Theorising about reading the world: ensuring our students continue to be heard
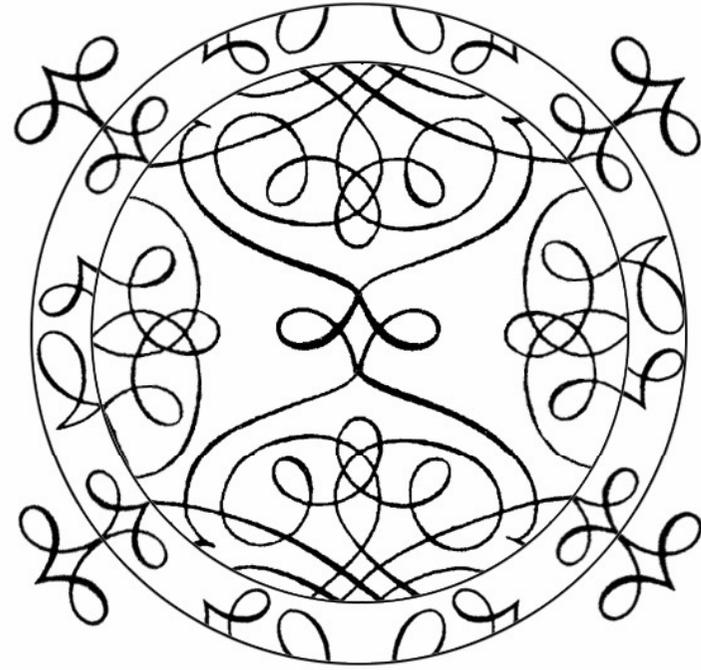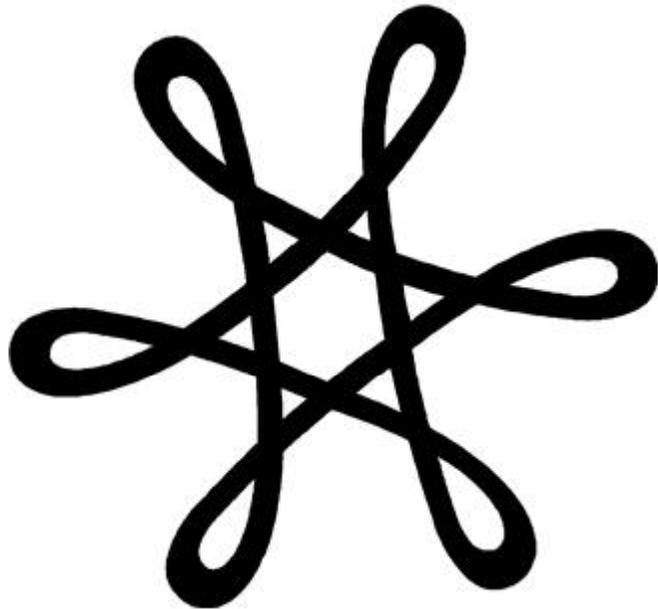
2012 VALBEC conference

Never only theory,
never only practice.

Critical

All literacy is a critical project
Literacy for emancipation or domestication ?
Students need to be also able to do '*a "reading of the cultures" around, behind, underneath, alongside, after and within the text*' (Luke et al, 2001, p113, italics in original).

Social Practice

Barton and Hamilton (2006) express six propositions
1. Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices.
2. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
3. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
4. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
5. Literacy is historically situated.
6. Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through the processes of informal learning and sense making.

Ideological:

Street (1984) differentiates between what he sees as the two dominant approaches to literacy, the autonomous model and the ideological model.

The **autonomous** model sees literacy as skills that can be isolated, and are technical and neutral.

The **ideological** model recognises the social practices of reading and writing to be ideological and therefore culturally embedded , put simply Street describes literacy as a 'shorthand for social practices and conceptions of reading and writing' .
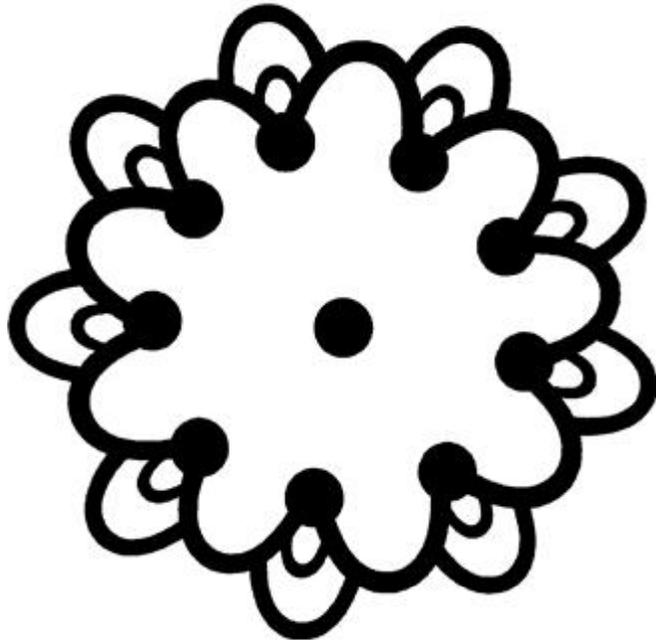
Dialogical:

Adult literacy teaching is a dialogical process that works against paternalistic teacher/student relationships and asymmetrical relations of power. Rather, it is co-intentional education, Brodkey (1986) stressed the we need to understand the students' tropes :
'Functional literacy requires them to learn to read what we write – our tropes, our worlds, our politics. ....in our eagerness to instruct, we forget that "illiterate" others also have tropes for literacy. Dialogic literacy would require us to learn to read the unfamiliar tropes in which they write their lives (p.54)

Fluid:

'Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making as well as formal education and training'
(Barton, 2002, p6)
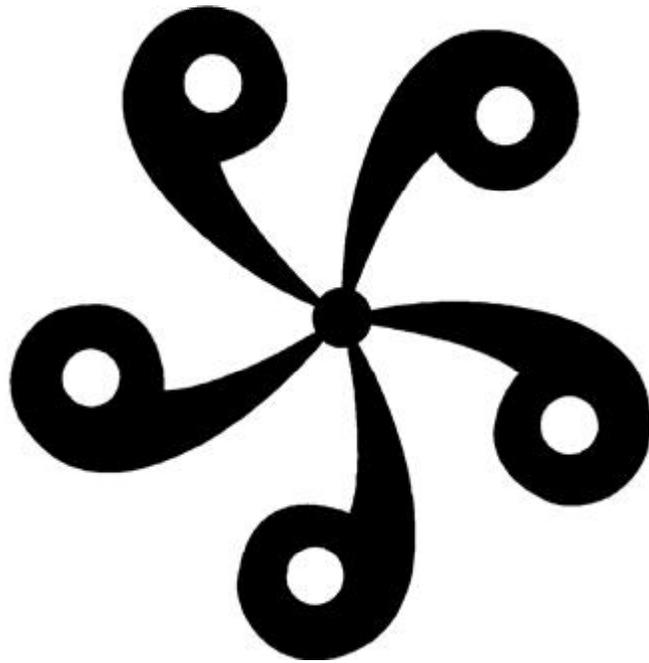
Life long and life wide:

'it is necessary to develop some coherent understanding of literacy that reflects the many capabilities required to become a participating member of a literate society'
(Lo Bianco & Freebody 2001, p.20)

Explicit:

Northedge (2003, p.31) believes 'we cannot persist with models of teaching as 'knowledge transmission', nor rely on unfocused student-centred approaches that leave the students floundering within everyday discourse.

Mc Cormack (2011) suggests students from 'strong social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds resist giving up their existing identities and discourses in order to be assimilated into official mainstream Discourses.

Contextualised:

It always takes place somewhere, with some group of students.

'The only way to find a vision is to be somewhere in particular' (Haraway, cited in Janks and Comber, 2006)

Acquired as well as learned:

Gee (1996) builds on the work of Krashen and makes a distinction between learning and acquisition

Acquisition is the process of acquiring something (usually, subconsciously) by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching. It happens in natural settings which are meaningful and functional in the sense that acquirers know that they need to acquire the thing they are exposed to in order to function and they in fact want to so function. This is how people come to control their first language. (p.138)

 Learning is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching (though not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher) or through certain life–experiences that trigger conscious reflection. This teaching or reflection involves explanation and analysis, that is, breaking down the thing to be learned into its analytic parts. It inherently involves attaining, along with the matter being taught, some degree of meta-knowledge about the matter. (p138)

Complex:

Luke and Freebody's four roles mode pont to the complexity of literacy -
'The basic proposition of the 'four roles' model is that effective literacy in complex print and multi-mediated societies requires a broad and flexible repertoire of practices' (2003 p53).

Effective literacy tuition draws on a repertoire of resources that allow learners to:
1. Break the code
2. Participate in the meaning of texts
3. Use texts functionally
4. Analyse texts critically
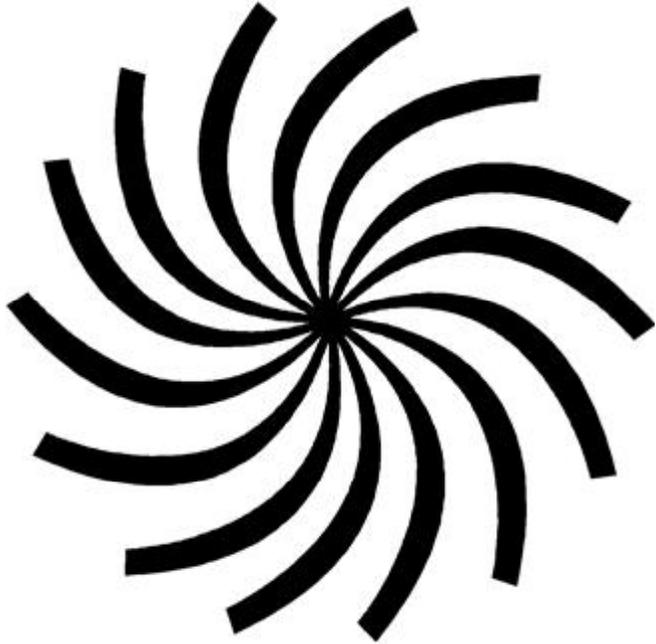
Multiple:

The New London Group's (1996) multiliteracies attempts to broaden an understanding of 'literacy and literacy teaching and learning to include negotiating a multiplicity of discourses' (p.61).

Their purpose is to respond to changing working and private lives, in a more complex and changing world.

They suggest multiliteracies is multiple in two ways, they are:
- Culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised societies
- Burgeoning variety of text forms

Personal mandala
– participants were given this to use as a record of theories they draw on in their teaching practice

Good practice features identified in the workshop as they relate to theory

Critical
- *Student empowerment*
- *Create authentic learning materials*

Complex
- *Student focused*

Acquired as well as learned
- *Explicit teaching /learning*
- *Integrated*
- *Scaffolded learning*

Contextualised
- *Culturally appropriate*
- *Success breeds success*
- *Student centred*
- *Situated practice and contextualised*
- *Relevant social practice*
- *Authentic texts*

Life long and life wider
- *Along a continuum*
- *A safe culture – cultural safety*

Fluid
- *Students experience success*
- *Celebrating success*

Dialogical
- *Collaborative learning*

Ideological
- *Employability skills*

Social Practice
- *Strengths based*
- *Adult learning principles*
- *Demonstrating respect and success*