

Extending literacy: Addressing the needs of marginalised groups in Papua New Guinea and Australia

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Abstract

This paper looks at conceptions of literacy and a range of expectations about what literacy should deliver. While being literate is empowering, lacking literacy holds people back and prevents them from achieving their full potential. Literacy involves far more than simply being able to read and write at a certain level of competency. Literacy is a dynamic concept that enables participants to interact with texts as they construct knowledge and fulfil both personal and larger objectives. It is a transformative and iterative process that involves reconstructing personal identities and re-visioning the future. The challenge for PNG is to extend literacy to all in a country where close to half the adult population is lacking. In Australia, the challenge is to make higher education more accessible for less privileged groups. At Avondale College of Higher Education, an attempt is made to redress some of the existing inequity through its alternative entry pathway program, the Diploma of General Studies (DGS), a program that has operated in one form or another since 1991. My research is showing that DGS students reconstruct their personal identity as they create for themselves an academic identity. In the process, they demonstrate high levels of academic literacy.

Introduction

While there is no agreed definition of literacy, it is generally associated with language and communication skills. In traditional societies it means having oral and aural skills; being unable to read or write is no particular disadvantage. European societies were like this until the invention of the printing press, and even less so with the coming of the industrial revolution and the increased availability of books, giving the average person ready access to printed material. Reading was no longer restricted to the wealthy. Today, people have many expectations of literacy, including an improved standard of living, better education, personal happiness, and freedom to explore their potential and re-vision their lives.

Assuming – as we generally do – that literacy includes the skills of reading and writing, the provision of universal schooling is vital if all members of society are to be personally empowered. It seems to me that literacy is a term more likely to be used in discussions around the margin between literacy and illiteracy. At a higher level, discussions about literacy focus more on access to higher education, qualifications and credentials. The issues around literacy in PNG are not exactly the same as the issues in Australia. Illiteracy is still a significant problem for PNG (ASPBE, 2011). Unequal access to higher education is the larger problem for

Australia (Wheelahan, 2009). Responding to this problem, most universities now have alternative entry processes in place to assist the disadvantaged (Ferrier, 2006; Phillimore & Koshy, 2010). At Avondale College of Higher Education, the Diploma of General Studies is part of a strategy for providing greater access to higher education and academic literacy for those who miss out via the traditional paths.

Definitions of literacy

The literature on literacy includes many types of literacy, including health literacy, quantitative literacy, spatial literacy, financial literacy, moral literacy and so on. All these literacies have at least one thing in common: knowledge (Street, 2003, p. 2). It is interesting to note that not all languages have a word for literacy. Neither French nor German has a word for literacy. In French *literacy* translates to "communicative competence", and in German it becomes "alphabetic ability" (Janks, 2010, p. 1). These transliterations do not do justice to the meaning conveyed by the English word literacy. What does it mean to be literate? Parr and Campbell (2012, p. 560) list some of the ways in which people answer this question: finishing high school, completing post-secondary education, having a literate state of mind, having effective communication skills, being able to interact with the world.

Knoblauch (1990, pp. 77-79) identifies four types of definitions of literacy: those that emphasise a functionalist approach, those that emphasise cultural literacy, those that emphasise personal growth, and those that emphasise critical literacy. Functional or utilitarian literacy relates to purpose and is often linked to achievement levels. It looks at the practical purposes of literacy. Functional literacy includes the level of literacy required for an individual to cope with the demands of adult life (Lawton & Gordon, 1996, p. 108). Cultural literacy moves people on from basic literacy, giving them an appreciation of literature and their cultural heritage. This goes beyond comprehension to the development of aesthetic sensitivity and the capacity to analyse and evaluate texts. Literacy for personal growth provides opportunity for all individuals to achieve personal growth, including those from minority groups and disadvantaged groups. This includes women. It includes also literacy for people with extensive needs or disabilities (Keefe & Copeland, 2011).

Edwards and Potts (2008) identify two trends in Australian literacy, a broad view held by academics and a narrower view that focuses on performance in the early years of school. Four metaphors are used to illustrate the narrow view: literacy as skill, literacy as employment, literacy as levels or competences, and literacy as morbidity (sickness needing remediation). This illness is characterised by underachievement, poor behaviour and poor outcomes. Proper diagnosis can lead to correct treatment for the "disease" (p. 132). A broader view sees literacy in more dynamic terms, integrating the four communication skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing with critical thinking and intrinsic purpose (p. 133).

Critical literacy identifies the value-laden nature of texts (McDonald & Thornley, 2009, p. 58) and of language use. Critical readers interact with text to construct meaning, recognising the reality of silences in texts and the influence of ideologies. Critical readers appreciate the relationship between words and power. In schools,

critical literacy can bring together the “experiences of the world, school and literacy” (p. 62) and empower students to engage with texts in sophisticated ways.

The OECD (2000) defines literacy as “the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” This definition uses five levels. Level 1 is the level of “very poor skills”. Level 3 represents “minimum coping with everyday life”. Levels 4/5 include having a “command of higher-order information processing skills”.

UNESCO (2003) insists that literacy is about more than just reading and writing; it is about the full range of human communication and encompasses social relationships, knowledge and culture. Its many forms include paper, computer screen, television, posters and signs. We take too narrow a view of literacy when we restrict it to reading and writing. Parr and Campbell (2012, p. 563) use the acronym WORLD (word, orality, revision, literacies, discourses) to build a theory of literacy based on words in context, the social empowerment potential of literacy, the idea of multiple literacies and multiple ways of knowing, and the reality that language occurs in discourse communities that share particular worldviews, values and norms.

Literacy has been seen as a search for meaning that has the potential to provide personal transformation (Parr & Campbell, 2012, pp. 562-567). In his preface to *Literacy, A UNESCO Perspective* (2003), Koichiro Matsuura insists that literacy is about freedom. A report by Cambridge Assessment (2013) asserts that literacy “is central to being human” (p. 10). These views represent a broad understanding of what it means to be literate. Literacy should not be defined purely in terms of reading and writing and building the economy.

What follows if you are literate

Higher levels of education are linked to higher levels of numeracy and literacy, and in turn to greater labour market success (Chiswick, Lee & Miller, 2003). Being highly literate provides access to better-paid jobs and upward social mobility. In my youth, Australia still had a lot of secondary industries, with factories, steel works and manufacturing that provided work opportunities for people with minimal school education. People could leave school without completing the senior levels or going to university and have no trouble finding paid work. Australia is now a post-industrial knowledge economy. Work has become polarised between what has been called “symbolic analytic work and service work” (Janks, 2010, p. 4). The former requires a high level of literacy. Those with the right qualifications take the top jobs and earn the top salaries. They are thought to enjoy a better quality of life.

What follows if you are not literate

The downside for those who lack elite qualifications is that they find themselves doing less valued work and having lower earning power. In an information era, those with lower information technology literacy are seriously disadvantaged. They

sit lower in the social hierarchy and have reduced access to housing, land, medical care, transport, et cetera (Janks, 2010, p. 5).

Cree, Kay and Steward (2012) identify the costs of illiteracy. These include lost earnings and limited employability, lost business productivity, lost wealth creation opportunities, reduced technology skills and future capacity, poorer health, increased crime, welfare dependency, and the perpetuation of illiteracy where parents are illiterate. It is estimated that the annual cost of illiteracy to the global economy is US\$1.19 trillion. This is the cost of one in five adults – 774 million people (UNESCO, 2014) – being unable to read or write. In both developed and developing countries, the effect is similar: people are trapped in a cycle of poverty and disadvantage. The best way to overcome this is by increasing literacy levels. This can be done in two ways: by keeping children in school and by increasing adult literacy.

Literacy issues for PNG

Literacy rates continue to be a challenge for PNG. According to the PNG National Literacy and Awareness Secretariat (2011), “PNG’s adult literacy situation is in dire strait [sic]”. The 2000 census showed that just over half of PNG’s adults were literate. As is the case elsewhere, illiteracy in PNG has a “woman’s face” (UNESCO, 2012). It is claimed that two thirds of the world’s one billion illiterates are women (SIL, 2014). In PNG significantly more women than men are illiterate. Thiele (2013) reminds us that women can be empowered through literacy programs. So, too, can men. Literacy programs are needed for both men and women in PNG.

A paper by Eamonn McKeown (2001) describes changing attitudes to literacy in the Chimbu Province of the Highlands. The young men and boys stopped listening to the old men, whom they saw as being illiterate, ignorant, stupid, unable to speak English, and unable to help their place develop. In another paper, McKeown (2006) looks at the linkage between literacy and modernity in PNG and how different groups have used literacy for ideological purposes. The missions saw literacy as facilitating the process of converting Melanesians to Christianity. Governments have seen literacy as being in the national interest.

Hopkins et al. (2005) found that children in village schools were disadvantaged compared with their peers in urban schools, which are better resourced. Also, the urban children were more likely to be from homes where English is spoken at least part of the time. The authors identify an urgent need for more literacy resources in the schools.

Mel (2007) has surveyed the reforms that followed the Matane Report (1986) and noted that while “academic abilities are accounted for”, there has been “little focus on the other attributes” (p. 227), including student interests and the way students relate to their communities and to the nation of PNG. There is a strong emphasis on education for jobs and not enough emphasis on education for life (p. 228).

At the tertiary level, Pasilabban (2006) notes that “the capacity of Papua New Guineans to learn is no different” (pp. 61-62) to that of students elsewhere,

including, for example, students in Australia. He sees a need for teachers and lecturers to do more to promote critical thinking at tertiary level through upgrading their professional practices and finding ever more effective ways to engage students in learning and thinking.

At every level in PNG, there is opportunity to continue to raise literacy standards. Reform is an ongoing process. Wiping out illiteracy is a big challenge, one that will occupy the efforts of educational leaders and governments. If a big vision for PNG's future is to become reality in our lifetime, much remains to be done.

Literacy and Australian Higher Education

Parr and Campbell (2012, p. 560) ask what it means to be truly literate in the 21st century. One of the partial answers they suggest involves post-secondary education, including higher education, the sector in which I work. University education involves far more than just putting the final polish on one's reading and writing skills. Universities facilitate the search for meaning, identity and being (Street, 2003, p. 2). Students attend university not just to learn about the world, but also to discover themselves. Building literacy at this level contributes to the transforming of the self, the re-visioning of the future, personal empowerment (Parr & Campbell, 2012, pp. 563-567). Traditionally, a university education was available only to the intellectual elite. Today, there is a need to be more inclusive, to tap into the wider cultural capital and intellectual resources of a community. But in Australia, only the top one third of school leavers qualifies for entry to university. Those with a Year 12 rank (ATAR) below 60 need not apply. They are not seen as having the academic literacy needed for success. However, most Australian universities now have alternative entry processes and courses that offer students a second chance to qualify.

Avondale's DGS

Avondale College recognises the value of extending access to academic culture and academic literacy to non-traditional students. In 1991 the college set up a one-semester pathway course, Foundation Studies, to meet their needs. It was not an award course, nor was it accredited, but it provided access to degree courses for those who passed the course. The pool of units (then called subjects) offered by the new course included several certificate-level units, two new generic skills units that were developed for the course, plus – in theory – most of the 100-level units available in the various degree courses offered at Avondale. Most of the students in the inaugural class took two units from the generic and certificate offerings plus three degree-specific units (at the time, a full study load at Avondale comprised five units). The two generic units were designed to develop academic literacy, helping students with writing and study skills. The Foundation Studies course ran for four years, 1991-1994. A total of 47 students completed at least one semester of the course. Of these 37 (79%) passed the course and qualified to start a degree. Five of these left without taking up the degree place they were offered. Of the remaining 32, 24 went on to graduate, two with 3-year teaching diplomas and 22 with bachelor degrees (75% completion rate). Several completed more than one Avondale award.

An I-Kiribati student completed a Bachelor of Nursing before returning 10 years later to do a Grad Cert Nursing, followed by a Master of Nursing. Those who leave without completing an Avondale degree are not tracked, but we know that one from this period completed an environmental science degree at university after successfully completing Foundation Studies and not accepting the degree place he was offered at Avondale.

Avondale's Foundation Studies course was replaced in 1995 by a 2-year Associate Diploma in General Studies, accredited through the NSW Department of Education. When associate diplomas were phased out in 1999, it became a Diploma of General Studies (DGS for short). It has continued in this guise until now. From 2015 the DGS will be a 1-year course. In almost 20 years, no one has chosen to graduate with a 2-year diploma. But 2014 could see the first graduate, an overseas student who did not earn enough credit for a Bachelor of Arts.

While the name has changed and the course has evolved, its purpose is still the same: to make higher education more accessible for students found wanting by the system. The performance of most DGS students shows that they are capable of achieving the level of academic literacy required by tertiary institutions in Australia.

The DGS course has a flexible structure. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) commended Avondale for the DGS course, citing it as an example of good practice: "AUQA commends Avondale College's development of the Diploma of General Studies as an alternative entry pathway and for support given to students" (AUQA Report, 2009, p. 17). Direct entry to the course is possible for those with an ATAR of 45 or an equivalent STAT ranking. Those who do not achieve either of these benchmarks can apply for special entry. Applicants face a battery of in-house tests, including assessments of basic literacy, numeracy and academic skills. They also provide a sample of writing. Applicants seeking entrance under the special entry provision are interviewed. For special entrants, the purpose of the testing is two-fold. First, it provides the basis for deciding whether they are likely to cope with the demands of higher education. Second, it facilitates placing them on a suitable path, as the DGS is a multi-path course.

The entry level path for those with minimal entry qualifications is Path G. On Path G, students take four generic skills units. At the other end is Path 4, which is for those with an ATAR of 54 and no identified weaknesses in their generic skills. These entrants are permitted to take four 100-level units from the degree they aspire to move into after the DGS. Between Path G and Path 4 are Paths 1, 2 and 3, which involve mixes of generic skills units and degree-specific units. The path number represents the number of degree-specific units taken. Applicants who are identified as needing help with writing are required to take GSEN15000 Effective Tertiary Writing. Those identified as needing help with other aspects of literacy are required to take GSEN16600 Academic English. Those needing help with study skills and numeracy are required to take GSEN16700 Principles of Tertiary Learning. DGS students who pass all four of their units, regardless of the path they take, are permitted to articulate to a degree course in their second semester.

The success of the DGS is due in large part to the pastoral care that is provided plus the nurturing atmosphere of Avondale College of Higher Education. In the generic units, DGS students are introduced to the various aspects of academic culture (or subculture). The expectations of lecturers are explained. Tacit understandings are made explicit. The students are given safe opportunities to practise their skills plus clear structures to follow. Their existing knowledge is valued. They are not treated as remedial cases (Devlin, 2010, p. 11). In the three generic units that I teach, I make extensive use of exemplars and break large tasks down into smaller challenges. I teach and model critical thinking by bringing a questioning approach to tasks, questioning assumptions, examining evidence, using Bloom's taxonomy and being explicit about epistemologies. Study skills are taught and extra help is provided with basic literacy and numeracy. Free one-to-one tutoring is available for 20 hours a week in the college library on a first-come-first-served basis. I share with students my story of socio-cultural disadvantage and being the first in my family to complete high school, much less university.

While none of the more than 1200 students who have passed through the DGS (or its predecessor courses) has chosen to graduate with a Diploma of General Studies, some 400 have graduated with 3- and 4-year Avondale bachelor's degrees, including 125 nursing, 93 primary teaching, 63 secondary teaching, 55 arts, 45 theology, 30 business, 10 science and 6 early childhood degrees. Avondale's 2013 graduating class included 296 students completing bachelor's degrees; one in 5 of these were former DGS students who had gained alternative entry to their degree via the DGS pathway.

My research

Working with DGS students over many years, teaching academic literacy for higher education, has given me a keen interest in the stories of students and made me an advocate for alternative entry students and alternative entry programs. Three quarters of DGS students are recent school leavers who did not earn university entrance in Year 12. Nearly half of them go on to complete a degree at Avondale after spending one or two semesters in the DGS course. Seeing their success gave me the desire to understand better just what the DGS was doing for them to change them from being high school underachievers into successful higher education students. I wanted to know what explained this transformation.

My initial plan was to evaluate the DGS course, of which I have been course convenor since it began. The DGS had not been written about in the literature and I wanted to correct this lack. Given AUQA's 2009 commendation of the course, the story was worth sharing. I planned to make the project an evaluative case study, with the DGS course as the case. I would plan the case study, select the methodology, collect the data, conduct the analysis and write up the results as an omniscient researcher.

However, my ongoing interaction with DGS students, plus my academic reading and personal reflection (Charmaz, 2005, p. 528) shifted my central focus from the course to the experience of the students taking the course. Their stories provided a new trajectory that drew me towards narrative enquiry. My worldview as a researcher

had changed, a change matched by a shift in my research paradigm. These shifts illustrate the emergent nature (Creswell, 2013, p. 47) of the research design. The question emerged, the methodology emerged, my relationship to my participants emerged – every aspect of the project evolved and took me in a different direction from the direction I had envisaged at the start. My new focus on the student experience drew me to a qualitative (Creswell, 2013) research approach, using a narrative methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and narrative methods. I chose narrative because narrative is a natural way to understand human experience: we live storied lives, we learn through stories, people understand the world narratively. My data collection methods included interviews, observations plus documents written by the participants (Creswell, 2008, p. 213). I chose to use constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 1996) for the construction and analysis of the participant narratives because it is constructivist and interactive, making it compatible with the emergent nature of this project. Grounded theory helped me manage the data and facilitated the identification of themes. In this way, the mini-case studies (Stake, 2005, p. 451) were developed.

In the first week of the semester, I explained my research to the new class and invited interested students to indicate their willingness to participate by signing a consent form. Seventeen of the 21 recent school leavers in the class signed the forms. From these I chose six participants, three male and three female, using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2008, pp. 214-217). I wanted participants aged under 21, a balanced gender representation, and maximum variation in the qualities the participants brought with them. The six I selected were Andrew, Ben, Jeremy, Eva, Gaara and Jodi (not their real names). Two of the six were Anglo-Australian, one with overseas-born parents. The other four included a Pacifica female, a female with parents from the African region, a male from the African region and a male with an Asian father and an Australian mother. During their first semester at college I was closely involved with my participants continuously for 14 weeks. This provided the time needed to share our stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20), enabling me to gather rich data (Charmaz, 1996, p. 33).

The first narrative I developed was Ben's. His experience of primary school had been blighted by bullying. He was also bullied by his father at home; Carlisle and Rofes (2007, p. 24) call this child abuse. The bullying adversely affected Ben's socialisation. Instead of finding school a pleasurable place to learn, he struggled to survive. His quest to find his own identity (Gee, 2000) adversely affected his schoolwork. He told me that he found schoolwork easy most of the time, but in Year 12 he did not do well enough to qualify for university. He passed his DGS semester with ease, earning a distinction, two credits and a high pass. The distinction was for the generic unit Effective Tertiary Writing. If literacy is taken to mean having skill in reading and writing, Ben is certainly literate. He also has knowledge and a capacity for self-reflection. But he struggled with time management and found study a grind. Subsequent semesters did not see him continue on the same successful trajectory. I sense he is still struggling with the personal issues that blighted his school years. He thinks he wants to become a scientist, but his results in science units are modest. It seems he has yet to work out who and what he wants to become; he is still constructing his identity.

The second narrative I developed was Eva's. She too had been bullied in primary school, on account of her weight. Born in Australia, Eva is coloured, with parents from the African region. English is not the main language used at home. Eva's mother had aspired to become a nurse but lacked the opportunity. As Eva was growing up, her mother convinced her that she should become a nurse. An obedient girl, Eva accepted her mother's desire as a directive and in senior high school chose subjects that would help prepare her for nursing. Finding she did not enjoy these subjects, she began to lose interest in school. Completing Year 12 without earning university entrance, she came to Avondale with the idea of using the DGS course to get into Avondale's nursing course. In her first semester, she took two generic units and two nursing units. By the second week of college, she realised she was not interested in nursing. She earned 2 Ds for her academic literacy units and a C for one of the nursing units, but failed to complete the more scientific nursing unit. After switching courses a couple of times, she finally realised that Avondale did not offer the degree she wanted to take. Eva lacked not literacy skills, but a clear vision for her future. She left Avondale and returned home to seek a university place in the course she now aspires to take.

At school, Andrew had little interest in study. He wanted to become a professional footballer. Completing Year 12 without earning an ATAR, he started an apprenticeship. When that fell through, his family convinced him to try Avondale. "You'd make a good teacher," they said. A talented sportsman, Andrew was used to winning. He decided to be a winner at college too. In his first semester he averaged a distinction. He continued playing football, but began to see his future in teaching. He told me he wanted to help students who, like him, struggled with negative attitudes to schoolwork and teachers. Andrew has overloaded for several semesters with a view to finishing his degree early. He will graduate next year. At Avondale, Andrew has transformed himself and found a new vision for his life.

Jodi was like Andrew. She was an action girl; she was into sport, not just at school, but also on the weekends. Her dream of an action career inspired her to try to join the police force. She left school after Year 10, believing a TAFE course would enable her to commence police training. This did not work out. But she had taken a job working as a gymnastics instructor. This took her back into schools, where she found she enjoyed working with children and interacting with teachers and parents. Jodi's mother and sister both did the DGS course while Jodi was completing Year 10, just before she dropped out of school. Their success and her revived interest in school combined to inspire her to try the DGS. Despite not having done Year 12, she was accepted. Like Andrew, she did well from the start. Except for a serious accident in her third semester, she, too, would be graduating next year. She had started the DGS wondering whether she would make it, but with a strong desire to become a teacher. The course gave her the opportunity to demonstrate to herself and everyone else that she was up to the challenge. She, too, has been empowered by her college experience.

Like several of the other participants, Jeremy was bullied in primary school, not because he was small, but because he was different. Like his father, he had ADD. He and his parents and teachers were frustrated that he did so poorly in school. He had finished one year of high school when he moved with his family to Australia.

Despite enjoying his new school, he continued to underperform. Around the time he finished Year 12 (earning an ATAR of 43), he discovered he had a cousin with Irlen syndrome. He had similar symptoms, and a psychological assessment showed that he had Irlen's too. When he came to college after taking a gap year, he was wearing his special glasses for the first time. He did well in the DGS and has now almost completed a 3-year BA. In school Jeremy had struggled with literacy issues because of an undiagnosed learning difficulty. The DGS pathway course enabled him to flourish.

Gaara is an easy-going Australian from a happy, close-knit Pacific Islands family. School was a place to meet friends, play sport and have fun. She had little interest in study, but showed artistic talent, winning several prizes for her work. When she should have been studying for the HSC, she was playing games and indulging her passion for art. Despite doing poorly in Year 12, she applied to further her education at Avondale. She started the semester determined not to repeat the mistakes of the past. But she found so many distractions at college that there was little time for academic literacy. Failing all four of her units, she was invited to show cause why she should be permitted to remain in the course. Allowed to return, she put a little more effort into her second semester, passing three units and withdrawing late from a fourth. This meant she had to remain in DGS for a third semester. This time she averaged a credit for her three units. After five semesters at college she has yet to pass four units in a single semester. But she is doing well in her art units, earning mostly distinctions and credits. Gaara still struggles with time management and engaging with academic tasks that seem more like work than fun. After two years at Avondale, Gaara was still uncertain about her future. She was not sure what an arts degree would mean for her. She had thought about doing a teaching degree. She had demonstrated her capacity for success in higher education, yet lacked a strong sense of calling. Recently she told me she definitely plans to complete her degree and then reassess her options. Gaara has discovered academic literacy, boosted her self-belief and is in the process of revisioning her future.

Of my six participants, three are clearly on track to complete 3- or 4-year Avondale degrees: Andrew, Jeremy and Jodi. All three were special entrants to the DGS course, not having direct entry through Year 12 rank. Only one of the three had a Year 12 rank. Gaara, who took longer to engage academically in the DGS and found academic processes "alienating and uninviting" (Krause, 2005, p. 9), appears also to be on track to complete her degree. That leaves Ben and Eva, ironically the only two of the six with direct entry to the DGS course. Ben is currently on a second intermission from his science education course. He is still struggling to find himself and appears to be "torn between study and leisure" (Grund, Brassler & Fries, 2014). Eva has returned to her home state to seek entry to a university course that Avondale does not offer. The six have demonstrated varying degrees of academic literacy. All have shown they are capable of completing a degree and perhaps all six will. Each has a unique story, which the DGS has played some part in shaping.

Literacy should not be viewed narrowly but in broad terms that encompass the moral and intellectual dimensions. Literacy should be seen as a process of human empowerment that promotes the search for meaning, the building of human identity, and the transforming and re-visioning of self. Literacy offers people the freedom to

explore their world and participate in it more fully. Literacy is a human right, not a privilege. Literate communities are prosperous communities. Literacy must be available to all. No nation can relax as long as significant pockets of illiteracy remain or access to literacy is unequally distributed. My research illustrates the transformative potential of pathway programs that provide opportunity for underqualified high school leavers to explore their aptitude for tertiary literacy. My participants have all achieved a degree of tertiary-level academic and literary success; this will not be of maximum benefit to them until they complete their degrees. However, they have already benefited to the extent that they have learnt things about themselves and become more critical thinkers.

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