who cannot read and write. But this is not reflected in prevalent understandings of literacy in literacy programs in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, A UNESCO Regional Report on Literacy from 1972 states that “The illiterate man’s thought...remains concrete, he thinks in images and not in concepts. His thought is, in fact, a series of images, juxtaposed or in sequence, and hence it rarely proceeds by induction or deduction’ (see Scribner and Cole, 1981, p. 13).

Though the ideas of Goody and Watt or Havelock would not support this statement, they might back some other general arguments about the consequences of reading and writing. For example, that people who write in non-phonetic scripts such as Chinese might think differently from those who use phonetic alphabets, such as Russian, Arabic or French. Similarly, that the rise in the popularity of mass media that does not involve printed text, such as radio or films, might promote a regression in people’s reasoning abilities and ability to understand the world. For example, Havelock refers to Hitler’s early use of television broadcasting to promote ‘the oral ages of the past’ (Havelock,

1986, p. 31). A contrary argument is made by Illich and Sanders (see 1988, pp. 106-118) who claim that reading and writing can limit people's ability to think for themselves, so encouraging injustice, exemplified by the language of 'Newspeak' in Orwell's fictional account of a totalitarian state. This notion is found amongst educators associated with the *deschooling* movement (informed by Illich, 1971), who oppose the emergence of formal school education because it denies folk understandings of the natural world (e.g. see Prakash 1994; Bowers, 2003; Prakash and Esteva, 2008;) and where literacy education is claimed to encourage 'textual' ways of thinking (e.g. Fasheh, 2003). But regardless of whether reading and writing is deemed desirable or not, arguments have been made by anthropologists, classics scholars, historians and commentators of there being wide reaching societal consequences of literacy.

The 'literacy myth' of the Great Divide was refuted through on-going research by anthropologists and historians that I discuss in the following sections. Their findings demonstrated no universal or predictable consequences of learning to read and write. Instead they pointed towards wider definitions of literacy, beyond reading and writing, where literacy and literacies education can only be understood in societal contexts. In tandem with this a new model for understanding literacies education was developed in opposition to 'functional' understandings, known as the 'social practice' model.

### ***Social practice models and New Literacies Studies***

'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. The nature of these practices, including, of course, their technological aspects, will

determine the kinds of skills (“consequences”) associated with literacy’

(Scribner and Cole, 1981, p. 236)

This is the first definition of literacy which countered the idea that there are predetermined and universal consequences of learning to read and write, instead describing a ‘social practice’ model. The key idea that Scribner and Cole express is that there are no predetermined functional outcomes of teaching reading and writing because literacy has no effects or meaning aside from the particular cultural contexts in which it is used (see Gee, 1996, p. 59).

Scribner and Cole produced this definition following research amongst the Vai people of Liberia who speak and write in three languages. At that time in the 1970s, English was taught at school and was used to deal with the bureaucracy of the colonial legacy whilst Arabic was learnt through religious instruction as part of the Islamic faith. A third language, Vai, also has its own script and was learnt informally outside of school, through family and friends and used as part of these familial relationships. These different contexts of literacy learning allowed Scribner and Cole to differentiate between the consequences of schooling and the consequences of learning to read and write. As psychologists, Scribner and Cole were concerned that understandings about literacy in the 1970s had become overly reliant upon the study of ancient texts (ibid, p. 7). In response, the study employed methods for testing the development individuals’ cognitive processes in relation to reading, writing and schooling, as well as incorporating ethnographic methods to gain understanding of the varying contexts in which the three languages were used.

However, the psychological assessments that Scribner and Cole employed found no connection between literacy and cognitive development, where the consequences of learning to read and write were confined to the acquisition of very specific skills such as those relating to the coding and decoding of symbols. Instead, the social contexts in which literacies were used were found to influence whether people learnt to read or write and the types of literate practices that they employed. This suggested that ethnographic research methods were significant for research aimed at understanding literacies and literacies education rather methods drawing from psychology. The empirical findings laid the basis for the new definition of literacy that contextualised reading and writing in people's social and cultural relationships with texts and schooling. The definition, which discredited functional understandings, was the first to describe what is now known as the 'social practice' model of literacies. Historical studies backed this new understanding of literacies, for example Graaf (1979), who studied the effects of literacy through the examination of 19<sup>th</sup> century birth certificates and census data. Graaf found that being able to read and write made little difference to the types of employment that individuals were able to gain nor associated income levels. Comparing countries with historically high literacies rates such as Sweden, alongside countries with lower rates such as Italy, he found little evidence of significant differences in the country's economic progress that could be attributed to literacy levels.

All these developments contributed to the emergence of a new area of academic scholarship which became known as New Literacies Studies (NLS). New Literacy Studies consists of a series of writings, in both research and practise that treat language and literacy as social practices rather than technical skills to be learned in formal education. As the founders of this tradition, Hamilton, Barton, Gee, Heath and Street

developed the ‘social practice’ or ‘social literacies’ conceptualisation of literacies. Here, the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and linguistics were drawn from to create frameworks for understanding literacies as it is practised at home, work or in the community (Kelder, 1996; Street, 2005; Tagoe, 2008).

New Literacies Studies assumes that:

‘literacy studies is best understood in terms of academic/scholarly/research activities that understand literacy as socio-cultural practice, to build on these understandings ethically, politically and pedagogically, and to advance them conceptually and theoretically.’

(Lankshear, 1999, p. 210)

The research of anthropologists formed the backbone of NLS as it emerged. For example the anthropologist Brian Street developed the idea of there being ‘autonomous’ and ‘ideological’ views of literacies (Street, 1984) which broadly coincide with the descriptions of ‘functional’ and ‘social practice’ models that I have already described above. The ‘autonomous’ notion defines literacies as a series of skills to be taught independently from context, whilst the ‘ideological’ understanding of literacies assumes that literacy can only be defined and understood in the social context where they are used, where such contexts are never neutral (Street 1984, Kelder, 1996). Street used these ideas to make judgements about the existing provision of adult literacies education in England and asserted a need for anthropological research to be utilised in the development of a theory of ‘literacies practice’ (Street, 1984, p. 127).



Shirley Brice Heath (1983) is also of foundational influence in New Literacies Studies. She conducted ethnographic studies in schools and communities in Appalachia, revealing how literacies education replicated hierarchies of power, in particularly those associated with socio-economic class in American society. She also drew upon sociological understandings in the work of Pierre Bourdieu to reveal how social and cultural differences create different meanings for reading and writing, where some children's literate experiences at home fit with expectations at school allowing them to succeed where children from other groups are set up to fail. This explained differences which impacted future lives linking literacy to power and identity.

The experience of international literacies initiatives informed researchers associated with the 'social practice' tradition, an example being how foundational NLS researchers including Barton (1994) have considered UNESCO's work. UNESCO has been engaged with international literacies projects since 1948 (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006) and its work enacted and informed 'functional' understandings of literacies education (see Gray, 1956; Scribner and Cole, 1981, p. 13; Barton, 1994, pp. 192-199). It has been seen as an external agency imposing literacy on others through top down approaches which don't take account of social contexts of literacies use (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Barton, 1994; Wickens and Sandlin, 2007). UNESCO came to acknowledge that its functional approach was problematic after it had failed to meet targets for increasing literacy rates during the 1960s (e.g. UNESCO, 1976; Barton, 1994, pp. 194-195). In 1990, International Year of Literacy, UNESCO's Jomtien conference gave a high profile to Paulo Freire's ideas in its proceedings with later approval from the World Bank, the single largest funder of international literacies projects. Regardless of these

declarations their programs continued to adopt 'functional' approaches throughout the 1990s (Barton, 1994, pp. 194-195).

As well as being involved with the historical development of literacies studies as an academic discipline, anthropologists still undertake research to study the impact of literacies projects internationally (e.g. Maddox, 2007, Dyers, 2008, Holland and Skinner, 2008, Robinson-Plant, 2008) and have contributed to their design (e.g. Street, 2005). However NLS draws upon a range of disciplinary influences and theoretical underpinnings aside from anthropology. Gee, another foundational NLS researcher, describes how NLS arose alongside a 'heady mix' of movements drawing from a range of academic disciplines which he summarised as the 'social turn', where there was a move away from researching and understanding the behaviour of individuals and towards understanding social and cultural interaction (see Gee, 2000, pp. 180-183). This 'social turn' movement included the development of 'cultural models theory', 'ethnomethodology', 'cognitive linguistics', 'new science and technology studies', 'narrative studies', 'modern sociology' and 'post-structuralist' and 'post-modernist' work (ibid), with overlaps between all of these movements and the development of New Literacies Studies.

It would be inaccurate to suggest understanding power and empowerment has been a major preoccupation amongst all researchers in the 'social practice' tradition of adult literacies education. For example, the work of Street (1984) and Barton (1994) is not orientated exclusively in this direction, instead focussing more on utilising anthropological research methods to counter functional understandings of literacies education and establishing 'social practice' understandings in broad terms. However,

according to Lankshear, NLS assumes that ‘understanding literacy as sociocultural practice means that reading and writing can only be understood in the context of the social, cultural, political, economic, historical practices to which they are integral; of which they are a part’ (see Lankshear, 1999, p. 210). He summarises the emergence of NLS as a move away from functional interpretations of reading and writing which are rooted in developmental psychology and towards understandings rooted in sociology, where the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein, have held great sway (See *ibid*, p. 65 or see Kelder, 1996). Here the uses and meanings of literacy are always embedded in relations of *power*. In particular, research has placed emphasis on understandings of ‘discourse’ as ways of speaking, acting and writing which create meanings that can include or exclude people from social formations (see Gee, 2000, p. 183). Research arising from the NLS tradition does draw upon a range of disciplinary influences, including the work of Gee (1996), the New London Group (1996), Lankshear and McLaren (1993), Lankshear and Knobel (2003), Janks (2010) and Crowther, Hamilton and Tett (2003). However, as Lankshear suggests, they also have a commonality in that they all draw upon sociological conceptualisations that allow literacies education to be contextualised in understandings of power and I shall return to this shortly when I summarise the ideas of some of these academics.

### ***Summary – ‘functional’ and ‘social practice’ literacies***

So far I have briefly described how academics and educators have described two conceptualisations of literacies. Firstly, ‘functional’ understandings where literacies are defined by the skills required to read and write so that an individual might function effectively in society. Here it is assumed that there are wide reaching consequences of

learning to read and write both for individuals and society as a whole, typically expressed in the form of improved ways of thinking and behaving that might contribute to a successfully functioning society. Secondly, I have briefly described the emergence a ‘social practice’ model for understanding literacies, where the definition of literacy might be widened beyond reading and writing and where literacies is only meaningful in the context in which it is used, including contexts of power. The ‘social practice’ model has formed the basis for an emerging academic interest in literacies studies orientated towards anthropology, sociology and linguistics known as New Literacies Studies (NLS).

Below I will consider how academics associated with this tradition have given attention to the possibility of an empowering adult literacies education and have raised problems and issues associated with attempts to conceptualise this possibility. The problems and issues were raised in direct reference to the practise of adult literacies education as revealed through empirical research. For this reason, I commence by giving some attention to how adult literacies education has been practised and how it has developed as a distinct part of the formal education system.

I give primary attention to adult literacies education and its purpose, as it has evolved in the UK, both in its historical policy development and the activity of educators, students and academics. To accomplish this I introduce a three-dimensional approach to considering the purpose of adult literacies education, as utilised by Raymond Williams in his description of the history of adult education in Britain (Williams, 1993, 1993a, 1993b). This allows me to link the historical emergence of adult literacies education to wider developments in adult education. It also brings to my attention the activity of

educators and students who were concerned about empowering or emancipatory possibilities for education, raising questions, issues and problems about how this might be understood and practised, including the questioning of Williams's own conceptualisations.

### ***2.3 Adult literacies education in Britain and educational purpose***

Williams (1993, 1993a; see Steele, 1997, pp, 183-184) describes three entwined strands or overlapping dimensions that have constituted the development of adult education in Britain. He describes the '*Old Humanists*' education that developed from religious traditions where the purpose of education, as a minority pursuit, was to uphold cultural traditions which are taken to be intrinsically valuable. Here the written word is given respect and invested with power. This power transcends politics or economics where the literate person may derive meaning from intellectual activity made possible by the written word and where education is a repository for values. A second strand is education as '*Industrial Training*' where the purpose of education is to fit people into the workplace and the activity of earning a living through the gaining of relevant vocational skill and knowledge.

Williams described twentieth century adult education in Britain as a shotgun marriage between these two traditions, neglecting a third tradition of '*popular*' or '*public education*'. Williams summarises '*public education*' as having two parallel traditions in Britain, spoken with two voices. The first argues that the public are deprived, setting up funds for education by pointing to the depravity of the working classes where 'then it was drink, now it is television' (Williams, 1993, p. 229). This sentiment is expressed in (pre-television) late nineteenth century Britain with the emergence of the University

Extension Movement and its counterpart the British Association of Settlements. Influenced by Christian socialists, the Extension Movement was founded in 1873 by James Stewart, with the intention of spreading the 'democratic' traditions of the Scottish Enlightenment across the Britain by encouraging women and working class people to participate in university education through extra-mural classes (see Cooke, 2006, p. 118). The Workers Educational Association emerged in 1903, also supporting these aims, but developing its own network of provision (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). These developments were part of a movement which went on to establish Ruskin College in Oxford for working people in 1899, with several other residential labour colleges emerging in association with universities around Britain (Williams, 1993b, Fieldhouse, 1996). In contrast the University Settlement Movement brought the university into working class neighbourhoods, missionary style, through the acquisition of buildings or 'settlements' in those areas (McIlroy, 1996, Waugh, 2009, Lankshear, 1999) with the aims of 'humanizing and refining' people (see Williams, 1993, p. 259). The fear was that the intrinsically valuable traditions of 'Old Humanism' might be destroyed by a working class who did not understand them as they acted out their anger at the injustices of Victorian society through revolutionary activity. Both the Extension and the Settlement movement had the implicit intention to diffuse such oppositional responses by incorporating working class people into existing cultural traditions through an education system (Waugh, 2009, Cooke, 2006, pp. 118-119).

Williams describes the possible second voice of *public education*, where 'all education depends on the acknowledgement of an ultimate human equality' (see William, 1993, p. 124) and where students 'aren't given the conclusion of arguments, instead reaching their own' (see *ibid*, p. 262). Aspects of this notion might have been expressed in some

of the responses to the University Extension Movement and the Labour Colleges by working class students (see Waugh 2009; McIlroy, 1996). Ruskin College was the site of unrest in 1909 when the students declared opposition to being 'sandpapered', a term used about them by the dons when describing their wish to defuse the students' aims of 'human liberation' and turn their contempt for the existing college traditions into respect (Waugh, 2009). They went on strike demanding to be 'unsandpapered' through an end to exams, changes to essay writing and the translation of foreign language texts, including Marx, so that they could read them for themselves (Plebs League 1909). They proceeded to found an educational organisation called 'The Pleb's League' and perhaps the notion of education as 'unsandpapering' was further developed in early editions of their journal. Their founding of an associated Central Labour College in London formed the basis of what became known as the Independent Working Class Education movement (McIlroy, 1996). In Scotland, a parallel Scottish Labour College was founded (Cooke, 2006, p. 134) which ran classes in algebra, grammar, public speaking and Esperanto, as well as politics and Marxist economics.

Williams also criticised this tradition in British adult education, associated with the organisation of industrial workers, describing a danger where education might become orientated towards delivering students 'some kind of boiled-down pap which would indicate some already decided course of action to them' (Williams, 1993, pp. 263-4). For Williams, Public Education's second voice had to acknowledge that it is not acceptable to 'get away with speaking to people other than as equals' (Williams, 1993, p. 230) an idea he believed to have been undermined by people's relationships with modern communications, alongside the problematic notion of 'mass' culture, which

denies the idea of equality, leaving adult education by and large to the Old Humanists and the Industrial Trainers.

However, I can't explore how Williams' idea of a 'Public Education' might be further understood at this point; I return to this in Chapter 6 (see Section 6.3). Rather, I note in general terms that Williams raises the possibility that education might acknowledge and encourage equality as well as prepare people for employment or incorporate them into a particular cultural tradition. Later in this chapter I describe the ideas of educators and academics who raise similar possibilities in the context of adult literacies education.

I continue to utilise *Old Humanism*, *Industrial Training* and *Public Education* as useful notions in which to contextualise the emergence of adult literacies education as a formal part of the education system in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. Again, when it comes to describing adult literacies education as *Public Education*, this raises questions about what 'equality' might mean and how it might be understood and practised, which is the intention of this literature review, that I address in the remainder of the thesis.

### ***Old Humanists***

In England in 1972, around 5000 literacies students studied in the army, prisons and hospitals or in Local Education Authority (LEA) funded classes which were sustained and appreciated by small numbers of pioneering field-workers and tutors. However, in only three years, 'illiteracy' was transformed from a non-issue to that of a major social problem (Levine, 1986, pp. 150-151) or *literacies crisis* (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003,



p. 6). This change coincided with ‘literacies’ being used widely as a concept, replacing the terminology of ‘reading and writing’ (ibid).

The British Association of Settlements (BAS) was instrumental in the lobbying of the UK government in the early seventies that successfully achieved central funding of adult literacies education in England for the first time. It was in the Settlements that BAS members gained first-hand experience of illiteracy, defined as not being proficient in reading and writing (Levine, 1986), with involvement in literacy education reputed to commence when an individual came into a London Settlement asking for help to read a document (Withnall, 1994). Literacies education was organised with one to one tuition and volunteer tutors under the assumption that students would (or perhaps should) be embarrassed and wish to keep their ‘illiteracy’ a secret (ibid).

In 1973 the BAS organised a conference entitled *Status Illiterate – Prospects Zero* which contributed to a coalition of voluntary agencies and lobbyists who established a partnership with the BBC. The relationship between the BAS and the BBC publicised the issue of literacies education through a popular television campaign from 1974 including a telephone referral service. The government was obliged to respond by distributing £1 million for literacies education, allocating the money from an under spend in the university budget, with delivery through Local Education Authorities (LEAs). The result was that between 1972 and 1976 the number of students receiving literacies tuition trebled from 5000 to 15000 marking the beginning of the expansion of literacies education where its requirement was elevated to that of a major social problem (see Hamilton and Hillier, 2006, p. 9).

## *Industrial Training*

Post-industrialism was also integral to the creation the aforementioned ‘literacy crisis’ where the decline of manufacturing industry in the UK required a restructuring of the labour market. The workforce was seen as being poorly prepared for employment in the expanding service sectors (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003, p. 6). Government reports showed that universal free school education, which had been statutory since 1870, was no guarantee of a literate population. Here two Department of Education and Science (DES) reports were influential (Levine, 1986, 150 -151); Start and Wells (1972) who reported that 3-4% of 15 year olds had a reading age of nine years and the reporting of the Russell Committee on Adult Education (1973) which raised literacy as an issue. In Scotland, the Alexander Report (1975) highlighted a problem where the ‘disadvantaged’ had effectively been excluded from adult education through poverty, age, disability or rural isolation (Cooke, 2006, p. 158). These reports contributed to the development of a strong vocational driver behind the mushrooming of literacies education in the Thatcher years of high unemployment in the 1980s.

This was a period when literacies education was developed and substantially supported by LEA Adult Education Services and voluntary organisations with leadership and development of a new national agency, the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) which oversaw what was known as Adult Basic Education (ABE) (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). In 1980 this expanded to include ‘numeracy’, a term first coined in the UK government’s Crowther Report (1959) on education (see Coben, 2003). Statutory provision increased during the 1980s in tandem with training programs intended to lower the unemployment figures. Literacy education was delivered through

Department of Employment (DoE) initiatives via its agencies, such as the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), with additional funding from the European Union and the Department of Education. The focus on employability also caused tensions between the agencies and educators and students who sometimes engaged in innovative and controversial teaching approaches which I describe below. When the funding for literacies was eventually cut back in the late 1980s and accreditation was standardised, it was these innovative approaches that tended to lose out (e.g. see Woodin, 2008).

In Scotland, the Alexander Report resulted in adult literacies education being incorporated into an existing well established youth and community service in the late 1970s, which led to adult literacies education being isolated from continuing education opportunities in further and higher education. Initially there was also a decrease in adult education classes in the 1970s, though by the mid-nineties a quarter of a million adults were participating in community education classes annually (Cooke, 2006).

The vocational strand in literacies education has continued to dominate in England through the 1997 Labour government's Skills for Life initiative (SfL) which was launched in 2001 (DfES, 2001). SfL was informed by the Moser Report (1999) into adult literacy and numeracy in England and Wales which drew on IALS (International Adult Literacy Surveys) conducted under the auspices of the OECD<sup>3</sup>. Moser concluded that with regard to the UK:

‘Something like one adult in five is not functionally literate’...‘it is one of the

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<sup>3</sup> See Wagner, 2003; Boudard and Jones, 2003 for discussions of these tests and Kirch, 2003 for details about their design

reasons for relatively low productivity in our economy, and it cramps the lives of millions of people’.

(Moser, 1999, p. 1).

SfL aimed at addressing this issue by bringing more than a million adults into literacies education provision.

Moser also concluded that the empirical data backing the claim that 20% of adults are ‘not functionally illiterate’ arose from the administering of inadequate test instruments, particularly those aimed at measuring numeracy attainment (see Moser, 1999, p. 7). The response was to design and implement further tests under the Skills for Life (SfL), drawing upon IALS and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment, 2001) assessment designs.

There has been some acknowledgement that the conduct of national and international surveys has served to raise the profile of other academic research into adult literacy, in particular numeracy (Swain et al, 2008) and to legitimise what has been an under researched field (Hamilton and Hillier, 2007). However, the SfL assessments have been controversial on two main counts. Firstly, on the difficulty of creating tests that can assess literate skills with validity and without excluding important aspects of literacy (Coben et al, 2007, Swain et al, 2008, Hamilton and Barton, 2000, p. 386). There is research dating back to the 1970s (e.g. Lave et al, 1982) suggesting that people who are able to perform literate tasks in real situations, e.g. household budgeting, fail to perform them correctly in test situations even if the tests are constructed to simulate everyday life experience. Also, relating to this, there are no suitable tests for assessing areas of

literacy such as problem solving, making judgements about probabilities and likelihoods, or the presence of causal relationships in everyday life (Condelli, 2006). The problem here is that if curricula are based upon testable outcomes, important aspects of literacy might be excluded.

Secondly the very concept of testing is understood to support ‘functional’ understandings of literacy education, where literacies can be pinned down to a set of independent skills which can be taught separately from the contexts in which they are used with the expectation of predetermined outcomes (Hamilton and Barton, 2000, p. 387). This is illustrated by how the SfL literacy and numeracy curriculum is defined as a list of testable skills (Learning and Skills Improvement Agency, 2012). Surveys conducted by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) sit with this understanding by making direct links between people with levels of literacy categorised as ‘low’ and their ability to deal with ‘stumbling blocks’ in life (Parsons and Bynner, 2008). An NRDC survey also suggests a direct link between adults assessed as having low literacy levels and impediments to the cognitive development of their children (De Coulon et al, 2008). Both survey teams define literacies by the aforementioned list of testable skills and they assess cohorts of adults against these as part of the research. There is an implicit idea here, which is that if these discrete literacy skills were taught and learnt then this might result in the alleviation of the aforementioned problems.

Alarm has been raised by academics who advocate for the ‘social model’ of literacies that SfL courses and policy discourse might encourage literacies teachers to orientate towards functional approaches to the teaching of literacies (Riley and Torrance, 2003;

Oughton, 2007; Fulford, 2010). What's more, students might be deemed personally responsible for predicaments such as unemployment if they fail to take up the life-long learning opportunities offered by the SfL initiative (Hamilton and Pitt, 2009).

Whilst adult literacies education policy in England holds to 'functional' definitions with emphasis placed upon the teaching of skills through predefined courses, Scotland holds to a 'social practice' model in its adult literacy policy, a development associated with how adult literacies education continues to be delivered through informal community settings (Cooke, 2006). This provision is organised through local council youth and community services rather than through colleges of further education and takes place in settings such as libraries and community centres. The policy that guides this provision draws upon a 'social practice' model of literacies, defining literacy as:

'The ability to read, write and use numbers, to handle information, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems, as *family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners.*'

(Scottish Executive, 2001, p7, my italics)

This definition highlights literacy as being contextualised in people's lives as *family members, citizens and workers* rather than as a series of predetermined skills. The Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA, 2008) does offer a testable definition of literacies as 'core skills' which maps onto the national curriculum framework and the Scottish curriculum for schools identifies literacies in a similar fashion (Scottish Executive, 2004). However assessment of these may be accomplished through the building of a portfolio of evidence rather than formal testing (see *ibid*, 127). For

literacies educators in community settings there is no compulsion to use formal tests for any purpose. Instead, the literacies curriculum and associated assessment rests on the possibility of a relationship between teacher and student where the students' employment, family concerns or hobbies can be discussed and a unique individualised literacies curriculum devised and documented by the tutor in terms that are meaningful to both. This process of negotiation is also required to set goals for the student's literacies education and to decide whether these have been met (Scottish Executive, 2001).

However, there are still broad similarities between the policy and delivery of adult literacies education across the UK. Like England, Scottish policy is still justified by data obtained from the IALS Survey which concludes that 23% of the adult population in Scotland have low literacy and numeracy skills (ibid) and the White Paper on adult education in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2011) states 'employability' as a primary purpose of adult literacies education. In terms of policy enactment, research has demonstrated that tutors in Scotland typically do not negotiate and devise unique contextualised curricula with students (Tett et al, 2006), whilst in England a wide range of educational activity has been observed in adult literacy classroom settings, regardless of government policy (e.g. see Coben et al, 2007). Despite this, there has been a tendency to imply that Scotland has a more progressive adult literacies education than England because of the policy adherence to a social practice model (e.g. see Maclachlan, 2009) perhaps indicative of how academic discussion about literacy education has a tendency to orientate towards discussing the 'functional' versus 'social model' divide (as described by Maddox, 2007).

So far I have presented a history of some of the understandings that have informed adult literacies education as well as a brief history of the policy context, contextualised in Williams' three dimensions of educational purpose of adult education in Britain. I have described how the development of literacies education has been strongly influenced by the overlapping dual purposes of incorporating working class people into cultural traditions that are valued by existing society (*Old Humanism*) and the need to educate them so that they can operate effectively in work environments, often described as employability (*Industrial Training*). Next I describe examples of the third dimension of *public education*. I have mentioned Williams' notion that *public education* should encompass an 'acknowledgement of an ultimate human equality' (Williams, 1993c, p. 124). As I have stated already, this idea alone raises questions about what an education for equality might mean, what it might involve and how it might be understood or enacted. The purpose of this next section is to consider how similar notions have been raised by educators, students and academics in the context of adult literacies education. This will invite further questions about what *public education* might mean and how it might be enacted which will be addressed in later chapters. So the main purpose of the next two sections is to raise questions for later exploration.

### ***Public education?***

The third dimension of purpose in the development of adult literacies education in the UK is linked to the advent of New Literacies Studies (NLS). Here academics have attempted to understand an adult literacies education that might create possibilities described variously as emancipation, empowerment or liberation (e.g. Freire, 1972; Lankshear and McLaren, 1993; Luke and Freebody, 1997; New London Group; 1996;



Gee, 1996; Crowther, Hamilton & Tett, 2001) and I return to this the latter part of this chapter. But perhaps the third dimension originates with teachers, fieldworkers and students as the enactment of adult literacies education in Britain is ultimately driven by grassroots activism and commitments to social justice (see Hillier, 2009, p. 548).

Much of the work of pioneering field workers and students in prisons, the army and Local Education Authorities remains unknown. Though early academic interest in adult literacies education tended towards functional understandings that supported ‘Great Divide’ theories, it cannot be assumed that pioneering educators and students engaged in educational activity that followed suit. Street (1984, pp. 215-228) described how ‘social practice’ models of literacies education were already evident in Britain, particularly through the activity of student publishing (see below). It seems that a ‘social practice’ model of literacies education was practised in Britain before NLS academics had defined it.

In the early years of central funding of adult literacies education in England, in the 1970s and early 1980s, the government had no specific literacies policy which meant that educators had some free reign to develop their own ideas. Organised educational activity depended on local authorities and the pressure groups that lobbied them, with formal approaches to teaching being developed by local networks of practitioners (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006, p. 10). Here evidence can be found of educators and students holding a concern for an adult literacies education for social transformation rather than socialisation. The most significant development was the student publishing movement in the 1980s, where student writers published for a student readership including Write First Time and those published by Gatehouse Books (see Woodin,

2008). This movement was particular to the UK literacy scene, which means there is an archive of student writing, unavailable in other national settings, which might offer insights into students' experiences, opinions and motivations in relation to literacies education (see Hamilton, 1996, p. 143).

Gatehouse still publishes under the ethos of 'a beginner reader is not a beginner thinker' (Gatehouse, 2012) a phrase coined by Peter Goode (Goode, 1980), a literacies student who wrote with a scribe. Scribes were commonly employed, there being no compulsion for students to learn to read or write, where 'spoken rather than standard English was emphasised as a source of empowerment' (see Woodin, 2008, p. 223). Student editors were unlikely to select 'birthday card verse' that had been submitted for publication as they embraced pride in the working class as a means of mobilising students to have a sense of themselves as oppressed and denied rights rather than as victims 'in need of a dose of literacy' (ibid). The influence of Paulo Freire can be found here, particularly in how writings were read and studied by other students (ibid). There is also a distinctly British tradition evident where intrinsic value is placed on working class and rural culture, reminiscent of the work of Raymond Williams (1993, 1993b) and Richard Hoggart (1957).

However, this educational activity was controversial and an Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) newsletter in 1991 described how student publishing kept students in an 'educational ghetto' (Woodin, 2008). These concerns had already reached wide audiences after news media coverage of an anti-Thatcher poem composed by literacy students, referring to her blue coat turning red with blood (see Frost and Hoy, 1980). Funding possibilities for student writing dwindled in the late 1980s with the

introduction of accreditation, certification and a core curriculum in England (Woodin, 2008). However, student writing has persisted in a different format, with government funded schemes such as those encouraging Scottish students who are also prisoners to write stories (CLAN, 2008).

In the 1980s approaches for teaching adult literacies were being developed which linked literacies education to the possibility of societal change. Frost and Hoy's (1980) writing resource pack 'Opening Time' was written by students with Robert Merry's introduction describing a problem with adult basic education where 'It's too much of one person knowing what the other person would like to know and keeping it that way' (ibid, p. 2). There is no continuity between the writers of the pack and those of NLS. However, the pack argues that reading and writing is best learnt in the course of doing something that is important to the student and not as an isolated skill. The pack content is sometimes overtly political, for example the section that discusses 'What is it OK to write about?' written by young people on a Youth Training Scheme (YTS), contains anti-Thatcherite poems and stories about police violence. The influence of Paulo Freire, Raymond Williams and Herbert Kohl is apparent by how they are recommended for further reading at the end of the pack (ibid).

During the same period in the 1980s the Gorgie Dalry Adult Learning Project in Edinburgh was developed as the only full-scale and consistent effort to sustain a Freirian educational project in the UK (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989; Cooke, 2006, p. 163). The project, which continues in 2012, resulted in tangible outcomes for the local area including new road markings and the zoning of a park, the creation of a money-free

bartering system and local people teaching courses to widen the local skills base (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989).

When interviewing literacy educators and fieldworkers as part of their research into the history of literacies education in England, Hamilton and Hillier (2006, p. 116) heard Freire cited as a personal influence with his name mentioned more than any other. Freire (1972, 1970) describes education with emancipation as a purpose, but it is difficult to ascertain how extensive this influence was or is amongst educators and students and what kinds of engagement there have been with Freire's theory and ideas. Hamilton and Hillier (2006, p. 116) go on to suggest that literacies educators in the UK are first and foremost 'eclectic pragmatists' (ibid) where 'learners helped to read to their grandchildren are not seeking empowerment to challenge inequalities in society, or employment skills, whereas other learners are being helped to do precisely these things' (ibid). This implies that an emancipatory or empowering education is pertinent only if students demand it. It also suggests that adult literacies education for empowerment or against inequality is something that can be delivered to students on request, rather than, say, an alternative approach that could be integral to the educational relationship between students, teachers and educational materials, regardless of the subject matter being taught.

It could be that Freire's influence is indicative through how literacies educators often hold a general concern for the purpose of adult literacies education, hoping to avoid educational practices that might be considered oppressive and to encourage those that might contribute to 'emancipatory' or 'empowering' outcomes. Frost and Hoy's (1980) writing pack and the activity of the student publishing movement indicates that

educators and students have given attention to these types of concern, though it isn't clear precisely what the aims are or how they might be met through educational activity. But the point here is that possibility of an empowering or emancipatory education is being raised and the purpose of adult literacies education is being questioned.

I have considered the history of adult literacies in the context of its purposes, by making use of Raymond William's three-dimensional conceptualisations of 'Old Humanism', 'Industrial Training' and 'Public Education'. Here 'Old Humanism' refers to a tradition where the purpose of adult education is to uphold existing cultural traditions, whilst 'Industrial Training' is concerned with education aimed towards preparing people for employment. The third tradition of 'Public Education' is one that acknowledges equality between human beings, raising the question of how this might be understood and enacted. I have also described examples of what might be 'public education' in the context of adult literacies education in the UK. Purposes are described variously in terms of 'empowerment', 'equality', 'justice' or 'emancipation' again raising the question of what these notions mean in the context of understanding and practicing adult literacies education. Academics and educators have also given attention to exploring these kinds of questions and in the next section I briefly describe their ideas and the problems that have been raised in association with them.

#### ***2.4 Public Education – academics and educational purpose***

In this section I describe how academics from the 'social practice' tradition of adult literacies education have given attention to understanding adult literacies education as 'public education'. Though they don't use Williams' terminology, they do describe the

purpose of literacies education through three dimensions which are broadly congruent to William's, but where the third dimension of 'public education' corresponds with approaches described as 'radical', 'critical' or 'powerful' rather than 'public'. These approaches are influenced by ideas from sociology and linguistics which link adult literacies education to ideas about power, identity and discourse. I include the work of James Paul Gee, Colin Lankshear and the international consortium known as the New London Group, as well as the work of Luke and Freebody in Australia, Crowther, Hamilton and Tett in the UK and Hilary Janks in South Africa. In addition, I briefly consider the work of Paulo Freire and how it has been understood and criticised by academics and educators. The discussion begins to elaborate upon how an empowering or emancipatory education might be understood, introducing the possibility that 'empowerment' understandings might encourage socialising educational practices, suggesting the importance of distinguishing between emancipation and empowerment in the context of adult literacies education.

I have already discussed (in Section 2.2) how the purpose of what has become known as 'functional' models of literacies education is to give students the literacies skills deemed necessary for them to function effectively in society as it stands. This assumption rests upon the idea that there are wide-reaching consequences of learning to read and write, limiting the definition of literacies to reading and writing skills. I have also described the emergence of an alternative 'social practice' model of literacies education (in Section 2.2.) which assumes that literacy has no effects or meaning outside of the particular cultural contexts in which literacies are used. This raises the question of what the 'social practice' model might mean for the purpose of adult literacies education and it is in the consideration of this question that researchers

drawing from the 'social practice' tradition tend towards three-dimensional conceptualisations.

Scribner (1988) described three overlapping metaphors for literacy. Literacy as 'adaption', refers to the functional skills needed to perform effectively in daily life, whilst another metaphor is literacies as a 'state of grace', relating to education that is separate from the workplace or economic factors. Here the written word holds intrinsic virtue and literate people safeguard intellectual traditions and associated knowledge. Literacy as 'power' is a third metaphor, strongly influenced by the ideas of Paulo Freire, where literacy is made a resource for social transformation, allowing communities to engage in action that changes social relationships, though it is unclear what kind of change this might be. Scribner suggests that these three metaphors are not at odds, implying multiple educational approaches be they for functional skills, self-improvement or social power, which I suggest are broadly congruent with Williams' three domains.

Three dimensions of purpose are found broadly elsewhere. For example, in their policy history of literacies in England, Hamilton and Hillier (2006, pp. 115-116) who adhere to a social practice model, refer to three approaches in the English tradition, describing them as 'vocational', 'liberal' and 'radical'. Here again, Freire is linked to the 'radical' approach. Similarly, Freebody and Lo Bianco (ibid, 2006, p. 5), influential in the context of Australian literacy policy development, describe three 'families' of thought about literacy: 'skills' necessary to literate practices, literacies for 'personal growth and cultural heritage', and a third 'critical' or 'cultural' family, where once again, Freire is mentioned as an influence. Lankshear also borrows from the work of Brian Green

(Lankshear, 1999) to describe three dimensions (3D) of literacy; the ‘operational’, ‘cultural’ and the ‘critical’, but with specific meanings which I describe in the next section.

Summarising all these three-dimensional conceptualisations, the first dimension of educational purpose is aimed towards the operational skills needed for daily use including employment, which seems to correspond with Williams’ *Industrial Training*, whilst the second is aimed at the literacies pre-requisite to the continuance of existing cultural traditions, or Williams’ *Old Humanism*. The third domain or strand is described as a ‘radical’, ‘critical’ or ‘powerful’ approach, again raising the question of how these approaches might be understood and practised. Broadly, the third dimension of literacies education seems to be concerned, not with continuing existing cultural traditions, or to fit into existing workplaces, but rather to create alternatives to these that are understood to be socially empowering. This seems to contrast with Williams’ terminology of promoting equality. Again this raises the question of how all these notions might be further understood.

But some attention has already been given to understanding this third, ‘critical’, ‘powerful’ or ‘radical’ strand of literacies education by academics working in the ‘social practice’ tradition (e.g. Lankshear and McLaren, 1993, Luke and Freebody, 1997, New London Group, 1996, Gee, 1996, Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2003, Giroux, 1988). Though the work of Paulo Freire is cited as being of key influence to this third dimension amongst educators and students (see Scribner, 1988, Hamilton and Hillier, 2006, p. 116 *ibid*, p. 5), it seems that Freire is not of primary influence amongst



academics. So, before I describe the ideas of the academics I shall briefly summarise the influences that they tend to draw upon.

### *Literacies education and empowerment*

I have already described how New Literacies Studies has drawn upon a range of disciplinary influences (see Section 2.2). Also, some researchers working in this tradition have drawn broadly upon sociological ideas to inform approaches that allow adult literacies education to be understood in contexts of power, where the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, and before him Basil Bernstein, have held great sway (Lankshear, 1999, p. 65). In this section I consider some of the work of such researchers, describing how understandings of power have been informed by theory from the field of linguistics, particularly through the work of James Paul Gee (e.g. 1996). The influence of Gee along with Bourdieu has led to the idea of a potentially empowering adult literacies education which is predicated upon understandings of how ‘identity’ and ‘discourse’ create and replicate power in society. Because Bourdieu and Gee are of particular importance, I shall briefly describe their work.

Gee describes how ‘folk’ understandings of language assume that signs (e.g. words, facial expressions etc.) exactly match concepts that are held in the mind (as explained by Gee, 1996, pp. 271-275), the corollary being that if a language does not contain a word then the speakers cannot conceptualise what the word identifies. This understanding is found in relation to people who speak languages which do not hold vocabulary for numbers, such the Piraha people (Everett, 2008; Frank et al, 2008) or some sign languages for the deaf (see Bates, 2011) where claims have been made that the speakers are incapable of becoming numerate or of numerate ways of thinking. This

illustrates how the ‘literacies myth’ of the Great Divide, which assumes that reading and writing effects peoples’ ability to think, might be backed up by the assumptions people make about language. For Gee, this means that adopting a different linguistic theory might offer alternative understandings about literacies and literacies education that might counter the ‘literacy myth’ and offer the possibility of a third ‘empowering’ or ‘liberating’ strand of literacies education (see Gee, 1996). This is Gee’s starting point for describing an alternative theory of literacies education which presents what he describes as a ‘post-structuralist’ understanding of language which incorporates a conceptualisation of power and how it is reproduced through discourse. Critical discourse analysis is used both as a research tool and an educational practice that incorporates understandings about how discourse reproduces relationships of power and knowledge in society (which I discuss in detail in Chapter 4).

As with Gee, Bourdieu attempts to counter ‘structuralist’ or deterministic understandings of language. As a sociologist, he is informed by and also criticises the work of early sociologists such as Durkheim and Weber. Bourdieu draws upon Marxist concepts, but attempts to develop Marx’s work so that it might incorporate a role for language and discourse within understandings about the relationship between people’s agency and the structure of society and how society changes (Bourdieu, 1991, Bourdieu in Wacquant (1989, p. 45, Snook, 1998, p. 168; Garnham and Williams, 1980). Both Gee and Bourdieu present education as a process of identity formation through discourse which is understood to reinforce societal power relationships.

These types of ideas rather than Freire’s have been influential amongst NLS researchers who have given attention to the possibility of a literacies education that might be

‘radical’, ‘powerful’ or ‘critical’. In the next section I describe this briefly through summarising the work of a selection of such researchers from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA.

***‘Powerful literacy’ - Crowther, Hamilton and Tett***

Crowther, Hamilton and Tett’s approach is embedded in findings from empirical research into the practice of literacies education around the UK, reflecting the concerns of the RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacy) grouping of which they are founding members. In their book, *‘Powerful Literacies’* (2003), emphasis is placed upon social practice models of literacy with influence from Gee and Lankshear. They state opposition to policy that emphasises the vocational strand of adult education and the aims of employability and economic progress. The difficulty with adult literacies education aimed at employability, the economy and international league tables as constructed by the International Adult Literacy Surveys (IALS), is that it fails to address the power relations in people’s lives and what they might be able to do about them (ibid, p. 1).

Instead, they state an aim of opening a space for the divergent and critical voices of students and educators engaged in the practice of adult literacies education to be heard in a policy context. This means grounding literacies education in people’s everyday lives where associated research should engage with these situations, be they in the workplace, community or home, as this will reveal what makes literacy education meaningful to students. Drawing heavily on the work of Gee, the logic here is that understandings and practices of adult literacies education that don’t place importance on revealing power imbalances in people’s lives are ultimately ‘disempowering’. In other

words, if educators and researchers aren't actively engaged with the endeavour of revealing power structures then this amounts to contributing to maintaining those structures, because literacies education that 'obscures the power relations in its construction ultimately disempowers' (ibid, p. 3). There is a tacit assumption here that the social practice model of literacy with the employment of ethnography and discourse analysis are in some way 'empowering' whilst functional models, which underpin most nations' literacy policies have disempowering consequences. This is indicative of a tendency for discussions about the purpose of adult literacies education to be short-circuited into debates across the 'functional' versus 'social practice' dichotomy (as described by Maddox, 2007, or as found in Tett and Maclachlan, 2008; Maclachlan, 2009 or Fulford, 2010).

### ***'Critical literacy' - Luke and Freebody***

Luke and Freebody's work is indicative of how literacy education is understood in the Australian policy context, describing an approach to critical literacy that marks out:

'a coalition of interests committed to engaging with possibilities that the technologies of writing and other modes of inscription offer for social change, cultural diversity, economic equity, and political enfranchisement'

(Luke and Freebody, 1997, p. 1).

Influenced by Bourdieu, (see Carrington and Luke, 1997) they acknowledge that inequality in the literacies classroom contributes to the reproduction of social inequality and various forms of injustice in society. The argument is that this might be addressed

by seeking approaches that provide ‘analyses of how schools function as social institutions regulating access to resources and knowledge, and of how literacy can be made to count in the stratification of wealth and power in late capitalist societies’ (Luke and Freebody, 1997, p. 6). Here the issue is how Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural capital’ can be reproduced through literacies, enabling entry into current society (ibid, p. 9), an idea that has been taken up at policy level in adult literacies education in Australia (see Commonwealth of Australia, 2010). But literacies education should not be limited to giving students the technical literacies so that they might join and be socialised into existing institutions. Rather, the challenge is to create possibilities for using discourse and literacy to *reinvent* institutions, by critiquing and reforming rules for the conversion of ‘cultural and textual capital’ in communities and workplaces. Here they draw upon Heath (1986), Gee (1996) and Kress (e.g. 2003), arguing that this might be attained through a social practice approach to literacies (Luke and Freebody, 1997b, p. 212). As with Crowther, Tett and Hamilton, this re-states a dichotomy between social and functional models of literacies education, where the former is empowering and the latter disempowers, but explicit use is made of Bourdieu’s concepts to describe these possibilities.

### ***‘Multiliteracies’ - New London Group***

Luke and Gee were both part of an international consortium of academic researchers, including Gunther Kress, Mary Kalantis and Bill Cope, who convened at the New London guest house (in New England) to collaborate on a new approach to literacies education. Describing themselves as the New London Group, their approach was named *multiliteracies* and set out in the form of a manifesto (NLG, 1996). The Group described their endeavour as inherently political and concerned with the literacies

required in a 'fast capitalist' world. The notion of *multiliteracies* was developed through what they claim to be post-structuralist understandings of both language and the economic system. Multiliteracies has been influential in Australia where group members have been engaged with literacies research alongside policy formation and its enactment at governance level, indeed Allan Luke (2011) has described his granddaughter bringing home a school report specifying how her 'multiliteracies' was in need of improvement.

The notion of 'multiliteracies' is influenced by understandings about linguistics, semiotics and sociology, further developing a social practice understanding of literacies but linking it to possibilities for empowerment in what is understood to be the 'post-fordist' world of 'fast capitalism' (see NLG, 1996, p. 5). Importance is placed upon the assumptions that literacies educators and researchers make about language. If definitions of literacy assume that language is a stable system based upon rules, then this will 'characteristically translate into a more or less authoritarian kind of pedagogy' (see NLG, 1996, p. 3). The multiliteracies group express the idea that if this potentially authoritarian linguistic theory is linked to orthodox Marxist class-based views of society then it encourages deterministic understandings of the economic system as well as practices in literacies education that serve to socialise people into rigid and inflexible workplaces. Instead they hold to what they would describe as 'post-structuralist' understandings of language and alongside this offer a conceptualisation of current day capitalism broadly described as 'post-Fordist'. This provides the basis for arguing that workplaces nowadays require broad and creative communication skills, including those necessary to team working and new technologies, where people must successfully operate as negotiators. Here, they argue, 'design' (as understood by Fairclough, 2000)

has become central to the workplace, where it is claimed that the term is free of negative associations that sit with stable understandings of literacies based around grammar.

The upshot is a broad definition of literacies that might include anything from text messaging to tilt of the hat on your head (but with no reference to numeracy). The alternative literacies education described is reliant upon a particular sociological analysis that sits with what a poststructuralist understanding of language. It seems that these understandings can also be used, not only to understand the workings of capitalism, but to change capitalism for the better. The ‘multiliteracies’ approaches to literacies education might encourage the redesign of the discourse of the workplace so that the desirable attributes of creativity, negotiation and team working are encouraged and where access to these might be made equitable.

### ***‘Critical’ literacy - Colin Lankshear***

Lankshear attempts to make a contribution towards filling a ‘theory gap’ which he claims to have identified, which is that the term empowerment has a tendency to be used in a meaningless way in the context of literacies education (Lankshear, 1997, p. 63, see Section 2.4). To do this he borrows from the work of Brian Green and James Paul Gee to describe three dimensions (the 3D) of effective literacy (Lankshear, 1999), the ‘*operational*’, ‘*cultural*’ and the ‘*critical*’. The ‘*operational*’ refers to the ‘means’ of literacy through competency with the language system and how it is used and handled; a question of individuals being able to read and write adequately in a range of contexts in an appropriate and adequate manner. The *cultural* dimension (ibid, p. 217) involves competency with the meaning system, recognising that literacy acts and events are not

only *context* specific but also entail a specific *content*. This might mean understanding the work or study contexts in which writing is done, not just technical skills aspects of its use. Thirdly, the '*critical*' dimension is concerned with how social practices and their meaning systems are socially constructed in the first place, where there could be opportunities to create new meanings, rather than being socialised into existing '*operational*' and '*cultural*' contexts. However, it is unclear from Lankshear's argument how to judge whether any 'new meanings' are more desirable or better than any old ones.

Considering literacies education, unless individuals are also 'given' access to the grounds for selection and the principles of interpretation, they are merely socialised into the meaning system and are unable to take an active part in its transformation, again without providing a criterion for gauging whether the transformation is better or worse. So, the '*critical*' dimension is the basis for ensuring that people can transform and actively produce new social practices in literacies (ibid, p. 218), which is the purpose and domain of critical literacy education. Importance is placed on these ideas because it is understood that literate practices and their contexts are instrumental in the reproduction of relationships of power and knowledge in society, so the purpose of critical literacies education is to influence these reproductive processes. Here Lankshear draws heavily on the work of James Paul Gee, describing how students might gain meta-level knowledge of discourse, revealing the ways in which power is produced and enacted through language and so 'giving them' ways of accessing power through literacy (see Lankshear 1997, pp. 75-78), where critical literacies education is understood as a form of empowerment.



### *'Literacies and Power' Hilary Janks*

Hilary Janks describes a 'critical literacy' that works at the interface between language, literacy and power (Janks, 2010, pp. 21-26). She acknowledges that literacies education is not a neutral activity in relation to power and so students must develop a critical stance in relation to writing and other media such as film or photography. She argues that the various conceptualisations of critical literacy, such as those described by Green or Freebody and Luke, Gee, or the New London Group bring to the fore one or other of 'domination', 'access', 'diversity' or 'design' whilst neglecting one or all of the others. By 'domination', Janks refers to the idea that literacies is powerful in maintaining existing relations of domination that might be addressed utilising the tool of critical discourse analysis. Connected to 'domination' is 'access', or the question of how students might gain access to dominant forms of literacies. Janks links this to a paradox where gaining access serves to perpetuate dominance, whilst denying access to students further marginalises them. This raises the question of how to make features of dominant discourses visible in order to 'give' students access to them (ibid, p. 24). By 'diversity', Janks refers to the differences in discourses and their connection to the diverse range of ways by which people are identified and labelled as part of social institutions. Differences between discourses are considered to be 'productive' as they allow people to enter new discourses and be identified differently, offering alternative ways of being in the world, whilst excluding this diversity might exclude students' diverse languages and literacies. Finally, 'design' incorporates the idea of productive power, recognising that human creativity can produce new meanings that might 'revolutionise' students' literary practices and the character of the workplace. Janks argues that all four concepts, described above, must be integrated in a single approach to literacies, including

curriculum design, and she describes how this might be practically achieved with examples from the classroom.

### *Summary – literacies education for empowerment*

The positionings briefly described above hold to common understandings about how a ‘radical’, ‘critical’ or ‘powerful’ strand of adult literacies education might be understood. Literacy does not consist of a set of discrete and identifiable skills, rather a range of social practices which are linked to the distribution of societal power. This allows a broad definition of literacy, much wider than reading and writing, where literacies includes many forms of symbolic identification perhaps including clothing, ways of moving the body or facial expressions. These ways to identifying, naming or labelling people are understood as processes of ‘discourse’ formation that are assumed to constitute people’s ‘identity’, where ‘identity’ is linked directly to the replication of power relationships in society. Importantly, processes of discourse reproduction are understood to operate in ways that are undetectable to the participants. In this sense discourse is understood as ideology, or to be ideological in character (see Eagleton; 1991, p. 3, *ibid*, p. 198), so that understanding the operation of power necessitates a requirement for some people to sit outside of a discourse in order to analyse its workings, and I discuss this in detail in Chapter 4.

Literacies education is then associated with understanding the replication of societal power, so suggesting the possibility of a third dimension or domain of literacies education that might reveal existing power hierarchies and create opportunities to change these. Students might then take control of dominant discourses in order to change them, where to be literate means being able to participate in such activity. In

broad terms, *this is literacies education understood as a form of empowerment* (e.g. Crowther, Tett & Hamilton, 2003, p. 4; Janks, 2010, p. 35; Lankshear, 1997, pp. 70-71), where to be liberated is to be powerful (Gee, 1996, p. 144). To gain a more detailed understanding of what this empowering literacies education might consist of and how this relates to concepts such as ‘identity’, ‘discourse’ and ‘power’ I explore the theory of Bourdieu and Gee in detail in Chapter 4.

### ***Paulo Freire, literacies education and emancipation***

As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, Paulo Freire’s work is of significance amongst practitioners in the UK (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006, p. 116) and is acknowledged as being historically of greatest influence in the conceptualisation of a third ‘radical’ or ‘critical’ strand of literacies (e.g. as described by Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Scribner 1988; Janks, 2010; Gee, 1996). But, Freire’s work has had little influence in the academic work I have just described above. However, the influence of Freire continues in the activity of field workers, educators and students, linked to literacies projects around the world (e.g. Sandler & Mein, 2010; Ramdeholl, 2009; Betts, 2003; Tagoe, 2008; Archer and Newman, 2003; Archer and Costello, 1990). Traces of Freire’s influence can also be found amongst ‘social practice’ researchers which I describe below.

My main engagement with Freire’s work takes place in Chapter 5 and so this section does not aim to describe his work in detail. Rather, in this section I briefly contextualise Freire’s ideas as part of the history of adult literacies education and the discussions within it that I have already described. The purpose is to raise questions which will be

engaged with in subsequent chapters concerned with how adult literacies education for emancipation might be understood, including attendant problems and issues. Firstly, in this section I contextualise a brief description of Freire's theory of education within another, alternative three-dimensional conceptualisation of educational purpose. The conceptualisation allows me to raise the idea that literacies education for *empowerment*, associated with understandings about the ideological character of discourse reproduction and identity formation, might be distinguished from literacies education for *emancipation*, associated with the notion of *subjectification*. I then discuss how the dominance of the idea of education for empowerment seems to have influenced the interpretation of Freire's work. Here I raise for the first time the possibility that literacies education for 'empowerment' might be understood as a form of socialisation, suggesting the importance of distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation if the possibility of an education that does *not* serve to socialise is to be maintained. Finally, I describe the main criticisms of Freire's ideas since initial publication more than forty years ago. I also describe how nonetheless his work is returned to by academics working in the 'social practice' tradition and that this might be where they themselves raise a need to understand and practice adult literacies education as *emancipation*.

### ***Freire – education for emancipation***

Biesta (2010, p. 5, *ibid*, p. 21) refers to three overlapping domains of educational function and purpose, to inform discussions about 'what education should be *for*'. The first is *qualification* which describes education as providing students with the knowledge, skills and understandings, as well as dispositions and forms of judgement that allow them to "do something", be it laying bricks, passing examinations, living on a budget or using a voting booth (*ibid*, pp. 19-20). Secondly, the *socialisation* function

refers to educational activity that serves to continue existing ways of doing and being, be they cultural or religious traditions. This might be an explicit aspect of education, for example in the form of religious instruction, or it might be implicit in the ways that schools or teachers encourage particular ways of speaking or behaving (ibid, p. 19), perhaps by prohibiting swearing or endorsing school uniform. Biesta also refers to education as a process of *subjectification* or being and becoming a human subject (ibid, p. 20), which he describes as the ‘opposite of the socialization function’ (ibid) because ‘it is precisely *not* about the insertion of “newcomers” into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders’ (ibid). In the context of education, subjectification could be understood as being explicitly political or to incorporate moral questions (ibid, pp. 24-25), where questioning the purpose of education means considering the possible “quality” of subjectification (ibid, p. 21).

I suggest here that the first two domains of purpose Biesta describes are already familiar, corresponding broadly with those described by Williams, Scribner or Hamilton and Hillier, as education for employment or skills for daily life and education that encourages existing cultural traditions. Also, in generalised terms, the third domain is suggestive that there might be an education that does not socialise but rather offers some kind of alternative to socialisation. Here it seems that the alternative conceptualised by Biesta does not coincide with the literacies education for empowerment that I have just described in the work of Crowther, Tett and Hamilton, Luke and Freebody, Lankshear, the New London Group and Janks, which place emphasis on processes of identification and the constitution of power relationships.

In contrast, Biesta describes this third domain as a process of *subjectification* understood as the quality of how people act and respond to each other’s actions (Biesta,

2006, p. 137). Understandings of identity are inadequate or perhaps irrelevant to this conceptualisation, because they cannot engage with questions about how people relate to each other socially and respond to each other's acts. Rather, 'identity' seems concerned only with potentially individualistic processes by which people label or name each other and themselves, where to have an 'identity' is to have a name (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 120-122), so that people might only need each other in order to identify how they are different or the same, ignoring questions about why it *matters* that people are unique and irreplaceable (Biesta; 2010, pp. 85-86). I shan't explore this understanding further at this point. Rather, I state in general terms that a distinction might be made between education for empowerment and education for emancipation, which might be associated with a distinction between processes of identification and processes of *subjectification*.

Biesta's three-dimensional conceptualisation is useful when considering the work of Paulo Freire. Freire's ideas could be interpreted as an attempt to describe how education for subjectification might be understood and practised. His central concern is how to distinguish between education that socialises (i.e. that oppresses) and education that maps onto the domain of subjectification (i.e. that emancipates). Freire's own particular understanding of subjectification relates to a specific definition of what it means to be a human subject. Freire pins down and defines the 'human subject' as a description of a natural way of being, understood as 'species being' (see Freire, 1972, pp. 70-71). He assumes that humanity has a natural predisposition to be in a social state of simultaneous reflection and action upon the physical and social world, described by the notion of *praxis* (see *ibid*, p. 70, p. 96). If people enact *praxis*, then they are enacting their vocation to be emancipated human subjects. This allows emancipatory education

to be understood as a process of becoming a human subject, a process of subjectification enacted by teachers and students in *praxis* with each other and the physical world (see *ibid*, p. 30, *ibid* p.53). All these ideas are discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, the point here being that Freire's ideas pertaining to adult literacies education are understood as a process of subjectification rather than a process of identification through discourse production.

It seems that the concept of *subjectification* is associated with the idea that education might *emancipate*, whilst *identification*, linked to the understanding how power is reproduced, is associated with understandings of education that might *empower*. But it is not possible to undertake a meaningful discussion about this possibility until terms such as 'identity', 'discourse', 'the human subject' or 'equality' have been further understood. This is addressed in Chapters 4 and 5, when the concepts of literacies education for empowerment is explored through considering the ideas of Bourdieu and Gee, and the idea of a literacies education for emancipation is explored through the detailed analysis of the work of Freire and Rancière.

### ***Freire and empowerment***

Such is the influence of ideas which associate education with the constitution of power and identity, the idea of emancipation tends to go unarticulated when Freire's work is examined by researchers or educators. This is in keeping with a strand in the critical tradition where emancipation is understood to be brought about from the outside and here the task of critical social science is to make visible the operation of power which is hidden from everyday view (Biesta, 2009, 2010a).

It seems to me that the emphasis that has been placed upon understanding power may have contributed to a tendency for Freire's work to be discussed in the context of *empowerment* or the expose of *power*. Both Scribner (1988) and Hamilton and Hillier (2006) make reference to Freire's work in this way, in their three-dimensional descriptions of educational purposes for adult literacies education (see Section 2.4) Freire's work is described in the context of empowerment in the reporting of literacies programmes around the world. For example, Oughton (2007), Rocha-Schmidt (2010) and Tagoe (2008) all introduce Freire with reference to power or the revelation of power relationships and *not* emancipation. Stromquist (2006), Brookfield (2005), Barton (1994, p. 13), Luke (1991), Ellsworth (1989), Archer & Costello (1990), Macedo (1998), Hamilton (1996) all mention or discuss Freire's work in this fashion.

The same approach is also found in the theoretical underpinning of the Freirian inspired REFLECT projects, which place emphasis on making links between literacy and power rather than literacy and emancipation (Archer & Newman, 2003). David Archer co-designed the REFLECT (*Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques*) as a director of education for the charity Actionaid International. Since 2000, 350 organizations in over sixty countries have implemented REFLECT projects and several evaluation studies that have been conducted globally (e.g. Riddell 2001; Betts 2003; Burchfield et al 2002; Tagoe, 2008). Archer states firm opposition to what he describes as the colonial implementation of literacies where 'Rifles, railways and writing' were the '3 Rs' of colonial conquest (see Archer, 2003, p. 33 or Archer and Newman, 2003), drawing upon Freire and ideas from the 'social practice' tradition to create a program that claims to link literacies to empowerment.



Though there is some reference to Freire's notion of praxis in Archer's description of literacies education as a 'critical group process' incorporating 'reflection-action-reflection' (see Archer, 2003, p. 46), but the idea of education as a process of *subjectification* that might orientate towards emancipation is lost. Instead Archer contextualises the purpose of literacies education as a description of power relationships, claiming strong links between literacy and power, where power is categorised as Government power, Economic power, Social Power, Religious power etc. and where literacies education might give students greater access to these (Archer, 2003, Archer and Newman, 2003). This suggests a purpose of empowering people so that they might participate in society as it stands, rather than creating possibilities for emancipatory alternatives to it.

At this point I wish to make it clear that I make no judgements about how educators and students undertake REFLECT projects on the ground. However, the possibility that the emancipatory orientation of Freire's ideas has been lost is implied by a review of REFLECT projects (Duffy et al, 2008). The report states REFLECT's aim to influence literacy development, where 'individual and community empowerment' is a goal for nine out of sixteen projects around the world (ibid, p. 17) and where 'empowerment' is an 'additional development outcome for eight of the projects'. 'Individual and community empowerment' is defined as the strengthening of the capacity of people, particularly women, to secure their basic rights (ibid, p. 4), perhaps through gaining access to employment or political enfranchisement. This might re-engage with functional understandings of literacies education which both Freire as well as those working in the 'social practice' tradition have set out to avoid. For example, taking this

to its logical extreme, empowerment might be measured and this notion is found in a World Bank review of literacy projects (Abadzi, 2003). Abadzi suggests that empowerment gains should be measured through experimental trials with control groups that might even uncover an empowerment ‘placebo effect’, citing research conducted by Hashime et al who claim to have measured empowerment with the use of ‘empowerment indicators’.

According to Lankshear (see Lankshear, 1997, p. 79) the term ‘empowerment’ has come into popular usage in literacies education in such a way that it can mean ‘all things to all people: which is to say that it means nothing clear’. However, in instances where the term is used without explanation, for example in UNESCO discussion or review documents pertaining to adult literacies (e.g. UNESCO, 2006; UNESCO, 2010; UNESCO UIL, 2008a; UNESCO UIL, 2008b; UNESCO UIL, 2008c; UNESCO, 2009a), it tends to refer to the idea of ‘giving’ people the literacy skills they need in the context of their working, home or community lives so that they might participate within the global economy. For example, the Belem Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2009a) states a commitment to reducing ‘illiteracy’ by 50% by 2015 where literacy is described as:

‘a prerequisite for the development of personal, social, economic and political empowerment. Literacy is an essential means of building people's capabilities to cope with the evolving challenges and complexities of life, culture, economy and society.’ (UNESCO, 2009a; p. 3).

This statement seems to describe educational activity that might perhaps map entirely onto the domain of socialisation. According to Welton (2005), the terms ‘empowerment’ has been an ‘award-winning, celebrity word’ that crossed-over from business into education in the 1980s, when companies implemented ‘employee empowerment programs’ with the aim of incorporating workers into company ways of doing and thinking (ibid, also see Inglis, 1997). Perhaps a question should be raised here as to whether *all* understandings of adult literacies education aimed at ‘empowerment’, including that conceptualised by Janks, Gee or Lankshear are orientated towards functional activity for socialisation and I re-engage with and explore this possibility in Chapters 4 and 6. If so, the implication is that empowerment and emancipation *must* be distinguished if the possibility of an adult literacies education that does not serve to socialise students is to be raised, supporting the central aim of this thesis which is to distinguish between education for emancipation and education for empowerment. In this context, my research can also be understood as a rediscovery of Freire’s endeavour to understand and practice education as emancipation.

### ***Freire – issues and problems***

The voicing of Freire’s ideas in terms of power rather than emancipation might have implications for some of the criticism of Freire’s work, of which there has been a wide body over the last forty years. For example, Freire has been criticised for holding to a simplistic and inadequate understanding of how power operates (e.g. Coben, 1997 or see Taylor, 1993, p.59), perhaps without taking into account that the theory is actually concerned with educational emancipation rather than explaining how power is reproduced. I return to this in Chapter 6, when I contrast criticism of Freire from an

empowerment perspective with that raised by researchers who assume the possibility of emancipation.

Other strands of criticism include concerns that Freire promoted educational practices that restrict the ways that people think (Gee, 1996), in particular that he privileges rational thought allowing students to be categorised as irrational by their teachers (Ellsworth, 1989; Luke, 1992), perhaps incapable of understanding how they are oppressed (Prakash and Esteva, 2008). There is an associated problem raised about how Freire pins down humanity by offering a final and definitive definition of what it means to be a human subject, described by his notion of *praxis*. The problem is that that this might exclude other ways of being human whilst unconditionally accepting his own, with potentially undesirable consequences. Biesta outlines this problem in broad terms, describing theories that make assumptions based upon a fixed understanding of what it means to be human as ‘humanist’ theories (see Biesta, 2006, p. 5). Gur-Ze’ev criticises Freire specifically on this point, raising a concern that Freire’s ideas might even support violence (Gur-Ze’ev, 1998). Gur-Ze’ev and Rancière describe understandings of subjectification that might avoid this problem, which I describe and discuss in Chapters 5 and 6.

### *Freire revisited*

Regardless of the body of criticism, there are also instances where the ideas of Paulo Freire are revisited by researchers associated with the ‘social practice’ tradition. Freire describes an educational emancipation that is inherently social (Freire, 1972) which has gained attention from researchers concerned that literacies education should avoid supporting individualistic responses to what they see as social and political problems in

society (see Inglis, 1997<sup>4</sup>). For example, Tett and Maclachlan (2008) suggest that a social practice model of literacies education might be linked with Freirian inspired educational activity, implying that the employment of ‘values of equality and activity’ might contribute to a radical literacies education and ‘cultural action for freedom’ (ibid). Also in the UK tradition, Hamilton and Pitt (Hamilton and Pitt, 2009) raise alarm at how the discourse of UK literacy policy encourages inequality to be understood as a personal problem for individuals to deal with. Though not going as far as endorsing Freire, neither do they cite any alternative to him, referencing his influence within a ‘critical’ tradition that counters this type of individualism.

Similarly, Lankshear & McLaren (1993) refer back to Freire in detailing criticisms of what they call ‘postmodernism’ or ‘poststructuralism’ which they understand to orientate towards ‘liberal humanism’ rather than challenging existing social relations. Though others do not rely upon Freire, they may attach importance to Freirian concepts, for example, Freebody and Luke (1997, pp. 10-11) cite Marx’s theory of alienated labour (the 1844 manuscripts) and the notion of ‘species being’ for its usefulness in understanding the context of literacies education, though how it is useful is unclear. In similar vein, Janks (2010, pp. 58-59) argues that Marxist perspectives on power, alongside those of Foucault, are important for critical literacy, though again it is unclear why this might be the case.

This return to Freirian ideas may be indicative of how those who use the work of Gee or Bourdieu to discuss the possibility of a ‘critical’, ‘radical’ or ‘powerful’ literacies

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, for Inglis, this concern informs how he distinguishes between empowerment and emancipation in the context of education, where ‘empowerment’ is associated with individualism and emancipation with social responses to oppression. Whilst the arguments I present in this thesis agree with Inglis’s broad distinction, I take issue with how Inglis describes an emancipatory education and I elaborate upon this in Chapter 4,

education, continue to question these same ideas, even their own. Gee himself raises a problem with his own argument that an empowering literacies education might be geared towards the creation of new identifications and discourse. The problem is that there is no way of making judgements as to whether one discourse is better or worse than another discourse, or in other words, whether an identity or label is preferable to any other (Gee, 1993, pp. 291-292). I have already alluded to this problem when describing Lankshear's work above and I discuss it further in Chapters 5 and 6. Lankshear, who draws heavily upon Gee, describes a literacy education that might create new meanings and social practices, but with no indication of how to judge whether these are better or worse than the existing ones. Freire's (1972) theory incorporates ways of making this type of judgement, which rests upon how he defines humanity in praxis. Gee attempts an alternative strategy, dealing with the problem by introducing a framework of ethical principles upon which judgements can be made. Mary Kalantis and Bill Cope, members of the Multiliteracies consortium, raise a similar problem (Cope and Kalantis, 2000, pp. 206-208). Rather than introducing an ethical framework, they suggest the need to demarcate between the merits of various attempts at 'being human', again referring to the possibility of a 'species being' (ibid). For Gee as well as Kalantis and Cope, perhaps this is where the idea of a human subject and a process of *subjectification* is being introduced into their theorising of education, and I return to similar questions in Chapter 6.

I have described two issues above, raised by researchers who have given attention to the possibility of 'radical', 'critical' or 'powerful' literacies which places emphasis on processes of identification linked to the idea of empowerment. There is a concern that adult literacies education should support social rather than individualistic responses to

what are considered to be social problems in society, as raised by Tett, Hamilton, Crowther and Lankshear. Secondly, there is the problem of distinguishing between desirable and undesirable discourse or in other words, how to judge if the outcomes of and empowering literacies education are desirable, as raised by Gee, Kalantis and Cope. Other strategies have also been employed, which, as with Freire, seem to involve re-engaging with ideas associated with subjectification, rather than identification. But Freire's own understanding of subjectification as 'species being' and *praxis* has faced criticism.

At this point I raise a third issue which sits with Biesta's (2009, 2010a) observation that the tradition of 'critical' education orientated towards the revelation of how power operates has a tendency towards creating a dependency between teachers as 'liberators' and students as 'liberated'. This is apparent in some of the language used by academics who have engaged with the possibility of a 'critical' or 'powerful' adult literacies education. For example Lankshear (1999, p. 218) states how critical literacies relies upon students being 'given' access to grounds for selecting and interpreting meaning systems, suggesting the student is dependent upon the teacher. Similarly, Gee (1991, p. 9) describes how students need to be 'given' meta-knowledge about discourses by teachers, again suggesting a paradox where students are dependent upon teachers for knowledge that might liberate. Related to this is the connection made between research into adult literacies education and policy formation (e.g. Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2003; Luke and Freebody, 1997; Fulford, 2010) suggesting a similar paradox where approaches to literacies education that might empower must be prescribed to and followed by teachers and students. I return to this in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

## 2.5 *Summary*

This chapter addressed the first aim of this thesis by mapping out the issues and problems that have been raised by academics, educators and students who have given attention to the purpose of adult literacies education and its implications for how it might be understood and practised educationally. In so doing, I have also dealt with the first five research questions, through an engagement with three areas of literature. Firstly, the ideas which have informed adult literacies education historically; secondly how adult literacies education has developed as a distinct and formalised part of the education system as understood by the teachers, students and activists who have championed it. Here I paid particular attention to how adult literacies education has developed in the UK. Finally I described some issues and problems raised by academics, educators and students who have given attention to an adult literacies education that might raise possibilities for empowerment or emancipation and I summarise these below.

I have described how the policy context of adult literacies education has historically been dominated by what is known as a ‘functional’ understanding of literacies, supporting a ‘Great Divide’ theory or ‘literacy myth’ which assumes that there are wide reaching and pre-determined consequences of learning to read and write for both individuals and society. Empirical research, particularly the ethnographic work of anthropologists as well as evidence from cognitive tests has discredited this notion, suggesting that there are no predetermined consequences of learning to read and write, where literacies are only meaningful in the societal contexts in which they are used. This has led to wider definitions of literacy, as part of what known as a ‘social practice’



model that might include speaking or body language and which incorporates understandings of how power operates in society, raising the possibility that literacies education might be ‘empowering’ or ‘disempowering’. However, most policy contexts for adult literacies education continue to be informed by ‘functional’ understandings, encouraging discussion and debate around a ‘functional’ versus ‘social practice’ divide.

I have described how the scholarship associated with the ‘social practice’ model of literacies, has become known as ‘New Literacies Studies’ (NLS) and has incorporated influences from anthropology and linguistics and is strongly influenced by sociological understandings of adult literacies education. Here some attention has been given to addressing issues of power, as well as the possibility of an adult literacies education that might not always serve to socialise students into society as it stands. Those with concern for these issues have described the purpose of adult literacies education in three dimensions, broadly congruent to those described by Raymond Williams. The third strand that might correspond with William’s ‘public education’ is described variously as ‘critical’, ‘radical’ or ‘powerful’ literacies’, where Paulo Freire has held greatest sway. However, when NLS researchers have given attention to the possibility of this third domain, the work of Pierre Bourdieu and John Paul Gee has been of far greater influence.

The orientation towards these theorists by NLS researchers has allowed the third dimension of adult literacies education to be expressed in terms of empowerment through understandings of power, identity and discourse, raising the possibility that new forms of discourse and identity might alter existing power hierarchies. I have also described a tradition in the practice of adult literacies education influenced by Freire,

which assumes the possibility of an education that might emancipate. I have discussed this possibility in terms of education as a process of becoming a human subject, or what Biesta (2010) describes as *subjectification*, in so doing raising the question of how education for empowerment might be distinguished from education for emancipation.

Taking the ideas of academics in the ‘social practice’ tradition alongside those of Paulo Freire, two types of problem have been encountered by those who have given attention to the possibility of an emancipatory or empowering literacies education. Firstly, there is the problem of what is meant by a range of notions and concepts, such as ‘literacies’, ‘empowerment’, ‘emancipation’, ‘equality’, ‘oppression’, ‘discourse’, ‘power’, ‘subjectification’ and ‘identity’.

Secondly, there are issues associated broadly with the idea that education need not always serve the purpose of socialising students into society and how this might be understood and practised in the context of adult literacies. Such educational alternatives have been described in terms of empowerment or emancipation, with empowerment associated with how processes of identification re-produce power hierarchies, which I describe in Chapter 4, whilst emancipation is understood as a process of subjectification, described in Chapters 5 and 6. This raises questions about how empowerment might be distinguished from emancipation in the context of adult literacies education and exploring this distinction is the main aim of my project.

Particular problems have been associated with literacies education for empowerment. Firstly, there is concern about educational practices that encourage individualism; secondly there is the problem of how to make judgements as to whether educational

outcomes are desirable or not; and thirdly that understandings of empowering literacies might encourage a dependency between teachers and students that replicates existing societal hierarchies. These three problems relate to ideas strongly influenced by John Paul Gee and Pierre Bourdieu and so I examine the work of the two theorists in more detail. I describe and justify my approach to this in the next chapter (Chapter 3) and set out my analysis and its outcome in Chapter 4. Attendant problems are that understandings of both emancipatory or empowering adult literacies education have a tendency to rely upon fixed notions of what it means to be human, privileging some ways of thinking and being whilst excluding others and with potentially undesirable consequences. This issue has been particularly associated with the work of Paulo Freire and is explored in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

But next I turn to the question of methodology.

### **3 Design**

In this chapter I justify the main aim of this project. I also describe and justify the objectives and the methods that I employ to meet them. What I do not describe at this stage is a theoretical argument that might underpin the aim, objectives and methods. This is a theoretical study that incorporates an examination of various attempts to define and theorise education which are described in the chapters that follow. This means that discussion about the possible theoretical justifications for my research and how I undertake it are better placed in a later chapter so that it might be informed by the ideas that precede it. This makes for a more meaningful discussion and so engagement with the theoretical justification of my research aims and the associated methods, including how I criticise or make judgements about theory, is situated in the final chapter (Chapter 7).

Instead this design chapter is geared towards describing two other aspects. Firstly I justify the pragmatic decisions that I have taken in the undertaking of this project. Secondly, in the broadest of terms, my research is concerned with exploring the possibility of an emancipatory or empowering adult literacies education. This means that I am making the general assumption that an emancipatory or empowering literacies education might be possible. There may be some broad repercussions that follow the making of this assumption that influence the approaches that I employ and some of the decisions and judgements I have made. I attempt to justify these here. I shall structure this by restating and then justifying the main aim of my research. I then move on to justifying the objectives that follow on from the aim as well as the research design and approaches that I employ to meet them.

### ***3.1 The main aim – empowerment or emancipation***

The main aim of this research project is to explore whether it is possible to distinguish meaningfully between adult literacies education that might contribute towards empowerment and adult literacies education that might create possibilities for emancipation. This aim has emerged from discussions amongst educators, students and academics associated with adult literacies education and who have given attention to its purpose and which I draw upon in my review of literature. What I am arguing here is that the research aim and objectives are rooted in existing discussions and can be interpreted as an attempt to continue an existing conversation, though perhaps rerouting it along a new course.

There is an existing tradition where academics, educators and students have questioned the purposes of adult literacies education, with wide acknowledgement that it typically serves to incorporate or socialise students into society as it stands. However in these discussions society is also understood to be inherently oppressive, unjust or unequal making socialisation unacceptable and giving rise to the broad notion that adult literacies education with a purpose other than socialisation might be possible. It is from my engagement with literature pertaining to this discussion and the positions held within it that the main aim and objectives of my research emerged and I describe this process in the next section.

#### ***Design of literature review and emergence of main aim***

In common with most PhD projects, my first objective was to conduct a review of literature, in this case pertaining to adult literacy education. However it was through the meeting of this objective that the main aim of my research was clarified. This means that the justification for the design of the literature review is integral to the justification of the project as a whole and so this section serves two purposes; firstly, to justify the design of the literature review and secondly to justify the central aim of my project and ultimately to justify the objectives that follow from this. For this reason, I have explicitly stated the questions that drove the literature review as an integral part of the research questions listed in Section 1 (see pp 13-14). Once identified, I strategised how to meet the central aim through a series of essays, each answering a different question, which I take to be the research questions that this thesis addresses. However, the essays are not presented intact and in chronological order in this thesis, rather they have been re-presented as a single coherent text.

The purpose of the literature review that I have set out in Chapter 2 was to map out the issues and problems that have been raised by academics, educators and students who have given attention to how adult literacies education might be understood and practised. I explored three areas of literature. Firstly, the ideas that informed adult literacies education historically including ‘functional’ and ‘social practice’ conceptualisations. Secondly, how adult literacies education developed as a distinct and formalised part of the education system particularly in the UK context. Finally I explored the issues and problems that have been raised by academics, educators and students who have given attention to the possibilities for empowerment or emancipation in the context of adult literacies education.

I started by describing ‘functional’ and ‘social practice’ models of literacies education as this is how literacies education is typically discussed by those who describe its history, for example in the summaries set out by Harman (1970), Tagoe (2008) and Kelder (1996). Also, the two models, even if expressed through different terminology, have been integral to the presentation of theories and understandings about literacies education (e.g. Street, 1984, Barton, 1994, Gee, 1996). In addition, academic discussions in adult literacies education are often presented in a ‘functional’ versus ‘social practice’ context, again even if different terminology is used (e.g. see Maclachlan, 2009; Fulford 2010; Wicklin and Sanders; 2007, Oughton; 2007; Hamilton and Pitt, 2009) and Maddox (2007) has noted this tendency. Higher level analyses of the trajectory by which literacies has become a focus for academic research is also couched in terms that relate to the ‘functional’ versus ‘social practice’ approaches (e.g. Lankshear, 1999 or Gee, 2000), where psychological research has been associated with ‘functional’ understandings whilst sociological understandings are linked to the emergence of New Literacies Studies and the development of the ‘social practice’ model.

Contextualising the first part of the literature review within the ‘functional’ versus ‘social practice’ dichotomy sets out the discussions as they are usually presented and it provides a useful structure to present some the history of the development of ideas and understandings. However, whilst the notion of ‘functional’ literacies is linked directly to predetermined and predictable outcomes and purposes for adult literacies education (see Section 2.2.) the ‘social practice’ model discredits this possibility. This raises the question as to what the ‘social practice’ model implies for the purpose and function of adult literacies education and so I adjust the inquiry of the literature review so that it re-

orientates away from the 'social practice' versus 'functional' model discussion and towards examining literature from the 'social practice' tradition that addresses the question of educational purpose. This reorientation continues throughout the remainder of the review of the literature and as a result the main aim of the project emerges.

Researchers from the 'social practice' tradition who have considered the question of educational purpose were found to utilise three-dimensional approaches e.g. Scribner (1988), Hamilton and Hillier (2006), Lankshear (1999), Freebody and Lo Bianco (in Hamilton and Hillier, 2006, 5). The approaches describe three distinct but overlapping strands of purpose for adult literacies education. Firstly, literacies for the workplace which encompasses vocational skills and secondly literacies education that upholds cultural and intellectual traditions where these two dimensions are understood to socialise students into society as it stands. Thirdly, the possibility is raised of a third dimension that might not serve to socialise students, understood as a 'critical', 'empowering' or 'emancipatory' literacies education. In broadly similar but not identical terms, Williams (1993) describes a three-dimensional approach in relation to the history of adult education in Britain as does Biesta (2010) in relation to education in general and I utilise these during the process of reviewing the literature and in the design of the review itself.

In the broadest of terms, the three dimensions or domains of purpose all raise the possibility that adult literacies education need not always serve to socialise students into society as it stands, instead suggesting the possibility of some kind of more desirable alternative. If a distinction cannot be made between education that socialises and education that creates emancipatory or empowering alternatives then perhaps education



may only be understood as a socialising machine. There could be a range of sociological models offering insights into its operation, but no possible way of understanding or enacting an emancipatory education that might *not* serve to socialise people into society as it stands. However, there has been a refusal to accept this, found in the tradition I have referred to above, where educators, academics and students associated with adult literacies education have assumed that there might be an alternative purpose that does not always serve to socialise students. It is here that I feel that my responsibility lies as an academic researcher as I cannot accept that my work should contribute only to the socialisation of students. This leaves me with no alternative but to assume that some kind of alternative is possible and to design and enact research accordingly. Because the three-dimensional conceptualisations assume this possibility, I utilised them to structure the literature review from which the aim and objectives of my research arose.

Contextualising the design of the last two sections of the literature review within three-dimensional approaches oriented me towards exploring literature that assumed the possibility of a third non-socialising dimension of adult literacies education. It orientated my attention towards the endeavours of academics, educators and students who have attempted to understand and describe it. Exploring these understandings as part of the literature review raised understandings of how the third ‘alternative’ purpose of adult literacies education has been broadly associated with either notions of empowerment or notions of emancipation. What’s more, that empowerment and emancipation are understood through contrasting concepts, suggesting that they might refer to distinctive educational purposes and practices. This laid the basis for the main aim of this thesis, which is to explore the understandings of empowerment and

emancipation in the context of adult literacies education and whether they might be distinguished from each other.

### *Selection of literature*

It should be apparent from the discussion so far in this chapter that I did not commence with any particular understanding or definition of empowerment or emancipation. As such I had no specific basis upon which to select or discuss literature pertaining to emancipation or empowerment as part of the literature review. However I employed two strategies both consistent with idea of the three-dimensional approach to educational purpose and the assumption that an empowering or emancipatory literacies education might be possible. Firstly, I made a very broad distinction between literature which described literacies education aimed at socialisation and literature which was attempting to describe education that in some way was *not* aimed at socialisation. This strategy brought to my attention a range of ideas and educational activity which I was then able to examine in more detail to gain an impression of what the educational ‘alternatives’ consisted of and how their purpose and practices might be understood.

The second strategy influencing my selection of literature concerned with emancipatory or empowering adult literacies was a concern for the issue of dependency between teachers and students in the context of emancipation (Biesta, 2009, 2010a). Biesta describes a paradox which is that if people are reliant upon academics or educators for understandings about how they might be oppressed, empowered or emancipated, then they will be in some way be dependent upon them for their own emancipation, seemingly making emancipation impossible. This idea allowed me to make early judgements as to whether ideas or theories were concerned with emancipation as a

purpose for education. For example, it seemed to me that Raymond Williams, Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière, at the very least, acknowledged the same issue and had attempted to explore it further. On the other hand, ‘empowerment’ understandings of educational alternatives for adult literacies, associated with Colin Lankshear, Alan Luke or John Paul Gee seemed to re-inforce rather than attempt to confront this problem (see Section 2.4). This allowed me to make early judgements or criticisms about ideas pertaining to adult literacies education, suggesting that a distinction might be made between ‘empowerment’ and ‘emancipation’.

I also interpreted the issue of dependency between teacher and student for emancipation to mean that the ideas of educators and students had to be included as well as literature pertaining to academia. If I assume broadly that an emancipatory education is possible then I cannot assume that only academics can consider or understand this matter and so the ideas of non-academics or perhaps students might be brought into the discussion. I would argue that this notion sits with Raymond Williams’ (1992) three-dimensional approach where the third dimension is understood as an enactment of equality. I don’t attempt to elaborate on this at this point (though I return to it in Chapter 7), but his approach seems to encourage the valuing of students’ ideas rather than privileging those of the teacher or academic. This could include the valuing of much of Williams own writing which are the observations and insights of an adult education tutor rather than the scholarship of an academic. It might also include ideas in the magazines produced as part of the student publishing movement or the journal of the Plebs’ League (see Section 2.3). This is a theoretical study rather than a historical project and I have not delved into the archives associated with these two historical grass roots movements in adult education in Britain. Instead I orientate towards the work of academics who have

given attention to the notion of empowering or emancipatory education and my research endeavours to contribute to this tradition. However, the point here is that my approach acknowledges that such archives might hold potentially important ideas about adult education. One of the outcomes of my work is that it might offer a justification for researching these archives from an education perspective and I reengage with this possibility in Chapter 7 – again I can only discuss this meaningfully after the bulk of the theoretical analysis comprising my research has been set out.

My literature review contextualised the practice of adult literacies education within the British experience. This was partly a pragmatic decision. I am situated in Britain where I have experience as an adult literacies tutor and development worker, also time and resource constraints prevent any detailed exploration of the experience of more than one country. However the British tradition is also one with a legacy where teachers and students have orientated towards the idea of there being emancipatory possibilities for education. In Britain adult literacies education has been largely driven by grass roots activism (Hillier, 2009) from which approaches to teaching have emerged, as well as the writing of its history. For example there are the ideas of Raymond Williams or Richard Hoggart, histories such as those by Webb, McIlroy, Waugh, Cooke or Hamilton and Hillier, writings from the student publishing movement which are unique to the British context, as well as documented approaches to literacies teaching (e.g. Frost and Hoy, 1980). There is also the documentation of influences from other traditions, such as Kirkwood and Kirkwood's of Freire in Scotland. This legacy informed the historical approach to the literature review, allowing me to situate my research in existing traditions where the issues and problems I seek to explore have already been set out by others.

### *Exploring empowerment and emancipation*

As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, it was from the literature review that the main aim of my research emerged which is to explore understandings of empowerment and emancipation in the context of adult literacies education and whether they might be distinguished from each other. Aside from raising the possibility of a distinction between adult literacies education for empowerment and adult literacies education for emancipation, the literature also raised a range of issues and problems associated with these two notions which I have summarised at the end of Chapter 2, the objective being to explore and discuss these further.

I have also alluded to how I have commenced without any predefined notion or understandings of what ‘literacies’, ‘education’, ‘empowerment’, or ‘emancipation’ might mean. The literature review raised examples of educators and students with strongly held opinions on some of these matters, for example, the opinions of students such as Merry (Frost and Hoy, 1980) or Goode (1980) and the Plebs League (1909), or educators such as Williams (1993); Freire (1970, 1972); Hoggart (1957) or Frost and Hoy (1980). It also raised the scholarship of academics such as Gee, (1996); Crowther, Hamilton & Tett (2001); Lankshear (1997); Lankshear and McLaren (1993); NLG (1996) and Janks, (2010).

Exploring this work had raised questions, issues and problems relating to the ideas of empowerment and emancipation in the context of adult literacies education. None of the issues and problems that I seek to explore in my research originated with me. They have all been raised first by other educators and researchers who have a relationship with adult literacies education and have given attention to the possibility of an emancipatory

or empowering purpose. My research could be interpreted as a continuation of the endeavours of others as I pick up problems that they first raised and formulate my research objectives around further pursuing their exploration.

However raising such issues and problems did not resolve the problem of how to embark upon meaningful discussions that might explore them further. The literature pointed towards concepts such as ‘identity’, ‘power’, ‘discourse’, ‘the human subject’, ‘subjectification’, ‘oppression’, and ‘equality’, yet understandings of what empowerment, emancipation, literacies or education meant for academics, teachers or students remained sketchy and precluded the possibility for meaningful exploration. The next objective of the research had to be to develop a more detailed conceptualisation of ‘empowerment’ and ‘emancipation’ so that they might be understood in the context of adult literacies education, furnishing me with some definitions, understandings and reference points to allow the continuance of a meaningful exploration. Here the notion of *subjectification* is significant, which Biesta (2010) employs in general terms to describe the possibility of an education that might serve an emancipatory function. I commence with no definition of *subjectification*, but addressing how it might be understood compels me towards attempting a deep level of engagement with ideas and understandings, breaking beneath generalised descriptions of how emancipation might be understood in educational contexts. This drilling down, which I attempt to accomplish in the latter stages of this thesis, encourages a more nuanced and detailed distinction to be made between ‘empowerment’ and ‘emancipation’ in the context of education, with repercussions for how an emancipatory literacies education might be understood. In this sense, exploring emancipation as *subjectification* has been key not only to establishing the aim and objectives of this thesis, but also the meeting of these.

I pursue this end by setting out to define empowerment and emancipation separately through analysing the work of theorists whose work has been influential in attempting to describe these notions in the context of education. This is the main justification for the second and third objective of my research, which I outline and justify next along with the approaches I employ to meet them.

### *Selection of theorists*

The second objective is to reconstruct and explore the work of Pierre Bourdieu and John Paul Gee in relation to how the notion of literacies education for empowerment might be understood and practised and what the implications might be for defining literacies. The decision to examine the work of these two theorists in more detail arose from reading the work of academics who have given attention to the idea that adult literacies education might serve a purpose of empowerment.

The notion of an empowering adult literacies education (e.g. Janks, 2010; Crowther, Hamilton, Tett, 2001; NLG, 1996 etc.) draws on a variety of understandings from sociology and linguistics. In particular, the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu and John Paul Gee seem to hold great sway. There are other influential academics, particularly from the field of semiotics i.e. Kress (2000), which I don't consider for further analysis. There are also academics who, like Gee, have developed understandings based upon discourse analysis, e.g. Fairclough (2000). Amongst older literature (e.g. Harman, 1970) there is influence of the sociological work of Basil Bernstein, who Lankshear (1999) presents as a precursor to Bourdieu (1999). However, as this research is concerned with how education might serve a function other than to slot students into existing society, I orientate towards theorists who give attention to acknowledging and attempting to

understand this possibility. I chose Bourdieu and Gee for further analysis not only because their influence seems to be widespread, but also because they offer definitions of ‘power’, ‘discourse’ and ‘identity’ and link these to understandings of ‘education’, suggesting that a detailed analysis of their work might offer a greater understanding of what literacies for empowerment might mean and how problems associated with the notion might have arisen.

Bourdieu’s ideas can be found in foundational work in New Literacies Studies, such as Heath (1983) and Gee himself (1996). There is influence amongst Luke and Freebody (1997b) in Australia and Janks (2010) in South Africa. The *multiliteracies* conceptualisation also has influence from Bourdieu, as found in the work of Fairclough (2000) and the aforementioned Luke and Gee, who were part of the original *multiliteracies* consortium (NLG, 1996).

In particular, Gee drew upon the field of linguistics to create his own understandings of how literacies education that might empower, which has had a wider reaching influence amongst academics. As well as being a founder of the multiliteracies consortium, he directly influences Lankshear’s (1997, 1999) description of ‘Critical’ literacy, as well as Crowther, Hamilton and Tett’s (2003) description of a ‘Powerful literacies’ which has been influential in the UK. Hilary Janks (2010) own take, within the South African context, also draws on Gee when linking literacies with ‘power’.

The third objective was to reconstruct and explore the work of Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière in relation to how an adult literacies education for emancipation might be understood and practised and what this implies for defining literacies. Again, as well as



providing reference points, definitions and understandings that might inform later discussions about how empowering and emancipatory literacies education might be distinguished from each other, the assumption was that such an analysis might offer a deeper understanding of the problems associated with emancipatory education, for example the existing body of criticism about Freire's work.

Freire was selected as the theorist most influential in the emancipatory tradition of adult literacies education as identified by Scribner (1988), Gee (1996), Hamilton and Hillier (2006). Hamilton and Hillier's historical survey of adult literacies education in England found tutors citing Freire as a personal influence more than any other figure (*ibid*, p. 116). His work is still influential in the context of literacies projects around the world and has informed the charity ActionAid's approach to literacies education for adults. Influence is also visible from the scale and depth of criticism of his work, (e.g. Gee, 1996; Ellsworth, 1989; Coben, 1997; Luke, 1992; Gur-Ze'ev, 1998; Biesta, 2012) demonstrating the large level of attention that it has received. In the literature review I argue that Freire's work is often cited as being concerned with 'empowerment' rather than 'emancipation' and I justify this claim as part of my detailed analysis of his ideas. Rancière is not so obvious a choice. Unlike Bourdieu, Gee and Freire, his ideas have little influence upon discussions in adult literacies education. Though published more than twenty years ago (e.g. Rancière, 1991), there has been little interest amongst educationalists until recently (e.g. Bingham, 2009; Lewis, 2009, 2010; Bingham and Biesta, 1998, 2010) and there has been no attempt so far to consider his ideas in the context of adult literacies education through academic scholarship.

The inclusion of Rancière is where I bring some new ways of considering old problems into the discussion, continuing a tradition that has discussed the emancipatory or empowering possibilities for adult literacies education, but starting to consider new understandings. In later discussions I also briefly explore the ideas of Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (with help from Holloway, 2002) which serves a similar purpose. The decision to explore Rancière in detail was based upon my own claim and which my analysis (in Chapter 5) demonstrates, which is that he gives attention to very similar problems to those set out and addressed by Freire. They both offer a detailed theory that sets out how education for emancipation might be understood. Within this context they both deal with a range of similar issues, for example, both Freire and Rancière attempt to conceptualise emancipatory education that might avoid the paradox where students are made dependent upon teachers for their own emancipation (see Section 2.4).

### *Method of analysis*

I conduct two sets of analyses. Firstly, to explore the notion of empowerment, I offer a detailed reconstruction of the ideas of Bourdieu and Gee. Secondly, to explore the idea of an emancipatory education, I reconstruct the ideas of Freire and Rancière. I adopt a similar approach for both pairs of theorists.

To consider the theory of Bourdieu and Gee, I reconstruct the ideas in parallel commencing by describing the assumptions that each theorist makes. I then examine how the assumptions inform each theorist's understanding of oppression. Finally I describe how each theorist's understanding of oppression informs their conceptualisation of a literacies education that might overcome oppression through processes of empowerment. I then consider the theory of Freire and Rancière with a

similar approach, describing the assumptions that they both make and how these inform their definitions of oppression. However, whilst Bourdieu and Gee are considered with respect to the possibility of a literacies education for *empowerment*, I consider how Freire and Rancière might describe a literacies education for *emancipation*.

This approach to understanding theories pertaining to education is justifiable on at least four counts. Firstly, it orientates attention towards the assumptions that the theorists make about human beings demonstrating that these are, indeed, just assumptions and cannot be taken as immovable certainties. It also shows that the assumptions that the theorists make can be linked directly to how they conceptualise empowerment or emancipation, and ultimately to understandings about how literacies education might be practised by teachers and students. Or to state it the other way around, considering the four theories in this way demonstrates how educational practices may be justified by the assumptions that theorists, teachers or students make about people.

Whilst this approach demonstrates that there is no blueprint or definitive way of understanding education that claims to empower or to emancipate, it informs a detailed description of how empowerment or emancipation might be understood. There are four useful repercussions that might justify this approach. Firstly the detailed setting out of the theories in parallel brings to the fore the problems associated with idea of empowerment or emancipation that I have already raised at the end of the literature review, for example the issues arising from the critique of Freire's work, demonstrating how these issues may have arisen from the assumptions that the theorists have made.

Secondly, and importantly, the detailed description and comparison of the pairs of theories helps to set out some terminology and concepts which I can utilise as reference points so that further meaningful discussion can continue about the possibility of emancipatory or empowering education. For example, in the literature review I briefly describe Williams' idea that 'public education' might acknowledge equality between humans, but make no attempt to try and explore it any further at that point (see Section 2.3). After analysing and setting out the work of Bourdieu, Gee, Freire and Rancière I am able to re-engage with and discuss matters such as Williams' ideas as I have some reference points and terminology with which to consider it in a meaningful fashion. It is in this way that I am able to sustain and inform a meaningful discussion around a range of issues pertaining to adult literacies education, empowerment and emancipation in Chapters 6 and 7. This includes setting out how education for empowerment might be distinguished from education for emancipation, allowing the main aim of my research to be addressed.

Thirdly and relating to this, comparing and contrasting the four theorists allows the possibility of setting up a conversation between the theorists, giving opportunities for raising further issues and problems. In this sense my strategy could be seen as taking two theories (i.e. Bourdieu and Gee) and comparing them and in so doing raising a range of problems. When this comparative examination is exhausted, I then introduce the two other theories and exhaust these. I can then compare the four theories, see what questions arise and exhaust that discussion. After this, I bring in further ideas, notably from Gur-Ze'ev and so the discussion continues, but pointing towards other possibilities for engagement rather than reaching definitive conclusions. The main aim of this project suggests that the objective is not to seek and define a 'final solution' to adult literacies

education and the aims of empowerment and emancipation, but to initiate a discussion and develop an argument about the emancipatory potential of adult literacies education. The comparative analyses allow me to set up a debate that might continue, perhaps even beyond the bounds of my research.

Finally, as my approach is orientated towards understanding how empowerment and emancipation might be defined, it follows that the resulting definitions might also be *compared*. In this way, my approach to exploring the four theorists allows me to begin *distinguishing* between empowering education and education for emancipation, so meeting the central aim of my exploration. I take the main characteristics of empowerment and contrast them with those that might define an emancipatory education, but the distinction between the two is not confined to making straight comparisons. I am also able to consider what the different definitions of empowerment and emancipation imply for how ideas about education might be criticised and the types of problems that the contrasting forms of criticism raise. Here I draw upon the existing wide body of criticism of Freire's work, the bulk of which comes from 'empowerment' perspectives, and contrast this with criticism of Freire raised by researchers such as Biesta and Gur-Ze'ev who assume the possibility of an emancipatory education. As well as offering a more penetrating examination of Freire's theory, this strategy opens the way for a deeper engagement with how empowerment and emancipation might be understood, including drilling down into the idea of education for *subjectification*. There are implications here for how I make my own judgements or criticisms about the literature I review and analyse during this research. However, once again, I cannot discuss this meaningfully without first presenting my analyses and so I return to this in Chapters 6 and 7 when I re-engage with the methodology that underpins this research.

### 3.2 *Design Summary*

In this chapter I have justified the main aim and objectives of my project as well as describing and justifying the approaches that I employ to meet them. I have described how the main aim of the thesis, which is to distinguish between how an empowering or an emancipatory literacies education might be understood and enacted, arose from an existing tradition of questioning the purpose of adult literacies education that is expressed in the work of educators, students and academics. This means that the aim of this thesis as well as the problems and issues that it addresses originate with existing discussions rather than with me, making the design and organisation of my literature review integral to the justification of my aims and objectives and the strategies I employ to meet them.

I have described how I drew upon three-dimensional conceptualisations of educational purpose, as defined by Williams, Hamilton and Hillier, Scribner, Freebody and Lo Bianco and Biesta, to organise and structure the literature review. The resulting structure drew my attention to empowerment and emancipation as potential purposes for adult literacies education and the possibility of demarcating between these. It also raised a need for terms such as ‘identity’, ‘power’, ‘equality’ or ‘the human subject’ to be defined or understood so that discussions could be meaningfully continued, so laying the basis for the objectives of my project.

I have discussed and justified how I selected the work of four theorists for detailed analysis, John Paul Gee and Pierre Bourdieu in relation to understanding empowerment and Freire and Jacques Rancière who are associated with education for emancipation. I also set out my strategy for analysing the theories by reconstructing them in parallel and

in comparison to each other describing how this would place emphasis on the assumptions that theorists make about people in the context of education, allow terminology and reference points to be defined, raise the possibility of setting up a conversation about the purpose of education that might continue beyond this project, as well as providing a strategy for distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation. I have also described how my strategy creates opportunities for exploring what it might mean to *criticise* or judge ideas about education in the context of empowerment or emancipation, including my own engagement with the literature pertaining to this thesis.

However I also make clear that a deeper engagement with the justification for this thesis and the methods I employ cannot be conducted meaningfully at this point. I have only been able justify the pragmatic decisions that I have taken in the undertaking of this project and some of the repercussions that might follow from attempting to explore the possibility of an emancipatory or empowering adult literacies education. But until the ideas of Gee, Bourdieu, Freire and Rancière have been set out and discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 it is not possible to engage in a deeper discussion about any theoretical justification of my approaches to examining theory. I will re-engage with these types of questions again in Chapter 7. But for now I shall commence with the main analysis of theories pertaining to adult literacies education, empowerment and emancipation, starting with the ideas of James Paul Gee and Pierre Bourdieu.

## **4 Empowerment in the context of adult literacies education**

### *4.1 Introduction*

In Chapter 2 I described how researchers advocating for ‘social practice’ understandings of adult literacies education have given attention to the idea that education might empower students (see Section 2.4.). I also raised issues and problems identified by researchers associated with such understandings of empowering literacies (see Section 2.4.). To summarise, there are three main problems; firstly that conceptualisations of empowering literacies education might suggest educational practices where teachers and students are made individually responsible for solving problems in society that are understood to be structural in character. Secondly, there is the problem of how to make judgements about whether a new ‘identity’ or ‘discourse’ resulting from educational activity is more desirable than that which it replaces. Finally, understandings of empowering literacies education seems to suggest educational practices that might replicate existing power hierarchies by making students dependent upon teachers and researchers for understandings about how ‘discourse’ and ‘power’ operate.

The ideas of Pierre Bourdieu and James Paul Gee have held great sway amongst researchers in the ‘social practice’ tradition (see Section 2.4). The objective of this chapter is therefore to reconstruct and explore the work of Pierre Bourdieu and John Paul Gee in relation to how the notion of literacies education for empowerment might be understood and practised and what the implications might be for defining literacies. This will allow me to address research questions vi., vii., and viii. Firstly, I outline how Bourdieu and Gee conceptualise an empowering literacies education. From this analysis I go on to describe how the notions of ‘power’, ‘identity’ and ‘discourse’ are understood



in the context of literacies education. Finally I discuss how the problems and issues associated with the practice of an empowering literacies education arise from the assumptions that the theorists make.

My analysis allows me to create some reference points as well as raising more questions that might contribute towards addressing the main aim of my research, which is to explore the distinction between empowering and emancipatory literacies education.

To address the questions outlined above, I examine the work of James Paul Gee and Pierre Bourdieu together and in parallel. I describe the assumptions they each make, how they each conceptualise oppression and what the repercussions are for understanding an empowering or emancipatory literacies education, including the anticipated practices of teachers and students.

#### ***4.2 Bourdieu and Gee - assumptions***

In order to describe how Bourdieu and Gee conceptualise oppression, literacies education and the possibility of empowerment, I am going to start by describing the assumptions that they each make. Both seek to address a problem that they have identified with how language has been typically understood by academics and others, suggesting that this has influenced understandings of how power operates, perhaps even contributing to the replication of existing power relationships in society. To address this problem, they both attempt to describe how language operates to privilege social groups whilst excluding others, through definitions of ‘discourse’, ‘identity’ and ‘power’. This also lays the groundwork for setting out how an ‘empowering’ literacies education might be understood.

### ***Bourdieu's assumptions***

Bourdieu claims to follow the programme suggested by Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* (see Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p. 43), where the final thesis reads 'Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways, the point however is to change it.' (see Bernstein, 1972, pp. 1-3). However, Bourdieu seeks to rectify a problem he has identified with Marx's theory which is that it fails to account for language and processes of 'symbolic production' such as speech, writing or facial expressions. Instead, Marx places emphasis on the structure of economic production, perhaps encouraging deterministic understandings about society and the processes that might change it, leaving little room for human agency (Garnham and Williams, 1980).

However, Bourdieu still makes assumptions and utilises theoretical methods that are in keeping with an interpretation of Marxian concepts. This includes reliance upon a Marxian notion of dialectics to describe the dynamics that drive societal change, conceptualising a dialectical relationship between agency, structure and symbolic production (ibid). He also relies on a Marxian notion of *praxis* to describe his understanding of language and theory and what it means to be human (see Harker et al; 1990; Garnham and Williams, 1980, p. 212; Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 2-3). I return to these ideas in Chapters 5 when I describe and discuss the work of Freire and Rancière, distinguishing it from that of Bourdieu. But more important here are the assumptions that Bourdieu makes about language as these are integral to his understanding of how power, systems of education and literacy might be defined and it is this aspect of his work that I describe in this chapter.

Bourdieu claims that early sociologists such as Comte (or Marx) and later linguists such as Saussure and Chomsky support the idea that all people have the same linguistic competence. This is the notion that all people have universal and predetermined language skills where language is a common ‘treasure trove’ that everyone has equal access to. Bourdieu claims that this idea ignores the processes by which power is reproduced in society, as power operates through the extent of people’s mastery of linguistic competencies (Bourdieu<sup>5</sup>, 1991, pp. 43-44).

Central to Bourdieu’s understanding of how both literacies education and power operate is the idea that people are unable to detect how some understandings about people come to be taken as valid and legitimate whilst others are not. According to Bourdieu this is because meanings are imposed upon people through an undetectable process which simultaneously replicates and reinforces hierarchies of power in society. Bourdieu describes this process as symbolic violence, where meanings and ‘truths’ are enforced through ‘symbolic productions’ such as speech, writing, or other symbolic forms like facial expressions, mannerisms or ways of wearing clothes. He summarises:

‘Every power to exert symbolic violence, i.e. every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations’

(Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977<sup>6</sup>, p. 4)

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<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu’s book *Language and Symbolic Power* referred to as LSP for the remainder of this text

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu and Passeron’s book *Reproduction In Education, Culture and Society* is referred to as RE for the remainder of this text

Bourdieu claims that the idea of there being an undetectable process of symbolic power is an 'axiom' or self-evident truth, which he describes as the 'principle of the theory of sociological knowledge' (RE, p. 4). He also claims that anyone who fails to acknowledge the existence of symbolic power is in effect colluding with existing power hierarchies by neglecting the possibility of being able to understand about how power operates. Logically, this would suggest that if the operation of power is exposed, the degree of its operation might be weakened. However, paradoxically, accepting Bourdieu's axiom also means accepting 'the truth' that power is reproduced in undetectable ways making such exposure impossible. The upshot seems to be that regardless of whether we accept Bourdieu's 'axiom' or not, power relationships are continually reproduced and serve to reinforce existing social hierarchies by imposing meanings onto people through 'symbolic productions' such as speaking, writing or gesticulating.

For Bourdieu, language is 'a 'system of norms regulating linguistic practices' (LSP, p. 45) typically dominated by the official language in a nation state. The enforcement of an official language creates the illusion that language is a common treasure trove mediated by the dictionary. Linguistic or symbolic production (i.e. speaking, writing, or facial expressions etc.) is effected by each individual's anticipation of how the linguist markets (i.e. people situated in social hierarchies) will receive their speech. This means that speakers amend their speech to suit its anticipated reception or they will suffer sanctions which influence their position in the hierarchy of power. For example, an individual might amend their regional accent, choice of words, grammar and body mannerisms during a job interview with neither themselves nor the interview panel being aware of this taking place. This amounts to a form of self-censorship that is

legitimised by both speaker and listener and is influenced by existing hierarchies of power in society. Bourdieu understands this as activity that raises or lowers the value of an individual's 'linguistic currency', which might rise or fall on 'linguistic markets' which are already dominated by particular groups. This raises the idea of individuals having 'linguistic capital' that can be exchanged for 'social capital' within a social grouping, which ultimately counts as currency that can be cashed in for money and other goods, perhaps through obtaining lucrative employment.

Bourdieu conceptualises 'discourse' as a way of describing the consequences of individuals' transactions on the 'linguistic market'. Discourse is the speaking, writing, bodily movement etc. that results from people wanting to speak well and achieve optimum value on a particular linguistic market, be it academia or the school playground. It results from the contradiction between what a person might intend to achieve through the way they express themselves and the amendments forced upon them because of how they anticipate their speech might actually be received. Discourses are defined as:

'compromise formations' resulting from transactions between the 'expressive interest' (the content of what is communicated) and the censorship inherent in linguistic production'

(LSP, p. 78).

To explain how an individual's own linguistic expression is linked to wider power relationships, Bourdieu introduces the idea of the 'habitus'. This is an important concept for Bourdieu because it allows him to explain how each individual's speech might

influence power structures in society, whilst simultaneously explaining how existing power structures might influence an individual's speech as he conceptualises a dialectical relationship between the two (see Section 5.2. for a description of dialectical relationships).

An individual's habitus is 'their subconscious system of thought, perception and action; a set of dispositions which tend towards replicating the dominant culture' (RE, p. 40). Or to put it another way, it is their set of linguistic practices which, without them being able to detect it, contribute towards the replication of existing hierarchies of power. Bourdieu likens the reproduction of habitus to a form of genetic transmission (RE, p. 32) that people have no control over. The habitus includes a person's own knowledge and understanding of the world, which in turn influences their action in the world and so their contribution to changing it (an idea which sits with a Marxian notion of *praxis* which I discuss in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 in comparison with Freire's understanding of the term). People are structurally predisposed to see the world in accordance with the habitus of dominant groups, or for a child perhaps in accordance with its parents. Habitus changes with each generation, unfixing the practices that it helps to structure, (see Mahar et al, 1990, pp. 10-12) but in a capitalist economic system, the dominant culture is that of the dominant economic class (LSP, p. 83).

For Bourdieu, the form and content of discourse depends upon the relationship between the habitus and the 'linguistic market', whilst the habitus is a set of linguistic dispositions that are a product of sanctions on this market (LSP, p. 79). Bourdieu also conceptualises a dynamic relationship between discourse and an individual's 'identity' as discourse institutes 'identity' through acts of naming which influence how people

conduct themselves. Being given an ‘identity’ is having a name which signifies an individual with an assigned essence that tells them what they are and how they should conduct themselves through their own linguistic productions (LSP, pp. 120-122). Identifications are also recognised by others and so the giving of ‘identity’ is linked with habitus formation. For example, the wearing of a police officer’s uniform may influence the practices of an officer, but this is reliant upon other people, e.g. the public or the courts, legitimising (i.e. going along with) the officer’s discourse and behaviour (ibid, p. 125).

### ***Gee’s assumptions***

Like Bourdieu, Gee assumes language can only be considered in its social context where both theorists define language in relation to power, ‘identity’ and discourse. Gee claims to hold to a ‘post-structuralist’ understanding of language, which he defines in contrast to what he describes as popular or ‘folk’ views of language that most people hold to in everyday situations. The ‘folk’ view assumes that signs (e.g. words, facial expressions etc.) exactly match concepts that are held in the mind (Gee, 1993, pp. 271-275). This understanding would imply that if a language does not contain a word then the speakers cannot conceptualise what the word identifies. For example, if a language has no vocabulary for numbers then the assumption would be that the speakers are incapable of understanding numerical concepts (see Section 2.4).

Gee contrasts this ‘folk’ understanding with a ‘structuralist’ conceptualisation of language which equates with Bourdieu’s description of the linguistic theory of Saussure or Chomsky, where language is understood to be a ‘common treasury’. Gee explains how ‘structuralist’ understandings of language assume that the relationship between

words and meanings is pre-determined through human biology or predictable frameworks that follow from the structure of society. For example, though there are different words for colours in different languages and cultures, the assumption is that all people would ultimately categorise colours in an identical way. This could be due to the biology of the eye, or predictable structural commonalities found universally across all societies so that, for example, the colour red might always associated with danger. Here the *system* of signs and the structure of the mind and body is privileged over the human being. As Gee puts it, ‘if the system changes, the meaning of red changes regardless of what goes on in an individual’s head which is irrelevant to meaning’ (ibid, p. 276).

According to Gee, both ‘folk’ and ‘structuralist’ understandings of language back up the ‘literacy myth’ that there are predetermined consequences of learning to read and write. The ‘folk’ understanding suggests that if people have a limited vocabulary then this will limit their capability for thinking (see Section 2.4). Meanwhile the ‘structuralist’ understanding suggests that as everyone is ‘wired up’ for language in the same way then the consequences of speaking or writing must be predetermined and independent of the social context in which they are used, in line with ‘functional’ understandings of literacies (see Section 2.2).

For Gee, the example of these two understandings of language suggests that the assumptions that people make about language will influence whether or not they hold to the ‘literacy myth’ and the ‘great divide’ theory (see Section 2.2). The corollary is that holding to an alternative linguistic theory might encourage alternatives to the literacy myth, with repercussions for the practice of literacies education. This argument underpins Gee’s endorsement of what he claims to be a ‘post-structuralist’ understanding of language. Gee describes how instead of understanding the meaning of



a sign (e.g. a word) to be perpetually ‘tied down’, languages can be understood as sign systems which are historically derived social practices of particular groups, where practices evolve to privilege some groups over others. Like Bourdieu, this links understandings of language, which includes bodily mannerisms and facial expressions, to understandings of power and how it operates in society. However, unlike Bourdieu, Gee does not connect social practices to ‘linguistic capital’ and the structural operation of the class system under capitalism. Rather, Gee associates social practices with an alternative ‘post-structuralist’ understanding of capitalism, described as ‘post-Fordism’ or ‘fast capitalism’ (Gee and Lankshear, 1997; New London Group, 1996). This seems to suggest that capitalism itself can be understood as a social practice and a manifestation of discourse, though I do not attempt to consider this idea further as part of this exploration.

Gee uses the concept of Discourse to describe social practices, distinguishing Discourse (with a capital ‘D’) from discourse (with a lower case ‘d’) which he uses when referring only to the ‘language bit’ or textual aspects of social practices. Gee defines Discourse as:

‘ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or ‘types of people’) by specific *groups of people*, whether families of a certain sort, lawyers of a certain sort, bikers of a certain sort, business people of a certain sort, church members of a certain sort, African-Americans of a certain sort, women or men of a certain sort, and so on through a very long list. Discourses are ways of being ‘people like us’.’

(Gee, 1996<sup>7</sup>, p. viii)

For Gee, Discourses create meaning, for ‘apart from Discourses, language and literacy are meaningless’ (SL, p. 190). Discourse is a ‘sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, often write and so take on a particular social role that others will recognise’ (SL, p. 127). Drawing upon Wittgenstein’s theory of language, Discourses are ‘forms of life’, ‘always and everywhere *social* and products of social histories’ (SL, p. viii) though it is unclear what constitutes the ‘social’ for Gee.

Gee cites Bourdieu and Foucault simultaneously to support the assumption that Discourses create social positions (perspectives) from which people are invited (‘summoned’) to speak, listen, act, believe and value in certain characteristic, historically recognisable ways, combined with their own individual styles and creativity’ (SL, p. 128). This means that Discourses are embedded in social institutions where human artefacts such as books or technologies are ‘props’ that support particular Discourses, underwriting ‘identity’ and ways of being of different ‘kinds’ of people.

As with Bourdieu, Discourses are ultimately connected to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society as control over them can lead to the acquisition of ‘goods’. There are dominant Discourses used by dominant groups who are empowered by their use, where ultimately the qualities associated with these Discourses can be ‘cashed in’ (Lankshear, 1993, p. 70).

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<sup>7</sup> Gee’s book *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology and Discourse* referred to as SL in the remainder of this text

Gee also describes how any discourse has a tendency to incorporate generalisations about people, which inevitably leads to some groups of people being either privileged or excluded. For Gee, this tendency is indicative of the 'ideological' character of Discourse, predicated on the idea that Discourse cannot be criticised internally because ways of criticising are in themselves defined by Discourses which exclude. To put it another way, Gee assumes that Discourse encapsulates cultural models which generalise and exclude, but in a way that is so natural that people are usually oblivious of it (SL, p. 79) and it is this characteristic of Discourse which makes it 'ideology' or 'ideological'. It means that for Gee, most of what a Discourse does and most of what people do with a Discourse is unconscious, unreflective and uncritical (SL, p. 190).

Bourdieu tends not to use the term 'ideology' in his work (Eagleton, 1991, p. 156), however, Gee's understanding of Discourse as ideology echoes Bourdieu's notion that processes of Discourse production are inherently 'misrecognised', undetectable and unnoticed by participants, so that Discourses cannot be critiqued from the inside. For Gee, Discourse is transmitted through social groups like a virus (SL, p. 167), whilst Bourdieu likens the reproduction of habitus to form of genetic transmission (RE, p. 32). Gee affirms an idea that seems to sit with Bourdieu's understanding of the functioning of the 'habitus', namely that:

'It is sometimes helpful to say that it is not individuals who speak and act, but rather that historically and socially defined Discourses speak to each other and through individuals.'

(Luke in Gee, SL, p. 190)

Gee defines 'theory' as generalised or generalising Discourse, implying that all theories are 'ideological' (SL, 86). Echoing Bourdieu's idea that there might be self-evident truths and the associated concept of symbolic power (RE, 4), Gee claims that some generalisations are hit upon that people accept without further argument or grounding, where all people can say is 'that's the way we (people in my group, in regard to this sort of matter) do things' (SL, 19). Such theories can be understood to be 'master myths', an example being the *literacy myth*, where it is popularly understood that there are wide reaching and predictable consequences of learning to read and write (see Section 2.2).

### ***Summary of Bourdieu and Gee's assumptions***

Though Bourdieu and Gee make different assumptions about language, they both assert against what they refer to as 'structuralist' understandings of language. Bourdieu's understandings of language are based upon Marxist dialectics and a conceptualised relationship between 'agency' and 'structure' where language is *praxis*. Meanwhile Gee understands language where the meaning of a sign cannot be 'tied down' by either an individual person or structural determinants such as human biology or predictable laws that govern society. For both, language, which includes ways of talking, facial expressions, moving or wearing clothes, is a consequence of social practices where language in turn might influence those practices.

To conceptualise this, both introduce and define discourse as a manifestation of social practices that identify people, but where there is a tendency for processes of discourse and 'identity' formation or 'naming' to privilege dominant groups, linking discourse and identification to the reproduction of power. This makes education a process that reproduces discourse and 'identity', reinforcing existing power hierarchies. For

Bourdieu these existing hierarchies are partly determined by the structure of the capitalist economic system, again relying on a Marxian notion of the dialectic to explain the character of this dynamic, whilst Gee claims to hold to a ‘post-structuralist’ understanding of the capitalist system where capitalism is itself a social practice or Discourse.

Gee and Bourdieu both conclude that the way in which discourse imposes meanings which exclude or disadvantage groups of people is inherently undetectable. Indeed it is the un-detectability of this process which *allows* the impositions and exclusions to occur. Gee describes this as an ‘ideological’ process, where the propensity for Discourse to generalise and exclude serves as a definition of ‘ideology’. Whilst Bourdieu does not use this term, his theory describes a similar process, driven by individuals whose linguistic behaviours are, in effect, entwined into and indistinguishable from the structural operation of a social and economic system (i.e. capitalism). Theorising within a Marxian tradition, Bourdieu’s description of symbolic imposition as an ideological process seems to coincide with a tradition of theorising about oppression which relies upon understandings of ideology as a form of ‘illusion, distortion and mystification’ and which might be traced to the work of Marx and Hegel (Eagleton, 1991, p. 3).

### ***4.3 Bourdieu and Gee – power, discourse and identity***

In this section I describe how both Bourdieu and Gee understand oppression in the context of literacies education and how this links with the assumptions that they both make about ‘discourse’, ‘identity’ and ‘power’. I show how Gee and Bourdieu both

describe processes of discourse and ‘identity’ formation which replicate power structures in society. They both define oppression as a process that is integral to systems of education such as schools, where linguistic productions impose meanings which influence how students are positioned in social groups and their likelihood of succeeding within them.

### ***Bourdieu – oppression as symbolic violence***

As mentioned above, Bourdieu describes a process where meanings are imposed on people through symbols, be it writing, speech, facial expressions or ways of wearing clothes. The process of this imposition is inherently undetectable, for if it were detected then meaning would no longer be imposed and so the process of imposition would have been dismantled. Bourdieu refers to this process as ‘symbolic violence’, describing how it is integral to any social formation, so that all individuals, groups or classes are not only manifestations of power relations but are also engaged in replicating them through their own discourse production.

In a capitalist society this means that symbolic violence reinforces class relationships of power integral to the economic structure of the system. However, when Bourdieu refers to symbolic power he is not referring to class power, as in the relationship between the ‘bourgeoisie’ and the ‘proletariat’. Rather, symbolic power is defined as the degree to which meanings can be imposed on individuals or groups through symbolic productions such as text or speech, though there is a relationship between symbolic power and class power where each makes the other possible.

Symbolic power is understood to be enacted through an ‘educational’ process so that all systems of ‘education’ are inherently oppressive. All relationships between teachers and students enact symbolic violence which reinforces the dominance of individuals and groups in society (RE, pp. 6-7). This defines education as a process of inculcation where teachers impose meanings through a process which neither teachers nor students are able to recognise or detect. The replication of symbolic violence isn’t confined to the activity of teachers; it extends to educationalists and theorists of education too. For Bourdieu, any theory or understanding of education that fails to acknowledge symbolic violence only serves to increase its un-detectability, so furthering its replication (RE, p. 13). This implies that educationalists such as Freire (e.g. 1972) are ‘blind’ to the ‘objective truth’ about how dominant culture remains dominant (RE, p. 24). It also implies that exposing how power operates, perhaps through educational research, might serve to change power hierarchies rather than reinforce them.

Bourdieu describes how pedagogic activity functions in two ways. Firstly it gives value to the style and content of symbolic representations arising from dominant groups, whilst devaluing the rest. For example teachers might praise children who speak ‘Queen’s English’ more than they praise children with regional accents, but where teachers and students are inherently unaware of this and might even wish to prevent it happening in their classes. Teachers also select and exclude content, (RE, 8), perhaps by selecting classical music for play rather than rap music. Importantly, the dominated groups legitimise this, colluding in the enactment of their own domination. They might expect classical music to be on the curriculum and complain if it is removed, just as they might expect airline pilots to speak ‘Queen’s English’ and feel unsafe if they do not.

Secondly, because symbolic violence can only be enacted when it is undetected, it must also be inherently arbitrary in the way it operates. If attempts were made to control or plan it, say by a government's education department, then this would make it more easily detectable and so weaken its enactment. By its illusory character symbolic violence cannot be controlled and occurs when the social conditions chance to be suited for inculcation to take place (RE, p. 8). It is the 'misrecognition' of this arbitrary process that allows symbolic violence to be legitimised. This also means that symbolic violence cannot be directly linked to ideas about 'human nature' or the 'nature of things' (RE, p. 8) because this would predetermine the meanings to be inculcated, again raising the chances of its detection and so weakening its enactment. If a schoolgirl is punished for having untidy handwriting whilst untidy schoolboy writing is praised, to some extent this is a consequence of assumptions being made about the innate character of girls and boys. However, it is the attitudes of teachers and students that allow this to occur, without any conscious decision making by teachers and students (RE, p. 10). A repercussion of this notion is that the *content* of ideas isn't crucial to the enactment of symbolic violence, rather, the way in which the content is transmitted (RE, p. 25).

Bourdieu describes how the 'the market' plays a role in determining the economic and social value of products resulting from the school system (i.e. educated people). So, if the product is 'people with qualifications' and the middle classes view these as high currency in the market then they will legitimise the education system which produces them, perhaps by being docile and sensitive to sanctions and rewards at school which will enable them to achieve the qualifications more readily (RE, p. 28). This process encourages a tendency for educational markets to be unified, so that a school teaching



the International Baccalaureate would exert greater authority than say, a local evening class in permaculture (RE, pp. 21-22).

However, the value of qualifications might fall on the educational markets, with the consequence of weakening symbolic violence, a process which Bourdieu claims to have been influential in provoking the student protests in Paris in 1968 (see Bourdieu, 1988<sup>8</sup>). But in general, 'bourgeois society' has unified the linguistic and educational markets, affirming and confirming its domination of power hierarchies (RE, p. 28). For Bourdieu, the working class are less able to compete and have greater sanctions imposed upon them if they do not speak well at school. Meanwhile the position of dominant groups such as the middle class is reaffirmed through an illusion which encourages the belief that their success in examinations etc. is the result of them being gifted or clever.

Bourdieu introduces the notion of a 'primary' and 'secondary' habitus to explain how dominated social groups are disadvantaged both at school and in the 'cultural', 'educational' and 'linguistic' markets that he conceptualises. The 'primary habitus' is formed through 'primary pedagogical work' that takes place within a family group, whilst the 'secondary habitus' is formed through 'secondary pedagogic work' taking place in schools, workplaces and other institutions. The success of this secondary inculcation depends upon how different the primary and secondary habitus are from each other. This makes a child's success in school education fundamentally dependent upon their primary habitus.

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<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu's book *Homo Academicus* referred to as HA in the remainder of this text

Bourdieu's understanding is that bourgeois families encourage a mastery of symbolic operations (e.g. talking, facial expressions or writing) that is in keeping with that required to succeed in the dominant culture. Bourdieu describes this dominant symbolic mastery as being directed towards '*the manipulation of words in relations to both other words as well as concrete things*' (RE, p. 50). His claim is that to operate in the dominant discourse means acquiring mastery over the manipulation of words and other symbols without having to relate them to concrete situations. However, for working class children there is a marked difference between the education received at home and that at school, which means they have to go through a process of deculturation as well as reculturation when they enter the formal education system (RE, pp. 45-46). Bourdieu makes the claim, backed by ethnographic data, that the home culture of the working class encourages a practical mastery that is restricted to '*the manipulation of things and relating these to words*', in other words, they are restricted to relating concrete situations to symbols. As a result they are prepared less effectively for school and require more formal teaching when they get there (RE, p. 49).

Bourdieu claims that it is impossible for students from dominated groups to catch up and succeed within the education system because they will not be able to fully acquire the symbolic mastery needed to be inculcated into the dominant habitus. The ability to operate symbolically at school and in society beyond relies upon a *practical mastery* of what's needed to do this, such as skills in reading and writing, pronunciations or physical gestures. However, according to Bourdieu, the linguistic practices associated with the dominant habitus cannot be reduced completely to practical elements that can be taught by teachers in literacies classes, making it impossible for a dominant habitus to be completely inculcated through a process of reculturation at school. Dominant

groups are advantaged and this cannot be redressed and so they continue to increase their linguistic and educational capital, which ultimately can be exchanged on the markets for goods and money (RE, p. 46).

***Gee – oppression as discourse that excludes***

For Gee, discourse is inherently problematic as it reproduces and replicates hierarchies of power through processes of ‘identity’ formation. There is a paradox here which Gee surmises might have been discussed since the historical emergence of alphabetic text, perhaps first articulated by Plato. Plato was concerned that writing could be misinterpreted by readers because the author is absent and so cannot confirm the meaning of the text. On the one hand this is potentially liberating for a reader as they may interpret their own meaning, however it could also allow texts to be used for dangerous purposes against the intention of the writer. This places texts in a contradictory situation where there are two sides to literacy (and discourse production) as both liberator and weapon (SL, p. 30).

For Plato the resolution of the problem of how to enforce the ‘correct’ interpretation of texts was to restrict writing to an inner circle of students and to build different layers of meaning into texts so that only people with particular skills could find it. Though aiming to privilege the writer’s voice, in effect this meant creating rules about who is allowed to read where readers deemed to be acceptable include those who make these rules in the first place, creating a hierarchy with philosopher-kings (i.e. people like Plato) at the top. For Gee this paradox illustrates his belief that literacy (and Discourse) is inherently political in the sense of involving relations of power among people (SL, p. 22). Discourse always excludes and so it is inescapably linked to the creation and

reproduction of hierarchies of power in society. He attempts to show that the history of literacy encapsulates humanity's struggles with this contradictory problem, including the fuelling of *master myths* about the consequences of reading and writing.

Gee describes how the meaning of signs encapsulates cultural models which people accept as they allow social institutions such as language to do a lot of thinking for them. This is a situation we can't escape from because we can't possibly make decisions about what everything means, just as we couldn't dance if we had to think about every step. Words have no meaning in and of themselves. The meanings of words relate to choices made by speakers and writers and the guesses and assumptions made by listeners and speakers. But the choices and guesses of speakers and listeners are also constrained by the formal system of language and cultural models enacted through the practices of all people (SL, pp. 75-77). According to Gee, the 'ideological' character of cultural models inevitably excludes people. For example the word 'bachelor' comes with tacit assumptions about typical gender behaviour, which could marginalise Catholic priests, gay men, or other people who just don't want to get married. These exclusions take the form of social theory that generalises beliefs or claims about the ways in which 'goods' are distributed in society, where 'goods' are 'anything that people in the society believe are beneficial to have or harmful not to have' (SL, p. 21).

Like Bourdieu, Gee distinguishes Discourse acquired within the social group from Discourse learnt elsewhere in workplaces, schools or other social organisations or groupings. He demarcates between 'Primary Discourse' which constitutes people's first social 'identity' and informs people's taken for granted understandings of *who* they are and *who* people 'like us' are from the Secondary Discourses they are apprenticed to in

later life. Secondary Discourse is learned as part of people's socialisation into groups outside of the home, though Gee is careful not to define a dichotomy between the two borrowing the term *heteroglossia* from Bakhtin to describe the manifestation of impure mixtures of social languages (SL, p. 69). But in general, Primary Discourses are 'acquired', usually unconsciously, by exposure in social groups and without formal teaching, whilst, Secondary Discourses are 'learned' through a process of conscious knowledge gained through teaching and explanation, perhaps in the formal education system.

Gee claims that people are better at performing 'acquired' Discourse than 'learnt' Discourses. However, though they often know more or have greater meta-knowledge about the operation of Discourse that they have 'learnt' as Secondary Discourse (SL, p. 139). This brings Gee to echo Bourdieu's conclusion that mastery of a Discourse cannot be overtly taught through educational activity. People who have acquired a Primary Discourse which is not dominant will struggle to master prevailing Discourses from teaching within in a school setting. Drawing upon the work of Heath (1983), he claims that 'middle class' Primary Discourse has many confluences with the Discourses found in schools, so that children from those backgrounds are advantaged in the school environment. Ultimately this allows them to achieve positions in society where they might exclude others and where their Discourse can be cashed in for 'goods' (SL, p. 146).

### ***Summary***

Gee and Bourdieu broadly coincide in that they both describe processes by which discourse and 'identity' creation contribute to the reproduction of hierarchies of power

in society which is integral to the organisation of education systems. However, the differences in their philosophical positioning influences how they understand these oppressive processes. Bourdieu relies upon a Marxian approach which allows the concept of symbolic power to link an individual's linguistic disposition to the reproduction of the organisational structure of capitalist society. Meanwhile, Gee describes inescapable power relationships that are underpinned by a claimed 'post-structuralist' understanding of language, where discourse inherently encompasses theories and exclusions. Gee's understanding is also associated with an alternative understanding of the capitalist system, where the economic system is understood as Discourse and where proficiency in dominant Discourses can ultimately be cashed in for 'goods'.

Gee claims to take a 'post-structural' approach to language as a starting point rather than understandings of the economic system, where ideology is 'a set of complex effects internal to discourse' rather than a property of society's economic base (see Eagleton, 1991, p. 198), as implied by Bourdieu. However, they both understand that power is reproduced through discourse production where meanings are imposed through undetectable processes which cannot be determined from inside discourses.

In this next section I examine what Bourdieu and Gee's theory might imply for an 'empowering' literacies education. For both, oppression as they define it is activity that replicates relationships of 'power' so the possibility of 'empowerment' is predicated upon how 'power' is understood by each theorist. For both, power is associated with the reproduction of discourse and 'identity' and these processes are an inherent part of

educational activity in schools and colleges. However, their definitions of power vary so I give attention to describing these differences in the next section.

#### ***4.4 Bourdieu and Gee – possibilities for an empowering literacies education?***

So far I have discussed the assumptions that Bourdieu and Gee make and how this relates to their understanding of oppression in the context of schooling. In this section address research question vi. by describing how Bourdieu and Gee conceptualise an empowering literacies education.

Bourdieu's assumptions imply there is no possibility for educators and students to avoid the replication of existing relationships of power. In contrast Gee attempts to describe the possibility of a literacies education that might empower by creating alternatives to existing power structures in society. But I also describe how Gee identifies problems with his ideas which he does not adequately resolve, so that the educational practices he advocates can be understood to replicate existing power hierarches rather than countering or change them. Overall, the discussion allows me to outline how the problems associated with the idea of an empowering adult literacies education described at the start of this chapter arise from the assumptions that Gee and Bourdieu make about language and power.

#### ***Bourdieu – orchestrating market devaluations***

Bourdieu asserts that processes of symbolic violence are not inescapable (RE, pp. 36-37) and that there is always room for human agency. However, academics from the disciplines of sociology, politics and education have found it difficult to detect from

Bourdieu's ideas how such an escape might occur (e.g. Rancière, 2005; Jenkins, 1992; Field, 2005; Schuller et al, 2000; Tett and Maclachlan, 2007; Eagleton, 1991, Schostak and Schostak, 2010; Inglis, 1997, 12).

Bourdieu has dismissed such claims (see Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p. 36), but I concur with Bourdieu's critics that there seems to be no escape from symbolic power and in particular no role for education in the context of empowerment (see Rancière, 2005, p. 179). This is initially implied by some of the language and insights which Bourdieu invokes (Field, 2005). For example, Bourdieu's usage of the term 'sub-proletariat' (e.g. see HA, p. 179) suggests that there are groups of people, identifiable by experts, who are both outside of and beneath their fellow humans and incapable of contributing to social endeavours. In similar vein, Bourdieu appears to place blame onto dominated groups for the predicaments they find themselves, which relates to his idea that people are predisposed to legitimise and enforce symbolic impositions, ultimately colluding in their own exclusion from educational markets, linguistic markets and ultimately markets for goods and money (RE, pp. 41-42). For example, this legitimisation is inherent to symbolic violence 'which persuades people (no doubt all the more so, the less privileged they are) to work at *being satisfied* with what they have and with what they are, to love their fate, however mediocre it may be' (HA, p. 167). Here, according to Bourdieu, it seems that 'mediocrity' is defined by those who dominate the existing social order, where to escape from 'mediocrity' is to become successful by 'successfully' participating in the oppression of others.

Bourdieu's presupposition is that people should *want* to be included by and participate in linguistic practices that replicate domination. There is no conceptualisation that



people might be excluded as a result of their de-legitimisation of the practices of dominators, perhaps by *refusing* to be included. But according to Bourdieu those who attempt to place themselves outside of societal structures are held responsible for legitimising the system too. Bourdieu describes how even the outlaw who lives outside of society's jurisdiction recognises the law by the very activity of hiding from it, so the force of the law is still granted and the outlaw's behaviour is conducted accordingly (RE, p. 14). It seems to me that theorists of education might be placed in this group if their ideas don't take account of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, and so Bourdieu's detractors might be deemed responsible for further replicating societal hierarchies.

However, Bourdieu claims that his account of the 'crisis of May '68' contains the embryo of a theory of *symbolic revolution* (see Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p. 36) and so I briefly consider it here. The student protests in Paris in 1968 are described as breaking the cycle of symbolic reproduction within universities (HA, p. 161). Bourdieu treats Paris in 1968 as a case study suggesting that his inferences cannot be generalised, but he does seem to make generalisations about how symbolic violence might become disrupted.

Bourdieu identified a social effect amongst the student population, which he termed 'structural downclassing', claiming that it generated a collective disposition (or habitus) to revolt. The effect was manifested when the numbers of university students increased whilst at the same time the value of university degrees decreased in the context of the French job market. According to Bourdieu, this devaluation or 'downclassing' led to a decrease in students' 'educational capital' (HA, p. 168) in the educational market,

creating a mismatch between their expectations and the actual opportunities available to them (HA, p. 163). The phenomenon was so deep and widespread that the pre-existing 'social capital' of the students bore little influence, so that even bourgeois students were affected (ibid).

'Downclassing' triggered students into refusing to recognise the rules of the 'game' of education. They stopped 'playing', creating a moment when the game might have been redefined along with 'the moves which permit one to win it' (HA, p. 172). Bourdieu claims that such a situation could undermine the authority of an education system, allowing forms of symbolic violence to be recognised by both students and academics. Convergences between disparate groups could be created in these circumstances that might result in a general crisis, or what Bourdieu terms a 'historical event' (HA, p. 173).

However, Bourdieu also describes how such convergences are partly dependent upon a relationship of *objective orchestration* between the people involved, suggesting that human agency has an important role to 'seize the opportunity created by the critical break in the ordinary order', to advance or defend their own interests (HA, p. 175). It is unclear what the character of this *orchestration* is and how it is undertaken, though there does seem to be a role for the sociologist in determining the character of circumstances and the candidates likely to be orchestrated. He describes how leaders often emerge as 'extraordinary actors' (HA, p. 181), implying that most people take the role of the *orchestrated* (HA, p. 175). This idea also suggests that 'identity' is integral to societal change, where people come together with from diverse fields and with different practices and discourses, creating a common 'identity', perhaps through the creation of new discourses (HA, p. 180).

Whilst Bourdieu considered the unrest in Paris in 1968 to have been dominated by ‘bourgeois’ interests, he describes how such a ‘crisis’ could have led to diverting the reproduction of society as it stands into the creation of an alternatives, where the:

‘crisis undoes the sense of placing, of knowing one’s place, knowing how to place sound investments, which is inseparable from the sense of realities and possibilities which we call sensible. It is the *Critical Moment* when, breaking with the ordinary experience of time as simple re-enactment of a past or a future inscribed in the past, all things become possible (at least apparently), when future prospects appear really contingent, future events really indeterminate, the moment truly instantaneous, suspended, its consequences unpredicted and unpredictable.’

(HA, p. 182).

However, I agree with Rancière (2005, p. 179) that whilst there is a role for education in reproducing oppressive social orders, there seems to be no role for it in the creation of the possible alternative that Bourdieu describes. The ‘*Critical Moment*’ seems to be reliant upon ‘orchestrators’, perhaps with the attributes of sociologists, sitting outside of situations so that they might explain and orchestrate them from above, seemingly replicating existing power structures in the process. Bourdieu’s axiom describing the undetectable character of symbolic power seems to support an unbreakable circle, where discourse might be understood to be inherently ‘ideological’ and where even attempts to *theorise* alternatives to symbolic power can be accused of merely replicating it. It seems that education can only be understood as a process of symbolic violence. Though claiming to follow Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach* (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p. 43, see Bernstein, p. 1), Bourdieu seems to have amended the 11<sup>th</sup> thesis to:

‘Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways, the point however is to explain why it can’t be changed.’

### ***Gee – taking control over discourse***

Whilst Bourdieu appears to define literacies education as a process of inculcation which replicates an oppressive social order, Gee attempts to describe an alternative to this, suggesting the possibility of an empowering literacies education. Gee defines literacy as the ‘*mastery of a secondary Discourse*’ (SL, p. 143), however, as people operate in multiple discourses, literacy is only meaningful in the plural, *literacies*. Reading and writing could be considered as the *mastery of a secondary discourse involving print*, but as print constitutes only part of many discourses, Gee sees no gain from including it in any definition, where literacies defines a much wider categorisations than just reading and writing that could include ways of gesticulating, moving or behaving.

To recap, Discourse is inherently ‘ideological’ as it inevitably makes generalisations about people which encourage the replication of existing power hierarchies that privilege some and exclude others. What’s more, printed texts, when considered as snapshots of discourse, are inherently political as on the one hand the reader has the freedom to interpret meanings, but on the other this could lead to misinterpretations of writers’ intentions with texts being used for unintended harmful purposes. All of this suggests that literacies are never neutral in terms of power hierarchies and it is not possible to escape from its consequences. However, Gee refuses to accept that there is no alternative, attempting to describe a literacies education that is potentially

‘liberating’ and ‘empowering’. He does not demarcate between these two terms, so ‘liberation’ seems to be synonymous with ‘power’ (SL, p. 144).

Gee describes how gaining mastery of more than one Discourse, i.e. alongside meta-knowledge about how Discourse operates, allows individuals to take control over dominant Discourse, create new identities and so change relationships of power. A literacy is ‘liberating (‘powerful’) if it can be used to allow students to critique other discourses and understand how discourse operates (SL, p. 144). In order to do this, people need to have mastered a secondary Discourse, where the practices associated with a ‘liberatory’ or ‘empowering’ literacies are those needed to teach students how gain such a mastery.

As with Bourdieu, Gee describes how it is very difficult to gain mastery of a dominant Discourse when it is being learnt as a secondary Discourse. Those with greatest mastery will have acquired the dominant discourse as a primary Discourse, so gaining an advantage during schooling. Whilst Bourdieu suggests no way out other than waiting for a devaluation or ‘downclassing’ in the linguistic or educational market, Gee suggests an alternative. He describes how people from less dominant groups might still participate in dominant Discourse through a process he describes as ‘mushfake’. ‘Mushfake’ refers to the partial acquisition of a secondary dominant Discourse, alongside the learning of meta-knowledge about that dominant Discourse, which if used together by students might allow them to give an impression of proficiency. The meta-knowledge allows students whose primary Discourse is less dominant to gain an ability to manipulate dominant Discourse to their advantage. As Gee defines theory as discourse that makes generalisations, understandings about how Discourse operates can be understood as a form of ‘theory of society’ which could be used to resist oppression

(SL, p. 147). Gee speculates that this liberating literacy might ‘open some doors’ for non-dominant groups. Possibilities could be created where instead of Discourses operating ideologically by ‘capturing’ people and using them to ‘speak’ throughout history’, people ‘capture’ Discourses and use them to strategise and survive’ (SL, p, 149).

There are consequences for how an empowering literacies education might be practised. Gee claims that it might be achieved by students partially mastering a Secondary Discourse through acquisition, supplemented with meta-knowledge about how Discourse operates. In practical terms, this gives the empowering literacies teacher two roles. Firstly, the teacher should create possibilities for students to be exposed to secondary discourse in natural, meaningful and functional settings rather than through the formal teaching of technical aspects such as grammar and spelling (SL, p. 144). This would require teachers to gain knowledge about the secondary discourse being taught and use this knowledge to inform the creation of naturalistic environments where the Discourse might be acquired. This might mean giving students opportunities to participate in corporate events, academic conferences or to join a theatre company. It might also mean using newspapers, advertisements or work-related spread sheets during a class rather than replica ‘text book’ materials. Secondly, students must gain meta-knowledge about how Discourses operate so that they might critique them for themselves. Here Gee stipulates that formal teaching is mandatory and so the second role of the teacher is to receive meta-knowledge about Discourses from researchers and then deliver it to students. The delivery should include explanations and analysis, breaking down the material into analytical bits so that the operation of Discourse might be understood (SL, p. 145).

Taking these ideas together, Gee's literacies for liberation involves elements of 'learning' and elements of 'acquisition', but where the 'learning' aspect that relies upon formal teaching is essential. The repercussion is that experts in linguistics and ethnography are necessary for garnering and evaluating meta-knowledge about Discourse which can then be taught formally to students alongside methods of analysis. Students might then help prevent a group's discourse from being misrecognised, marginalised or excluded by taking a degree of control over discourse (SL, pp. 166-167).

### ***Empowering literacies education – discussion***

In this section I address research question viii by describing problems and issues associated with the practice of an empowering literacies education and how they arise from the assumptions that the Bourdieu and Gee make. So far in this chapter I have described how the theories of Bourdieu and Gee, which hold great sway amongst researchers from the 'social practice' tradition, might inform ways of understanding an empowering adult literacies education. However, my analysis suggests that Bourdieu's ideas offer no possibility of an empowering education and I will briefly return to this again when I draw my conclusions. On the other hand, Gee's work does assume that an empowering literacies education might be possible and attempts to describe how this might be understood. For this reason, my attention turns to Gee's ideas and the problems that they raise for most of the remainder of this chapter.

There are at least three implications of the educational activity that Gee describes which broadly coincide with problems already identified by researchers about how the idea of

an empowering education has been understood (see Section 2.4), which I restated at the start of this chapter. Firstly, Gee's empowering literacies education makes students dependent upon researchers for knowledge about Discourse and also upon teachers for delivering this knowledge to them. The problem with this relationship is that it seems to replicate existing power hierarchies rather than change them. Secondly, there is the problem of how to make judgements about whether a new 'identity' or 'discourse' resulting from educational activity is more desirable than that which it replaces. Gee himself identifies this as a problem and suggests a way of getting around it (Gee, 1993, pp. 291-292).

The third implication is connected to how Gee (and Bourdieu) both associate the creation of identities with empowerment. In Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4) I described some researchers' concerns about teachers' placing emphasis on individual students authoring their own 'identity', as it might encourage individualistic educational practices that fail to address the social character of society and its problems. However, in the analysis of Bourdieu and Gee's ideas that I present above, it seems that the development of a common or shared 'identity' amongst groups of people is deemed to be important to understanding empowerment in the context of education. I attempt to discuss this further and in more detail below when I consider these three problematic implications in turn. But I start by considering the issues of dependency and the criteria for making judgements about discourse, as these are also connected to understandings about 'identity'.

### *Dependency between teachers and students*



Gee's practical understanding of an empowering literacies education places students in a relationship with their teachers where they are reliant upon them for knowledge about how discourse operates. There is a similar relationship between teachers and researchers, as teachers are dependent upon them for knowledge so that they might then fulfil their role of delivering it to students. The required knowledge is described by Gee as 'meta-knowledge' about Discourse which students must receive and then learn to use so that they might control dominant discourse. The problem with this scenario in education is that it seems to replicate existing hierarchies, making students dependent upon an emancipator for their own freedom. Biesta describes this paradox through asking the rhetorical question:

'Should slaves remain grateful to their masters for setting them free?'

(Biesta, 2010a, p. 45)

The problem of dependency seems to be associated with Gee's (and Bourdieu's) assumption that the functioning of particular discourse cannot be fully understood by those who participate within it. According to Gee, Discourse creates generalisations (i.e. theories) which exclude people, but in a way that is so natural that people are unaware of this process (SL, p. 79). What people do with their literacy (i.e. their mastery of 'secondary' discourses) is unconsciously critical and unreflective (SL, p. 190). It is this particular understanding of discourse as 'ideology' that seems to underpin how Gee's understanding of empowering literacies relies upon the paradoxical dependency between teacher and student that I have described.

Gee's literacy education could be summarised as an attempt to get around the problem of the ideological character of discourse, so that students might take some control over it rather than the other way around. Whilst Bourdieu's understandings suggest no such possibility, Gee refuses to accept that there is no escape from ideology. But it seems he is unable to break the dependency between researchers, teachers and students for knowledge about power. Discourse operates in such a way that students must be able to adopt a third person stance in order to understand and take control of its operation. But to gain this 'mastery' they must become dependent upon teachers twice over. Firstly, they depend on the teacher to recreate a naturalistic environment where they might gain some mastery of a secondary Discourse through 'acquisition' rather than 'learning'. Secondly, the teacher is dependent upon the receipt of 'meta-knowledge' from researchers about discourse, so that they might deliver it to the student. So as with Bourdieu, there is a privileged position for the sociologist or socio-linguist.

There are repercussions here for how Gee understands educational relationships. Gee seems to limit the possibilities of teachers and students' relationships to one of knowledge transmission. In turn, this suggests that discussions in literacies education should orientate around what the content of that knowledge should be (for Gee it is meta-knowledge about discourse) and possible ways of transmitting knowledge (for Gee this would be through a mixture of teachers' explanation and teachers' creation of 'naturalistic' environments in which students learn how the knowledge is used). It seems to me that these two orientations broadly coincide with the domains of 'qualification' and 'socialisation' described by Biesta (2010)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> A similar conclusion can be drawn from Inglis's (1997) attempt to distinguish between empowerment and emancipation in the context of adult education. Here Inglis claims that 'emancipation concerns critically analyzing, resisting and challenging structures of power' (ibid, 4). Inglis advocates a claimed educational 'emancipation' where 'By laying bare its features and by announcing the various strategies

To recap, Biesta (2010) refers to three overlapping domains of educational purpose and function: *qualification* which describes education that allows people do something e.g. fix leaky pipes or pass exams; secondly, *socialisation*, referring to education for assimilating people into existing traditions of society; finally *subjectification*, which is education that might create possibilities for emancipation from the existing social order, creating possibilities for alternatives to society as it stands (see Section 2.4). Relating this conceptualisation to Gee's understanding of literacies education, the delivery of meta-knowledge about discourse could be considered as education with a purpose of *qualification*, where students are 'given' knowledge that allows them to do something i.e. analyse how discourse operates. Meanwhile, the teachers' role of creating environments in which students learn how to operate within existing Discourse could be understood as a form of *socialisation* into society as it stands.

To reiterate, Gee's understanding of an empowering literacies seems to discount the possibility for emancipation as *subjectification*. As yet, I have only described briefly how the idea of 'subjectification' might be understood and what is important about this in the context of adult literacies education (see Section 1.5). My research aims to describe how emancipation as *subjectification* might be understood and I attempt a detailed description in Chapter 7. But the point here is that that Gee (and Bourdieu)

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and tactics through which it is exercised, adult educators can help people, particularly the less powerful, to know and understand power and to see how it operates in their lives.' (ibid, 10). This 'requires a theoretical or conceptual framework which enables the oppressed to see different types of power so that they can learn to see how they are being dominated.' (ibid 15). What's more 'if adult education is to make a contribution to emancipation, it needs to provide not merely a theory of power, but one which comes in a language that can be understood by the oppressed. It is this goal of producing an analysis of power which is at once attractive and accessible...' (ibid). Though Inglis draws upon Foucault's theoretical work, he discusses this in terms of how it might inform subject matter being taught to students, rather than considering the implications for educational relationships (eg as attempted by Biesta (2012b). Though Inglis raises pertinent questions about the character of power, the educational practices he recommends broadly mirrors Gee's and so I would categorise this as education for 'empowerment' rather than 'emancipation' (as claimed by Inglis)

offers little in the way of insights about this matter and it is in this second sense that Gee's work can be judged to offer no overlap with *subjectification*. Perhaps Gee comes closest to addressing the possibility of *subjectification* as a *purpose* or *function* for education in his attempt to overcome the problem of how to judge whether one Discourse is preferable to another, though there seems to be no place for *subjectification* as an educational *function*, but I discuss this further in the next section.

### ***Judging discourse***

Gee himself raises a concern about how to distinguish between discourse which reproduces existing social hierarchies and discourse that might create more desirable alternatives to it and what this might mean for understandings of literacies education. If the purpose of an empowering adult literacies education is to master a Secondary Discourse, then presumably this new Discourse should be preferable to that which it replaces. But on what basis can any Discourse be judged better or worse than any other? As Gee puts it:

‘if all sign systems are rooted simply in historically derived social practices, then how can we ‘morally condemn’ one discourse over another? Any such judgement made would itself be rooted in a sign system which like all other sign systems cannot be validated from outside itself or ‘outside history’.

(Gee, 1993, pp. 291-292)

It seems that it is here, in the context of his own theorising of literacies education, that Gee's attention turns to a question which Biesta (2010) might consider to be an

educational one. Gee is posing the problem of how to judge the outcome of literacies education, in other words, whether the resulting Discourse can be judged to slot people into existing (oppressive) social hierarches, or whether it might have raised the possibility of more desirable alternatives. There could be some overlap here between this question and Biesta's (2010) posing of the possibility of distinguishing between education with a purpose of *socialisation* and education with a purpose of *subjectification* (as emancipation). I start to explore how such a distinction might be made when I reconstruct the theories of Freire and Rancière in Chapter 5. But Gee seems to immediately shut the question down again, by introducing two ethical principles which *must* be used to make judgements about Discourse. What's more, Gee states that if anyone disagrees with the ethical principles then he 'would withhold the term 'human', in its honorific, not biological, sense, from such people' (SL, 20, Gee, 1993, 293). The first principle states:

'That something would *harm* someone else (deprive them of what they or the society they are in view as 'goods') is *always* a good reason (though perhaps not a sufficient reason) *not* to do it.'

(SL, p. 19; Gee, 1993, p. 293)

Here, 'goods' are described as 'anything that people in the society believe are beneficial to have or harmful not to have, be it life, space, time, 'good' schools, 'good' jobs, wealth, status, power, control, or whatever'. So Gee defines society as any grouping who share beliefs about what counts as 'goods' (SL, p. 21; Gee, 1993, p. 293).

The second principles states:

‘One always has the (ethical) obligation to (try to) explicate (render overt and primary) any theory that is (largely) tacit and either removed or deferred when there is reason to believe that the theory advantages oneself or one’s group over other people or other groups’

(SL, p. 21; Gee, 1993, p. 293).

Considering the two ethical principles in turn, the first is concerned with the acquisition of goods but with no criteria for judging whether the ‘goods’ are ‘any good’. Given the dependency of students on teachers that I described above and how this might replicate existing societal processes, this seems problematic. Gee claims that society is defined by peoples’ common understanding of what counts as goods, but given that there is a privileged role for researchers in Gee’s description of literacies education, perhaps researchers will be privileged in determining what counts as goods.

Gee’s second ethical principle seems to be a circular argument. Gee has already argued that the ideological character of Discourse is such that it always advantages or excludes. To make this understanding overt suggests that understanding how Discourse operates might allow people to judge the Discourse. But an explanation of how a Discourse operates does not in and of itself provide criteria for *judging* it. It might demonstrate that a particular Discourse excludes, but it doesn’t help in the making judgements about *what to exclude or include*. It might explain how literacies education operates as a socialising machine, but it doesn’t suggest how teachers and students might put a spanner in its works.

What's even more alarming here is Gee's idea that those who don't accept the two ethical principles might be in some way considered to be inhuman. Instead of encouraging further exploration of the problem of how to judge discourse, it shuts it down. In this way it seems to function in the same way as Bourdieu's 'axiom' about the inherently misrecognisable character of symbolic violence, where anyone who disagrees with it is assumed to be encouraging the replication of existing power hierarchies.

Gee's ethical principles seem to define humanity through its relationship with discourse. Though he claims a 'post-structuralist' understanding of language, the ethical principles return Gee to a structure where humanity is predefined to the extent that those who do not accept the definition may be considered unworthy of the honorary title of human. This could open Gee's ideas up to the same criticism that Freire has received for defining humanity through a description of the concept of *praxis* (see Section 2.4. and Section 6.3). After placing great emphasis on describing empowering literacies education as one that might create new 'identities' through discourse production, Gee has returned the possibility of empowerment to a problem about how to define humanity and I return to this again in the next chapter when I consider Freire's work in some detail.

Another problem with Gee's ethical principles is that they imply that education might be an individualistic practice. If the role of the teacher is to make judgements about Discourse, then it is their task to judge an individual student's Discourse and the ways that they identify themselves, making teaching an individualistic pursuit. However, Gee also attaches some importance to students creating shared identities. This brings me to

the question of individual and group ‘identity’ and how it relates to the idea of empowerment, which I discuss next.

### *Identity and identification*

The discussion so far seems to suggest three problems with understandings of literacies education that aims to encourage the creation of new identities through discourse, which I outline briefly in this section. Firstly, as with Discourse, there is an absence of criteria for judging whether any ‘identity’ is preferable to any another. Secondly, that understanding education as a process of identification neglects the possibility of an active and social human subject, limiting human relationships to those between people and symbols. Thirdly, that this has implications for how educational relationships might be understood, perhaps suggesting educational practices should be limited to the passing down of knowledge.

Gee emphasises the importance of creating social identities, as the naming or the labelling of groups or people, as part of an empowering literacies education. He defines a social grouping by the commonly held understanding of what a group considers to count as goods, where goods are anything that the group considers it to be harmful not to have, such as jobs, wealth, status or power (SL, p. 21). This implies that the main purpose of developing a social ‘identity’ is to create new discourse about what counts as ‘goods’, where, in the context of literacies education, mastering this discourse might allow the goods to be acquired. This logic doesn’t add to or detract from the problems I have already discussed in the previous sections. Gee’s understanding of identity can’t be disassociated from circular arguments which seem to revolve around Gee’s initial



assumption that all Discourse is inherently ideological, operating to exclude people through processes that speakers, writers and gesticulators cannot detect.

Gee associates Discourse directly with the ways in which people identify or label themselves and each other. Discourse operates as a kind of identity kit that influences how people wear their clothes, speak and behave (SL, p. 127). But here the problem of how to distinguish between preferable or less preferable discourses that I described above applies equally to the constitution of identity. As Holloway puts it: ‘it would be nonsense to say there are good identities and bad identities’ (Holloway, 2002, p. 68). In the context of Gee’s empowering literacies education, it seems that if such judgements *are* made, there is a privileged role for researchers as only they can sit outside of a discourse and analyse its operation. In Bourdieu’s terminology, perhaps the importance of creating social identities is that this might identify groupings of people ripe for ‘orchestration’ by sociologists as revolutionaries.

For Biesta, the problem with understandings of education orientated towards identification and identity is that they offer a limited understanding of the ways in which people relate to each other and respond to each other’s actions. The purpose of human relationships might be reduced to us identifying whether we are the same or different from each other.

‘This has to do with the fact that if we would only relate to others in order to make clear how we are different from them, there would, in a sense, be nothing “at stake” in our relationships with others. Or, to put it differently, we would only “need” others in order to find out and make clear how we are different from them -

how my identity is unique - but once this has become clear we wouldn't need others any more. Our relationship with others would therefore remain instrumental.'

(Biesta, 2010, p. 86)

Biesta draws upon the work of Levinas and Arendt in educational contexts, asking the question of why it *matters* that we are unique, (Biesta, 2010, p. 86), considering uniqueness as irreplaceability and exploring the quality of human relationships where people are both the subjects of action and responsive to the actions of others (Biesta, 2006, p. 137). Biesta discusses these as aspects of being and becoming a human subject, in other words, education as subjectification. This re-orientates the discussion away from questions around what *makes* us unique, where our characteristics and possessions become matters of overriding precedence. From my exploration of the ideas of both Gee and Bourdieu, it seems that their understanding of human relationships in the context of education is indeed limited to that between people and the symbols that identify them, where human qualities such as responsibility, trust, love or friendship are not mentioned.

Gee's ethical principles seem to define and judge human beings by whether or not they accept an understanding of how Discourse operates, in other words by whether or not they accept an understanding of how people are identified or labelled. It seems that humans are primarily the carriers of characteristics (Biesta, 2010, p. 86) and so importance is attributed to how these characteristics are assigned. The consequence is a limited description of how education might be understood. I have also discussed above (in Section 4.4) how Gee understands education as a process of knowledge

transmission, characterising literacies education by processes of identifying the knowledge that should be transmitted and the ways in which the transmission might be organised. Here again, the character or quality of the relationships between people, for example the relationships between teachers and students, is not considered beyond processes of delivering or receiving knowledge.

The implications of Bourdieu's understanding of discourse and power have even bleaker implications for the quality of human relationships. For Bourdieu, symbolic power is woven into the operation of the capitalist system, suggesting that if that system were replaced then symbolic power might be dismantled. But as I mentioned above, Bourdieu's theory seems to describe the impossibility of such an occurrence. It seems that symbolic power cannot be escaped as all discourse is inherently oppressive. To take Bourdieu's understandings to their logical conclusion, escaping from symbolic power would mean escaping discourse and processes of identification or naming. Human equality would be reliant upon the ceasing of all speech, bodily mannerisms or facial expressions, as well as the halting of all symbolic expressions such as dance, painting or music. Presumably science itself would cease if it is understood as social activity reliant upon human discourse.

But the point here is that to understand inequality in terms of the imposition of identification through discourse reproduction suggests a limited if not absurd notion of equality and what it is to be human. Perhaps 'identity is the antithesis of love and friendship' (Holloway, 2002, p. 68). Whilst I have described the work of Biesta to help illustrate this point, I pursue the notion of subjectification through exploring the work of Freire and Rancière. I introduce the work of these two theorists of education in Chapter

5 and explore what this means for understanding emancipatory education for subjectification in Chapter 6.

This chapter set out to explore how empowerment might be understood in the context of adult literacies education, through considering the ideas of Bourdieu and Gee. It seems that understandings of ‘empowerment’ must be in some way be intrinsically linked to understandings of ‘power’, so before I summarise my exploration, I briefly give attention to how Bourdieu and Gee conceptualise ‘power’, so addressing research question vii.

### ***Power and empowerment***

Gee doesn’t explicitly define power in his work, presenting ‘liberating’ literacies as being synonymous with ‘empowerment’, without distinguishing between the two terms (SL, p. 144). However, his usage of the term ‘power’ seems to refer to a measure of a degree of ability to control discourse, or to put it another way, a degree of ability to recognise or exclude some identities over others. Gee also links the mastery of Discourse to the possibility of acquiring goods. Lankshear (1997, p. 70) summarises Gee’s understanding of power, echoing Bourdieu’s description of linguistic and social capital:

‘To *have* access to power is to possess qualities that have been related positively to goods or means of accessing them. To actually *exercise* power is to draw on these qualities, to ‘cash them in’, as it were. To be *empowered* is to have the qualities one possesses (or has available) made discursively – that is, through Discourse –

into ‘currency’ for acquiring goods and benefits, or for having them bestowed.’

(Lankshear, 1997, p. 70).

It seems that those whose Discourse excludes are dominators and will have power (and goods), whilst those who are excluded by dominant Discourse have less power (and therefore less goods). But being empowered is to take control over discourse and somehow ‘cash it in’ for goods, where literacies education might encourage this. Given how mastery of Discourse is dependent upon meta-knowledge about how Discourse operates, it is no surprise that Gee also declares that ‘Knowledge is *power*, because it can protect all of us from harming others and from being harmed, and because it is the very foundation of resistance and growth’ (SL, p. 191).

Presumably it is meta-knowledge about Discourse that is powerful, relating directly to the notion of ‘*powerful* literacies’ as the mastery of discourse and that might ‘give’ students the skills to author new identities. It seems to me that it is this understanding that seems to have garnered influence amongst academics from the ‘social practice’ tradition of adult literacies education (e.g. Crowther, Tett & Hamilton, 2003; Janks, 2010). Perhaps this is best summarised by Crowther, Tett & Hamilton’s statement that ‘literacy [education] that obscures the power relationships inscribed in its construction ultimately disempowers’ (2003, p. 3).

This notion can be seen to inform research that is orientated towards revealing the operation of power in situations where literate practices are required, such as form filling (Fawns and Ivanič, 2003), interpreting advertisements (Janks, 2010) or understanding teacher-parent relationships on family literacy programs (Rocha-Schmid,

2010). Here the assumption is that exposing power hierarchies must be integral to the task of changing them. Otherwise parents might be ‘deluded’ (Roch-Schmid, 2010, p. 357), or form fillers remain without power in their hands (Fawns and Ivanič, 2003, p. 92).

Bourdieu defines power or ‘symbolic power’ as a degree to which meanings are imposed through symbolic productions. This power is exerted through its legitimisation, as people ‘misrecognise’ the arbitrary way in which symbolic imposition operates. By definition, it isn’t possible for those who are suffering this imposition to detect its operation and so simultaneously dismantle it. It seems that symbolic power is inescapable and tends to support existing structural hierarchies associated with the economic classes in the economic system. The notion of the habitus describes a mechanism where symbolic power is woven into the structure of capitalism, where groups who accumulate linguistic capital will tend to be bourgeois and those who do not, to be proletarian. But ultimately, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are defined by their relationship with the production of economic capital, rather than Bourdieu’s galaxy of other forms of capital, be it ‘linguistic’ ‘symbolic’ ‘cultural’, ‘social’ etc.

This brief summary of Bourdieu’s understanding of power seems to re-iterate how there seems to be no possibility for an empowering education. This sits with how Bourdieu’s ideas are engaged with by literacy researchers, where they are utilised to inform how literacies education might be researched rather than explore possibilities for its practice (e.g. Luke and Freebody, 1997, Heath, 1983). Perhaps their purpose is to further understand literacies education as a socialising machine rather than to explore how teachers might practice a literacies education which places spanners in the machine’s

works. But, again, I shall re-engage with how the ideas of Bourdieu and Gee have been picked up in Chapter 7.

#### *4.5 Conclusion*

This chapter attempted to reconstruct and explore the work of Pierre Bourdieu and John Paul Gee in relation to how the notion of literacies education for empowerment might be understood and practised and what the implications might be for defining literacies. This exploration has allowed me to describe notions such as ‘power’, ‘identity’ and ‘discourse’ in the context of literacies education, so that they might serve as reference points to enable a meaningful exploration of issues and problems raised in relation to the idea of an empowering education. In this chapter I pursued these ends by considering the work of Gee and Bourdieu together and in parallel. I described the assumptions they each make, how they each conceptualise oppression and what the repercussions are for understanding an empowering or emancipatory literacies education, including the anticipated practices of teachers and students.

This allowed me to address the question of how a literacies education for empowerment might be understood. It also allowed me to address the question of how problems and issues associated with the practice of an empowering literacies education arise from the assumptions that the theorists make. I concluded that both theorists take understandings of language as a starting point and link this to the idea that discourse is inherently ideological, where Bourdieu’s understandings of power and discourse suggest no possibility for an empowering literacies education, whilst Gee’s imply educational practices which are problematic.

In the discussion above I raised the possibility of an emancipatory literacies education that might overlap with Biesta's domain of subjectification (Biesta, 2010). In the next chapter I attempt to describe how this might be understood, through exploring the theories of Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière which attempt to describe education as emancipation. In Chapter 6 I continue this exploration to explore how education for emancipation as subjectification might be understood and distinguished from education for empowerment, preparing the ground for exploring the possibilities for emancipation in the context of adult literacies education in the latter part of this thesis.



## 5 Exploring emancipation

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to reconstruct and explore the work of Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière in relation to the question of how an education for emancipation might be understood and practised. As with Bourdieu and Gee, I take the theories of Freire and Rancière together and in parallel, considering the assumptions they each make, how they understand oppression and how these ideas inform the possibility of an emancipatory education, so addressing research questions ix, x and xi. The exploration allows me to describe how concepts associated with the idea of an emancipatory literacies education, such as ‘emancipation’, ‘equality’, or ‘oppression’, might be understood. These descriptions create reference points to inform a meaningful exploration about how education for empowerment might be distinguished from an emancipatory education, including descriptions of education for subjectification, which commences in Chapter 6.

Rancière theorises how an emancipatory education might be understood but perhaps with more detailed descriptions than those provided by Freire, so part of my reconstruction of Rancière’s work continues into Chapter 6. For example, Rancière details the significance of identity and identification in relation to understanding emancipation. This aspect of Rancière’s work has implications for understanding how empowerment might be distinguished from emancipation in the context of education and so I also consider it in Chapter 6.

The reconstruction of Freire and Rancière's work set out in this chapter also informs my discussion about the emancipatory potential of literacies education. Freire's work has already been considered in this context (e.g. Freire, 1986, 1970; Giroux, 1988). However, to date, the work of Rancière has not been explored in the context of literacies education and attempting such an exploration is one of the objectives of this project. I consider specifically what the ideas of Freire and Rancière imply for the understanding and practice of adult literacies education in Chapter 7.

In this chapter, in my reconstruction of Freire and Rancière's ideas I will begin to touch upon the problems I have already raised about literacies education for empowerment and hint at how understandings of education for emancipation might avoid such issues. I discuss and summarise these aspects in some detail as part of my main exploration of empowerment in relation to emancipation in Chapter 6.

Though the central purpose of this current chapter is to reconstruct the theories of Freire and Rancière so that they might inform later discussions, I will also begin to touch upon some of the problems that have been raised by researchers and educators about the understanding and practice of emancipatory literacies education. The issues are generally associated with the ideas of Freire, whose work has had greatest influence in attempted practice of an emancipatory adult literacies education (see Section 2.4) and I discuss these in detail in Chapter 6. To restate, the central purpose of this chapter is to reconstruct the theories of Freire and Rancière in parallel and so I commence by considering the assumptions that each theorist makes.

## 5.2 *Freire and Rancière – assumptions*

Bourdieu and Gee take understandings of language as their starting points and relate these to describing how power is replicated in societal institutions, including formal systems of education. This contrasts with Freire and Rancière who start out with questions about how education might be understood. Central to this is the question of how to distinguish between education that socialises people into an intrinsically oppressive society and education that might create possible emancipatory alternatives. Like Bourdieu and Gee, both Freire and Rancière describe how education typically serves to replicate societal processes that are understood to be oppressive in character. But whilst the starting point of Bourdieu and Gee is to define how inequality is reproduced and then consider what this might mean for understanding educational institutions and practices, Rancière and Bourdieu commence from understanding education as an enactment of equality, with follow on implications for understanding societal inequality.

Crucially, unlike Gee, both Freire and Rancière describe how education for emancipation is *not* reliant upon teachers delivering more correct knowledge to students about the nature of their oppression, claiming instead that such educational practices actually *replicate* societal oppression. Rather, importance is placed upon the character of the *relationships* between students and teachers *and* the relationships between these people and the educational materials that they use (though in the case of Freire, the content of such materials is also significant). For both, emancipatory education cannot be systemised or implemented by government policy (Freire, 1972,<sup>10</sup> p. 31; Rancière,

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<sup>10</sup> Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, referred to as PO for the remainder of this text.

1991<sup>11</sup>, p. 46; Bingham and Biesta, 2011, p. 37), demanding instead that people trust one other (Rancière, 2007, p. 51-52; PO, p. 135; IS, p. 46). Though they offer different conceptualisations of emancipation, both Freire and Rancière describe its *pursuit* as a risky undertaking which people try to avoid, encouraging a tendency for people to replicate oppression themselves (IS, 16, 22, 40, PO, 23-24, pp. 99-100). In Chapter 4 I demonstrated how Bourdieu and Gee's understandings about the operation of literacies education could be traced to the assumptions they make about the ideological character of discourse. In this chapter I also consider the assumptions that Freire and Rancière make about 'ideology' as this might encourage an understanding of the distinction between education for empowerment and education for emancipation.

Freire and Rancière both describe oppression and emancipation as activity that might be enacted by teachers and students. They each present assumptions about humanity and use these to produce a definition of equality. This definition is then utilised to describe oppression in terms of activity that serves to undermine equality, the corollary being that emancipation can be understood as educational activity that might re-instigate it. In contrast, Bourdieu and Gee might use their starting point of inequality to explain how equality might be understood educationally. As I mention in Section 4.4, for Bourdieu, equality could only be achieved if people stopped all forms of discourse production as discourse production is assumed to be inherently oppressive. This would mean people with no speech, bodily mannerisms or facial expressions, no poetry, music, dance, song or science; a strange if not absurd notion of emancipation.

Freire defines equality by the assertion that all people are conscious beings who are

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<sup>11</sup> Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, referred to as IS for the remainder of this text

equally predisposed to reflect and act upon the world around them. Such social activity is assumed to be integral to the innate character of humanity and if it is suppressed or prevented then social inequality results. Rancière's definition of equality is described in terms of the *opinion* or assumption that all people are equally capable of directing their intellect towards forming their *own opinions*. This means that if the intellectual activity that is necessary to forming opinions is suppressed or undermined, then inequality is replicated. Each theorist elaborates a complicated theory of emancipatory education from these brief definitions of equality and I start by describing these definitions in more detail.

### ***Freire - assumptions***

Freire assumes that people are conscious beings that have evolved from and are part of an ever changing natural world. Humans are aware of themselves and each other as well as external reality (PO, pp. 54-55) within the context of ceaseless change. As historical beings, people are aware of a past, present and future which allows them to separate themselves from the consequences of their actions, encouraging them to believe that reality can be transformed through conscious activity. There is no need for people to resign themselves to the physical and social world as it is because they can make conscious plans to take action that might change it (PO, pp. 70-1). This drive for transformation and inquiry informs Freire's conceptualisation of education as the enactment of humanity's conscious and eternal striving towards completeness in the context of an ever changing social and physical world (PO, pp. 56-57). For Freire, 'The unfinished character of men [sic]<sup>12</sup> and the transformational character of reality

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<sup>12</sup> Both Freire and Rancière use the terms 'man' and 'men' to refer to all people. This has been controversial in the context of Freire's work as have his writing in relation to women more generally (e.g. see hooks, 1993), but as far as I am aware there has been no comment about this by researchers who have

necessitate that education be an on-going activity' (PO, pp. 57).

As with Bourdieu, Freire draws upon a notion of *praxis* which is presented as integral to humanity's innate way of being (PO, p. 70, p. 96). Though it is natural for people to be engaged in social activity that enacts *praxis*, Freire doesn't assume that this is permanent. Rather, it is a relationship that might be enacted and Freire conceptualises emancipatory education as educational activity that encourages and sustains *praxis*. It is on this point that Freire diverges from Bourdieu, who understands *praxis* as a permanent human condition (see Bernstein, 1972, pp. 45-49, or Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010, p. 115, p. 131). There are implications here for how each theorist understands ideology and the possibilities for emancipation, which I shall return to when I describe how Freire understands emancipation.

Freire understands *praxis* as a social relationship between people and the social and physical world, where they simultaneously and consciously reflect and act upon that world. *Praxis* must involve both action and reflection, indeed an act of true reflection cannot occur without action and vice versa. The two social activities are connected in a relationship of opposites, where action requires simultaneous critical reflection and where this reflection if 'true', results in action (PO, pp. 27-8, pp. 40-41, p. 96) and it is the character of this dynamic that defines it as a *dialectical* relationship.

Freire assumes that the social reflection that is integral to *praxis* is reliant upon dialogue between human subjects whilst they consider the concrete situations that limit them. Importantly, this means that the starting point for this process of simultaneous reflection

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engaged with Rancière's work. I do not discuss gender in this PhD thesis, however I leave quotes intact

and action (i.e. *praxis*) is always the social perception of challenges being encountered in the ‘here and now’, where intervention is required (PO, p. 57). By starting from this situation, people in *praxis* perceive that the problematic conditions in which they find themselves are alterable rather than fated, static and permanent. In contrast, if people’s social relationships do not constitute *praxis* they perceive their problems to be permanent and inescapable, a situation which Freire understands as a manifestation of oppression.

Freire understands emancipatory education as social activity which encourages *praxis*, which in turn encourages the social action that results in some kind of resolution to the problems that have been perceived. This activity results in some kind of resolution that changes the problematic circumstances that were first encountered and Freire describes this as a process that drives forward human history (PO, pp. 71-74). However, new limiting situations will inevitably arise, so that there is always a need for emancipatory education that encourages *praxis*. For Freire there will never be a time when education is redundant and no longer necessary.

Freire assumes that when people are socially engaged in simultaneous reflection and action upon the social and physical world, (i.e. when they are in a relationship of *praxis* with the world), then they also fully *conscious* of the world, an idea that informs his usage of the term conscientization (e.g. see PO, p. 42, Freire, 1970, p. 42). Freire also understands that everyone is equally predisposed to enact *praxis* with others, making *praxis* a definition of equality. *Praxis* is also understood to be humanity’s natural state of being when people are understood to be free. This means that when people are

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so that the reader is not sheltered from this language

socially engaged in a relationship of praxis with each other and the world they are not only fully conscious of the world, but experiencing freedom as well. For Freire, freedom is synonymous with humanity acting out history in *praxis*, in tune with their ‘species being’. The notion might be traced to Hegel, though the terms ‘Geist’ or ‘reason’ might have been used rather than ‘consciousness’ (see Bernstein, 1972, pp. 42-45). It seems that what it means to be ‘conscious’ is a debate in itself (ibid, 14-59) and I do not attempt to engage with it here or to interpret Hegel’s work for myself, not least because it might constitute a separate thesis. However, I do return to the notion of ‘reason’ when I discuss Rancière’s work in Chapter 7.

Freire assumes that dialogue is integral to the possibility of social reflection, making it crucial to the possibility of social equality and freedom (Freire and Shor, 1987b). It is here that he draws upon the ideas of Martin Buber to describe how ‘I-It’ relationships between people are manifested when dialogue is obstructed, where ‘I’ turns the ‘conquered ‘thou’ into a mere ‘It’, making a relationship between two subjects into a subject object relationship where ‘Thou’ is made inhuman and inanimate (Guilherme and Morgan, 2009). Buber assumes that humans oscillate between ‘I-Thou’ and ‘I-It’ relationships where ‘I-Thou’ relations are those of dialogue between subjects, where people are creatively and spiritually fulfilled (ibid, p. 567). For Freire, true dialogue creates the possibility of relationships of co-subjects, where ‘two ‘thous’ become ‘two I’s’” (PO, p. 135). Importantly, the relationship that Freire describes is reliant upon love and trust, making these human qualities integral to the possibility of praxis and full consciousness of the social and physical world (PO, pp. 62-64).

The emphasis Freire places on dialogue in the context of *praxis* describes an education



that is inherently social rather than individual, that might orientate towards wider goals of social justice. For Freire, the social character of emancipatory education makes individual emancipation as impossible as being the midwife at one's own birth (PO, p. 25 or see Shor, 1997).

The concept of *praxis* that Freire describes suggests human subjects in constant flux, immersed in ever changing relationships with each other and an ever changing social and physical environment. However, for Freire, *praxis* also describes the innate character of humanity, where the state of *praxis* is associated with freedom, relationships of equality and the possibility of an emancipatory education, all of which I elaborate upon below. The point here is that reliance upon the notion of *praxis* confines Freire to a fixed and absolute definition of what it means to be human. Freire has been criticised specifically for this on the grounds that it is both impossible and undesirable to define humanity in the context of education (see Section 2.4). This becomes relevant when I consider Freire's understanding of an emancipatory education below. However, Rancière avoids the problem by describing the assumptions that he makes about humanity in the context of education as 'opinions' rather than the 'truth' about humans, which I describe in the next section.

### ***Rancière – assumptions***

Rancière draws attention to the assumptions that theories make about humanity by describing the possibility of an emancipatory education that does not claim to be based upon any 'truth' of people's natural predispositions. Though Rancière assumes that unlike animals, people can enact equality through expressing opinions (see IS, pp. 77-78), this assumption is itself presented as just an *opinion*. This contrasts with Freire's

presentation of the truth about humanity's 'species being' (see PO, 98) as well as Bourdieu's ultimate definition of humanity in praxis, which is linked to the structural operation of the capitalist system. Bourdieu persistently refers to his description of the operation of power as 'facts' or the 'truth' (for example see RE, p. 12, p. 15, p. 22, p. 31), where his initial definition of symbolic power is referred to as an 'axiom' (see RE, p. 3) or self-evident truth. Gee attempts to avoid defining humanity through his claim that all Discourse excludes and can only be understood as a partial description of social contexts. However, this doesn't seem to include his *own* written discourse which in my judgement is treated as the truth. Indeed he argues that this truth must be passed down to teachers and students if they are to be empowered (see Section 4.4). I will further explore this aspect of the theorists work in Chapter 7, when I discuss the implications for both literacies education and also for its associated research methodology. In this and the following sections I demonstrate that Rancière draws attention to how defining 'the truth' about people might be problematic if the possibility of an emancipatory education is to be enacted, whilst setting up assumptions in his own work that might get around the issue.

Rancière claims that his work is informed by 'opinions' rather than 'facts' or 'the truth' about people and as a consequence his description of oppression and the movement to educational emancipation is taken in a different direction to that described by Freire. In Rancière's writing, opinions are not presented as an account of the innate character of human beings or even as being consequent of organised empirical research. Opinions are just opinions. But the opinions that Rancière raises inform understandings about how opinions arise in the first place as well as his conceptualisations of both equality and oppression. So the use of opinions is in keeping with the arguments that the theory

makes to describe possibilities for an emancipatory education. Rancière's writing (e.g. 1991, 2007, 2007, 2011) could in itself be interpreted as an example of what can be achieved if the logic of his opinion about opinions is followed through.

Rancière elaborates his arguments through the story of a nineteenth century educator, a teacher named Joseph Jacotot, who gained some notoriety in France and Holland (Rancière, 2010, 1). Rancière describes how Jacotot discovers emancipatory education by accident from observations made when he was teaching a language he didn't know. He gave the students a bilingual text and left them to figure it all out for themselves, which they did, implying the possibility of an *ignorant schoolmaster*. This story describes how Jacotot's opinions about education arise from chance encounters in everyday situations, demonstrating that it is in such contexts that opinions might arise. Jacotot observed that the students had learned in the same way that they had learned their first language, 'by repeating and verifying, by relating what they were trying to know to what they already knew, by doing and reflecting about what they had done' (IS, p. 10). The students hadn't been instructed or followed orders, rather they had taken the measure of each other's intellectual capacity and used it (IS, p. 17).

It is these and other everyday observations of Jacotot's that inform Rancière's first opinion, that '*all men [sic] have equal intelligence*' (IS, p. 18). To summarise, Freire's starting point for an emancipatory education is to assume the possibility of enacting a social relationship of '*praxis*' in the context of the issues and problems that limit people's ability to act, whilst Rancière describes a starting point of everyday encounters which are acted upon in the belief that everyone is an intellectual equal.

Rancière's opinion is stated in the context of an exploration of the possibility of an emancipatory education. As with Freire, the starting point and purpose of Rancière's work can be interpreted as an attempt to distinguish between educational activity that socialises and educational activity that might emancipate. To illustrate the implication of this I shall re-introduce Biesta's (2010) conceptualisation of *qualification*, *socialisation* and *subjectification* as possible purposes and functions for education (see Section 2.4). Considering these three overlapping domains of purpose, Rancière is attempting to understand *subjectification*. It is in the context of the possibility of emancipation, that Rancière's opinion is enacted. For Rancière, the problem wasn't 'the instruction of the people', rather, 'that of emancipation; that every common person might conceive his human dignity, take the measure of his intellectual capacity, and decide how to use it.' (IS, p. 17).

By stating that everyone has equal intelligence, Rancière is not claiming that all people, regardless of their situation, are equally predisposed to be instructed to become air traffic controllers, lace makers, welders or confectioners. Rather, he is taking the opinion that when it comes to *subjectification as emancipation* we have to assume that all people are intellectual equals, or the enactment of equality (or emancipation) cannot be possible.

Rancière describes intelligence as being synonymous with equality (IS, p. 73) and there is a sense in which his reference to intelligence is a reference to equality itself. He is taking the opinion that all people are predisposed towards enacting equality. But whilst Freire defines equality by people's equal predisposition to live in *praxis* (PO, p. 70), Rancière is defining equality by expressing the opinion about people's equal

predisposition to enact the opinion that intellectual equality is possible (IS, p. 18). I elaborate upon this in subsequent sections, but first I shall describe two other opinions which comprise Rancière's assumptions.

Rancière notes that even though he assumes that all people have equal intelligence, people can be observed to achieve different outcomes when applying their intellects to achieve similar goals. This might include differences in some of the qualities relating to what Bourdieu would call their 'symbolic productions', such as their speech or writing, suggesting that all people are *not* intellectual equals. If people *are* equal in their intelligence, how does this account for evidence that suggests the contrary? As a consequence of anecdotal observations Rancière introduces a second opinion that '*man [sic] is a will served by an intelligence*' (IS, pp. 51 – 52). The performance of intelligence, or equality, relies on an act of the will. Those who don't attend to their will whilst acknowledging intellectual equality are enacting a form of intellectual weakening, creating diversity in achievement in specific situations. Equality between people is reliant upon individuals attending to their will whilst acting under the assumption that everyone has equal intelligence. If people rely on the intellect of others, accepting others' opinions and neglecting to form their own then they fail to attend to their own will and equality is no longer enacted. The consequence of this argument is that reliance on a group will undermines equality, making all societal institutions enactors of inequality. From here, Jacotot's initial opinions produce a third opinion that: 'it is precisely because each man [sic] is free that a union of men is not' (IS, p. 78).

So far I have described the assumptions that Freire and Rancière make in their respective theorising of oppressive and emancipatory education. For Freire, the

assumptions encompass a description of the innate character of humanity where people are taken to be conscious and historical beings living in *praxis*. In contrast, Rancière avoids the making of truth assumptions about humans, instead referring to his assumptions as just opinions. Bourdieu and Gee commence by stating their assumptions about language and using these to define how *inequality* is replicated in society as a consequence of the ideological character of discourse. In contrast, Freire and Rancière's assumptions are orientated towards the definition of education as the enactment of *equality* which might give rise to understandings of inequality and the possibility of an emancipatory education. Whilst Freire refers to power in the wider context of class power (e.g. see PO, pp. 106-107; Freire, 1970, p. 16) and Rancière refers to intellectual power (e.g. see IS, p. 15) neither Freire nor Rancière offer a conceptualisation of power in the context of discourse production.

Rancière and Freire seem to share a joint endeavour in that they both attempt to distinguish between education that might socialise and education that might raise possibilities for emancipation, taking a definition of equality as their starting point. Though Rancière and Freire do not produce a definition of ideology, their work has implications for how ideology might be understood. This comes into play when they consider how inequality is enacted as oppression, which I consider in the next section.

### ***5.3 Processes of oppression: banking education or stultification***

In this section I will describe how both Freire and Rancière describe oppression as a process of knowledge transmission that is enacted and replicated throughout society and its institutions, not just in schools or colleges. Both Freire and Rancière understand

oppression as the dichotomising of the human qualities that might enact equality. In Freire's case, oppression is the dichotomising of people from the world; the separation of reflection from action. This breaking down of humanity's innate ways of being results from human activity that blocks dialogue between people and is enacted through an educational process described as 'banking education'. In contrast, Rancière describes oppression as a dichotomy of intelligence dividing people into a world of ignorant minds and knowing ones. This is understood to be enacted by processes of explication (i.e. explanation) where educators encourage students to believe that some are more intelligent than others, weakening the attention that students give to their own intellects and the intellects of others. Both Freire and Rancière describe these oppressive processes as forms of knowledge transmission which are understood to be replicated throughout society, not just in the formal education system.

### ***Freire – banking education***

Freire describes a class driven oppression where dehumanisation is a fundamental attribute of society (PO, pp. 21-22). Oppressor and oppressed classes are locked into a co-dependent struggle for recognition which will only be resolved when the dehumanisers are defeated. But it isn't people's *destiny* to be oppressed; rather it is their *vocation* to become human and this struggle can only be led by the oppressed who will free their oppressors as well as themselves. Oppressors make oppressed people dependent upon them for knowledge about the world, but they themselves are dependent upon the oppressed for the possibility of a future social emancipation. Here Freire makes clear that this project need not be left to chance for there can be a role for humanising education.

Freire's description of a class driven oppression cites Hegel as justification. Though he is influenced by the early writings of Marx (i.e. the 1844 Manuscripts, see PO, pp. 70-71; Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010, p. 112) and describes oppression in the context of class, unlike Bourdieu, Freire does not refer directly to the organisation and structure of the economic system of capitalism (e.g. in Freire 1970 or Freire 1972). This could be in part due to how Freire positions himself as 'man' from the 'third world' (Freire, 1970, p. 17), where education takes place in the context of agrarian economies inhabited by 'peasants' rather than the 'proletariat'. However, as I mentioned above, Freire's understanding of equality also suggests that oppressive circumstances might always challenge people before or after the capitalist system is replaced, so that the need for an emancipatory education is always there and never made redundant (Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010, p. 113).

Freire understands the separation of humanity from the physical and social world to be enacted by an oppressor class that acts as if other people are mere objects rather than fellow humans. They render everyone inanimate in an all-encompassing act of dehumanisation which, drawing on Fromm, Freire equates directly to sadism, violence and a love of death (PO, p. 40, pp. 50-51). For the oppressors, 'to be is to have and to be of the 'having' class' (PO, p. 35) and so they live in a world without people. The oppressed, objects in the world of the oppressors, are people without the world. They are encouraged into passivity, disconnected from active engagement with the world because 'as things they have no purpose except those that the oppressors prescribe for them' (PO, p. 36).



For Freire, dialogue is integral to praxis so that oppression is physically enacted through ‘anti-dialogical acts’ that isolate people by interrupting the social reflection that must accompany all action. Anti-dialogical acts take the form of mythmaking, sloganeering, and cultural invasion which distrusts people and serves to keep them apart. This is enacted throughout society, including organisation aimed at reducing inequality such as the welfare system, development projects and political parties. This activity is understood to disrupt *praxis*, as oppressed people are ‘objectified’, weakening their social enactment of reflection and action upon the world. Freire describes this process of oppression as *banking education*.

The banking education model describes a social world where oppressors, as teachers, assume the role of subject and act to make people (as students) objects by regulating and controlling the knowledge of the world that enters their consciousness. Students may not open their consciousness to the world as they intend, but passively receive it in the form of deposits which they may file and store. The teacher teaches, knows, thinks, talks, chooses, acts and decides. But students, as the objects of education, do the opposite of all of these things, making them dependent on the teacher for these actions. They are receptacles for knowledge about the world that they may collect, catalogue and store but not act upon, transform or recreate. The teacher justifies this relationship by presenting themselves as knowledgeable, encouraging students to accept themselves as ignorant (PO, pp. 46-49).

Banking education controls people’s conscious engagement with the world, making them receptive to knowledge transmission from the ‘teacher’ and less able to communicate or reflect amongst themselves. This socialises the banking educated

person into a world of objects; the oppressive society created by the oppressor class. They accept the status quo and believe that they cannot engage with the world other than through the teacher's guidance. This false perception prevents them from objectifying the oppressor; indeed, they may admire oppressive people and harbour ambitions to be like them, as the peasant dreams of becoming a landowner. As banking education denies the ever changing nature of people and the world they inhabit, oppression seems to be permanent with no prospect or possibility for change.

Though they know that they are oppressed, people's perception of their situation is impaired so that they may be unable to describe the reality of their own oppression. This notion implies that, as with Bourdieu and Gee, oppressive education is ideological in character. Bourdieu and Gee describe the illusive character of discourse, where discourse imposes meanings through processes that people cannot detect. For Bourdieu there seems to be no prospect for education to intervene in this process, whilst for Gee, and empowering literacy education is predicated upon knowledge transmission about 'the truth' of how discourse operates. In contrast, Freire is describing the ideological character of knowledge transmission, which cannot ever be countered by more knowledge transmission. This is the case regardless of 'the truth' that is being transmitted. The problem is that knowledge transmission prevents 'the truth' from being discovered in the first place, so it can be assumed that any transmission about the character of a person's oppression will contain mistruths.

However, nonetheless, Freire's theory still conceptualises that students are unable to detect 'the truth' of the world around them, because they are in receipt of knowledge directed to them from others, instead of intending towards the physical and social world

in praxis. What's more, the possibility of emancipation is predicated on the revelation of 'the truth' (Biesta 2012). This leaves Freire the difficult job of describing an emancipatory education that can overcome the false or naive consciousness of 'the oppressed' *without* resorting to educational liberators revealing the world to 'them' through processes of knowledge transmission in an endeavour to emancipate from the outside. He attempts this by utilising his understanding of the transient character of *praxis* which I discuss below. But first I describe how Rancière's assumptions, like Freire's, describe oppression as an educational process of knowledge transmission. However Rancière's does not suggest that oppression manifests as an ideological process that distorts people's perception of 'the truth'.

### ***Rancière – explication***

In common with Freire, Rancière sets up an educational model that describes the enactment of oppression throughout society that is replicated in all social institutions, not just schools or colleges. However, Rancière takes schooling as a detailed example. He describes how school children are encouraged to believe that they can't understand without explanation (i.e. explication) which makes them intellectually reliant on a teacher, in contradiction to life before school when children learn to speak, relate and do with no explanation. This makes school a place where children grieve over the loss of their ability. The continual process of explication may be the result of a teacher's good intentions but also serves the purpose of allowing teachers to reinforce their status as the knowledgeable one. The more the teacher explains, the more the child becomes dependent on explanation; it is a regression ad infinitum. The teacher may be well meaning and conscientious, perhaps even arguing that 'teaching was not about

cramming students with knowledge and having them repeat it like parrots' (IS, p. 3). But unlike Freire who views such techniques as manifestations of knowledge transmission as banking education, preventing students from intending their consciousness towards the social and physical world, cramming isn't the problem. Instead, Rancière understands knowledge transmission as the entwining of two relations between student and teacher, that of will to will and that of intelligence to intelligence (Rancière, 2010). The processes of explanation enacted by teachers serve to weaken the will to will relationship whilst strengthening that of intelligence to intelligence, encouraging students to believe that they need help to understand. Students are encouraged to enact the belief that some are more intelligent than others and rely upon the opinions of others instead of directing their will towards their own intellect whilst acknowledging the intellect of others.

For Rancière, the word *understanding* 'throws a veil over everything' (IS, p. 6). The teacher obscures knowledge and then gradually unveils it making teaching the art of continually gauging the distance between the taught material and the understanding of the student. Using Freire's description of banking education this process could be interpreted as the regulation and control of the knowledge that enters into a student's consciousness; an oppressive act of objectification. In contrast, Rancière constructs inequality as a process that enforces the belief that some people have an inferior intelligence. The result isn't Freire's 'naive consciousness', but rather a kind of intellectual laziness underwritten by the belief that all people vary in intellect (IS, p. 40). This weakens the attention people give to their own intellectual powers, replicating inequality by encouraging reliance upon the opinions of others.

Unlike Freire (as well as Bourdieu and Gee), there is no process of illusion or ‘misrecognition’ here and as I mentioned above, emancipation is not predicated on the revelation of the truth. In this sense, Rancière’s understanding of oppression is not ideological in character. For Gee and Bourdieu, the ideological character of discourse as a process of illusion or misrecognition serves to socialise students into existing power hierarchies. Similarly for Freire, ‘banking education’ is ideological in the sense that it encourages a false consciousness that serves to maintain existing oppressive societal relationships. But whilst Freire’s emancipatory education must overcome a delusionary process, Rancière’s emancipatory education is reliant only upon enacting the belief that all people have equal intelligence.

For Bourdieu and Gee, it is the ideological character of discourse that serves to socialise students as it underpins the processes that replicate oppressive power hierarchies. This is also the case for Freire, except that it is the ideological character of knowledge transmission that encourages socialisation. In contrast, Bourdieu’s ‘misrecognition’ is understood to pervade ‘even when the information transmitted tends towards zero’ (RE, p. 21) implying that knowledge transmission from teacher to student might rectify the problem (see Rancière, 2010, p. 10). Like Freire, Rancière understands that processes of knowledge transmission serve to socialise students (IS, p. 78), but this is not an ideological process for there is no illusion or misrecognition. Instead, for Rancière, understandings of education or politics underpinned by a concept of ideology are taken to be problematic. If people act under the assumption that ideological processes are operating in society then this entails practising a socialising education because they encourage the idea that knowledge transmission should be an integral part of educational relationships (see Rancière, 2010, pp. 10-11). Gee and Bourdieu both argue

that failing to acknowledge how power is reproduced through ideological processes has the effect of replicating it. But for Rancière, to enact Bourdieu or Gee's presumption of ideology means enacting inequality, socialising students and replicating the social order.

Using Rancière's terminology, this enactment of inequality serves a 'policing' function that serves to replicate the 'police order'. In contrast, the enactment of equality is 'political' and defines Rancière's own definition of 'politics'. This means that most activity commonly understood to be political, such as parliamentary work, lobbying or industrial solidarity would be described by Rancière as 'policing' rather than 'politics', as it encourages the belief in intellectual inequality (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, pp. 32-38; Biesta, 2010b, pp. 546-547). For Rancière, the problem isn't that that 'the truth' is distorted, but the very concept of ideology as 'the truth of the false' (Rancière, 1999, p. 85) where ideology 'is, in short, the concept in which all politics is cancelled out' (ibid, 86). The presumption of ideology drives the enactment of intellectual inequality by dichotomising intelligence into 'a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid' (IS, p. 6). This means that for Rancière, emancipation cannot be about understanding power relationships (Rancière, 1999, p. 42).

Freire characterises the enactment of oppression as the dichotomising of subject from object, people from the world, where the oppressed are made objects in a world without people. But for Rancière, people are not disconnected from the world. Rather, people are encouraged to act in the belief that some are intellectually superior to others and so neglect to form opinions of their own. This belief is replicated through acts of explication throughout society's institutions, in what Rancière describes as a series of

interlocking circles of inequality. In relation to child development, professionals might perform tests on children's brains supposedly producing evidence of the difference in their intellectual capability (IS, p. 47), under the premise that it is natural for intelligences not to be equal. This supposed measurement of intelligence is actually an enactment of inequality because people can't (and in point of fact haven't) measured differences in intelligence. All they are doing is explaining *differences* by giving them the meaningless label of *intelligence* and using this to reinforce a 'circle of inequality' (IS, p. 87) where the oppressive opinion that *all people are unequal* is re-stated endlessly.

This process of reinforcing inequality through explication prevails throughout society including parliament, government, academia and courts of law. A stultifying educational process is also enforced by those who aim to help the common people, including those (like Freire) with a goal to undermine the social order. Revolutionaries, progressives, supporters of meritocracy and philanthropic rulers are bundled together by Rancière as well-meaning people but with something else in common too (IS, p. 17). They all transmit their ideas via an explicatory monitor system; an inverted tree of instruction from which their orders radiate outwards. Their intention is to explain knowledge to people, be it political philosophy, psychology, sociology or journalism, believing that they are encouraging the possibility of liberty when actually they are extending the reach of inequality (ibid). Of course more inequality means even more explanatory work for the revolutionaries and progressives to attend to, further reinforcing the 'circle of inequality' (IS, p. 87).

Rancière presents a very strong statement against the possibility for social science to

contribute to the preservation of humanity (IS, p. 77-78). If humans are studied and explained like other animals under the auspices of natural science, then their continuance as a species need not be considered because the natural laws cannot raise such questions (ibid). The needs of existence can only be attended to by individuals who enact a belief in intellectual equality, who attend to their will and so create their own opinions. Rancière describes how social science utilises the intellect of ordinary people whilst simultaneously functioning to suppress it. Systemised social science instruction enacts oppression by taking opinions that might originate with the everyday habits of ordinary people and then explicating these back to them as though they cannot understand them, telling people that:

‘An *opinion* is a feeling we form about facts that are superficially observed. They are from weak and common minds and are the opposite of science which knows the true reasons for phenomena’

(IS, p. 45)

Here, Rancière could be describing the work of Bourdieu or Gee and the assumptions that they make about the ideological character of discourse. This ideological function can only be observed and understood by observers from outside of a discourse, such as sociologists or socio-linguists, who might explain its operation to teachers and students. For Rancière, such explanations and explanatory theories not only encourage the oppressive opinion that people have unequal intelligence, they also undermine the attention people might give to their intellectual powers, weakening the intellectual activity from which opinions originate in the first place, for ‘where need ceases, intelligence slumbers’ (IS, p. 51). So, according to Rancière, enacting the assumptions



that Bourdieu makes about ideology serves to replicate inequality and leaves no possibility for emancipation as education (see Rancière, 2005, p. 179) and presumably this would also apply to Gee's assumptions also.

I have described how both Freire and Rancière understand oppression as a process of knowledge transmission that is enacted throughout all social institutions, including schools and college and serves to socialise students. However, whilst Freire understands knowledge transmission to distort students' perceptions of the truth, for Rancière knowledge transmission weakens the will of students to attend to their intellects. I have also described how they both present oppression as the dichotomising of the human attributes that are necessary to equality. For Freire, this is dichotomising of people from the social and physical world, a breaking down of humanity's innate ways of being in praxis that results from a 'banking education' that blocks dialogue between people. Rancière describes oppression as a dichotomy of intelligence dividing people into a world of knowing and ignorant minds, enacted through processes that weaken people's wills so that they neglect their intellect and the intellect of others, replicating the belief that some are more intelligent than others. In the next section I shall describe Freire's understanding of an emancipatory education.

#### ***5.4 Freire's emancipatory education***

In keeping with the notion of praxis, Freire presents emancipatory education as a practice as well as a theory, describing how an educational project might be conducted 'on the ground'. Emancipation must *not* involve the practice of educators explaining more correct knowledge of people's objective situations back to them as liberators

coming from the outside because this replicates banking education. Instead of knowledge transmission, it is the relationship between educator, students and the 'world' that is of importance.

For Freire, *praxis* is not a permanent state for there are processes of knowledge transmission which disrupt it that are understood to be oppressive. For Bourdieu, *praxis* also defines the species being of humanity, but following Marx, *praxis* is a *permanent* state of affairs (see Bernstein, 1972, pp, 45-49). Bourdieu assumes that it is the historical circumstances dictated by the economic system of capitalism which ultimately distorts people's conscious understanding of how discourse operates, where the 'habitus' operates like a genetic transmitter, passing down the linguistic dispositions that replicate the structure of capitalism (see RE, p. 32). Though Bourdieu understands there to be a dialectical relationship between people's collective habitus' and the operation of the economic system, it seems that capitalism is the driver, where ideological character of discourse is permanent at least until capitalism is replaced.

For Bourdieu, if there is a quantitative change in the economic system, for example, one that results in the devaluing of university qualifications (see HA, p. 168), this might result in a change to how people perceive 'the truth' of how society operates, precipitating a social response that might be orchestrated by sociologists (see Section 4.4). Importantly, sociologists can only view oppressive discourse as observers rather than understand it as participants, suggesting that *praxis* might also be understood as a scientific technique where the unification of theory and practice might allow sociologists to determine an objective truth.

According to Bourdieu the purpose of research is to achieve ‘objectivity’ about how power operates. In contrast, for Freire, ‘objectivity’ and the associated process of ‘banking education’ is the *problem* where ‘objectification’ is synonymous with oppression<sup>13</sup>. The purpose of Freire’s emancipatory education is to undermine processes of objectification by unifying subject and object, where people’s dialogic relationships with each other and the world encompass a quality of intersubjectivity, understood as *praxis*, ‘an event in which subjectivity and objectivity are united’ (Freire, 1970, p. 21, p. 31). According to Freire, when people reflect and act upon the world together in *praxis* they are fully conscious of ‘the truth’ of the world, where there is ‘indisputable unity between subjectivity and objectivity in the act of knowing.’ (Freire, 1970, p. 31).

However, as Freire understands being in *praxis* as an act of knowing, he simultaneously assumes that emancipatory education functions to allow people to ‘objectify’ their oppressors revealing the true character of their own oppression (ibid, p. 25; PO, p. 22). It seems that though Freire assumes that knowledge transmission is oppressive, there is an extent to which a process of objectification, perhaps as knowledge transmission, remains integral to the emancipatory education that he describes. This might arise from Freire’s assumption that it is only when people can fully understand ‘the truth’ of the problems that challenge them will they be able to intervene and counter them through collective action (PO, p. 57, see Section 5.2) and I return to this in Chapter 6..

Nonetheless, a demarcation can still be made between Bourdieu’s and Freire’s

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<sup>13</sup> According to Bernstein (1971, p45) it is on this point that Marx distinguishes himself from Hegel, so perhaps here Freire can be seen to follow Hegel rather than Marx. It follows logically that this is also where Freire can be demarcated from Bourdieu

understandings of education. Whilst Bourdieu describes a need for sociologists to reveal ‘the truth’ of how power operates from a third person perspective, Freire describes liberatory educators who do not serve to reveal ‘the truth’ to students, but rather encourage an intersubjective enactment of praxis, where students can reveal ‘the truth’ by reading the world for themselves. This implies that to be literate means to engage in *praxis*, as a social enactment of dialogue and so develop a critical consciousness of the world and the situations within it that serve to limit peoples’ freedom.

Freire elaborates on how this education might be understood in practical terms. He describes how the role of the teacher is to re-instigate dialogical and reflective practices which simultaneously re-initiate praxis and link people back to the world (PO, p. 30). It is dialogue within the educational relationship that drives the emancipatory process, whilst ‘the world’ holds a mediating role (PO, p. 53). This raises questions about the status of *dialogue* and ‘*the world*’ in the educational emancipatory process. For Freire, dialogue is essential to the dialectic between reflection and action that constitutes praxis. This makes dialogue the driver of emancipation, but Freire introduces another dimension. A profound love for the world and for humanity is described as *prerequisite* to dialogue. Martin Buber informs Freire’s notion that those in dialogue may depart from relationships of domination opening up not just the possibility, but the *necessity* for a non-oppressive relationship between teachers and students. In banking education the relationship between teacher and student is one of oppressor to oppressed. In emancipatory education this opposition is expected to dissolve, transforming the student-teacher relationship into one of love and trust, where they work *with* each other, replacing the oppressive subject object relationship with one of *co-subjects* in *praxis*. For Freire, love is distorted in this relationship. Drawing from Fromm, he describes an

oppressive love which takes the form of necrophilia as a love of things not people, or a love of death rather than life (PO, pp. 50-51).

The existence of this relationship is dependent on love and trust which are essential to dialogue and the initiation of a complex of dialectical relationships between critical thinking and dialogue, dialogue and reflection, reflection and action and ‘I and thou’ without which emancipation cannot be enacted. Freire describes the relationship between dialogue and critical thinking as being like that between reflection and action, in that they define each other. Critical thinking takes place if it generates dialogue and likewise true dialogue generates critical thinking. Dialogue cannot exist without critical thinking:

‘which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and men, admitting of no dichotomy between them – thinking which perceives reality as process and transformation, rather than as a static entity – thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved’

(PO, pp. 64-65).

I make no attempt to describe what is meant here except that this is where Freire relates the significance of ‘the world’ in emancipatory education, for dialogue and critical thinking are activities that must take place whilst co-intending upon concrete situations arising from the physical and social world. Here, Freire not only trusts people’s relationships with each other, but also their relationships with the ‘world’ which they may reveal to each other without the unveilings of an educator.

But for the oppressed, praxis has broken down and there is a distorted perception of reality as it is. Freire argues that 'the world' must therefore be re-presented in symbolic form as educational materials geared precisely towards the lives and experiences of the oppressed students. If the content is too obvious, then education can degenerate into propaganda, sloganeering or knowledge deposits, but if it is too enigmatic it can turn into a puzzle or guessing game where the educator takes the role of revealing the answer (PO, pp. 86-87). Either way, these scenarios continue banking education as they block dialogue. To get around this problem the 'world' must be 'codified' encompassing the experiences and concerns of the students (Freire, 1970, pp. 32-34).

Here, Freire returns to the concept of people as historical beings, incorporating the historical philosophy of Hans Freyer which assumes that humanity creates not only material goods but also ideas, concepts and social institutions whilst they simultaneously create history and become 'historical-social beings'. It follows that the study of history or society can reveal ideas, values, concepts and hopes as well as oppressive situations. These are the themes of the current epoch and they both contain and are contained within *limit-situations* from which the *limit-acts* necessary to transform society may be detected (PO, pp. 71-74). Following from this, Freire's educational practice describes a complicated process of producing a 'codified' world in the form of educational materials that encapsulate the reality of student's lives (PO, p. 75). Educator and students will *co-intend* upon the 'codified' world as if for the first time, investigating the themes through dialogue and enabling 'limit situations' to be found. Educators can then pose these situations back to students as problems for them to solve. In so doing it is assumed that students can name the corresponding 'limit-acts' and start to plan transformative actions; a 'conscientization' through dialogue that

initiates praxis and drives forward history.

In summary, Freire is describing emancipatory education as a process of ‘conscientization’ that overcomes knowledge transmission by attempting to break the dependency between teachers and students for knowledge about the world. Freire’s emancipatory education can be understood as an enactment of equality where the purpose is for students to become fully conscious of ‘the truth’ of the circumstances that they find themselves in, through an emancipatory educational relationship that is ultimately driven by love and trust. Here, the role of the teacher is to instigate dialogue whilst co-intending upon symbolic representations of ‘the world’ alongside students, so that *praxis* might be reinstated.

### ***5.5 Rancière’s emancipatory education***

Freire’s emancipation is understood as an enactment of equality as a humanising process that reinstates people’s innate character of being in *praxis* whilst overcoming knowledge transmission. Rancière’s emancipation follows this model in the sense that it is also understood as an enactment of equality that reinstates the opinions about humanity that the theory assumes, whilst dismantling processes of knowledge transmission.

But whilst Freire’s emancipatory education is assumed to reveal ‘the truth’ about the situations that students and teachers find themselves in, Rancière’s emancipatory education is understood as an enactment of intellectual equality so that students give attention to their intellect and create their own opinions rather than relying on the opinions of others. Not only does this remove any dependency between students and

teachers for understandings about the social world, it also describes emancipation with a purpose other than revealing ‘the truth’. Rancière’s understanding of emancipatory education also maintains a distinct relationship between teachers and students, describing a relationship of will against will that drives the emancipatory process, rather than Freire’s relationships of co-subjects. This links with Rancière’s understanding of emancipation being predicated upon assumptions that are just opinions rather than an ultimate definition of the human subject, for example as described by Freire. The repercussion is that though, like Freire, Rancière’s emancipatory education is also reliant upon relationships between teachers, students and symbolic productions, there is no need for particular understandings about the world to be incorporated in the form of ‘codifications’.

Three opinions are enacted in the emancipatory process; that all intelligences are equal; that man [sic] is a will served by an intelligence and that equality cannot be maintained in unions of men. This gives the emancipatory educator two roles (IS, pp. 13-14) which are supported through the use of texts, visuals or other symbolic productions, described by Rancière as ‘the book’. Firstly, to reinstate the equality of intelligence the emancipatory schoolmaster must be *ignorant* which is not to say that the teacher must feign ignorance in order to help students to acquire knowledge, perhaps by a teacher asking questions of students whilst already knowing the answers. Neither is it a case of someone judging another person to be ignorant and then putting that person into the role of teacher.

Rancière describes knowledge transmission as the entwining of two relations between student and teacher, that of will to will and that of intelligence to intelligence (Rancière,



2010, p. 2). An ignorant schoolmaster is someone who teaches without transmitting knowledge, by dismantling the intelligence to intelligence relationship that creates the deficit between their own intellect and that of the student. This requires the ignorant schoolmaster to be ignorant of inequality by enacting the opinion or assumption that all people have equal intelligence. To do this, the teacher ignores the explanations that pervade from the social order that serve to undermine the equality of intelligence and does not participate in any explicatory acts. But this does *not* mean that an emancipatory teacher merely has to avoid the act of explanation, where students might be emancipated if teachers stop explaining. The emancipatory teacher must also enact the opinion that all people have equal intelligence by demanding that students pay attention to the power of their own intellect whilst acknowledging the intellect of others. The relationship of will against will is strengthened in order to weaken the relationship of intelligence to intelligence, where the will of the teacher drives the will of the student towards emancipatory intellectual acts. This makes teaching for emancipation about verifying that students have paid attention; a new educational relationship described as a circle of power of the wills.

The consequence is that each student is propelled to follow their own circle of opinion forming, where opinions are formed whilst enacting the opinion that all people are intellectual equals. Students must rely on their own will, in line with the third opinion that equality cannot be maintained in unions of people. Whilst Freire's emancipation is reliant on the maintenance of a relationship of co-subjects between teacher and student so that the resulting dialogue might drive praxis, for Rancière it is the will of the educator that drives the emancipatory process making Rancière's educational relationship into one of domination – will against will. But this relationship can only be

emancipatory if it is conducted under the auspices of the equality of intelligence. In this way, Rancière's emancipatory process removes the split between inferior and superior intelligences just as Freire's conscientization undoes the dichotomy between people and the world.

Whilst Freire's theory raised questions about the status of *dialogue* and symbolic representations of '*the world*' in the emancipatory process, for Rancière, there are questions about the status of the *will* and the status of the symbolic representations in '*the book*'. Here the teacher's role is to ensure that the student is paying attention to their own intellect, whilst enacting the equality of intelligence by not participating in explanatory acts, but where the symbolic artefact could take any form because its purpose is not to reveal 'the truth' about students' circumstances. Rather, the symbolic productions are necessary when demanding that students give attention to their intellect and the intellect of others. It is in this context that Rancière explains in some detail about what it means for students to pay attention to their will.

According to Rancière, the will is driven by the belief that all intelligences are equal, for this is what drives the need to understand and to be understood. Here the notion of the will is directly equated to reason, just as intelligence is synonymous with equality (IS, p. 73). To believe in the equality of intelligence means assuming that all people are capable of understanding each other's thoughts, emotions or opinions. To enact this belief requires 'tireless work' (IS, pp. 9-10, pp. 63-64). For example, poets will expend enormous effort revising and correcting a poem because they work under the assumption that the readers will understand the results of this endeavour (IS, p. 68). The argument is that if people are to enact their own intellectual power in the conduct of

daily life, then this will require endlessly repetitive acts where everyday encounters are imitated, ordered, translated, reconsidered and compared so that opinions might be created and expressed to others, under the assumption that they too have the intelligence to understand them (IS, p. 55). Of course this repetitive activity is relentlessly boring, making the demanding of equality an act of the will, with the emancipatory teacher taking on the role of demander (IS, pp. 55-6). For Freire, the repetitive acts of ordering, repeating and translating might be associated with banking education, for Rancière the acts of imitating, translating, taking apart and putting back together might be associated with the enactment of equality if students, at the same time, give attention to their own intellect whilst assuming that all others are equal in intelligence.

What Rancière describes is a circular motion of emancipation where the will is driven by the belief that all people have equal intelligence, but where the enactment of this belief is driven by the will. The role of the teacher is to maintain and strengthen this motion. Rancière defines the guidance of intelligence by the will as *attention* (IS, p. 25), so more precisely, the role of the emancipatory teacher is to verify that the student has indeed *attended* to their will whilst they *simultaneously* acknowledge that all intelligences are equal. This is where symbolic representations of the ‘world’ become integral to the emancipatory process. Freire relies on ‘codifications’ that incorporate the concrete social and physical circumstances of students’ lives so that they might become more fully conscious of them through the dialogue that re-instigates praxis and reconnects them to the ‘world’. As discussed above, for Rancière, people don’t need reconnecting to the world because they are connected already. ‘The book’ is required to verify that students have paid attention and directed their intelligence and is described as:

‘The thing in common, placed between two minds, is the gauge of that equality, and this in two ways. A material thing is first of all “the only bridge of communication between two minds”. The bridge is a passage, but it is also distance maintained. The materiality of the book keeps two minds at an equal distance, whereas explication is the annihilation of one mind by another.’

(IS, p. 32)

The student must engage with the text or picture (IS, p. 66), answering a three part question: what do you see, what do you think about it and what do you make of it? This allows the teacher to enforce the will of the student, encouraging the repetitive acts of translation, imitation and so on required for opinions to be formed. The symbols aren’t veiled and then revealed incrementally through explanations so the student is no longer encouraged to believe that they understand less than the teacher or that say that they don’t understand it (IS, p. 10). The purpose of emancipatory education is not to reveal knowledge about the world, but to strengthen the students’ will so that they might give attention to their own intellect whilst enacting the opinion that all people have equal intelligence.

Rancière also relates how learned people find it very hard to stop explicating, making their emancipatory teaching very reliant on ‘the book’ to maintain intellectual equality between themselves and students. On the other hand, the ignorant and uneducated find it much easier to be ignorant teachers and have less need for ‘the book’ for the purpose of preventing explication. However, as well as being ignorant, a master must also emancipate (IS, pp. 14-15) by verifying that students have attended to their wills and the

power of their own intellects. Ignorant or learned, all teachers rely on ‘the book’ for this purpose. The teacher’s role is to reveal students’ intellectual power (IS, p. 17) and so it follows that any symbolic production, be it a text or other representation, can be used (IS, pp. 27-28, IS, p. 32). As Rancière states:

‘The problem is to reveal intelligence to itself. *Anything* can be used. *Télémaque*.

Or a prayer or a song that the child or the ignorant knows by heart’

(IS, p. 28).

In the context of Jacotot’s emancipatory education, described in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, only individuals can be emancipated (Rancière, 2010). However, like Freire, Rancière attempts to understand a social emancipation that might counter societal oppression<sup>14</sup>. He explores this possibility in later works (see *ibid*), describing how ‘individual emancipation carried to its logical extremes reconnects with shared concerns’ (Rancière, 2007, p. 51). Rancière describes how the enactment of intellectual equality is a public enactment and must be so for emancipation to be effected, where teachers demand that a student will ‘speak’ (IS, 26, Biesta, 2010b, Rancière, 2007, p. 51) for ‘It is essentially as a speaking being he [sic] discovers his equality with all other human beings’ (*ibid*). For Rancière, ‘speaking’ is inherently social and can be understood as a political act. It can also be understood as an educational process of *subjectification* which I address in detail in Chapter 6.

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<sup>14</sup> The avoidance of education that encourages individualistic responses to societal oppression is of key concern here (see Inglis, 1997). It is a concern articulated by academics and educators who have given attention to the possibility of non-socialising purposes to education (see Section 24, pp84-86 or Biesta, 2012a). Rancière’s body of work attempts to describe social emancipation, However, taking, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* in isolation, it may seem that for Rancière, only an individual emancipation is possible and his work has been interpreted as making this assumption (eg see Radford, 2012).

If the notion of ‘literacy’ were to come into play in Rancière’s work, it might be defined in relation to the act of ‘speaking’ that Rancière refers to. In Chapter 7 I discuss what the emancipatory activity described by Freire and Rancière implies for the possibility of an emancipatory literacy education. Here I return again to the question of what it means to ‘speak’ in the context of Rancière’s understanding of emancipation and re-engage with the tension between individual and social emancipation in the context of his work.

As I described above (in Section 5.3), for Rancière, people’s symbolic expressions, regardless of their formal education or role in society, are assumed to replicate existing social organisation, or in Rancière’s terminology, the existing police order. Here there is no misrecognisable or illusory process in operation and the replication of the police order is neither complete nor unavoidable. Rather, there are fluctuating states of emancipation amongst different individuals at different times, where anyone in society might be oppressed, oppressor, emancipated or emancipator.

For both Freire and Rancière, education as emancipation is a risky undertaking. Rancière describes how people tend to avoid having to deal with intellectual emancipation (IS, p. 16) and the change that it signifies. People will pretend that they can’t understand and take on a public persona of humility, arguing that they are less intelligent than others (IS, p. 40) when actually they are frightened of the consequences of their intellectual freedom (IS, p. 57). Rancière also describes emancipation as being ‘uncomfortable’, where it is easier to participate in what he terms as ‘metapolitics’, or interpreting emancipation through acts of explication<sup>15</sup> (Rancière, 1999, p. 85). The ‘fear of freedom’ is also discussed by Freire (PO, pp. 23-24, pp. 99-100), drawing on

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<sup>15</sup> Perhaps that is the function of this thesis

Fromm, as one where it is easier to conform to the oppressive social order, loving death and not life, than to enter risky relationships with potential comrades in emancipatory projects. Both theorists outline a tendency for the oppressed to become oppressors with Rancière describing the successful student who learns his lesson so that he might ‘peer down on high from those he [sic] has surpassed’ (IS, p. 22) in his role as lawyer, journalist or academic. Meanwhile Freire describes a culture where peasants strive to become landowners and where to be a ‘real man’ is to be oppressive (PO, p. 22). He also describes a tendency towards ‘false generosity’ (PO p. 21, p. 36) where oppressors give charitably only to satisfy their guilt whilst situating the poor as passive receivers.

Freire suggests degrees of oppression and emancipation and complicated relationships within a class society which he discusses further in his later writings (Roberts, 2003; Giroux, 1988). However in Freire’s main theoretical expositions (i.e. Freire 1970, 1972) the distinction between the oppressed and the emancipated also seems clear cut, as the teacher is unequivocally presented as emancipated whilst ‘the oppressed’ are presented as a distinct group where it seems that I who read the theory cannot be oppressed myself. This is not the case for Rancière, for whom intellectual emancipation is always possible but cannot be understood as a fixed state to be achieved in the future. Otherwise groups might come to hold to the same opinions and then intellectual emancipation would be destroyed. For Rancière, the very possibility of an emancipatory relationship is reliant upon movement; changes in the attention people give to their intellect where individual wills are in constant flux (IS, p. 78).

There is always the possibility that people’s speech might enact the opinion that everyone has equal intelligence, though for Rancière such forms of expression have a

tendency to be rare. Such expressions might effect a reconfiguration of the police order, incorporating an inscription of equality, and I consider this possibility in more detail in Chapter 6. Such expressions arise throughout society in the fashion of a flickering flame that moves and fluctuates but has yet to be extinguished (IS, p. 78) and might be encouraged by an emancipatory education that can be enacted by anyone, regardless of their formal education (IS, p. 26). But Rancière doesn't downplay its significance, for 'at the moment when society is threatened to be shattered by its own madness, reason performs a saving social action by exerting the totality of its own power, that of the recognised equality of intellectual beings' (IS, p. 97).

## **5.6 Summary**

In this chapter I have addressed research questions ix, x and xi by describing how education for emancipation might be understood through an analysis of the work of Freire and Rancière. This has allowed me to describe how terms associated with the idea of an emancipatory education, such as 'equality', or 'oppression', might be conceptualised, creating reference points to inform my exploration of the emancipatory potential of adult literacies education which commences in Chapter 7. But first I address the central aim of this thesis, which is an attempt to distinguish between empowerment and emancipation in the context of education. To make this distinction, I start the next chapter by reviewing the main assumptions and understandings I have described in my reconstruction of the work of Bourdieu, Gee, Freire and Rancière in Chapters 4 and 5. In so doing I consider how the idea of 'subjectification' is an important one if the possibility of emancipation in the context of literacies education is to be upheld,



culminating in my attempt to describe how education as 'subjectification' might be understood.

## 6 Empowerment and emancipation

### 6.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I begin to address the central aim of this research by exploring how education for empowerment might be distinguished from an education that assumes the possibility of emancipation. This, along with the reconstruction of the ideas of Freire and Rancière in Chapters 4 and 5, lays the groundwork for my consideration of how an emancipatory literacies education might be understood which I set out in the concluding chapter.

I explore the distinction between empowerment and emancipation in three stages. Firstly, addressing research question xii, I summarise the reconstruction of an empowering and emancipatory education that I presented in Chapters 4 and 5 and review it to make some initial distinctions between the two. I then consider the broad characteristics of an empowering education in relation to the problems I raised about the practice of an empowering literacies education at the end of Chapter 4. Here I suggest that the idea of an empowering education is inherently problematic as it encourages practices that can be understood to socialise students, the corollary being that empowerment *must* be distinguished from emancipation if the possibility of an education that does *not* serve to slot students into society is to be upheld.

Secondly, I explore the historical criticism of Freire's ideas, addressing research question xiii by contrasting the criticism raised by researchers from empowerment and emancipatory traditions. I describe how Freire's work is typically discussed by researchers who utilise a terminology of empowerment and how Freire's theoretical work shares some of the assumptions associated with understandings of power. I

attempt to disentangle the ‘empowerment’ and ‘emancipation’ aspects of Freire’s work by considering criticism of Freire from an empowerment perspective separately from that of researchers who take the possibility of an emancipatory education as a starting point. This allows me to demonstrate that a distinction can be made between the types of criticisms each makes and the sorts of questions that they each ask. It allows me to further distinguish between empowerment and emancipation with implications for how understandings of education, including its research and practice, might be questioned and criticised if researchers assume the possibility of emancipation as a starting point. There are also repercussions for my own critical engagement with the literature as part of this research project and so I come back to some of this discussion when I discuss the question of methodology in the concluding chapter.

Thirdly, I take criticism of Freire raised by researchers who assume the possibility of an emancipatory education and use this to drill down further into the distinction between empowerment and emancipation, attempting to detail how an emancipatory education might be understood as a process of *subjectification*. In so doing, I tackle research question xiv and here I rely predominantly on the work of Rancière, in part as developed by Biesta. I also introduce some of the ideas of Ilan Gur-Ze’ev as a theorist of emancipatory education who shared some of Freire’s assumptions whilst engaging directly in the critique of Freire’s work. However, it is here that I reach the boundaries of my exploration and in Chapter 7 I begin the process of passing on the torch, addressing the title of this thesis by exploring the possibilities for emancipation in the context of adult literacies education.

## **6.2 *Empowerment and emancipation – a review***

In this section I briefly review how empowerment and emancipation are understood as functions for education, drawing upon the reconstruction of the work of Bourdieu, Gee, Freire and Rancière that I set out in Chapters 4 and 5. I then begin to distinguish between empowerment and emancipation as functions or purposes for education and suggest that an empowering education can be understood as one that serves to socialise students.

To recap, both Bourdieu and Gee make assumptions about the character of language and power, allowing them to describe how discourse operates as ideology. This means that the starting point for both is to describe societal processes that replicate inequality. Here they both assume that ideological processes are perpetually in operation that impose or exclude meanings in ways that the participants of a discourse cannot recognise or detect, so replicating power hierarchies in society. For Bourdieu, language is a consequence of a dynamic relationship between the structure of the economic system of capitalism and individuals' symbolic productions, where discourse results from peoples' attempts to position themselves favourably within existing power relations. The 'truth' is that people are always unaware of or 'misrecognise' some of the linguistic decisions they make, resulting in the imposition of meanings that serve to replicate existing social hierarches. For Gee, discourse inevitably privileges some meanings whilst excluding others, a consequence of how most meanings are historically derived and are relied upon by people because it would be an impossible task to examine the meaning of every word before uttering it. Again, this makes discourse

production a process that serves to replicate existing power hierarchies in ways that the speakers of a discourse are unable to detect.

Bourdieu and Gee both define power as a process of discourse production that replicates inequality, where inequality is in turn associated with the uneven distribution of ‘goods’ or money within society. For Bourdieu, linguistic practices are taken to be woven into the structural operation of the exploitative economic system of capitalism, whilst Gee understands capitalism as discourse, again linking discourse to the system of work and economic production. Discourse reproduces power relationships, where for Bourdieu, power is understood as a degree to which meanings are imposed through undetectable symbolic productions, allowing the accumulation of ‘symbolic capital’ which operates as a currency that can be exchanged for status or money in symbolic and economic markets. According to Gee, power is a degree of ability to control discourse, or to put it another way, a degree of ability to recognise or exclude some identities over others, linked directly to the possibility of acquiring goods. This means that exercising power means drawing upon the qualities necessary to the production of discourse and ‘cashing them in’ for goods or money.

Starting from the assumption of defining power as an ideological process of discourse reproduction implies that an empowering education might involve students taking control of such processes. For both Bourdieu and Gee discourse cannot be critiqued from the inside, necessitating a requirement for researchers positioning themselves on the outside of discourse so that they might identify how power is operating. In the case of Bourdieu, discourse production is so tightly woven into the structural operation of capitalism it is seemingly impossible to extrapolate how any escape might occur. It

seems that processes by which identities are instituted, where an identity is 'having a name' (LSP, pp. 120-122) are ultimately driven by the structural functioning of the capitalist system. However Gee describes how the knowledge required for this task might be formally taught to students so that they too might analyse discourse and start to take control of it and author their own identities, linking empowerment to the assertion of identity where students take control over the processes by which they are identified. This ties students into processes of discourse production where they too must exercise power, but to their own advantage. Teachers who do not take these ideas on board and put them to work can be assumed as colluding in the replication of existing power relations, whilst those who take Gee's ideas as the truth and act upon them can consider themselves to be empowering teachers.

Instead of starting with definitions of language, discourse and power, Freire and Rancière make the assumption that an emancipatory education is possible and attempt to distinguish between education that socialises and education that might encourage emancipation from society as it stands. To undertake this endeavour they both take the starting point of defining equality in terms of human qualities and describe emancipation as the enactment of equality. The definitions of equality that they take follow on from their assumption that humans must be demarcated from other living creatures if responsibility is to be taken for and judgements made about the continued existence of humanity. According to Rancière, if decisions are made about people under the assumption that humans are no different from another other species of animal, for example as might the biologist or chemist, then no judgement can be made about either the preservation of the species or the needs of existence (IS, p. 78). For Rancière, only individuals giving attention to their intellects can engage with such questions and so he

defines equality in terms of individual intellects and the quality of the human relationships that drive them. Equality is so defined by the opinion that all people have equal intelligence, or that all people are equally predisposed to give attention to their own intellect whilst assuming everyone else is their intellectual equal. If this assumption of intellectual equality is enacted then people might create their own opinions instead of relying upon the opinions of others, so equality is reliant upon a ‘process of difference’ (Rancière, 1995, p. 68) but this activity is predicated on trust as it is understood to be a risky undertaking.

For Freire, animals are creatures of pure activity and never reflect on their nest building or fruit gathering whilst humans are aware of a past, present and future, identifying challenges and making plans. To consider people as any other animal would amount to assuming that humanity were a group of inanimate objects and so Freire defines equality in terms of people socially reflecting and acting upon the social and physical situations they find themselves in as ‘historical beings’. For Freire, equality is defined by the notion of *praxis*, where all people are assumed to be equally predisposed towards socially enacting a simultaneous reflection and action upon the physical and social world. Praxis is inherently social in character, driven by human qualities of love and trust and predicated upon dialogue between people whilst they co-intend upon the problems that challenge them.

Both Freire and Rancière understand oppression as a dichotomising of the human qualities that might enact equality. For Freire, oppression is the dichotomising of people from the world; the separation of reflection from action as the breaking down of *praxis*. As love and dialogue are integral to praxis, this disruption of humanity’s innate ways of

being results from human activity that blocks dialogue, described by Freire as an educational process of 'banking education'. Similarly, Rancière describes oppression as a dichotomy of intelligence dividing people into a world of ignorant minds and knowing ones. This is taken to be enacted by processes of explanation, where educators encourage students to believe that some are more intelligent than others, so weakening the attention that they give to their own intellects and the intellects of others. Both Freire and Rancière describe these oppressive processes as forms of knowledge transmission which are understood to be replicated throughout society.

Freire and Rancière describe emancipation as an educational process that enacts equality by disrupting or weakening processes of knowledge transmission. Both emphasise the quality of human relationships as part of an emancipatory education, including people's relationships with symbolic productions such as speech or text. For both, a process of symbolic production is necessary to emancipation as it plays an integral role in processes that might disrupt knowledge transmission. For Freire, the role of the emancipatory teacher is to re-instigate praxis by encouraging dialogue and love between students and teachers as they co-intend upon symbolic representations of the social world. Here, the representations must incorporate problematic aspects of students' lives so that students might reveal the problems for themselves and then attempt to solve them, but ultimately it is human love that drives emancipation. For Rancière, it is the intelligence to intelligence relationship, driven by the belief that some are intellectually superior to others that encourages knowledge transmission. This relationship is weakened by the strengthening of a will to will relationship, where the role of the emancipatory teacher is to demand that students attend to their wills and to their own intellect, whilst acknowledging the intellect of others.



From this summary of the broad understandings of the four theorists I begin to make some distinctions between empowering and emancipatory education. Firstly, emancipatory education takes the assumption of *equality* as its starting point, where emancipation is understood as the enactment of equality in the present as educational activity. In contrast, empowerment understandings take *inequality* as a starting point by commencing with the definitions of discourse reproduction as oppressive processes which are related ultimately to the distribution of material goods in society (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p. 31). This allows empowerment to be understood as a situation to be worked towards and achieved in the future, accompanied by a redistribution of ‘goods’. In Bourdieu’s case, the concern is that empowerment is forever over the horizon and so unachievable. In contrast, the enactment of emancipation can only be manifested in the present, suggesting that emancipation is temporary and fleeting, described by the quality of active relationships between teachers, students and the educational materials that they use.

Secondly, emancipatory education is understood as the enactment of the assumptions that have been made about humanity, where educational relationships are understood to encourage the dismantlement of processes of knowledge transmission between teachers and students. In contrast, empowerment understandings of education are predicated upon revealing ‘the truth’ about how power operates as an ideological process to privilege some groups over others in the context of social hierarchies (in line with Rancière, 2010, pp. 10-11). This makes empowering education reliant upon the passing down of understandings about the social world and how power operates from researchers and teachers to students. The repercussion is a need for researchers or

teachers to determine whether empowerment is necessary or has taken place. In contrast, assuming the possibility of an emancipatory education means assuming that emancipation is a normal state of affairs, where every day human relationships might be educational and where there is no need for researchers to diagnose if emancipation is needed or has taken place. What's more the enactment of emancipation requires students to express their own understandings of the everyday social world. But this is not a free for all where to be free means students expressing themselves in any fashion. Expressions integral to the enactment of emancipatory educational relationships incorporate relationships with symbolic artefacts, where students understandings are a revelation of 'the truth' of the challenges that face them (Freire) or opinions that express the equality of intelligence (Rancière), but where there is no reliance upon an outsider to reveal these understandings on the students' behalf. Here, as with empowerment understandings, Freire's emancipation remains predicated upon the revelation of 'the truth' and the understanding that ideological processes are in operation. I explore the consequences of this when I consider some of the historical criticism of Freire's work below.

Thirdly, emancipation is understood as an enactment of human qualities, making the quality of active human relationships integral to emancipation. For Freire these qualities are defined by notions of love, trust and dialogue, whilst Rancière describes the qualities of trust, intellectual activity and the human will. For both, this links understandings of education as emancipation to questions about what it means to be an active and speaking human subject<sup>16</sup>, described as a process of *subjectification* (See

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<sup>16</sup> This has invited criticism, eg aimed at Biesta (see Munday, 2011), that his ideas fail to break with 'humanism' (which I discuss later in this chapter). However, the contribution that both Rancière and Biesta make (as does Gur-Ze'ev) is to elaborate upon why humanist theories matter educationally. They describe the educational problems associated with humanist theories (e.g see Biesta, 2006, p. 5; Gur-

Biesta 2010, p. 5, p. 21 and Rancière, 1995, p. 65) which Biesta understands as the quality of how people act and respond to each other's actions (See Biesta, 2006, p. 137). In the latter part of this chapter I consider how education as subjectification might be understood. But the point here is that in contrast, an empowering education is predicated upon the relationship between individual people and their identifications in the form of symbols or 'material goods', where other human qualities are neglected or ignored.

By summarising some of the broad distinctions between empowerment and emancipation it seems that the characteristics of an empowering education that I have described correspond with the *problems* I have already raised about it in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.4). This suggests that the broad characteristics of an empowering education are inherently *problematic* if I work under the assumption that an emancipatory education might be possible, which is the intention that underpins this thesis (see Chapter 3).

The problems follow from the underlying assumption that discourse is inherently ideological, where meanings are imposed on people through undetectable processes of symbolic production. This makes an empowering education reliant upon revealing 'the truth' about how power operates, so that students are dependent upon teachers and researchers for understandings of the social world, seemingly replicating existing social

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Ze'ev, 1998, pp. 468-469) which I describe in later sections. Biesta, Gur-Ze'ev and Rancière all acknowledge and attempt to tackle these problems in their theoretical work, which is integral to their assumption that an emancipatory education is possible. This seems to require a demarcation to be made between humanity and other creatures, the issue being that emancipatory education can only be for humanity. Psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists are not necessarily precluded from giving attention to the needs of dogs. But dogs are not the domain of education. There are two repercussions. Firstly, given that emancipatory education is concerned with issues of oppression, equality and emancipation, it seems that these concepts cannot be understood in the context of debates about animal welfare, which may be significant. Secondly, it also demonstrates nicely that theories of emancipatory education provoke questions and debates about the limits and boundaries of education, and what makes education possible, which I demonstrate below. This includes discussing how education might be demarcated from training (or learning), or empowerment from emancipation, allowing theses such as the one you are now reading to emerge.

hierarchies. However, even if students take control of discourse to author their own identities there is no means to make judgements about whether new discourse disrupts existing social hierarchies or whether new social hierarchies are more desirable than those they replace. Having an explanation of how power operates does not in of itself provide a set of criteria for judging whether a new discourse and its associated identifications is more or less desirable than that which it replaces.

Students are left with just one option, which is to become more involved in the exercising of power, i.e. become empowered. This requires the creation of new identities and discourse, where people must identify or label themselves or be identified as either similar or different in relation to existing individuals or groups. Where the idea of social identity does come into play, this suggests that the grouping together of people who carry similar characteristics might somehow be beneficial, perhaps, in Bourdieu's terms, so they might be more easily 'orchestrated'. Again, this is indicative of how empowerment understandings of education are reliant upon relationships between individual people and symbols and human qualities such as trust, love, equality or responsibility have no consequence.

In the broadest of terms, empowerment understandings of education imply educational practices that can be understood to overlap with Biesta's domain of socialisation (See Biesta, 2010, 5, 21 or Section 1.4) as the handing down of understandings of the social world is integral to the teacher student relationship, so replicating existing social hierarchies. It seems that empowering education is predicated on the idea that excluded people must participate in existing social hierarches and work them to their advantage in terms of the receipt of 'goods' and describing what counts as 'goods' and in this sense

the aim is to redistribute the existing social system rather than create alternatives. In contrast, the possibility of an emancipatory education relies upon the assumption that there might be a release or break from the current social order which is taken to be inherently oppressive, where new ways of being and doing are enacted that encapsulate human qualities that counter and disrupt processes of knowledge transmission.

It is this process that is understood as a process of subjectification which I explore further in the last part of this chapter. How this process is understood relates to the assumptions that are made about humanity and what it might mean to be or become an active human subject. These assumptions also allow judgements to be made about the desirability of educational outcomes as well as ways of understanding education. I explore this further below when I consider the historical criticism of Freire's work, and in so doing, further demarcating between empowerment and emancipation in the context of education.

### **6.3 *Questions to Freire***

Demarcating between empowerment and emancipation need not just take the form of a comparison of how each is understood, of the type that I undertook above. In this section I also consider the questions and problems empowerment and emancipation understandings raise when they are engaged in the criticism of the theory or practice of education. This allows me to explore how empowerment and emancipation might also be distinguished by the types of questions and lines of inquiry each understanding raises. Of course there are implications here about how I have made my own judgements in the conduct of the research I have done for this thesis including my

approach to reviewing the literature and the analysis that I have so far presented, so I will return to such questions in Chapter 7 when I re-engage with a discussion about the methodology and methods that have underpinned this project.

In this section I consider Freire's work as a theory of emancipatory education that is entwined with empowerment understandings of education. Freire's ideas have been described and criticised by researchers who take a perspective of exposing and understanding power. As a consequence, much of the discussion pertaining to his ideas is articulated using terminology associated with empowerment and power. But more than this, though Freire outlines how education might emancipate, his main theoretical work makes an assumption that is in keeping with understandings of empowerment. Like Bourdieu and Gee, Freire relies upon a notion of ideology or to use Freire's terms, a 'false' or 'naïve' consciousness that education must overcome by functioning to reveal 'the truth' that oppressive processes have obscured (Biesta, 2012). It is in relation to this feature of Freire's work that problems might be raised by researchers who assume the possibility of an emancipatory education.

Given the propensity for Freire's ideas to be discussed in the context of power, my attempt to disentangle empowerment and emancipation whilst exploring the historical criticism of Freire's work could be taken as an attempt to rediscover his endeavour to describe and practice education as emancipation. However, my exploration also describes fundamental problems with Freire's understanding of emancipation and what it implies for the practice of education, implying that a conversation about the emancipatory potential of education must continue. As I drill down deeper into Freire's work, addressing the central question of how empowerment and emancipation might be

distinguished, I begin to discuss the idea of education as subjectification around which such a conversation might orientate.

### *Freire and empowerment*

Freire is frequently cited as being associated with empowerment as a purpose for education (e.g. see Scribner, 1988; Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Oughton, 2007; Rocha-Schmidt, 2010; Tagoe, 2008; Stromquist, 2006; Brookfield, 2005; Barton, 1994; Luke, 1992; Ellsworth, 1989; Archer & Costello, 1990; Hamilton, 1996; Macedo, 1998, pp. xxix-xxx; Biesta, 2010a; Inglis, 1997). However, even in much of his later writings (e.g. Freire, 1998) Freire continues to avoid the employment of a terminology of ‘empowerment’ in the context of education. One exception, it seems, is Freire’s work with Donaldo Macedo (Freire and Macedo, 1987) where the terminology of empowerment manifests. Here ‘critical’ and ‘emancipatory’ literacies are referred to as a re-appropriation of ‘cultural capital’ and Bourdieu is cited (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 145). However, in his conversations with Shor about wider educational contexts (Freire and Shor, 1987, pp. 108-110) Freire expresses a fear that the notion of empowerment might encourage individualistic educational practices. He agrees with Shor’s analogy which describes how ‘empowerment’ understandings situate the teacher as a kind of lamp-lighter where:

‘The teacher walks into a classroom, provokes some illumination, like turning on a light switch, and walks out, mission accomplished. On to the next class, where once again the teacher lights some lamps and calls it ‘empowerment’’

(ibid, p. 108)

It seems to me that this analogy could apply to the teacher who delivers meta-knowledge about discourse to students. Freire's theory both acknowledges and asserts against the problems inherent to the idea of an empowering education that I described above. Importantly, Freire acknowledges that knowledge transmission serves to socialise students into an oppressive society, emphasising that the central function of an emancipatory education should be to dismantle processes of knowledge transmission between teachers and students which he considers to as an enactment of inequality, described by the term 'banking education'. His work can be taken as an attempt to break any dependency between teachers and students for knowledge, so that students and teachers 'read the world' for themselves without the help of researchers operating from a third person stance.

Unlike understandings of empowerment which suggest no criteria for judging educational outcomes, integral to Freire's work is the possibility of making such judgements. He attempts this by commencing with a definition of equality described by Freire's notion of *praxis*. If education is understood to encourage *praxis* it is emancipatory; if it does not, then it serves so socialise. In this sense, a central feature of Freire's work is its attempt to distinguish between education that socialises and education that might raise emancipatory alternatives. Finally, Freire's understanding of education attempts to avoid the privileging of individualistic practices which limit or ignore aspects of what it means to be an active human subject. Freire describes education as an inherently social activity; a process of being and becoming a human subject, where the process of subjectification is defined by the concept of *praxis* that in turn is reliant upon the human qualities of love, trust and hope.



However, as mentioned above, many researchers identify Freire's work as an attempt to counter power in an educational context and so it can come as no surprise to find that Freire's ideas are most frequently criticised from the perspective of power and empowerment. Such criticism is typically contextualised within a discussion of how Freire does not take account of relationships of power in his work (e.g. Taylor, 1993; Coben, 1997; Ellsworth, 1989; Luke, 1992; Orner, 1992; Jackson, 2008). But perhaps this can be expected from researchers who utilise understandings about power and its operation as a yardstick, though not necessarily those of Bourdieu or Gee.

In his main theoretical work (Freire, 1970, 1972), Freire doesn't define power in terms of discourse reproduction, but he *does* describe processes of symbolic production which researchers might consider from the perspective of the operation of power. For example, Freire assumes that 'codifications' (texts, photographs or other symbolic productions), along with social dialogue, are necessary to educational relationships that might emancipate. Researchers could consider these activities as processes of discourse and identity formation and criticise them from the perspective of their implications for power relationships between teachers and students. From the stand point of Gee or Bourdieu, relationships of power are always attendant to discourse production necessitating research conducted from the stand point of an observer who sits outside of discourse and explains its operation. But in Freire's seminal theoretical works (Freire, 1970, 1972) he does not consider either the existence or consequences of power understood in these terms.

Bourdieu and Gee both argue, albeit in different ways, that any researcher or educator

that does not take account of power and symbolic production is in effect colluding with it. As I stated earlier in this chapter, the problem with this notion is that it allows educators and researchers who do not take the critique of power as a starting point to be dismissed on the basis that their activity will encourage or collude with existing social hierarchies. This criticism can be thrown at theories of emancipatory education including Freire's work. However, it can also be stated that theories that take understandings of power as an ideological process of discourse production as a starting point exclude any role for education as emancipation or subjectification (see Rancière, 2005, p. 179) and I further illustrate this possibility below.

The premise of Freire's work is to distinguish between education that socialises or oppresses and education that might emancipate. It is not an attempt to describe how power operates and in this sense it can be understood as a theory of emancipatory education rather than a theory with implications for empowerment. What's more, Freire's major theoretical work (e.g. 1970, 1972) pre-dates that of Bourdieu and Gee, as well as the 'social turn' associated with New Literacies Studies when emphasis came to be placed on the operation of power in the context of literacies research (see Section 2.2). Both Freire in some of his later writings (see Roberts, 2003 or Freire and Macedo, 1987) and those who draw upon Freire's work (e.g. Giroux, 1988) have attempted to renegotiate Freire's ideas in the context of discussions about power or empowerment, as well as discourse and identity (e.g. Lankshear and McLaren, 1993; Tett and Maclachan, 2008). I would argue that such projects have encouraged some confusion where Freire's understanding of an emancipatory education has become further associated with the idea of empowerment. An example of this can be found in the way that Lankshear and McLaren seem to merge the idea of identity with the notion of the human subject as if

they were equivalent (e.g. see Lankshear and McLaren, 1993b, p. 386)<sup>17</sup>. I discuss how identification might be distinguished from subjectification in the latter part of this chapter.

But the point here is that I have already made the argument that understandings of education as empowerment imply educational practices that socialise students into existing society. This suggests that a clear demarcation *must* be made between the notions of empowerment and emancipation if the possibility that education might not *always* serve to socialise is to be raised.

### ***Disentangling empowerment and emancipation***

The untangling of empowerment and emancipation in the context of Freire's understandings of education that I present here not only reclaims Freire's work as an endeavour to describe an emancipatory education. It is also a springboard for continuing to raise the possibility of an emancipatory education as a project that must continue if education is understood as anything other than a socialising machine.

By attempting to distinguish between empowerment and emancipation, my research seeks not to follow a pattern of bringing emancipation and empowerment together by attempting to re-contextualise Freire's ideas within understandings of empowerment. Rather, I am attempting to disentangle the two in the context of examining what this implies for education, so that the possibility of emancipation as a function of education might continue to be raised and explored. So next I continue the process of disentanglement by criticising Freire's ideas from the starting point of assuming the

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<sup>17</sup> As does Janks (e.g. Janks, 2010, 55) though not specifically in relation to Freire's work

possibility of emancipation as a function or purpose for education.

Here I rely on the work of three theorists who assume that an emancipatory education is possible; Biesta, Gur-Ze'ev (with help from Holloway) and Rancière. Biesta raises higher level questions about the purpose, function and possibility of education and problems associated with traditions in critical education where emphasis has been placed upon exposing the operation of power (Biesta, 2010, 2010a, 2010b, 2006). In describing possibilities for education as subjectification Biesta asserts that the notion of identity is not a useful one (Biesta, 2010, p. 86, see Section 4.4). However Rancière's work can be read as a specific response to Bourdieu's work (e.g. see Rancière, 2005), considering questions of identity, power and discourse head on in the context of exploring emancipatory education as a process of subjectification (e.g. see Rancière, 1995). Gur-Ze'ev is a theorist of emancipatory education who has responded specifically to Freire's work (Gur-Ze'ev, 2010, 1998) and raises fundamental problems about how Freire understands emancipation, drawing upon the concept of negative dialectics described by Theodor Adorno. My interpretation of Gur-Ze'ev's ideas is supported by the work of Holloway (2003) who explains negative dialectics to a lay audience in the context of critiquing anti-capitalist politics.

Taking the assumption of emancipation as a starting point, at least four problems arise from Freire's understanding of emancipatory education. The first is that Freire fails to achieve his declared goal of removing the dependency of students on teachers for knowledge about the social world. Secondly, and relating to this, Freire associates acts of 'objectification' with a distortion of human love toward necrophilia, yet 'objectification' remains integral to his understanding of emancipatory education, with

alarming consequences. Thirdly, a question has been raised over whether the emancipatory relationships that Freire describes can be understood to be educational. Finally, that Freire's definition of *praxis* as humanity's species being might imply educational relationships that serve to socialise students, again suggesting that Freire fails in his attempt to distinguish between a socialising and emancipatory education.

### ***Freire, love and 'the truth' about ideology***

Taking each of these problems in turn, firstly, Freire assumes that 'the world' must be codified in symbolic form, so that teachers and students might co-intend upon these symbolic productions. This is necessary because Freire insists that banking education distorts people's perception of the world so that they are no longer able to accurately read it for themselves. Freire sets himself the task of describing how the truth might come to be revealed to students without an educator revealing this for them, so replicating 'banking education'. However, the codifying of the world upon which his understanding of emancipatory education relies seems to recreate at least some degree of dependency between students and teachers for understandings. For example, Freire describes how psychologists and sociologists might be involved in establishing the validity of the codified representations (PO; p. 89).

The central problem here is that for Freire, like Bourdieu and Gee, the purpose of education is to reveal 'the truth' to students. This means that for Freire the emancipatory teacher is at least in some way responsible for ensuring that the 'correct' truth is revealed and so some aspect of knowledge transmission and its associated relationships of dependency must remain integral to Freire's emancipatory education (Biesta, 2012). In this respect, Freire's work can be seen to replicate a problem I have already

associated with empowerment understandings of education, a paradox where students are made dependent upon teachers for their own emancipation. The difference is that Freire states an intention to break any such dependency, insisting that processes of identifying ‘the truth’ are driven by relationships of love in praxis. For Freire, education is inherently social and driven by human qualities. It is not an individualistic relationship between people and symbols implied by Bourdieu or Gee.

However, Freire’s claim that emancipation is reliant upon love and trust opens his ideas up to more criticism. Not only does Freire claim that emancipatory education results in students identifying ‘the truth’, this revelation is driven by love between teachers and students. To summarise Freire’s theory in a single sentence, Freire is asserting the idea that true love reveals ‘the truth’, perhaps reducing the quality of human love to an act of identification (see Gur-Ze’ev, 1998, pp. 468-469), or in Freire’s terminology, an act of objectification. The fundamental issue here is Freire’s insistence that objectification is the enactment of necrophilia or a love of death (PO, pp. 50-51), yet paradoxically, identification of an objective ‘truth’ remains integral to Freire’s emancipation. In practical terms, Freire’s work encourages teachers and students to believe and act upon ‘the truth’ as it has been revealed. Emancipatory teachers might take the understandings of particular groups of students as ‘the truth’ even if they incorporate expressions of hatred or violence, whilst the ideas, opinions and understandings of other students might be ignored (Gur-Ze’ev, 1998, 2010).

Like Freire, Gur-Ze’ev associates processes of identification with a love of death in the context of education. Gur-Ze’ev describes how this assumption is integral to traditions in Jewish thought (e.g. Gur-Ze’ev 1998, 2005; Gur-Ze’ev and West, 2010) and argues

that the later writings of Adorno encapsulate aspects of this spiritual tendency (Gur-Ze'ev 2010). Drawing upon Adorno's understanding of negative dialectics (see Holloway, 2003, pp. 150-155), Gur-Ze'ev understands emancipation as a process of 'anti-identification' or the negation of identity<sup>18</sup>, also driven by human love (Gur-Ze'ev, 2010 or see Holloway, 2003, p. 68). This implies an alternative understanding of ideology as a form of 'identity thinking' that can be countered by difference and heterogeneity rather than the revelation of the 'truth' (see Eagleton, 1991, p. 126).

Rancière concurs with Gur-Ze'ev in that the revelation of 'the truth' cannot be integral to an emancipation that relies upon individual's intellectual freedom, suggesting that identity is 'first about fear' (see Rancière, 1995, p. 70). If individuals' opinions solidify around an identified truth, then people's intellects and the products of their intellects will converge, so destroying intellectual emancipation. Instead, taking the assumption of intellectual equality as a starting point, Rancière describes an emancipatory education that is reliant upon students attending to their own intellects whilst acknowledging the intellect of others and in this sense emancipation is reliant upon difference. Like Gur-Ze'ev, he details this in relation to processes of identification, describing emancipation as a process of 'dis-identification' (see Rancière, 1995, p. 67) but Rancière dispenses entirely with a notion of ideology and I return this when I explore education, identification and subjectification below.

### *Freire and 'the truth' about humanity*

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<sup>18</sup> Or perhaps more accurately, as the negation of the negation of anti-identity

Closely connected to the problem of identification, Freire's understanding of education is reliant upon an ultimate definition (or identification) of what it means to be a human subject, encompassed by his notion of praxis. This also ties his understanding of emancipatory education to the 'truth' in terms of a definition of the innate character of human beings. Biesta defines 'humanist' theories, of which Freire's could be taken as an example, as theories that define the human subject and use these definitions to further human endeavours such as education (Biesta, 2006, p. 5). The problem Biesta raises here is that by predetermining 'the truth' about what it means to be human, the function of education is then predefined as a process that might replicate a model of humanity that has already been identified. Biesta argues that in this sense, on a deep level, humanist theories will suggest educational practices that can only be understood to socialise students into a predefined society, rather than raising possibilities for emancipatory alternatives.

The outcomes of education are pre-determined and the task of education is to enact practices that might achieve these by slotting all students into a preconceived formation (ibid, p. 7). Rancière and Gur-Ze'ev do not rely upon a pre-conceived notion of what it means to be human, in keeping with their shared understanding that emancipation cannot be aimed at identifying a 'truth'. Rancière describes his assumptions about intellectual emancipation as just 'opinions' (e.g. see IS, p. 73), where emancipation can only be destroyed by the belief in a collective 'self' encapsulated in a single identification of humanity (see Rancière, 1995, p. 65). Rather, emancipation is predicated upon difference and understood as a process of 'dis-identification'. For Gur-Ze'ev the only assumption that can be made about humanity is that humans *refuse* identification or being pinned down. The problem is not to have an understanding of



humanity, but to hold to the idea that humanity ‘already exists positively’. Instead the starting point is understanding that humanity, or the human subject, ‘exists only in a form of being denied’ (see Holloway, 2003, p. 153) raising the idea that processes of ‘anti-identification’ might be integral to subjectification and an emancipatory education, described by Gur-Ze’ev as a ‘counter-education’.

However, in Freire’s case the outcome of emancipatory education is predetermined by his notion of *praxis* which in turn defines the tasks that the teacher must undertake. Freire acknowledges this by the way he refers to emancipatory education as a humanising process (e.g. see Freire, 1972, p. 21). Some of the historical criticism Freire has received reflects Biesta’s concerns that I described above. For example Freire’s *praxis* is reliant upon what he terms as ‘critical thinking’ as part of an educational process that might overcome students’ distorted consciousness, suggesting a need for educational practices that encourage students to think in specific ways (see Freire, 1998, p. 41-42). The problem here is that these educational practices might prevent or ignore other ways of thinking, or encourage teachers to treat some students’ thinking as incorrect or irrational whilst taking others’ as examples of ‘the truth’ (see Gee, 1996, pp. 37-38; Ellsworth, 1989; Luke, 1992).

Related to this is the way that Freire presents a clear cut demarcation in the identification of ‘oppressors’ and ‘the oppressed’. Freire does acknowledge the complexity of oppressive relationships (PO, p. 25, pp. 50-59, pp. 66-68) implying that well-meaning educators cannot make easy assumptions that they themselves are not enactors of oppression. His notion of *praxis* also links his theory to the social and physical world where there are endless possibilities for liberated people to think and act

together to transform material reality. However, Freire's theoretical work (Freire, 1970, 1972) also refers to 'the oppressed' as a distinct group that might be readily identified by teachers, who themselves are not oppressors. From an empowerment perspective, this could be taken as indication of Freire's inadequate understanding of power relationships between teachers and students. But assuming the possibility of emancipation, this aspect of understanding of education can also be understood to create a dependency between teachers and students where part of a teacher's role is to identify oppressed people and whether emancipation is required. In contrast, for both Gur-Ze'ev and Rancière the very possibility of emancipation relies upon fluctuation where individuals can be both oppressed or oppressor, emancipated or emancipator and emancipation is not directed towards a particular group of people:

'intellectual emancipation means that there is no specific pedagogy of the oppressed, that there is no specific education for poor people or oppressed people etc. If there is a specific pedagogy of the oppressed, then it must be thought of as a specific case in the general idea of intellectual emancipation, because basically the idea of emancipation is the same for rich people and for poor people.'

(Rancière in Liang, 2009)

As implied above, Freire's reliance upon understandings about the inherent character of human beings might also lend his ideas to the production of sets of instructions for achieving emancipation. If the outcome of education is to achieve a predefined human state then programs might be developed aimed at realising this, so continuing the very paradox which Freire sought to avoid, of the 'emancipated' being made dependent upon

‘emancipators’ for their own emancipation. However, it seems to me that in addition, the notion of praxis might in itself encourage the generation of educational programs.

Freire describes how an emancipatory literacies education might be enacted in practical terms as part of his theoretical work (e.g. Freire, 1970, p. 38, 1986, PO), in keeping with the notion of *praxis* as the bringing together of reflection and action, where theorising without practice is considered as ‘verbalism’ or sloganeering and other forms of intellectual elitism (PO, p. 98). It is perhaps unsurprising then that Freire’s work has been utilised to create educational programs (e.g. as described by Archer and Costello, 1990 or Archer and Newman, 2003), as well as courses in ‘critical thinking’ (see Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010, p. 73), although once again I wish to make it clear that I make no judgements here about how such programs have been enacted by teachers and students on the ground.

But Freire is also clear that an emancipatory education cannot be systemised. The idea is that *praxis* as emancipation is enacted by teachers and students, not just by Freire the theorist, or there would be an inevitable reversion to banking education (see PO, p. 31, or Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010, pp. 73-74). Here again, Freire demarcates himself from Bourdieu, who utilises the notion of *praxis* to inform his own research, where *praxis* resembles a technique for achieving ‘objectivity’ rather than a intersubjective quality that may be enacted by all people (see Section 5.4). In conversation with Macedo, Freire states that “‘I don’t want to be imported or exported. It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without re-inventing them. Please tell your fellow American educators not to import me. Ask them to recreate and rewrite my ideas’” (Freire in Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010, p. 74, also, see Freire and Macedo, 1987, p.

134). Giroux attempts to develop this sentiment in the context of Freire's ideas and how they might contribute to a 'critical literacies' education that does not resort to the passing down of knowledge or skills (Giroux, 1988). But the problems remains that whilst Freire's notion of *praxis* describes the possibility of humans socially engaging in a continuous reflection and action upon the 'world', it also represents the ultimate definition of 'the truth' about what it means to be human, with all the attendant problems that I have described above.

Rancière is emphatic that emancipation cannot be turned into a policy or program as part of a formal system of education because by definition this would destroy the enactment of the equality of intelligence. This raises the question of how emancipatory education might be understood as educational practice and what the boundaries of that practice might be, which I turn to in Chapter 7 when I finally consider the potential for emancipation in the context of adult literacies education. But the main point here is that understandings of emancipatory education place doubt over the possibility that programs of instruction might function other than to socialise students into the current social order. This sentiment is expressed by Freire and his work undoubtedly contributes to that discussion, but his ideas also seem ripe for conversion into programs and policies for education, at least in part because they are underpinned by an ultimate and 'true' definition of what it means to be human.

### ***Freire and the possibility of education***

The final problem with Freire's ideas, as described by those who have assumed the possibility of emancipation, is that Freire understands an emancipatory student-teacher relationship to be a non-dominatory relationship between co-subjects, where students

and teachers co-intend upon the world together as if for the first time (PO, pp. 86-87). The issue here is whether this can be understood as an educational relationship (e.g. Biesta 2010b), the problem being that if a teacher-student relationship *could* be a non-dominatory there might no longer be a clear demarcation between the student and teacher. This brings into question whether an emancipatory situation continues to be an educational one rather than, say, one where people are working co-operatively together on a shared project. It would also undermine Freire's argument that *praxis* is an inherently *educational* process, the problem being that this might leave emancipation with no role in education, where education might only be enacted as a form of socialisation.

Biesta (2010b, p. 544) describes the possibility of this situation as one where 'education dissolves into learning', where the teacher's role becomes that of a facilitator and the student to that of 'learner'. Whilst Freire understands emancipation to be inherently social, his work often refers to 'cultural action' rather than 'education' (Taylor, 1997, p. 63), for example in the title of his book *Cultural Action for Freedom* (1970). In contrast, Rancière maintains a clear distinction between teachers and students as emancipatory education is driven by the will of the teacher who demands that students pay attention to their intellect and the intellect of others, though it remains unclear to me what Gur-Ze'ev implies for student teacher relationships<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> I have not attempted a detailed analysis of Gur-Ze'ev's ideas of the type I undertook with the work of Bourdieu, Gee, Freire and Rancière and his work does not represent a fully set out description of an emancipatory education as found in the writing of Freire and Rancière. My inability to discern what his ideas imply for educational relationships may just be indicative of the boundaries of my project. However, Holloway (see 2003, pp. 204-215), who considers Adorno's work for the lay reader in relation to what it might imply for political activity declares a difficulty in finding ways to describe what this might mean in practical terms. On the other hand, Holloway's conclusions, broadly, do not seem to contradict Rancière's understandings of 'policing' and 'politics' and this should be apparent in the discussion I present in this chapter

### ***Empowerment, emancipation and criticising ideas about education***

Before drawing conclusions about what this detailed criticism of Freire's work implies for understanding emancipatory education, I summarise some further possibilities for distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation. From an empowerment perspective problems raised in relation to Freire's work focus on his understanding of power and how he takes account of power hierarchies in the context of the practical enactment of education (e.g. Coben, 1997; Jackson, 2008, Ellsworth, 1989; Luke; 1992; Taylor, 1993; Gee; 1996). For example, the idea of Freire's 'false consciousness' might be criticised (e.g. Ellsworth, 1989) but in the context of understanding power in the classroom. Assuming that an emancipatory education is possible, the issue with 'false consciousness' is the follow on implication that students might not be able to understand without the help of their teachers, which Rancière and Biesta both raise as a problem in their work (e.g. Biesta, 2009, 2010a). But from an empowerment perspective, 'false consciousness' is problematic because it suggests that students might *be able* to understand *at all*. Power can never be escaped and so people can never understand each other. 'The truth' is that power reproduces through undetectable processes which can never be dismantled, so that relationships between teachers and students can only be understood in terms of 'moving about' or shifting between various identities and their associated knowledge (see Ellsworth, 1989, p. 321) with no possibility it seems for education as emancipation.

It follows that, from the perspective of empowerment, researchers and educators such as Freire who do not take account of power are assumed to be in collusion with its reproduction and are criticised for doing so. Criticism from an 'empowerment' perspective has a tendency to take this form and in so doing the very idea of an

emancipatory education is dismissed (see Rancière, 2005, p. 179). This further justifies my argument that empowerment and emancipation must be demarcated as purposes for education if the possibility of an emancipatory education is to be raised and not lost.

Criticism of Freire from those who assume that an emancipatory education is possible can be contrasted with that taken from an empowerment perspective. From the above discussion, it seems that assuming the possibility of emancipation means posing questions that interrogate the grounds of the possibility of education itself. Biesta's concern that educational relationships might necessitate a clear demarcation between students and teachers questions what makes education possible with implications for the critique of Freire's ideas. Questions to Freire taken from the assumption that emancipation is possible, orientate towards attempts to understand education and what these understandings imply about the quality of human relationships. Emancipation relies upon the enactment of human qualities, such as love, trust, responsibility or intellectual freedom. Criticism from those who make these assumptions is an expression of concern for the continuation of such qualities as integral aspects of human relationships. This is found in the criticism of Freire, for example in Gur-Ze'ev concern about how Freire understands love in the context of educational relationships. These types of criticism have the capacity to delve deep into the assumptions that Freire makes, raising further problems pertinent to the possibility of distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation and which empowerment perspectives neglect or ignore.

For example, the above critique of Freire has raised two more distinctions between empowering and emancipatory education. The first of these is that an emancipatory

education cannot be enacted through a program or policy, again raising questions about the boundaries and limits to which an emancipatory education might be possible. In contrast, researchers who refer to understandings of power do not question the existence of educational programs (e.g. see Janks, 2010; Gee, 1996; Crowther, Tett and Hamilton, 2003; Tett and MacLachlan, 2007; Luke and Freebody, 1997) or education policy (e.g. Tett and MacLachlan, 2008). Instead, discussion orientates towards what the content of programs or policy should be or how programs might be designed and developed.

Related to this, the second distinction is that an emancipatory education cannot be understood as the grouping or congregating around existing ways in which people are identified, or to use Bourdieu's terminology, people's ways of 'having a name' (LSP, pp. 120-122). Emancipation is not predicated upon processes of identification as these deny the possibility of an active human subject by encouraging the practical enactment of relationships that maintain a dependency between teachers and students for understandings about the social world. In contrast empowering education is reliant upon processes of identification as part of discourse production that might serve to alter power relationships. But I further justify these two claims in the final part of this chapter. Both Rancière and Gur-Ze'ev attempt to describe an emancipatory education as a process of subjectification that counters identification, or in Rancière's terminology 'encounters' processes of identification (Rancière, 1995, p. 62, p. 64). Gur-Ze'ev understands emancipatory 'counter-education' as one of 'anti-identification', whilst Rancière describes a process of 'dis-identification'. In the next section I attempt to describe Rancière's understanding of subjectification as dis-identification before summarising how empowerment and emancipation might be distinguished in the context of education.



#### 6.4 *Education as subjectification*

Rancière does not recognise ideology as ‘the truth’ of how power operates to distort or exclude through undetectable processes. For Rancière, there is no concept of Freire’s false or naive consciousness, Bourdieu’s ‘misrecognition’ or Gee’s notion that discourses cannot be critiqued from within. Rancière acknowledges that it is important to understand how the social order, or as he terms it, the ‘police order’ is reproduced, but it is equally important to understand how emancipation from it might be possible (Rancière, 1999, p. 32). According to Rancière, a situation isn’t emancipatory, or as he terms it, ‘political’, just because power relationships are understood to be at work in it, indeed emancipation has got nothing to do with relationships of power and the revelation of ‘the truth’ (see Rancière, 1999, p. 42 or Section 5.3).

For Rancière, only individual human intellects can take responsibility for the needs of humanity or consider the continued existence of humanity as a species and so equality and emancipation are understood as an enactment of intellectual freedom. This doesn’t mean that there is no ‘truth’, just that its revelation is not integral to the possibility of emancipation. What matters are individuals’ *relationships* with each other and the truth, where the possibility of emancipation is reliant upon each individual creating their own orbit around the truth (IS, p. 78), where flight paths fluctuate, ascending and descending in accordance with the attention individuals give to their wills and the degree to which they enact the equality of intelligence. Such enactments might create new identifications which are significant, but not because they are inscribed with ‘the truth’, rather because they are assumed to be inscribed with ‘equality’. But this does not mean that emancipation is a process of identification or authoring new identities. For Rancière,

identification is ‘policing’ (Rancière, 1995, p. 68) and emancipatory education as an enactment of equality is a process of ‘disidentification’ (Rancière, 1991, Bingham and Biesta, 2010)<sup>20</sup>.

Rancière’s describes subjectification or dis-identification when he discusses the process of emancipation in more detail in the context of defining ‘politics’ and the ‘political’. Rancière’s description of politics corresponds with that of both ‘education’ and ‘emancipation’ in his own terminology. The ‘political’ is an encounter between the two processes of *policing* and *equality* (Rancière, 1995, p. 63), understood as processes of identification and disidentification, which correspond with the Rancière’s understandings of oppression and emancipatory education that I described in Chapter 5.

To recap, the process of identification that Rancière understands is not Freire’s ‘objectification’, where people are prevented from intending their consciousness

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<sup>20</sup> Aside from how I haven’t engaged in a detailed interpretation of Gur-Ze’ev’s work, there are difficulties that prevent me from providing an adequate brief summary of how ‘anti-identification’ might be understood in the context of education. To explain ideas predicated on the notion of ‘negative dialectics’ would first require defining ‘positive’ dialectics as a starting point. However, popular understandings of dialectics as a Hegelian concept have a tendency to mis-represent Hegel’s work (See Bernstein, 1991), perhaps as a consequence of the legacy of popular explanations of Marxism. What’s more, as I have already hinted at in my comparison of Bourdieu and Freire’s understandings of praxis, there are divergences in understandings of praxis and dialectics amongst those who draw upon these concepts in their understandings of education. All of this makes me wary of providing a brief explanation of dialectics that can be satisfactory in the context of this thesis without embarking upon a significant additional piece of research. However, for any reader who is interested and already clings to some understanding or interpretation of ‘dialectics’, I offer the following: Gur-Ze’ev’s understanding of ‘anti-identification’ has some correspondences with Rancière’s ‘anti-disidentification’ but starts from a different set of assumptions. The starting point is the understanding of humanity as refusing or denying identification, where this refusal is an inherent aspect of humanity; bees don’t refuse to build hives and monkeys don’t refuse to climb trees. So, as with Rancière politics is in the name of an identification being denied, dismissing the idea of it taking the form of asserting a cultural identity. The concept of dialectics is turned upside down, so that the synthesis integral to the notion of a dialectical movement has no ‘happy ending’. Instead the start point and end point is negativity, as a refusal to be identified, where the negation is a process of identification that negates anti-negativity. The ‘negation of the negation’ takes the form of a temporary and fleeting process of anti-identification or subjectification (Holloway refers to subjectification whilst Gut-Ze’ev refers to de-subjectification, but the concept of negative dialectics entails potentially confusing sign swapping, so this may not be significant). This ‘negation of the negation of anti-identity’ is understood as a form of transcendence, a kind of explosion of humanity’s love of life. The synthesis, as a new identification, is inherently oppressive – it is not the ‘synthesis’ associated with popular understandings of dialectics - and so the end point is negativity and refusal. Gur-Ze’ev understanding of identification differs from both Rancière and also Freire, which also means a different

towards the world, with its associated notion of ‘false consciousness’ and ‘banking education’. Rather, the logic of policing is the logic of explication or explanation as this encourages people to congregate around shared understandings and identifications instead of giving attention to their intellects and the intellects of others (see Section 5.3). Processes of identification are integral to the possibility of any social institution, no matter its function, be it the courts of law, media organisations, universities or parliaments. Groups of people must hold to common understandings, goals and characteristics if institutions are to exist (IS, p. 57) and so the existence of any social order is reliant upon explanatory processes for its continued operation and can be understood to be inherently oppressive (IS, p. 17). Group consensus is necessary to the continuance of organisations, predicated upon policing activity (Rancière, 1995, p. 63). Societal institutions purport to act as the ‘self’ of the community, to incorporate characteristics which are understood to be representative of a group. To take part in the community, people must form allegiance with these identifications and so the social order by definition must encourage processes of identification or it would fall apart.

Rancière describes how much of the activity that we would commonly consider to be politics can be understood to enact a policing function that replicates processes of explication or identification. For example, most oppositional activity within the social order takes place through expressions that counter the prevailing values or characteristics of a ruling law or culture by setting out support for an alternative rule, law or culture and arguing for it through the same explicatory processes (ibid, p. 64). Groups of people, big or small, might make a claim for identity on the part of ‘so-called minorities’ whilst expressing disapproval of the current law (ibid, p. 64), or groups

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understanding of praxis, but I cannot elaborate on this in the context of understanding educational relationships without further research

might accuse each other of ‘barbarism or tribalism’ (ibid, p. 65) in reference to each other’s characteristics. Similarly, there might be an assertion of the ways and characteristics of particular groups, perhaps the working classes or women, undertaken by exerting their distinctive cultural forms and perhaps positing that these hold an inherent value. For Rancière, equality is not understood or enacted as a set of characteristics or existing identifications which can be appealed to or worked toward. All this activity is assumed to rely upon explication and so amounts to ‘policing’ that replicates intellectual inequality (ibid, p. 65, see Section 5.3).

As I described above, the enactment of equality cannot be what Rancière describes as an enactment of the ‘self’ in the sense that it cannot take the form of the identification or explanation of the characteristics that have been denied. For example, to state ‘the workers united will never be defeated’ or ‘we are women, we are strong<sup>21</sup>’ can be understood to encourage further policing activity as it encourages people to unite around common identities and rely upon common understandings, so destroying intellectual freedom. Though these slogans might be posed as arguments with the intention of opposing dominant groups or asserting against oppressive social structures, they actually serve to replicate them.

Similarly, asserting the culture of a dominated group can be understood as policing. For Rancière, ‘narrative and culture entail the reversion of subjectivization to identification’ (ibid; 68). There are implications here for Freire’s (1970) description of education as ‘cultural action for freedom’ and description of how transcriptions of peoples’ stories are of ‘unquestionable’ value in adult education (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 45). Also

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<sup>21</sup> These slogans are my examples, not Rancière’s

for legacy of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart in the UK tradition of adult education that I mentioned and drew upon in Chapter 2, which attaches inherent value to working class culture (e.g. Williams, 1993b; Hoggart, 1957, see Steele, 1997, pp. 176-198). Williams considered working class culture to encapsulate a form of democratic politics that gave rise to trade unionism and the co-operative movement in Britain. He understood cultural activity as a form of *Public Education* that might assert against education orientated towards the requirements of the workplace and the deference of the elite culture upheld by universities, referred to as *Industrial Training* and *Old Humanism* (1993a, 1993b, see Steele, 1997, pp. 183-184 and Section 2.3). Williams' *Public Education* project is problematic in the context of Rancière's understanding of an emancipatory education as it encourages grouping around sets of identifications (i.e. 'working class culture') in opposition to others (i.e. market generated 'mass' culture, or the university culture of *Old Humanism*), which could only serve to replicate existing explicatory processes, or 'police' logic. In this sense, amongst others, Williams' idea of *Public Education* cannot be taken to be educational and is indistinguishable from *Old Humanism* or *Industrial Training* in its enactment.

Whilst understanding social hierarchies to be replicated through the enactment of explicatory or 'police' logic, Rancière posts the possibility of an alternative emancipatory logic that might counter it. This logic of equality 'consists of a set of practices guided by the supposition that everyone is equal and by the attempt to verify this supposition' (see Rancière, 1995, p. 65). For Rancière, emancipation (or politics) takes place when the logic of *policing* or *policy* as explication encounters the logic of emancipation in an enactment of equality, when a temporary 'stage occurs when we take the political to be the place where the verification of equality is obliged to turn into

the handling of a wrong' (see Rancière, 1995, p. 62, p. 64) or 'tort', understood as a form of 'twisted logic' (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p. 159).

In a circular argument, Rancière also describes how 'Wrong is simply the mode of subjectification in which the assertion of equality takes its political shape' (Rancière, 1999, p. 39). Subjectification is a manifestation of a 'wrong' and enacting emancipation in the handling of a wrong might reconfigure the existing police order incorporating an inscription of equality (Rancière, 1999, pp. 39-40). But, to reiterate, Rancière is not referring to a 'wrong' that has previously been identified, so, for example, it will not be accounted for under existing governmental law, or understood in terms of the relationships between groups that have already been named. It cannot mean appealing to a collective self in the form of an existing set of characteristics. Instead, Rancière describes how a 'wrong' establishes or institutes a logic of emancipation that necessitates an *impossible* or *wrong identification*, understood as a process of dis-identification (Rancière, 1995, p. 67).

The idea that an impossible or wrong identification follows the enactment of emancipation suggests that there may be inherent difficulties encountered by those attempting to describe such a possibility, including myself, as it seems to require identifying an impossible identification. Rancière himself attempts a 'special dialect that carries no identification with any group' in the understanding that 'the act of thinking is primarily an activity of translation, and that anyone is capable of making a translation' (ibid, p. 62) for all people have equal intelligence. Perhaps, in a sense, the onus is not just on me to explain the counter logic of emancipation – it is also on you as my intellectual equal to translate it.

The logic of emancipation disrupts processes where people come to hold common understandings and identifications. Instead of identifying with a ‘self’, the first task of ‘politics’ or emancipation is to struggle against ‘selfishness’ (Rancière, 1995, p. 65). The logic of the equality of intelligence is always enacted in the name of a category denied, either in principle, or as a result of the consequences of its denial. Emancipation is a logic of ‘the other’, enacted to demonstrate the supposition of equality. It must be enacted and verified in the name of all people rather than a particular group already identified, which means an identity which is unknown or not yet (Rancière, 1995, p. 68). It must be enacted in the name of anyone, not only the injured party, which means in the name of an anonym (or pseudonym) (ibid, p. 65).

Because equality cannot be an identification that people appeal to or achieve in the future, it can only be repeatedly assumed, supposed and verified in individual emancipatory acts in the present. It is in this sense that it is the enactment of a logic; an emancipatory logic described as a ‘polemical universal’.

‘Equality is not a value to which one appeals; it is a universal that must be supposed, verified and demonstrated in each case. Universality is not the *eidōs* of the community to which particular situations are opposed; it is, first of all, a logical operator.’

(ibid, p. 65)

So what is important here is the logic of emancipation and its encounter with explicatory logic. The only ‘truth’ being tested is the truth of the logic of emancipation, as the enactment of the opinion that all people have equal intelligence. Emancipation is

a demonstration of this logic, a test of the line of argument that enacts equality by demonstrating the logical consequences of a wrong that oppressed groups set out to cope with (ibid, p. 65). Instead of identifying, the logic of emancipation specifies a gap between identifications (ibid, p. 66) and it is this process that Rancière understands as one of subjectification or ‘dis-identification’, or ‘politics’ rather than ‘policing’.

To enact equality in the name of a denied identification means asking questions that do not serve to reinforce existing identifications, rather they demonstrate the logic of emancipation. It is this demonstration, enacted by following lines of argumentation that point at gaps between identifications, or an ‘impossible identification’ as ‘an identification that cannot be embodied by he or she who utters it’ (ibid, p. 67). Rancière describes an example from his personal experience, recalling when Algerians were murdered by the French police in Paris in 1961.

‘We could not identify with those Algerians, but we *could* question our identity as “French people” in whose name they had been murdered. That is to say, we could act as political subjects in the interval or gap between the two identities, neither of which we could assume.’

(ibid, p. 67)

Rancière describes how such an impossible identification or gap is also pointed at by asking nonsensical questions, such as ‘does a French woman belong to the category of Frenchmen?’ (ibid, p. 66) posed in a situation where a woman is denied rights within the French state. Such a question articulates a gap where an emancipatory argument might be developed. Another example is the articulation of a ‘wrong’ identification,



encompassed by the statement ‘We are all German Jews’ (ibid, p 67) which Rancière describes as ‘an identification in terms of the denial of an absolutely essential wrong’ (ibid).

But what is important is what follows from a wrong identification. In the demonstration of equality, the ‘syllogistic logic of *either/or* (are we or are or we are not citizens or human beings?) is intertwined with the logic of “we are *and* we are not.”’ (ibid, p. 68). Subjectification or ‘disidentification’ as a space between identifications emerges when the logic of emancipation is enacted and verified. The staging or demonstration of this space is a process of subjectification, or ‘coming into presence’ – of a way of being that had no place and no part in the existing order of things’, that has yet to be identified (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p. 33). So for Rancière, politics, or equality, as the enactment of emancipation ‘is not made up of power relationships: it is made up of relationships between worlds.’ (Rancière, 1999, p. 42).

‘A political subject is not a group that “becomes aware” of itself, finds its voice, imposes its weight on society. It is an operator that connects and disconnects different areas, regions, identities, functions, and capacities existing in the configuration of given experience – that is the nexus of distributions of the police order and whatever equality is already inscribed there, however fragile and fleeting such inscriptions may be.’

(Rancière, 1999, p. 40)

The enactment of emancipation as subjectification is sporadic and fleeting, solidifying into a new identification, but one that is engrained with an inscription of equality (ibid,

p. 37), so reconfiguring the social order. But Rancière doesn't downplay its significance, for 'at the moment when society is threatened to be shattered by its own madness, reason performs a saving social action by exerting the totality of its own power, that of the recognised equality of intellectual beings' (IS, p. 97). However, Rancière is also less optimistic, describing how emancipatory logic is falling out of play, where the consequences are found in the manifestation of racism in France. Similarly, Gur-Ze'ev, who likens identification with death, describes the emergence of a 'new anti-Semitism'. For Rancière, humanity has been pedagogised with society likened to an enormous machine that enacts explicatory logic (IS, p. 134). But the point here is that for both, the idea of an empowering literacies education might serve to fuel the pedagogical machine, further demonstrating the importance of enacting emancipatory alternatives. Though my attempt above to elaborate upon subjectification as 'dis-identification' has probably raised more questions than it answered, I endeavour to demonstrate its relevance in the final chapter when I explore emancipation in the context of adult literacies education.

### **6.5 *Some conclusions***

In this chapter I have explored the distinction between empowerment and emancipation in the context of education. From reviewing the understandings of empowerment and emancipation described by Gee, Bourdieu, Rancière and Bourdieu, addressing research question xii, I have described how understandings of power as ideological processes of discourse production. These processes imply educational practices that can be understood to socialise students into the existing social hierarchy. This makes the notion of an empowering education inherently problematic, emphasising the importance of distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation in the context of education. In

considering the historical criticism of Freire's work, addressing research question xiii., I have shown how taking understandings of empowerment as a reference limits the exploration and criticism of educational ideas and practices. Criticism is limited to concerns about the accounting of power where power is understood from the standpoint of an observer, in so doing dismissing the idea that an emancipatory education might be possible.

Tackling research question xiv, I have also drilled down into the question of how an emancipatory education might be understood, suggesting that emancipation cannot be understood as a process of identity formation. Rather it can be understood as a process of being and becoming a human subject, in other words, it is a process of *subjectification*. This implies that education for emancipation might counter processes of identification, raising the possibility of understanding subjectification as an enactment of 'dis-identification' or 'anti-identification'. Here the possibility of an emancipatory education relies upon enacting human qualities that counter and disrupt processes of knowledge transmission, undermining the idea that people need help to understand the social world.

Not only can empowerment and emancipation be distinguished from each other, they are also linked. In other words, emancipatory education counters education that takes understandings of ideology as a starting point. Emancipatory education serves to counter empowering education, which can be understood to be oppressive. Again, this further emphasises the importance of distinguishing between the empowerment and emancipation in the context of education.

If I assume that an emancipatory education might be possible, empowering education seems to be defined by a series of problems that serve to underline how it can be understood to socialise students. It is predicated upon the transmission of knowledge as empowerment is reliant upon revealing ‘the truth’ about how power operates, making students’ dependent upon teachers and researchers for understandings whilst simultaneously replicating existing social hierarchies. Understandings of power offer no means to make judgements about whether new discourse disrupts existing social hierarchies, or whether new social hierarchies are more desirable than those they replace. The idea of an empowering education also seems to ignore human qualities such as love or trust, limiting educational relationships to those between students and symbolic productions. In summary, empowerment understandings take a starting point of defining inequality as a process of discourse production ultimately linked to the distribution of ‘goods’ in society. This makes empowerment a situation to be worked towards in the future, perhaps indicated by a ‘goods’ redistribution, but where outside observers decide what is ‘good’ about ‘goods’ and whether the redistribution is fair, perhaps making the possibility of empowerment forever over the horizon.

In contrast, the possibility of an emancipatory education means taking the assumption of ‘equality’ as the starting point (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p. 31), where emancipation is understood as the enactment of equality that can only take place in the present. Emancipatory education is predicated upon understandings of humanity, where a demarcation must be made between people and other living creatures if the needs and continued existence of humanity are to be considered. Theories of emancipatory education make assumptions about the qualities of human relationships that are integral to humanity, from which equality is defined, where emancipation might be predicated

upon the assertion of love, trust, or intellectual freedom where questions and discussions might orientate towards how to understand such qualities and preserve their continuance. The assumption is that the enactment of these human qualities disrupts processes of knowledge transmission, raising the possibility for new ways of being and becoming a human subject that have not yet been identified. This makes the enactment of emancipation predicated upon students expressing their own understandings of the everyday social world, rather than relying on the existing understandings of teachers or researchers. But this is not a free for all where emancipation means students expressing themselves, as emancipatory education relies upon students' expressions incorporating a social enactment of equality. It also means that emancipation cannot be about processes of identification and so cannot be reliant upon understandings about power, further underwriting the importance of demarcating emancipation from empowerment in the context of education.

To take understandings of empowerment as a starting point might mean accepting the idea that education might only serve to socialise students into society as it stands. For Rancière it also means accepting that there can be no politics, only activity that serves to reinforce the social order. To assume the possibility of an emancipatory education means refusing to accept this, which means raising a range of problems that question what makes education possible whilst taking responsibility for the existence of humanity and its needs<sup>22</sup>.

This is demonstrated by how taking the assumption of emancipation as a starting point, as I attempted in my criticism of Freire, raised questions and problems that do not arise

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<sup>22</sup> I hope that my thesis can be now be understood as sitting within this context, as a demonstration of this refusal.

from the perspective of empowerment. For example, questions about the bounds of educational programs and policy, about what makes an educational relationship, about whether culture can be educational and about how to justify and undertake a research project such as this one. As promised, I shall return to the question of methods and methodology, but in the concluding chapter I also reengage with how emancipatory education might be understood through addressing the title of this thesis as an exploration of the possibility for emancipation in the context of adult literacies education.

## **7 Conclusion – the possibility of an emancipatory adult literacies education**

In the last chapter I distinguished between education for empowerment and education that might raise possibilities for emancipation. In so doing I reclaimed Freire's work as a project that attempts to describe the possibility of an emancipatory education, arguing that this orientation in his work has been neglected whilst the idea that education might empower has come to hold great sway. I also claimed that educational practices associated with understandings of adult literacies for 'empowerment' encourage the socialisation of students, again neglecting the possibility of emancipation, which I attempted to describe as a fleeting process of being and becoming a human subject that is understood to enact equality. In this chapter I contextualise these claims by describing emancipation in the context of adult literacies education, as well as discussing the implications for the methodology that underpins this project, addressing research questions xv and xvi. I then make a final claim which is that the notion of emancipation must continue to be questioned and explored if educators, students and academics are to take responsibility for the practices associated with adult literacies education and their consequences.

It should by now be clear that the creation of educational methods and programs that might emancipate is illogical in the sense that there can, by definition, be no blueprint or instructions for emancipation. This means that this concluding chapter cannot take the form of recommendations for educational programs or policy. But it does not mean that the implications of this project are in any way irrelevant or impractical, just that they must be articulated in a different way. Neither does it mean that I cannot explore the emancipatory potential of literacies education. Rather, it suggests that there are

boundaries to what the activity of analysis can bring to a project of this type. I have engaged the analytical skills of reading, interpreting and reconstructing in my engagement with the work of Bourdieu, Gee, Freire and Rancière, but have reached the limit of what this might achieve in the context of an exploration of emancipatory education. I cannot continue with my analysis in order to construct what Rancière's work infers about methods, practices and policies for achieving emancipation. To take the exploration of emancipation in the context of literacies education further I must change gear, or perhaps change vehicle and take it in a different direction.

To accomplish this shift I return to the central problem that has come to my attention in the conduct of this research, that an empowering education relies upon notions of ideology that seem to negate the possibility of emancipation. It is this same problem that Rancière counters in his own work when he describes the logic of 'ideology' as 'the truth of the false' (Rancière, 1999, 85). Understandings of empowerment in the context of education are predicated upon the idea that there are undetectable and illusory processes that are integral to discourse production and the replication of power. People's understanding of the social world is taken to be inherently 'false' and empowerment is predicated upon revealing the 'truth'. Understandings of an empowering literacies education make these assumptions, whether they are informed by Bourdieu (e.g. Luke and Freebody, 1997; Gee, 1996; Janks, 2010) or Gee (Lankshear, 1997; Crowther, Tett & Hamilton, 2003; New London Group, 1996) or Freire (e.g. Lankshear and MacLaren, 1993; Giroux, 1988).

In the remainder of this chapter I conclude my investigation by considering emancipatory literacies education as one that goes beyond understandings of power.



This means exploring the possibility of an emancipatory literacy education, in the context of enacting a social response to societal oppression, which is *not* based upon the assumption that ideological processes are in operation. It breaks with how the question of distinguishing between empowerment and emancipation has been addressed previously (e.g by Inglis, 1997), where the focus has been on formulating appropriate knowledge for delivery to students. Instead, as suggested by the analysis presented in Chapters 5, emphasis is placed on understanding the character of the educational relationships between teachers, students and the materials that they use. But before I set this out, I commence by examining the implications for the methodology of this thesis raising wider questions about how research in education is justified.

### ***7.1 Methodology***

Bourdieu and Gee back up their assumptions about the ideological character of discourse with ethnographic and observational data. But in circular fashion, the methods they employ are informed by the assumptions that they make. They assume that the operation of power can only be revealed by researchers who sit outside of discourse to observe and analyse it and so this positioning is replicated in the design and deployment of research methods. Gee argues that theory, as generalised discourse, should wherever possible be constructed from primary or direct sources, so emphasising the need for researchers and research (SL, pp. 18-19). From the stance of an observer he describes how African Americans are less able to speak about texts in a detached, rational and objective fashion than their white counterparts (SL, pp. 173-175) and in an in depth study of stories told by an African American child called Leona, he argues that ‘There is a great deal of similarity between the structures we have found in Leona’s stories and those that have been found in oral structures from oral cultures around the

world' (SL, p. 113) and claims that 'This little girl's apprenticeship in the social practices of her community, ways of making sense of experience that, in fact have a long history going back thousands of years.' (SL, p. 115). Meanwhile, Bourdieu also places emphasis on directly linking his theory to empirical research, describing theory as a 'temporary construct which takes shape for and by empirical work' (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989, p.50). On this basis Bourdieu uses ethnographic data to claim that working class people have a tendency to be happy, even though their lives by all accounts are mediocre (HA, p. 167). What's more, bourgeois children are more able to manipulate symbols in relation to abstract concepts than their proletarian counterparts who are orientated towards understanding concrete situations (RE, p. 50).

Paradoxically, these kinds of statements seem to back up the idea of their being a 'Great Divide' in ways of thinking and behaving resulting from differences in people's literate practices, suggesting a failure to break with the 'literacy myth' that the New Literacies Studies project set out to dispel (see Section 2.2). Given that the practice of an empowering literacies education can be understood to socialise students into existing society, it seems that far from breaking with the notion of 'functional literacies', an empowering literacies education might be considered as a more complex and all-pervading form of functionalism that goes well beyond the remit of the first literacies programs which were limited to the teaching of reading and perhaps writing.

But the main point here is that the research findings revealed by Bourdieu or Gee utilise research methods and tools which have been designed in the assumption that some people (researchers) are more able to understand the world than others (the researched). The justification for such research is that it might attempt to discover how people are

being oppressed, for the ideological character of discourse cannot be internally critiqued necessitating researchers sitting outside of discourse so that its workings might be revealed. The possibility of empowerment is linked to the revelation of true knowledge, where ‘If only people could be made aware of the real circumstances of their lives, so the argument might go, then they will naturally seek to make appropriate changes’ (Schostak, 2009, p. 2). The knowledge revealed can then be taught to students, passing them down the knowledge required for empowerment. However, as I have argued in Chapters 4 and 5, this process can be understood to reinforce the power relationships it seeks to dismantle. A ‘circle of inequality’ (IS, p. 87) is replicated where research findings back up the assumptions that underpin their generation, justifying a need for more research that utilises similar methods. In this way, notions of ideology can be understood to stimulate research which serves to encourage socialising education, so replicating inequality.

Freire, Bourdieu and Gee all assume that the central problem that research must address is that ‘the truth’ is distorted and must be revealed for equality in the distribution of ‘goods’ to be achieved. What’s more, they all take this understanding about people’s false understanding of the world to be ‘the truth’. Indeed, the understandings of *praxis* offered by Freire and Bourdieu’s, as well as Gee’s understandings of language and discourse, are taken to be facts by those who make reference to them (e.g. Janks, 2010; Crowther, Tett and Hamilton, 2003; Lankshear and Maclaren, 2003). But the analyses I presented Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated that these understandings are not the ‘truth’, rather they are theorists’ assumptions. For Rancière they are mere opinions which assume the *inequality* of intelligence, where acts underpinned by these assumptions deny the possibility of politics or emancipation.

Rancière suggests that an alternative assumption can be made that denies the opinion that people need help to understand. The alternative is to take the assumption of intellectual equality as a starting point, to assume that all people are intellectual equals and not in need of help from teachers and researchers in order to understand the social world. But this does not mean that equality is enacted by people expressing themselves in any fashion, regardless of the process by which their expressions or opinions arise. Freire describes how people's expressions or dialogue must be driven by relationships where qualities of love and trust are manifested so that 'the truth' might be revealed. For Rancière the quality of people's expressions is also understood to be integral to the possibility of emancipation. Rancière argues that the enactment of emancipation is reliant upon the expression of opinions which incorporate the belief that all people are intellectual equals, requiring students to give attention to their own intellects whilst acknowledging the equality of intellect of all others (see Section 5.5). Freire's linkage of love and dialogue to emancipation suggests that emancipatory education is an inherently social activity. Similarly, Rancière's emancipation, through reliant upon individuals, is inherently social because students must speak and in so doing connect with shared concerns and I explore this further in the later sections of this chapter.

There are repercussions here for research methodology in the broad sense that researching education might orientate away from attempting to account for power in the context of educational relationships and towards making the assumption that an emancipatory education is possible and that a socialising (or empowering) education might be distinguished from one that might emancipate. My PhD project does not involve empirical research and on the basis of this project alone I am not in a position to speculate about specific research methods or research questions that might follow if

researchers take the *assumption* of emancipation as a starting point. However, in the last chapter I have already described how assuming the *possibility* of emancipation has the potential to raise a breadth and depth of questions and problems that probe the boundaries of what makes education possible, suggesting the possibility of a multitude of research questions and aims. I would argue here that a reorientation away from discussions about empowerment and towards understandings of emancipation does not mean pulling researchers, educators and students towards an impossible and therefore an impracticable and irrelevant possibility. Rather it might both expand and give depth to discussions and explorations, taking them into unforeseen and novel directions whilst firmly rooting them in real problems and shared concerns.

However, outstanding questions remain about the relationships between theories of emancipation and research methodologies. For Bourdieu and Gee, the purpose of research in the context of an empowering education is to reveal how power operates. This knowledge about power might then be passed to teachers and students, as it is assumed that knowing about power will help to overcome it, furthering the aim of social justice, with the attendant problems that I have described above.

Freire's work implies a different purpose for research in the context of an emancipatory education, where the process of knowledge transmission ('banking education') between teachers and students is assumed to be oppressive. Emancipatory education is reliant upon dialogue between teachers and students, so that they might reflect and act upon the problems that they face. Symbolic artefacts such as films or texts are integral to this relationship because they are understood to encourage dialogue and praxis (see Section 5.4). Here the content of these artefacts must incorporate the everyday experiences and

problems of students, or banking education will continue, necessitating a requirement for research in the context of an emancipatory education. This means that for Freire, research is aimed at understanding the everyday *experiences* of students so that these might be incorporated into the content of educational materials. Freire details the associated research methods for undertaking this type of project (see PO, Chapter 5).

The ideas of other theorists who have assumed the possibility of an emancipatory education suggest that limitations might be placed upon the purpose of empirical research. For Rancière (IS, pp. 14-15), emancipatory education is not reliant upon the transmission of particular knowledge content, or educational materials formulated to incorporate particular types of knowledge. For Biesta (2010a), Gur-Ze'ev (1998, 2005) and Holloway (2002), emancipation cannot be reliant upon researchers diagnosing the need for its enactment, or detecting that it is in occurrence or has taken place. In Chapter 6 I demonstrated that theories of emancipatory education are important in the generation of more and different understandings (Biesta, Allan and Edwards, 2011) and might stimulate the emergence of new questions and problems for researchers to attend to. But perhaps these same theories are limited in what they might contribute to the creation of methods for the empirical investigation of these new objects of study (though I must restate that I cannot claim definitive conclusions about this on the basis of my research). I raise similar issues when I attempt to describe an emancipatory literacies education in the latter part of this chapter, so I shall reengage with this potential problem again below.

Returning to my own research, as I outlined in Chapter 3, both the premise of this project, its central aim and objectives, as well as its design are informed by two

assumptions. Firstly, that an emancipatory education might be possible and secondly that socialising education might be distinguished from emancipatory alternatives. I selected and organised the literature review by making decisions as to whether literature expressed the possibility of an alternative to education that functions to socialise students and it was from the exploration of such literature that I was able to select theoretical works for analysis and formulate research aims, objectives and the questions that I have sought to address. These two assumptions correspond with my refusal to accept that education can achieve no function or purpose other than socialisation which underpins the premise of my research.

I have relied heavily upon insights and help from theorists who make these assumptions – Biesta, Gur-Ze'ev, Rancière, Freire and Williams, though in the case of Freire and Williams I have turned some of their assumptions against them in my concluding discussions in Chapter 6. Whilst Freire and Williams undoubtedly raise problems and questions arising from the assumption that an emancipatory education is possible and contribute to pertinent debates, they also rely upon notions of ideology which orientates their work back into the realm of empowerment. My research can be taken as an attempt to re-orientate attention towards the problem that Freire and Williams first gave attention to, but considering other ways of addressing them. In this sense, I hope my work reclaims and continues Williams' project of raising the possibility of a *Public Education* that might counter the shotgun marriage between *Old Humanism* and *Industrial Training* that might describe the history of adult education in Britain.

About the consequences or repercussions of my research, to reiterate, the result of research that explores emancipation cannot be translated into new methods or policies

for teachers and students to follow. This implies a break with how theory or ideas are presented for the engagement of educators, students and researchers and raises questions about how these readers might engage with understandings about education. I shall take the work of Brookfield (e.g. 2005) as a perhaps typical example. Brookfield describes the ideas of influential thinkers in education, such as hooks, Freire or Foucault, presenting them as elements in an array of resources from which adult educators might make selections to support their work of empowerment in the classroom.

For Rancière, emancipation is predicated upon the making of impossible, wrong or nonsensical identifications, whilst for Gur-Ze'ev, it is a refusal to be identified, where for both, emancipation is always a response to, or following, an encounter with oppressive processes as they understand them. It seems to me these notions are expressed in the work of Rancière (e.g. 2005, 1999) and Gur-Ze'ev (e.g. 1998, 2005, 2010) when they also, like Brookfield, discuss a range of philosophers and theorists, but whilst upholding the possibility of emancipation as they each understand it. The consequences are texts which might challenge readers' own understandings and assumptions with the expectation of a more complex engagement rather than an easy translation into 'practice'.

Rancière (1991) describes how the emancipated produce symbolic works (perhaps including theory) that recognise the equality of all people (IS, pp. 69-70). Such works need to be figured out, encouraging the exercising of the will and intellectual powers. Unlike empowerment understandings which are taken as 'the truth' and expected to reveal 'the truth', symbolic productions that arise from an enactment of emancipation



are assumed to be inscribed with ‘equality’. In contrast, the product of stultified minds doesn’t recognise the equality of intelligence in others. Such works explain and sloganise requiring the reader to listen and be commanded to, for it is assumed that they might not be able to understand. This sits with the idea that this type of symbolic production might be translated as a method, instruction or policy, so that ‘the truth’ as it has been revealed might be followed by others<sup>23</sup>. I do not intend to enter a debate about the expressions incorporated in this thesis. But as I embark on the problem of how to describe the possibility of an emancipatory education, I am hoping that the reader will seek to meet me by endeavouring to figure out and translate for themselves what this might mean.

## ***7.2 Emancipatory adult literacies education?***

The question remains as to how an emancipatory literacies education might be understood. To tackle this question I start by considering briefly Freire’s work in the context of literacies. This brief re-engagement with Freire’s legacy serves to demonstrate pitfalls that must be avoided if an emancipatory literacies education is to be described, so that my initial account of an emancipatory literacies education takes the form of what it *is not* and *cannot be*. I then take up the work of those who assume the possibility of an emancipatory education (Biesta, Rancière and Gur-Ze’ev) and face the challenge of stating positively how an emancipatory literacies education might be

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<sup>23</sup> In her defence of Freire, bell hooks (1994) describes how educators are more than capable of taking on board the problems with Freire’s understandings and interpreting and translating their value in educational contexts. Likening theory to water, in circumstances where ‘thirsty’ students and educators encounter oppression, ‘dirty water’ theory such as Freire’s is readily ‘filtered’ by them, whilst researchers who position themselves outside and above such challenges can dismiss Freire and demand their ‘bottled water’ theory regardless of the resources expended in the process (and here I would add, so that teachers and students can be made by them to drink it).

understood.

### *Freire and literacy*

I have argued that empowering education can be understood as a form of socialisation for students, so emphasising the importance of disentangling understandings of education for empowerment from those which make the assumption that education might emancipate. In Chapter 6 I attempted such a separation in the context of Freire's work and legacy, the problem being that much of the discussion of Freire's work is presented from the perspective of power and empowerment. In addition, Freire's understanding of an emancipatory education is underpinned by a notion of ideology which has some correspondences with how empowering education is understood. This makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for Freire to succeed in describing an emancipatory education that does not revert to encouraging the socialisation of students into society as it stands. These difficulties seem to come to a head when Freire's theory is considered in the context of adult literacies education, as I demonstrate below.

Freire designed, co-ordinated and taught literacies programs for adults in the 1950s and 60s and in 1963 he was appointed head of the Brazilian National Literacy Program. The Program attempted to organise the teaching of reading and writing to upwards of two million adults before a military coup led to its seizure and Freire's imprisonment and exile the following year (Archer and Costello, 1990; Dix, 2010, p. 82). Perhaps this aspect of Freire's work encourages the assumption that Freire considered reading and writing to be integral to emancipation (e.g. as found with Esteva, Prakesh and Stuchul, 2008, Archer and Costello, 1990 or Inglis, 1997).

However, for Freire, emancipation means ‘reading the world’ as enacted by students and teachers participating in dialogue and critical thinking whilst co-intending upon symbolic representations, so that they might be more fully conscious of the challenges that face them (Freire, 1972, see Chapter 5). By this definition, the reading and writing of text cannot be prerequisite to emancipation and Freire falls short of making such a claim (Taylor, 1993). Freire uses the term ‘literacy’ to refer exclusively to reading and writing, clearly stating that there can be no direct link between reading, writing and emancipation:

‘One must not think, however, that learning to read and write precedes ‘concientization’, or vice versa. Concientization occurs simultaneously with the literacy or post-literacy process. It must be so.’

(Freire, 1970, p. 42)

Freire also describes how learning to read or write cannot be a mandatory or compulsory aspect of adult education and counters claims of their being functional outcomes that follow learning to read and write such as increased success in obtaining employment (Freire, 1970, p. 25, 1986, pp. 399-400). This sentiment is encapsulated in the Freirian inspired ‘REFLECT’ projects designed by the charity ACTIONAID (Archer & Newman, 2003), where reading and writing is offered as a non-compulsory component in educational programs which many of the students choose to opt out from (Abadzi, 2003). Similarly, the only large scale Freirian project undertaken in Scotland was not aimed at teaching reading and writing (Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1987).

However, it is when Freire elaborates upon how an emancipatory literacies education

might be understood that emancipation and empowerment seem to become irrevocably confused in his work. There are two main problems. Firstly, though Freire states clearly that emancipation cannot be systemised or take the form of a recipe, he gives guidelines as to how reading and writing might be taught, drawing heavily on his understanding of emancipatory education. As I discussed in the last chapter, the concept of *praxis* that is central to Freire's understanding of education seems to encourage the translation of Freire's ideas into practical methods (e.g. PO, pp. 32-34 or Freire, 1970, pp. 85-86), as 'theory' or 'reflection' must be inseparable from 'practice' or 'action'.

Though reading and writing are not integral to emancipation, Freire describes how his understanding of emancipatory education might inform their teaching. This involves selecting and utilising single 'generative' words that encapsulate aspects of students' lives and the problems that challenge them, so that teachers and students might de-code them whilst engaging in dialogue, (Freire, 1970, pp. 85-88, 1986). He stresses the importance how 'generative' words are selected (see Freire, 1970, p. 38), where the selection processes might follow the methods he outlines for the production of 'codifications' (see PO, pp. 32-34 or Section 5.4). Using this method, Freire claims success in teaching people to read utilising only seventeen three syllable words (see Freire, 1970, p. 38). At the same time, Freire appeals to educators not to adopt his methods, but to create their own, because emancipation cannot be a recipe (e.g. Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 134). But to me, this is an inadequate response given Freire's understanding that emancipation cannot be systemised. What's more, the implication is that methods for emancipation created by a student's own teacher might be emancipatory whilst those borrowed from another student's teacher are not. But presumably the existence of any method implies that emancipation is something

students are having done for them or to them, aside from whether the methods and programs are a consequence of dialogue and love between students and their teachers.

Secondly, Freire assumes that the consequences of ideological processes must be overcome by teachers and students as part of any literacies education. This means that the idea of literacy or of being literate can be widened from learning to read and write to the wider notion of becoming conscious of the world (see Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 156) or becoming a 'knowing subject' (Freire, 1986, pp. 401-402), hence the description of literacy as 'Reading the Word and the World' (Freire & Macedo, 1987). This implies that dominating groups are no more capable of 'reading the world' than anyone else, with Giroux (1988) describing how for Freire, formally educated middle classes might also participate in literacies education. This contrasts with Gee's empowering literacy education which seems to place all the responsibility on 'excluded people' to become literate. However, it is here that Freire's understanding of literacies education becomes inextricably woven with empowerment understandings as I demonstrate below.

Perhaps Giroux hits the nail on the head when he argues that understandings of literacy education as reading and writing are about power and can only be about power and not emancipation (Giroux, 1988, p. 65). For Giroux, learning to read and write is about people gaining the capacity to operate more successfully within society as it stands, including gaining access to 'goods'.

'Literacy [as reading and writing] in these terms is not the equivalent of emancipation, it is in a more limited but essential way the precondition for

engaging in struggles around both relations of meaning and relations of power.

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)

However, as Freire's starting point is to assume that ideological processes are in operation, attempts to describe any wider notion of an emancipatory literacy as 'reading the world' by either himself or Giroux (1988) cannot seem to break out of describing literacies education as anything other than a form of empowerment. In Freire's later writings Freire even draws upon Bourdieu (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 145) describing 'emancipatory literacy' as 'the reappropriation of cultural capital' (ibid; 159). Freire's 'emancipatory literacies' are described in terms of dominated groups asserting their own literate practices and cultural identities (see Freire and Macedo, 1987, pp. 149-159), reminiscent of Williams' notion that 'culture is ordinary' but inherently valuable to democracy (Williams, 1993b), perhaps illustrative of how William's writings on the UK traditions in education can be interpreted as a precursor or anticipator of Freire's work (see Dix, 2010, p. 81). Here I would claim, in the light of the analysis that I have presented so far, that 'emancipation' and 'empowerment' are inextricably confused if Freire's work is interpreted in the context of adult literacies education.

### ***What emancipatory literacies education cannot be***

In exploring an emancipatory literacies education there are three conclusions I can draw from the brief consideration of Freire's legacy for adult literacies education that I presented above. Firstly, an emancipatory literacies education cannot take the form of

gaining a particular literate skill; secondly that it cannot be presented or understood in the form of a method, recipe or policy; and thirdly, that it cannot take the form of students' story telling or exerting a cultural identity. I discuss these aspects in more detail below.

An emancipatory literacies education is not predicated on the gaining of a particular 'literate' skill. The possibility of emancipation cannot be reliant upon learning a skill or particular knowledge as this would encourage teaching that takes the form of handing down knowledge to students, creating the paradox where students are reliant upon teachers for their emancipation. As I described above, Freire makes clear that reading and writing cannot be pre-requisite to emancipation. But if a wider understanding of discourse is employed, this also means that emancipation is not dependent upon following a particular line in clothing and footwear, learning to play computer games, or mastering social networking media such as smartphones or web applications like Facebook. It also means that emancipation isn't predicated upon being associated, labelled or identified with groups of people who are linked with these discourse preferences. There are implications here for how researchers in education approach the study of new digital media in the context of education (e.g. Knobel and Lankshear, 2010; Lankshear and Knobel, 2008; Gee, 2006, 2009) where it seems to me that possibility of either empowerment or emancipation is falling out of play. This suggests that the discussion contained within this thesis is timely, as it raises the importance of researchers, educators and students taking responsibility for the purpose and function of literacies education and its research.

Secondly, emancipatory literacies education cannot take the form of students telling

their stories in their own vernacular and promoting their existing cultural history or traditional ways of behaving, in the assumption that these are inherently valuable. Emancipation is not the creation of stories or appealing to existing characteristics and identifications through promoting one cultural tradition over another. This may seem counter intuitive within the UK tradition of adult literacies education with its longstanding practices associated with encouraging students to voice their own stories, informed by the work of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and Paulo Freire.

Finally, an emancipatory literacies education cannot take the form of a prescribed method, recipe or education policy. Adult literacies education *cannot* be a translation into a program for achieving emancipation in the context of Rancière's understanding of emancipatory education. Such a strategy would serve to encourage educators and students to congregate around particular understandings and ways of working so replicating intellectual inequality.

This means that the analytical skills that I put to work in Chapters 4 and 5 cannot be further utilised in a meaningful fashion. I could continue my analysis in order to reconstruct in tangible terms how the process of 'dis-identification' described by Rancière might be practised by teachers and students. For example, I could produce methods for how to stage an encounter between 'explicatory logic' and 'emancipatory' logic (see Section 6.4), alongside formulations for the articulation of an impossible, wrong or nonsensical identification. I could endeavour to set out emancipatory syllogisms for use in particular contexts, perhaps following Toulmin's example when he sets out an analysis of how arguments are made with supporting diagrams and example narratives (Toulmin, 1964). I could call it the literacy practice of 'emancipatory speech'



and recommend that it be passed down to teachers, perhaps even through policy, so that they might emancipate their students.

Alternatively, following Freire, I could consider Rancière's understandings of teacher, student relationships in detail (see Section 5.5) alongside the implications for relationships with symbolic artefacts such as books and make recommendations for an 'emancipatory' method for learning to read. But such instructions were followed by teachers and students, this could *not* be understood as an emancipatory education.

It seems to me that this tension is found in Rancière's own expressions. Rancière's emancipatory education is enacted by a teacher student relationship that 'assumes equality' as a starting point, but in Section 6.4 I have also described and given examples demonstrating equality as the enactment of a logic of dis-identification. I described this as a process of being and becoming a human subject that is understood as fleeting and temporary that might bring to presence the human subject that has yet to be identified; a process of subjectification that incorporates expressions of equality which might leave an imprint in a reconfiguration of the social order.

This process is perhaps referring to an 'assertion' of equality (Rancière, 2007, p. 51) that follows the 'staging' of an encounter between the logic of explication and the logic of equality or emancipation 'where the verification of equality is obliged to turn into the handling of a wrong' (see Rancière, 1995, p. 62, p. 64) or 'twisted logic' (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p. 159). However, teachers cannot take on the role of 'staging' encounters that might result in emancipation, for this would constitute a situation where students are reliant upon teachers for orchestrating their emancipation or on receiving knowledge

pertinent to understanding how emancipatory encounters might be managed. I cannot define an emancipatory teacher as a kind of events organiser<sup>24</sup>. However, this leaves the emancipation described by Rancière's understanding of politics as manifesting only rarely and fleetingly, where its staging might be accidental.

It seems that illustrating the notion of emancipation as an enactment of dis-identification invokes the idea that there could be a method or blueprint for emancipation with the attendant problems I have already raised. If Rancière describes emancipation in the contexts of political activity as a 'staging' of particular encounters and provide illustrative examples (eg Rancière, 1995, p. 65-67, see Section 6.4) this invites criticism that his understanding of emancipation includes a prescribed method (like Freire). However, not providing such examples might invite criticism that Rancière's ideas (or those of Biesta, Gur-Ze'ev, and Holloway) are impractical and therefore irrelevant. This issue sits with the potential implications for methodology and empirical research I discussed above in this chapter, though again, as this is a theoretical research project, I come to no definitive conclusions.

It is also significant that this tension in Rancière's work rears when he attempts to describe emancipation as a social endeavour. It seems that emancipation is destroyed when attempts are made at its social enactment, denying the possibility of anything other than an individual emancipation. However, Rancière himself does not share this pessimism (Rancière, 2010). Perhaps the strength of Rancière's theory is that it draws attention to how theories of social emancipation must surely also be concerned also with the individual, and assume that individuals' lives, concerns and judgements might be as

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, Holloway (2002, 214), who like Gur-Ze'ev, draws upon Adorno's negative dialectics, also describes political activity as a kind of events organisation

important and valid as those of any policy maker, researcher or educator. Else why the necessity for emancipation? This orientates discussion towards how we relate to and utilise theory rather than what the content of the theory is. After all, social theory is ‘just opinions’, and in this thesis I have demonstrated how the assumptions that theorists make about people can influence educational practice.

By drawing attention towards the tension between the individual and the social in the context of emancipation, no one escapes responsibility for humanity. What we do as individuals matters. We are all responsible for refusing methods and techniques that enact societal oppression and for the consequences of our engagement with theories and ideas. This also means that, by definition, the possibility of an emancipatory education is an ongoing question that must continue to be addressed and cannot be ignored.

The above descriptions of what an emancipatory literacies education *cannot* be, do not preclude its possibility. However, the problems that I have just set out *do* illustrate the challenge of describing an emancipatory adult literacies education, which I now attempt.

### ***Literacies and emancipation***

An emancipatory literacies education can still be assumed and for Rancière, it means starting from the assumption of equality. Rancière describes how ‘ordinary pedagogical logic’ is supported by two ‘fundamental axioms’. Firstly that ‘one must start from inequality in order to reduce it’ (Rancière, 2010, p. 4), which seems to correspond with my description of how an empowering literacies education is defined by the assumption that discourse is inherently oppressive and serves to perpetuate inequality. The second fundamental ‘axiom’ is that ‘the way to reduce inequality is to conform to it by making

it an object of knowledge' (ibid), in other words, that inequality can be addressed and narrowed by researching and producing knowledge about inequality and passing it down as knowledge to students. Again, I have described how understandings of an empowering literacies education sit with this by suggesting that knowledge about discourse be taught to students. For Rancière, it is this particular knowledge, as 'knowledge of inequality' that an emancipatory or 'ignorant schoolmaster' refuses.

According to Rancière, equality and inequality are not states that can be achieved, rather that they are just two 'opinions' and education can operate on the basis of assuming either. If a teacher assumes inequality, then they aim to achieve equality in the future supposedly by abolishing their own privileged position. To do this they explain inequality to the student in the assumption that they cannot understand it without teachers' help, so that one day they might be the teacher's equal (ibid, pp. 4-5). Alternatively, assuming the opinion of equality requires a teacher-student relation that cannot conform to 'the promise of an equality-to-come that will never come, but to the reality of a basic equality' which can only be enacted in the present (ibid, p. 5). It cannot be assumed that the student needs help to understand what the teacher says, instead, there must be an 'equality of speaking' described as an enactment of the 'equality of intelligence', where everyone can attend to their intellects and acknowledge others as their intellectual equals. It seems to me that exploring this 'equality of speaking' could describe how an emancipatory literacies education might be understood and I make a limited attempt at this endeavour below, ultimately leaving it as an open question.

In the context of the teacher student relationship, enacting the equality of intelligence means assuming that all people are capable of understanding each other's thoughts, emotions or opinions (see Section 5.5). It is here that demands are made on the students to express such thoughts and to understand those of others. Rancière expresses 'the idea that the activity of thinking is primarily an activity of translation, and that anyone is capable of making a translation' (Rancière, 1995, p 63), making the argument that in terms of emancipatory intellectual activity there might be equality as there are no especially gifted intellects:

'Meaning is the work of the will. This is the secret of universal teaching. It is also the secret of those we call geniuses: the relentless work to bend the body to necessary habits, to compel the intelligence to new ideas, to new ways of expressing them: to redo on purpose what chance first produced, and to reverse the unhappy circumstances into occasions for success.'

(IS, p. 56)

For a student to attend to their intellect and the intellect of all other people requires acts of translation, repetition and imitation, driven by the will, where students express opinions that propel their own orbit around 'the truth' (IS, p. 78) enacting an individual emancipation which might connect with shared concerns' (Rancière, 2007, p. 51). It is in this sense that students can be understood as speakers in the context of an emancipatory literacies education, where the role of the teacher is to refuse students the satisfaction of believing that they are less able intellectual inferiors who need help to understand the social world (Rancière, 2010, p.6):

‘Such a teacher forces the student to prove his or her capacity, to continue the intellectual journey the same way it began. This logic, operating under the presupposition of equality and requiring its verification, this logic deserves the name “intellectual emancipation.”’

(ibid)

Rancière describes a particular role for symbolic artefacts, but where the knowledge content of texts, photographs etc is not important in the context of an emancipatory education (IS, pp. 27-28, IS, p. 32). Though explicatory acts are understood to undermine emancipation, inequality cannot be unwound merely by teachers stopping explaining, though symbolic artefacts are understood to support this function. The teacher’s role is to reveal students’ intellectual power (IS, p. 17), verifying that students have attended to their wills and the power of their own intellects and it is here that there is a role for texts or other symbolic artefacts; what Rancière describes as ‘the book’ (IS, pp. 14-15).

The purpose of such artefacts in the educational relationship is to allow teachers to enforce and strengthen the will of the student, encouraging the repetitive acts of translation, imitation and so on required for opinions to be formed, where teachers no longer present texts incrementally so that their contents can be explained bit by bit to students (IS, 10,66). In their demands for students to speak, teachers are dismantling relationships of knowledge transmission in the context of the teacher student relationship, which means dismantling (Rancière, 2010, p. 2) the relationship that creates the deficit between their own intellect and that of the student.

For Rancière it is the ‘will against will’ relationship that drives the possibility of emancipation. The possibility of an emancipatory education is reliant upon the will of the teacher which is understood to drive the will of the student towards emancipatory intellectual acts whilst verifying that students have paid attention<sup>25</sup>. In this relationship of will to will, the teacher demands that students speak and ‘In the act of speaking, man [sic] doesn’t transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry; he translates and invites others to do the same’ (IS, p. 65). To reiterate, this does not mean students voicing their stories or expressing themselves in any fashion. Students’ speech expresses the belief in intellectual equality, acknowledging the intellect of all people, including their own.

‘Emancipation’ cannot be considered as a distinct method of instruction for there can be no emancipatory literacies programs or policies and if such a program were constructed no ‘social emancipation’ could follow. There can be no ‘emancipatory school’ (Rancière, 2010, p. 9). It follows that students do not require a literacies education in order to be able to ‘speak’ in the future after they have learnt the required skills or gained knowledge pertaining to literate practices. In the context of emancipation, speech is not a skill reliant on particular proficiencies in elocution, language acquisition or

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<sup>25</sup>This seems to raise questions about what is meant by ‘the will’. Rancière describes the notion of the will as directly equated to reason, just as ‘intelligence is synonymous with equality’ (IS, p. 73), implying that emancipatory education is an education of the will. If the will is synonymous with ‘reason’ this is reminiscent perhaps of the Hegelian notion of human ‘Geist’ understood by Freire as ‘consciousness’, discussed in the context of humans as historical beings moving history forward (see Section 5.2). Whilst I cannot explore this further here, Rancière’s description of human reason expressed in emancipatory acts, in the context of changing the configuration of the explicatory machine that is the social order suggests to me that there may be some association between Rancière’s work and that of Hegel. This would have implications for understanding concepts such ‘dialectics’ and ‘praxis’. Bingham and Biesta claim that the concept of the dialectic is absent in Rancière’s work, for example when Rancière describes emancipatory logic being employed in the meeting of a ‘wrong’ or ‘tort’ (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p. 159). However Gur-Ze’ev and Holloway’s work implies that there is more than one possibility for understanding dialectics and praxis (see footnote pp235-236). In this chapter I have demonstrated that the concept of *praxis* might serve to encourage the easy translation of ideas into methods or blueprints for teachers to replicate (e.g. PO, pp. 32-34 or Freire, 1970, pp. 85-86). Taking the assumption that an emancipatory education is possible implies breaking with this, suggesting new ways of understanding how theory is used and what theory is for, as well as new possibilities for critique. I do not develop this in my research, so cannot pass judgement about the extent to which Rancière, Gur-Ze’ev or Biesta have taken up this challenge in their work. However, I can conclude that this is an area that requires addressing on an ongoing basis.

enunciation that must be learnt. Instead, the assumption is that students can already speak as an expression of the equality of intelligence, where the teacher's role is to encourage or demand such speech, strengthening the will of the student (IS, p. 26, Biesta, 2010b, Rancière, 2007, p. 51). 'The emancipatory teacher's call forbids the supposed ignorant one the satisfaction of what is known, the satisfaction of admitting that one is incapable of knowing more' (Rancière, 2010, p. 6), for 'It is essentially as a speaking being that he [sic] discovers his equality with all other human beings' (Rancière, 2007, p. 51).

'The democratic man is a being who speaks, which is to say a poetic being, a being capable of embracing a distance between words and things which is not deception, not trickery, but humanity; a being capable of embracing the unreality of representation. A poetic virtue, then, and a virtue grounded in trust. This means starting from a point of view of equality, asserting equality, assuming equality as a given, working out from equality, trying to see how productive it can be and this maximising all possible liberty and equality. By contrast, anyone who starts out from distrust, who assumes inequality and proposes to reduce it, can only succeed in setting up a hierarchy of inequalities, a hierarchy of priorities, a hierarchy of intelligences – and will reproduce them ad infinitum.'

(Rancière, 2007, p. 51)

Students speaking whilst enacting the equality of intelligence are not speaking to reconfirm or align themselves with existing labels or identifications. Rather, emancipation is understood as an act of subjectification where the student's speech might be as yet unidentified in the existing social order, introducing a new aspect



(Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p. 140). It is this speech that can be understood to reconfigure the existing social or police order incorporating an inscription of equality (Rancière, 1999, pp. 39-40), when speech ceases to be 'noise' and exists as 'voice.' (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, pp. 140). That idea the quality of students' speech might have the power to inscribe equality is an important understanding.

But this notion seems to be associated with an unresolved tension in Rancière's work where emancipation is described in terms of the relationships between teachers and individual students as speakers as well as the idea of dis-identification as subjectification in the context of describing political activity that might reconfigure the social order (Pelletier, 2010).

### ***Conclusion***

The possibility of an emancipatory literacies education must remain an open question, for any claim to answer it definitively would have the consequence of setting out a blueprint could only destroy the possibility of emancipation. ut this is not a failing, rather an invitation to join a conversation that must continue if teachers, students and researchers are to take responsibility for the purpose and function of adult literacies education.

'this does not mean that all is lost, nor that all is relative in that naïve sense of saying that one person's opinion is just as good as another because there is no such thing as 'facts' or objective Truth. What it does is place an onus on individuals in relation to each other: it means that no one can flee the need to deal with each

other and the disputes that arise over how the world is to be managed by people. It also means that there can never be an exhaustive, once and for all solution’.

(Schostak, 2009, p. 4)

Rancière’s work is just ‘opinions’ and cannot be taken as the last word on the subject of emancipation and my research implies other possibilities for understanding an emancipatory literacies education. I have already touched upon the work of Gur-Ze’ev who also assumes that an emancipatory education is possible. He describes emancipation as a process of ‘counter education’ which could be explored further. In Chapter 3 I described how assuming that an emancipatory education is possible might mean making the assumption that people other than academics are part of a discussion about how education for emancipation might be understood (see Section 3.2). In the UK tradition of adult education I have mentioned the existence of archives of students’ writings, such as those of the journal of the Plebs’ League which dates to 1909 (Waugh, 2009, Young, 1983) and those that came out of what has become known as the Student Publishing Movement in the 1980s (Woodin, 2008). Perhaps in their writings some students have also assumed the possibility of an emancipatory education and the archives could be explored on this basis.

This raises the question as to who gets to speak and here again I return to the central problem that my research has brought to attention; that understandings of empowering literacies education are reliant upon assumptions made about the ideological character of discourse which negate the possibility of emancipation. The UK tradition of adult literacies education that I have described in Chapter 2 may have assumptions about

ideology inextricably woven into its understandings and perhaps its practices as well<sup>26</sup>, perhaps encapsulated in idea of an empowering literacies education that is associated with social practice understandings of literacies education. It seems that much of the research in literacies education is orientated towards the assumption that students need help from teachers in order to understand the social world. In the context of empowerment, students must gain or master literate practices before they can participate in activity that might address inequality.

On the other hand, there is also a tradition in UK adult education, perhaps found in the production of students writings, and associated with the legacy of Williams or Hoggart, where culture might be educational and students' voices or cultural heritage are deemed to hold intrinsic value. Here again my research suggests that appeals to cultural identifications or grouping around existing cultural forms or characteristics cannot be assumed to contribute towards achieving equality or understood as an enactment of social emancipation. What I do suggest is that if teachers, researchers and students are to take responsibility for the purpose and function of literacies education and its outcomes the possibility of emancipation must be assumed and a conversation about this possibility must be continued. This means assuming equality as a starting point and understanding that in the context of emancipation, students might already be speakers in such a conversation and the role of literacy teachers might be to demand this speech.

It also means moving beyond the 'functional' versus 'social practice' paradigm that I described in Chapter 2, where much of the discussion amongst educators and researchers in adult literacies educators revolves around defending understandings of

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<sup>26</sup> Though this research does not place me to judge this

literacies as social practices, often in the context of policy. My exploration of emancipatory education in the context of adult literacies cannot recommend either methods or policy for education cannot be understood as the following of instructions. But this cannot be understood as a failing. Rather, it highlights the importance of understanding and discussing the relationships between teachers, students and policy, rather than orientating towards judging what the content of policy should be. It also emphasises the importance of individual speakers connecting with shared concerns, instead of relying on the speech and ideas of others.

Adult literacies education is more than the trinity between researchers, policy-makers and tutors. Ultimately, adult literacies education in Britain has been largely driven by grass roots activism (Hillier, 2009) from which approaches to teaching have emerged, as well as the writing of its history. By emphasising the importance of distinguishing between emancipation and empowerment in the context of an adult literacies education, I hope I have also stressed the significance of the contribution of individuals and individual intellects in the context of education, where the opinions of students, researchers and teachers cannot be underplayed if responsibility is to be taken for the purpose and function of adult literacies education. For both Freire and Rancière the possibility of an emancipatory education is a question that by definition should not be ignored and which can only be addressed in the present.

But I finish by returning for the last time to the central problem that my research has raised, that an empowering education relies upon notions of ideology that seem to negate the possibility of emancipation. Though they make different assumptions, utilise different terminology and draw from different philosophical traditions, both Freire and

Rancière describe how oppressive education operates under the assumption that people are unable to understand their own oppression without the help of experts. This is the 'education' that is replicated by schools, political parties and institutions throughout societies, and it is associated with processes of knowledge transmission.

Empowering literacies education is understood and practiced under the assumption that ideological processes are always in operation. But this assumption *cannot* be taken as the truth. In the context of understanding and enacting a social response to societal oppression, what kinds of educational relationships and educational materials are *not* underpinned by this assumption? This is the question that Rancière and Freire both attempt to answer. However, the question remains an open one, not just because it hasn't been answered fully or successfully in this thesis. My research has also demonstrated that the question of an emancipatory education must continue to be addressed, if education is to manifest as something other than a series of socialising techniques. My research aimed to develop a conversation with the potential to continue. Such a conversation must orientate around this question, if teachers, students and researchers are to take responsibility for adult literacies education and its practice. It is a question that we all have a responsibility to address.

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