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## Book Review

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Chan, L. et al 2002. *Budapest Open Access Initiative*. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Retrieved 22 January 2007].

**Duckworth, V. and Ade-Ojo, G. (eds). 2015. *Landscapes of specific literacies in contemporary society: exploring a social model of literacy*. Abingdon: Routledge. pp.126 ISBN 978-0-415-74124-8. £90.00. Hbk.**

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At 126 pages, this slim volume belies the weight and the ambition of the content within. Over the nine chapters of this collection, the authors challenge commonly-held conceptions, ingrained through policy, about literacies and pedagogy. While the main focus is adult learning and post-compulsory education, there are some deviations from this focus, notably in chapter eight, in which Guy Merchant examines how mobile technologies and digital literacies are changing childhood. Mark Hepworth also takes a different angle in chapter six wherein he shines a light on information literacy in the workplace, an emphasis more on continuing professional development (CPD) rather than education. Before I began reading, I had thought that I would be most engaged by Lynn Coleman and Mary R. Lea's chapter, with its focus on higher education, but I found myself more energised by the chapters that took a broader view of society: this review focuses on these sections.

Gordon Ade-Ojo and Vicky Duckworth's introductory chapter could seem bewildering and intensely theoretical to the uninitiated, but perseverance pays. It sets the tone for the whole book, focusing our attention on the disaffected and alienated, those who fall outside of traditional definitions of literate. It challenges the dominant understanding that literacy is merely about reading and writing, by tracing perceptions of literacy through time, from being seen as mostly about oral communication, to incorporating modern technologies. It shows that literacy is a concept that evolves according to the requirements of the time and of society. The chapter also questions the concept of a single literacy and suggests a model of multiple literacies, setting out the agenda for the whole volume in arguing "for distinct literacy curricula for distinct social practices" (p5). In lay terms, this could mean teaching different sets of competencies for different contexts.

Ade-Ojo continues on these themes in the second chapter, examining and challenging a dominant cognitive model of literacy, which, he says, has failed many people "who have been classified as illiterate because of their failure to acquire it." (p11) He goes on to advocate literacy for specific purposes (LSP), a tailored curriculum approach developed around the needs of the learner, as opposed to a curriculum dictated by policy makers. There is a strong message throughout the book that context is key when it comes to literacy. The teaching must be discipline-specific and relevant to the learner's real life: decontextualised, it loses its value and learners disengage.

The volume as a whole illustrates the empowering nature of learner-centred education, in which curricula are designed in partnership with learners around their specific needs, aspirations and social contexts. Chapter two, written by Duckworth, entitled *Literacy and transformation*, presents a case study approach, and shows how using this approach gave students agency and empowered them to change their lives. Duckworth's approach allowed learners to recognise skills and literacies that they already had, which might have been rejected in other classrooms because they were not acknowledged as legitimate literacies or knowledge. By building the curriculum around who the learners were and what they wanted to achieve, they were imbued with confidence and self-worth, no longer diminished by definitions of literacy that left them on the outside. Empowered by recognition of their own literacies grown of their own backgrounds, learners were enabled to transform not just themselves, but their expectations of their futures and of their families' futures. This chapter was an inspiring and emotive demonstration of the theory in practice, making the ideas of previous chapters tangible.

Mary Hamilton, to whom the book is dedicated, writes in chapter four about survey literacies. She explains that governments worldwide are spending a huge amount on surveys of literacy which encourage countries and individuals to measure their own abilities and experience against a homogenised framework. She is concerned that this creates an unhelpful standardisation of definitions of literacy that don't take into account national or cultural differences. These definitions in turn influence policy and lead to a rejection of diversity of experience and a narrowing of education. She argues that these surveys cannot be considered to produce neutral facts and suggests that there is an uncomfortable power dynamic at play. She asks the questions: who is collecting the data, on whom and for what purpose? Hamilton is also critical of the way that the public are able to engage with these surveys: the journey from data collection to presentation of results in the public domain allows opportunities for distortion, whether intentional or not. It is a thought-provoking chapter, especially relevant in this era of Big Data, which has the potential to be revolutionary and liberating, but, as Hamilton shows, could also lead to stigmatisation and alienation for those whose experience is shown, through these surveys, to deviate from the norm. As Hamilton writes, "Determining what or who counts as eligible to be a citizen or a literate person also shapes the flip side – non-citizens and illiterates who are stigmatized as deviant outsiders," (p51).

This is a book with a social conscience, as these highlights demonstrate. It is at its best when it links the ideology of its authors with real-life practice, as it does excellently in Duckworth's chapter. As a whole, it is sometimes dense with theory, but it is energetic, exciting, at times radical, and ultimately accessible. It is an important book for anyone involved in post-compulsory education and for everyone who is concerned with social inclusion and pedagogy.