Literacy

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While a particularly pervasive notion of literacy casts it as a trait of the individual, anthropologists have shown that literacy's representational capacities are especially complex. Laypeople and scholars alike have used literacy to differentiate peoples and attribute all manner of qualities to the distinctions. Some anthropologists have pointed to differences in the uses to which literacy is put in sociocultural contexts to make the argument that there is no single phenomenon of literacy. Whatever the approach, anthropologists have come to agree generally that literacy is best understood as employable in a great range of activities, that literacy is often laden with ideological value, and that ethnography provides a means of finding out how literacy practices and ideologies are related (see Language Ideology).

Some scholars have privileged writing's capacity to represent language. There are several different possibilities for the visual representation of language through writing (see Writing and Writing Systems: Classification of Scripts). Logographic writing systems, for example, exhibit a tendency to represent morphemes with symbols. This should not imply, however, that graphic elements always represent morphemes in the same way. For example, in Chinese, some graphic elements, pictograms, do physically resemble the morpheme represented, but these are rare among the language's characters. Some graphic elements are ideograms and represent abstracted notions. Much more common than either of these possibilities are characters made up of compound constructions. These have been formed either from the combination of two radicals (components of the character) or from the combination of a radical and a phonetic representation. However, centuries of phonetic change have made the phonetic representations of graphic elements fail to correspond to modern spoken Mandarin.

Syllabaries are systems of writing wherein symbols represent syllables. Parts of graphic symbols in a syllabary can resemble each other when they share some phonemic representation, but this is not necessarily the case. Finally, alphabets are systems of writing wherein symbols represent phonemes. There is great variation among languages regarding the graphic representation of phonemic elements in alphabetical systems. There is no graphic representation in English, for example, of stress. And the writing system of a language can draw on more than one of these possibilities. Japanese, for example, uses logographic elements in *kanji*, and two syllabaries in *kana*. *Kana* consists of *hiragana*, used for native or naturalized Japanese words and grammatical elements, and katakana, used for loanwords and scientific words. Finally, *Rōmaji* utilizes roman script elements in the case of popular acronyms of international salience or Japanese company names for foreign audiences. The International Phonetic Association developed the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) in the late nineteenth

The International Encyclopedia of Linguistic Anthropology. Edited by James Stanlaw.

DOI: 10.1002/9781118786093.iela0242

century in order to represent the phonetic features of language (see International Phonetic Alphabet).

Stokoe notation for American Sign Language uses roman letters and numerals as well as iconic glyphs to represent aspects of hand position, shape, and movement (see Deaf Language and Sign Languages). SignWriting, in contrast, uses a combination of iconic images for handshapes, facial expressions, movement, and other aspects of representation, and is not phonemic (see, for example, Hoffmann-Dilloway 2013).

A seminal consideration of literacy in anthropology was Jack Goody and Ian Watt's 1963 article, "The Consequences of Literacy," published in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. Goody and Watt used the relationship between writing systems and language to make the case that the advent of alphabetic systems allowed certain social and cultural processes to emerge (see Writing and Writing Systems: History). The article has influenced how anthropologists have approached literacy in several respects, mostly by way of sharp critiques. Some anthropologists have argued against the treatment of literacy as a cause or a result of any one aspect of social and cultural life (see Writing and Writing Systems: Sociolinguistic Aspects). Some have noted that literacy is not itself a singular phenomenon useful for understanding historical transformations. Some have noted that literacy is emergent in sociocultural practices such that careful ethnographic research is required for its apprehension. And some have noted that literacy's ability to represent language is only one of its functions (but see Jaffe et al. 2012 and LaDousa 2018 on orthographic politics) (see Modality, Multimodality and Orthography). Brian Street, in particular, has critiqued Goody and Watt's work explicitly, while Shirley Brice Heath has written a profoundly influential monograph implicitly demonstrating critiques and alternative arguments. Since the emergence of Street's and Heath's work in the 1980s, anthropologists have considered relationships between orality and literacy, relationships between literacy and gender, literacy's often prominent role in development projects, the importance of considering unofficial literacy practices, and literacy's role in education and activism efforts.

Orality and myth, literacy and history

Goody and Watt's article, "The Consequences of Literacy," begins with a complaint. The authors note that critiques of the division of labor in the social sciences whereby anthropologists study "primitive man" and sociologists study "civilized man" have served to render invalid distinctions between societies based on literacy (Goody and Watt 1963, 305). Goody and Watt state that their goal is to establish the ways in which "cultural heritage" is transmitted in "non-literate" societies, and to make apparent the influence on such ways of transmission of "easy and effective means of written communication" (305). Thus, Goody and Watt draw on a long-established dichotomy between non-literate and literate societies, couple certain qualities and processes with literacy, and argue that literacy makes possible certain cognitive and social processes.

In Goody and Watt's understanding, a defining feature of non-literate or oral societies is a reliance on memory for the negotiation of the past in practice (see Orality).

For example, they argue that genealogies are not preserved in memory simply (or even primarily) to account for the past, but are also used to account for social organization in the present. Indeed, as groups split, merge, or move, genealogical accounts may adjust and change. And as generations progress and genealogies necessarily grow, they also shrink to allow for their oral transmission. Goody and Watt go so far as to argue that people living in non-literate societies perceive the past largely through their concerns in the present. For such people, "myth and history merge into one" (1963, 311).

Goody and Watt argue that the changing means of representing language via written symbols can be matched with changing capacities of societies to appreciate historical particulars and transformation and, along with those changes, truth. Goody and Watt identify the emergence of the alphabet in ancient Greece to be the phenomenon necessary for the diffusion of literacy. They foreground the Greek innovation of representing vowels by means of elements of the Semitic syllabary, something they claim allowed for a reduction in ambiguity in the way graphic elements represent language distinctions. Goody and Watt claim that the innovations in script allowed the dissemination of a set of cultural elements to all subsequent societies utilizing an alphabetic system for the representation of sound in language. Though they do not claim that there exists a causal link between the emergence of an alphabetic writing system and democracy, they nevertheless point to the emergence of democracy as a system of government in Greece, the first society with an alphabetic writing system.

Much more focused on writing systems in the ancient Near East and kingdoms and states in West Africa is Goody's book, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*, published in 1986. Especially prominent in Goody's overview of literacy in the ancient Near East are the economic uses to which lists were oriented. An especially prominent theme in the book is the recurrent point that literacy practices began as a means of recording various aspects of transactions including amounts and participants. In their especially comprehensive review of literacy studies, *Literacy and Literacies*, published in 2003, Collins and Blot express surprise at the short shrift Goody's book gives to West African literacy practices. This is especially surprising, Collins and Blot explain, given Goody's extensive ethnographic work in the region. Nevertheless, they explain that Goody's monograph presents literacy and its consequences in a much less triumphalist manner than does his earlier 1963 article co-authored with Watt. Collins and Blot rightly take notice that Goody's discussion in his 1986 book recognizes some of the less democratic consequences of literacy such as the possibility of surveillance. It would seem that engagement with the details of the uses to which writing has been put has led Goody to temper his glorification of the consequences of literacy (Collins and Blot 2003, 17–22).

Alternative constructions and critiques

In an especially influential ethnography, *Ways with Words*, published in 1983, Shirley Brice Heath draws on long-term fieldwork in the Piedmont region of the southeastern United States to consider literacy as it emerges in particular events. She explores literacy as it is connected to social relations and important institutions in the lives of

infants and children, and the adults raising them, in three communities (see Language Acquisition). Especially important in Heath's account are changes experienced by people as they grow up. Particular ways of involving infants and children with literate materials characterize the three communities such that there is no single way in which literacy events figure in the communities of the region. Heath is able to draw on ethnographic insights from the three communities to show that children's socialization indeed has consequences when they enter school. The school, Heath demonstrates, accommodated the habits of only one of the communities, and schoolteachers misrecognized displays of communicative competence on the part of students from the other two communities as evidence of disinterest, disrespect, and a lack of ability.

Heath shows how class and racial inequalities have shaped the three communities. The Piedmont area was undergoing economic shifts during the period of Heath's research, the 1970s. Paternalistic relationships between mill owners and workers were shifting to less personal wage-based relationships just as better positions in mill work were becoming available to African Americans. At the same time, the end of legal segregation had brought white and African American students together in school. The school has thus become a place drawing students from Roadville, a white, working-class neighborhood several miles from Maintown; Trackton, an African American working-class neighborhood close to Maintown; and Maintown itself, a small, largely white, middle-class city increasingly connected as a bedroom community to a much larger city nearby.

Socialization practices in Roadville begin with parents setting off a separate space for the newborn, which they decorate according to the infant's gender (see Language Socialization). Parents involve books and other printed materials in their interactions with their growing children and initially stress the recognition of letters and numbers (see Child Language and Reading). Questions focus on recognition of what is there in the text. As children grow in Roadville, their reflections on literate materials are judged by others as being true or false. This is especially so in the case of the Bible, a feature of a great many dimensions of social life.

Parents in Trackton do not place their babies in separate rooms, nor do they surround the newborn with literate materials produced for infants. Parents express confidence that the growing child will begin to participate in the social life of the family when they are ready, and children begin such activity by imitating segments of discourse to which they are exposed. Finally, children begin to attempt to capture the focus of group attention, and are evaluated by their ability to create an imaginative storyline that maintains the interest of others.

In Maintown, printed materials are ubiquitous and parents will often drop whatever they are doing to engage with their children via books, magazines, or other kinds of printed matter. Parents encourage children to make analogies to the world outside of the one introduced in the text, and children's recognition of fact versus fiction in such analogies becomes very important.

School interaction is based on Maintown habits, and Heath shows that children from Roadville and Trackton suffer in different ways at different times as they progress through grade levels. Initially, Trackton children suffer most. Teachers ask the children

their names and are met with silence. The teachers are unfamiliar with the communicative world of Trackton where strangers are not to be addressed by children, but, rather, by adults. Furthermore, children from Trackton take elements of discourse in the classroom and used them to generate an engaging story. Teachers find this to be evidence of misbehavior and disinterest in the material at hand, often drawn from a book by the teacher. Children from Roadville begin to have problems in school in later grade levels. As grade levels progress, children are increasingly asked to make analogies between elements of the text and other texts or between elements of the text and the world outside the text. Children from Roadville struggle to do this given the ways in which they have been raised to focus on deriving aspects of texts in ways that are "truthful."

While the challenges posed by Heath's work to Goody and Watt's claims about the consequences of literacy are implicit, those posed by Brian Street's *Literacy and Theory in Practice*, published in 1984, are explicit. Street considers the work of a number of authors including Goody and Watt, but also Angela Hildyard and David Olson, and argues that the various approaches embody an "autonomous" approach to literacy. By this, Street means that the authors treat literacy as a phenomenon the effects of which can be identified in particular cognitive and social phenomena. Several chapters of Street's book are devoted to reviewing the arguments of Goody and Watt, on the one hand, and Hildyard and Olson, on the other, largely in order to show that the arguments rely on and reproduce dichotomies. What is oral is opposed to what is literate; what is myth is opposed to what is history; and what is memory is opposed to what is evidence. Street demonstrates that advocates of the autonomous approach to literacy use the dichotomies generatively – such that an element takes on characteristics missing in its opposite – and outside of particular social and historical contexts (see Context and Contextualization).

Street calls his own approach the "ideological" approach to literacy. Street argues that literacy should be investigated in the particular contexts in which it arises. Careful attention should be paid to the uses to which literacy is put. Often, the uses of literacy are only accessible in institutional contexts, so such domains should be investigated for the ways they presuppose access and expertise. Furthermore, literacy's involvement in particular institutional contexts implies that literacy is informed by, and likely participates in, the reproduction of social structural inequalities of potentially any kind. Literacy is embedded in particular domains of social life. Consequently, scholars should appreciate and investigate literacy practices or even literacies. And finally, by calling his model ideological, Street urges for scholars to investigate the ways in which ideas about literacy are embedded in and emergent from particular contexts and practices. By doing so, scholars can avoid the search for effects of literacy wherein the variables identified as causes and effects are considered outside of the social and institutional contexts that give meaning and purpose to literacy practices and events.

In the text, Street contributes to the ethnography of literacy practices and events by providing an overview of his own work during the 1970s studying villages around Mashad, a city in northeastern Iran. Street notes the ways that entrepreneurs in the fruit-growing village of Cheshmeh were able to utilize aspects of what he calls "makhtab" literacy in their mercantile practices. In the *makhtab*, or Koranic school,

mullahs taught the Qur'an, primarily by rote and in Arabic. Although students did not gain the ability to read phonemically in Arabic, they learned about the layout of text on the page and aspects of literacy extremely useful in mercantile pursuits such as numbers. Students were able to take knowledge from one context of practice and begin to put it to uses in another context as they developed and engaged in marking systems for recording commercial transactions in the fruit market. Furthermore, some mullahs also exposed students to commentaries on the Qur'an in Farsi and kept copies of the Qur'an in Farsi, and students became adept at reading in their own language. Street goes to particular lengths to show that reflection on Islamic texts in the school (and in the wider region) is not a singular or monolithic practice of repetition (see also Messick 1993 for a particularly rich account from Highland Yemen).

The work of both Heath and Street has been influential in the study of literacy, whether in anthropology or in sociology, psychology, or even literacy studies. Indeed, Street has worked with colleagues predominantly outside of anthropology, including David Barton, James Gee, and Mary Hamilton, among many others, and their work has become known as "New Literacy Studies." Some of the proponents of New Literacy Studies have begun to work in digitally mediated domains of communication (see Language, the Internet, and Digital Communication), often referred to as "new literacies." Anthropologists have contributed article- and chapter-length considerations of text messaging in Kenya (McIntosh 2010), gossip online in the United States (Jones, Schieffelin and Smith 2011), and hashtag activism in the United States (Bonilla and Rosa 2015), but work on new literacies in anthropology has not matched the proliferation of such work in New Literacy Studies.

Orality and literacy

Two books have been especially influential in demonstrating that orality and literacy should be explored in particular contexts, and that any dualistic theoretical orientation should be avoided. Ruth Finnegan's work on orality in Sierra Leone is represented in a great number of publications, and she considers questions of orality and literacy specifically in a collection of papers entitled *Literacy and Orality*, published in 1988. Finnegan's research among the Limba provides ample evidence that they have developed through speaking some of the same characteristics attributed by Goody and Watt to the advent of literacy. For example, the Limba have an awareness of themselves as a group as opposed to others, as well as a rich means of considering differences between dialects. Furthermore, Finnegan questions the usefulness of any hard-and-fast distinction between the oral and the written when she reviews the development of oral poetry among the Limba. She notes that poets indeed have had some contact with written materials, but that such contact has not replaced poetry performances wherein new texts are developed. She argues that the emergence of oral poetry among the Limba has allowed for a complex interplay between traditions of oral performance and written inscription.

Storytelling Rights by Amy Shuman, published in 1986, considers the parts played by oral and written narratives in negotiations over who has the right to tell what to whom. The scene Shuman investigates is a junior high school located in Philadelphia, and her

informants are black, white, and Puerto Rican students. One of the most provocative examples of the ways that performance, context, and entitlement are intertwined in stories about conflict and fighting at the school is the case of a fight that involved a stabbing (see Dispute). Schoolchildren reflect on an account in the newspaper, noting that the newspaper did not do what is necessary to achieve the entitlement one would need to tell the story. Shuman's work is an important contribution to scholarship that argues that there is nothing essential about oral or literate contributions to acts of communication, and that apperceptions of the parts played by oral and literate contributions require attention to the practices and exegetical habits of interlocutors.

Literacy and gender

Literacy, Emotion, and Authority by Niko Besnier was published in 1995. The book chronicles the uses of literacy on Nukulaelae, a Polynesian Atoll. Besnier's account provides a comparative view of two genres in which writing figures centrally. Early chapters of the book provide details of letter writing and reading, the primary way in which residents communicate with loved ones through letters sent with travelers on ships. Such letters, Besnier finds, are characterized by especially strong expressions of love and empathy. Later chapters of the book describe the conventions of sermons, which are foci of Christian services. Besnier notes that sermons share features of secular oratory, but ultimately differ in that they are partly structured by lists derived from the Bible and topics for discussion. Besnier stresses that when one considers who gets to deliver a sermon, the genre is egalitarian in comparison to secular oratory, but most sermons are delivered by men and not by women. Gender is thus relevant to the larger world of literacy practices in Nukulaelae because the vulnerability and emotion associated with the sender of a letter are thought to be feminine qualities (see Language and Gender).

Literacy, development, and agency

While it is true that governments have used literacy as a means for the attainment of modernity, anthropologists have been careful to note that connections between literacy and modernity must be studied in particular contexts (see Modernity and Tradition). Laura Ahearn's *Invitations to Love*, published in 2001, traces the role of literacy in a period of rapid social change in Junigau, a village in Nepal. Ahearn's book considers both literacy practices wherever they are found in Junigau's social life and the emergence of a discourse of development in the village that is intertwined in complicated ways with literacy practices. Early chapters chart changes in marriage practices in Junigau and show that the ability to write and send love letters connects to a growing preference for marriage arrangements thought to offer agency to the prospective couple rather than to others (see Agency). Ahearn is careful to show that letter writing has no predictable outcome, but rather has introduced something to marriage negotiations that did not exist previously. For example, Ahearn recounts the actions of Pema Kumari, a young woman in Junigau, whereby she writes a threatening letter to her father protesting her

impending marriage. Although the letter fails to prevent the marriage, the inclusion of a letter with other acts of protest is unprecedented. Later chapters recount in fine detail the progression of relationships through the exchange of letters between young women and men. Letters reveal the complexities of the idea of "love" itself, the continuing salience of rumor in the community, the salience of changing economic circumstances of the interlocutors, and reflections on one's own agency. Ahearn (2001) also shows how literacy practices in the village include school texts that convey nationalistic constructions of gendered development, especially salient in a village where men must often travel elsewhere for work, including to India for military service (see Nation and Nationalism). Ahearn stresses throughout the book that literacy practices have brought new and gendered risks to negotiations based on fostering love toward marriage.

Government of Paper by Matthew Hull, published in 2012, is an ethnography of literacy practices among government officials as well as among people outside of the government working to accomplish land purchases and building projects. Hull foregrounds communicative practices in two government agencies, the Capital Development Authority and the Islamabad Capital Territory Administration, both located in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Three artifacts of literacy circulate among the agencies mediating social relations and institutional practices in different ways. Petitions for land allotments, visiting cards, and *parchis*, or slips of paper with favors noted on them, are used in different ways to achieve different ends. Yet, Hull's ethnography shows that the larger world of bureaucratic action in Islamabad brings the different forms into resonance with each other. Hull's discussion of the movement (or lack of movement) of files and the modes of inscription within is especially germane to discussions about the relationships between literacy and power in bureaucratic fields of action. Officials engage in descriptions of activity such that it becomes very difficult to isolate any particular person as bearing responsibility for a decision. Hull argues that careful attention to the material and semiotic dimensions that mediate social relations in institutional contexts enables the critique of any direct or causal link between bureaucratic institutions and the agency of actors within (see Bureaucracy).

Unofficial and grassroots literacy

While literacy practices are essential means for the state to engage in Foucauldian (see Foucault, Michel) means of surveillance, people engage in literacy practices outside of the purview and purposes of the state. *Magical Writing in Salasaca* by Peter Wogan, published in 2003, constitutes an exploration of writing practices in a small town in Highland Ecuador. Wogan stresses that most local townspeople have little access to official or authoritative literacy practices gained through schooling. At the same time, literacy practices are important in local lives through birth, death, and marriage certificates and registries, all embodiments of the power of the state and the state officials who are authorized to produce them. The ethnographic chapters of the book describe the way list making emerges in particular contexts. A set of journals owned by residents of a small city nearby contains a list of names of people to be bewitched by a sinister saint and witch. People pay to have names added or to have their own names removed,

and Wogan discovers that his own name is in the book. Wogan also notes the ways that Salasacans imagine God to be a bookkeeper. The list of people cursed to be bewitched and the actions necessary for protection provide townspeople with an analogy to corruption at the level of the state and its registry practices. God's book and its relative inaccessibility provide a juxtaposition to state practices with an embodiment of fairness and impartiality. A later chapter of the book considers the relevance of writing to weaving, a practice that some locals have engaged in to be able to sell items to tourists. Wogan juxtaposes tourists' understandings of weaving through analogies with reading to his informants' ideas about production. Wogan describes his own involvement in the local weaving industry for tourist consumption embodied in a pamphlet he helped his landlord create and produce.

In *Grassroots Literacy*, published in 2008, Jan Blommaert explores literacy events marked by grassroots literacy, or literacy practices that give evidence of a lack of access to elite or institutionally organized forms of education and genres of composition. Blommaert argues that a consideration of the circumstances of the production of artifacts of literacy is important in the understanding of any literacy practice, but is especially important to texts produced in circumstances of grassroots literacy. The monograph focuses on two men in Shaba, a southern province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. One Blommaert calls Julien, and another is named Tshibumba. Blommaert explores their writings, finding that aspects of them betray the men's lack of access to generic conventions. The writings, therefore, are oriented to genres, but the writers do not have a command of them.

The fact that the men's writings betray grassroots modes of production is especially apparent given that the men produced their writings for a non-local audience. Writing for Julien is envisioned by a former employer, Mrs. Arens, as a payment of a debt he owes her. Julien makes monumental efforts to have the letters he sends to Mrs. Arens delivered, traveling great distances to a missionary station. Blommaert explores the ways Julien's life emerges in three different moments of correspondence with Mrs. Arens. Tshibumba's writing has a different generic purpose. He is a well-known artist whose work has gained international acclaim. His writing is addressed to the project of providing a history of Zaire, that is, to the state. While his history manages to provide detail in the case of local provinces, details for more distant locales (demanded by a history of the state) are missing. Both authors' writings are marked by a relative absence of the kind of multilingual discourse common in the region from which they write, a mark of the literate genres to which their texts are oriented. Yet, ultimately, the generic conventions of autobiography and history to which the writings are oriented could indeed mark the writings as not legible. Blommaert urges the realization that the practice of genres can be adopted toward the production of literacy artifacts that are not necessarily recognizable as legitimate. Such artifacts can provide crucial resources for understanding the ways power and subjectivity are embedded in literate materials and processes of their production.

Frank Salomon and Mercedes Niño-Murcio's *The Lettered Mountain*, published in 2011, is a consideration of the long historical period in which literacy practices have been important in the social life of the community of San Andrés de Tupicocha located in the region of Huarochirí in Peru. The ethnography offers a historical overview of

the emergence and development of official literacy practices associated with colonial centers of administration and the Peruvian state (see Language, Globalization, and Colonialism). Careful attention to two artifacts, however, is necessary for understanding the ways in which inscription has been crucial for the mediation of social life in the rural Andean context of San Andrés de Tupicocha. The *khipu*, on the one hand, and paper, on the other hand, have figured prominently in accounting practices, accumulated as history, of labor in the area. The *khipu* is an Andean system of cords and knots that was displaced by writing practices during Spanish colonial rule. But, in rural regions, *khipu* resonates with tabular notation systems on paper in accounts of the contributions of kinship corporations in building and maintenance projects. The authors take pains to point out that such practices help to constitute the region as distinct at the same time that locals decry any affiliation with Indigenous identity (see Language and Identity) or Quechua language activism. The book constitutes a historically rich consideration of the uses of literacy outside of the practices and realms of authority of the state.

Literacy education and activism

Three books, among many others, have focused on literacy practices in activist efforts for social uplift and cultural representation. *The Word and the World* by Lesley Bartlett, published in 2009, explores four different adult literacy programs in two cities in Brazil to understand conceptualizations of the benefits of education and literacy on the part of those involved. Bartlett provides a review of the philosophical underpinnings of the work of Paulo Freire because the adult literacy programs she studied were inspired by Freirean ideas. One such idea is that teaching and learning are political acts and are always informed by a political agenda. Bartlett finds, however, that students in the adult literacy programs derived meaning from notions of education the program did not anticipate. For example, the students found that one of the primary benefits of the literacy education programs was the way they felt less shameful about the way they spoke. Students derived confidence from the habits of comportment they felt they acquired from the literacy programs. Bartlett uses her findings to argue that ideas about literacy are especially important to consider, and that ideas about literacy do not simply follow the logics of how literacy is taught or otherwise encouraged.

Frank Cody's *The Light of Knowledge*, published in 2013, considers the modernist underpinnings and the local practices of one of the world's largest and most successful literacy campaigns. The Arivoli Iyakkam, or "Light of Knowledge," has attracted the participation of women, in particular, in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu. An especially important insight of Cody's book is that more important than the content of literacy lessons were the apprehensions on the part of participants of social relations entailed by literacy lessons and practices more generally. Such apprehensions come to shape the relationship between citizen and state as women engage in the activity of filing a petition. Cody's analysis offers an important corrective to ideologies of individuality and autonomy presupposed in many constructions of literacy's role in political participation.

Erin Debenport's *Fixing the Books*, published in 2015, considers the history of efforts in the community she calls San Ramón Pueblo to develop and produce various literacy materials in the language she calls Keiwa, including a Keiwa-English dictionary (see Language Revitalization). Debenport foregrounds the ways that tension can inhere in the representational capacity of literate materials. Just as the production of literate materials enables circulation, it also enables editing and revision. Debenport compares a number of communicative practices at San Ramón Pueblo in order to reflect on the ideology of perfectibility that mediates knowledge, community, and practice. This ideology does not draw on the widespread dissemination of text enabled by printed materials stressed in the work of scholars like Benedict Anderson, but rather draws on the past as something perfectible through literate materials that will enable a future populated with Keiwa speakers.

SEE ALSO: Ervin-Tripp, Susan; Halliday, Michael

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