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# CLOTHING THE EMPEROR: TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK RELATING FUNCTION AND FORM IN LITERACY

*ABSTRACT: The paper argues that literacy as a technic needs to be separated from the social models of literacy which define how it will be used by whom and in what circumstances. These models of function are set by literate communities and lead in turn to models of text including physical appearance, conventions of language, structure, content, and style. The problem for many students, particularly those now labeled "at risk" is that they are unaware of those functional and textual models which have been established by the academic communities of schools and universities. Such models can be taught successfully without denying the autonomy and authenticity of students.*

*Once Upon a Time . . . . I live in the country outside of Troy, New York, and I have lived in a rural setting for most of my life. As a child in the Depression, I was taught to cut firewood by my father; together we plied a "two-man saw" as it was known, although at first I was simply along for the ride. When I was six he gave me my own saw for my birthday, and I was proud. I even felled trees for recreation (or to show my manhood). No George Washington, I once blamed beavers for my handiwork when my mother found me beside one of her prized willows. In the 1960s I bought my first*

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chain saw, and I am now on my fourth. For years I have been proud of the fact that I can supply most of my own firewood and do some clearing of the wood lot and windfalls. In my life I have had but three accidents cutting wood—each with an ax, and I have learned to respect and care for my tools to the point where I can perform most routine maintenance and repair.

I can use the chain saw after a fashion, although I am not adept at felling large trees; I am scared of the machine, and certainly cannot use it to create log sculptures or do anything more than speed up the kind of sawing that I did as a child. Occasionally I have hired professionals and have admired the finesse and agility with which they can handle the machinery; the differences among their acts when felling, limbing, clearing brush, or sawing; the degree to which they are aware of the hazards that surround them; their knowledge of the angle of a cut and its effect and of the kinds of cut that are best for felling particular trees (based on a knowledge of the properties of trees that are alive and those that are dead); of the precise angles for sharpening their saws and the precise qualities of different saws and blades. You might say that I am a minimally functional woodchopper, but certainly I cannot call myself a logger, a woodsman, or a forester, much less a millwright—each of which bears its own special set of distinctions and its own complex body of knowledge and skills. In the chain saw store, where I take my chains to be sharpened or go to see the new merchandise, I am acknowledged as a customer but clearly excluded from the professional communities and subcommunities of the profession.

At about the same time that I was given the saw, I began school where, I suppose, I learned to read and write, although I was read to a great deal and the whole family wrote little verses and stories as part of the evening's entertainment. I took part in readings of Shakespeare with a group of my mother's friends when I was eight and nine, and I played with word puzzles frequently. Every car trip of over two miles involved the alphabet game with road signs. Although my penmanship was execrable at school, I became an adept reader and writer and part of the literate world, so much so that I brought rare books to school as a hobby exhibit, volunteered in the school library, and helped in a cousin's bookshop.

From this beginning, I moved almost inevitably into schoolwork in literature, history, and languages. An English major at college, when I graduated, I faced the decision as to whether to go into publishing or English teaching. I also learned to do architectural lettering, to type after a fashion (eventually to use electric typewriters and word processors) and I studied layout and design. I chose graduate study and teaching and I moved up into the ranks as

a professional person of letters, accepted into the various guilds wherein I have continued to prosper. I am a member of one of the literate world's elite scribal groups, and I have tried my hand at others including poetry, fiction, and direct mail marketing.

I tell this about myself because I want to establish an analogy in order to enable us to begin with some definitions. I see the word processor I am using like the chain saw, and the earlier two-man saw like the pencil or perhaps the mechanical typewriter. I see writing and reading as analogous to using cutting instruments; written language as analogous to cordwood, lumber, cabinetry, or pulp; and literacy as the capacity to use the tools to produce the wood products. In my literacy community—academe—I am the equivalent of a woodsman, if not a forester. That wood and writing are connected in my mind is probably not entirely fortuitous, given the history of printing over the past 200 years. Both inventions have accrued multiple functions as well as complex technologies and social structures.

As do the environments engendered by other technologies such as the clock, the wheel, or the saw, the literate environment exerts its influence on everyone from the newborn child to the aged, from the remote rural dweller to the urbanite. Like other inventions in our environment, it has become a social and cultural emperor, dominating our consciousness and our actions. All under the rule of this emperor participate in what might be called a "textual contract" not unlike the social contract of the *philosophes* (Purves, 1991). But participating in that contract is not the same as prospering in a given literate community, much less a scribal one. Further, the terms of the contract vary according to the culture of the literate or scribal community that an individual inhabits. The number of scribal communities is larger than that of woodcutting communities, to be sure, but the nature of the two is similar.

As I shall note below, the terms of the scribal contract may be understood in terms of functional and textual models which are interdependent, and determined less by the nature of the medium than by the uses to which the technology and the practices are put, uses as determined by a cultural group. By being subjected to models and therefore standards, written language becomes not simply a tool nor literacy simply a capacity, but both are artifacts and definers of culture. The problem for many labeled marginally literate, including those who come from other cultures, is that neither the textual nor the functional models which they are expected to accept and by which they are judged are made explicit to them, and so they are perceived to be failures. We know this is the case of the non-native speaker, so we make an attempt to teach

our models, but we somehow expect native speakers of our language to be aware of and subscribe to our various models, to be members of our culture. The fact is some do not, and we label them slow, remedial, or illiterate.

It seems to me plain as a pikestaff that if we want to help others become members of our scribal society, the best way to do so is to teach them the rules of the game. I use that phrase advisedly, because research on models shows that the rules of literate discourse are rules created by social groups or communities partly as matters of efficiency and partly to serve functional rhetorical needs. But these rules have the later consequence of serving to bring people into the group or keep them out of it. The rules are not given by God, and they are indeed changeable over time as the perceived function changes. Why should people follow these rules? Because, that's why. The models of literacy are like those of *Monopoly* or checkers or using a chain saw; they can be taught and learned without any great psychic damage to the learner. Violating them, however, can mean a forfeit.

Models of text and literacy are socially constructed and exclusionary. So are the models of felling, trimming, and logging. Both sets as well as others have been so since the dawn of the technology; scribal societies and forestry societies are as ancient as the technologies they use. One cannot change the fact, but one can illuminate it and perhaps change the rules of the literacy game. By learning that literacy is a game like other games, many students whose parents fear literacy and schooling as threatening have the chance of becoming players and winners. Helping the "at risk" or marginal students in our society become good players at the scribal game is not to guarantee them entry into the middle class of our society, of course; there are always a multitude of factors in play.

In this paper, I develop a framework by which we may view literacy as a culturally mediated technology so as to elucidate its nature and use in the world; such a framework points to the dynamic relationship between the functions that literate acts play in society and the particular forms that they take or the text forms they evoke.

**I. *The Emperor Introduced: An Initial Definition of Literacy as a Socially Mediated Technology.*** Written language is a tool, what Marshall McLuhan (1964) called an "extension of man [sic]," a human tool for recording, storing, and retrieving information in a visible form that we have come to call text. In Western societies, these texts are alphanumeric; in some other societies they are ideographic, encompassing both linguistic and numeric constructs (if the two can be separated). Written language at first appears to be not particularly different from other tools, such as the wheel, the



steam engine, or the lever. If written language is a tool, literacy is the human capacity to use that tool in the reciprocal activities of storing and recovering information. Since it is a capacity, literacy is not an absolute, something that one has or does not have, but something that people can have to greater or lesser degrees of proficiency and can use in different ways, given the social function to which it is put. And there begins the clothing of the emperor.

We should note that these activities always take place within a complex social framework. As a tool, written language has both been incorporated into, and changed the fabric of, that social framework in many subtle ways. It facilitates urbanization, specialization, ecumenical religion, history, and law, as Jack Goody (1985) and many others have pointed out. Once having been developed and put into use it could not readily be abandoned. Those who became literate found written language all too useful in their daily commerce, in their capacity to record history or to codify other kinds of knowledge or lore both religious and secular. They found it impossible to renounce it once they had it. In many societies people even came to venerate the physical text and ascribe magical or curative powers to books and scrolls. Although the first literates may have shared their capacity with others, people soon came to see that being literate was both power and privilege. From the very earliest times across civilizations as diverse as the Chinese, the Hindu, the Mesopotamian, and the Greek, scribal communities emerged and literacy came to be associated with castes and classes, to be guarded through various systems of gatekeepers. These communities set the rules and standards for levels of membership and they continue to do so, although the scribal communities in our technological age have become highly complex. The emperor's palace resembles Kublai Khan's pleasure dome (or perhaps Kafka's castle).

Those who have grown up in a world where the tool of written language and various texts were readily available have found their world changed too. Just as people who cannot drive nonetheless find themselves thrust into an environment where roads and automobiles are the custom not the exception, where not to own a car or to be able to drive are seen as aberrations; so too those who grow up in a literate environment cannot ignore it. Indeed, it permeates their very lives to such an extent that they may not be aware of it. In such an environment, literacy is a social habit, so that an individual may paradoxically be seen as unable to use the tool of written language except haltingly but yet able to participate in the activities of the literate social world (Langer; Connerton; Wagner). Thus it is, that we cannot say that a child in a literate culture

resembles a person in a nonliterate culture; ontogeny, in this case, does not recapitulate phylogeny (Foster and Purves, 1990). For the child in a scribal society where texts are ubiquitous (even on diaper covers), the environment exerts its influence willy-nilly.

**II. *The Tailors Arrive: Literacy and Social Structures:*** We cannot, however, claim that there is a single psychological or social construct called “literate thinking” or “literate culture”; as I shall argue such notions of universality must be replaced by sociocultural ones. In making this argument, I join Scribner and Cole, Goody, and Street in opposition to the universalist ideas of people like Ong, Havelock, and McLuhan. Because written language and literacy have come to be part of the social fabric, they have been used as instruments of power and privilege and have had the effect of sorting society into groups ranging in proficiency from those nearly ignorant of written language to those who are highly adept and adaptable by being literate in several languages or sublanguages. As information has grown, the literate society has become more complex in its myriad scribal groups, which now range from literary theory to newspaper composition, from accounting to seismology. Together with the obvious variations in use of the tools of written language and text in various parts of the world, subgroups and strata have brought with them sets of values so that people in the larger scribal society associate cleanliness, punctuality, honesty, piety, patriotism, and other civic virtues with literacy. “The style is the man.”

Division and stratification have also brought with them some of the controversies concerning literacy cited by Wagner (1991) in his distinction between “emic” and “etic” views of literacy, or Street in his distinction between literacy in theory and practice. The activity of literacy has become a technic embedded in complex social practices which serve to set the conditions and boundaries of its use.

A technical definition of literacy would have it that those who are marginally literate are those who approach the lower end of the spectrum in having no technical ability—what is called dysfunctional or dyslexic. I would argue that many of them can maneuver in a world of literacy and text but they have not mastered it. They can function in a literate world but they are not literate in the sense of having control over that world and its social structures. They are excluded from many of the literate communities that constitute the “scribal society”; those who control our literate culture. One reason for this state of affairs is that they may not have adequate knowledge, which is to say adequate mental models of the functions of literacy by which the communities of the other strata operate and

which in turn drive the textual models that are the visible tokens of the scribal world (Purves, 1990); the clothes of the emperor.

From this sociocultural perspective, we can modify our definition of literacy by arguing that in order to master the activity of literacy in a given culture or subculture and be part of the scribal society, an adept literate possesses the following kinds of knowledge:

1. A portion of the information that is to be encoded or decoded. They know the vocabulary of what they are reading and writing about—probably as much as 75% of it before they begin to read or to write.

2. The graphic symbols that encode and structure that information (e.g., the alphanumeric system, punctuation, paragraphing, and document design). They can recognize complex text forms from simple stimuli—such as seeing pale orange newsprint and recognizing it as a financial newspaper.

3. The techniques for encoding and decoding using an appropriate technology (from a crayon to a computer). They can select appropriate technologies for their work or recognize the technologies that have been used.

4. Genres or different types of text and their uses, including models of successful text types (e.g., the differences between shopping lists and business letters). They know what these genres look like and how long they are expected to be as well as what purposes different genres serve.

5. The functions of text and text types in storing or communicating information, including the relative social utility and importance of these text types, and the appropriate ways to approach and use these types as information (e.g., the difference between real mail and junk mail). They know what to do with the variety of texts that are presented them in their environment and they know what text forms best serve their immediate and long-range purposes.

These five form the constituent underpinnings of literate behavior, and the fourth and fifth become all the more crucial as the society becomes more complex in its uses of written language. The most adept literate can employ them in a variety of activities, commercial, religious, cultural, communal, and domestic and do so in a manner that is seen as appropriate to each situation. The adept is not only articulate with written language and text, but fluent and socially appropriate as well. What appears to guide adept literates is the possession of a complex array of mental models of the functions and forms of written discourse (by discourse I mean text which can be seen as containing information; a computer keyboard

is not discourse but a shopping list is). Having these they can proceed to read or write; not having these in their full complexity literates are unable to survive except as marginal to an information society.

**III. *The Emperor Gets Dressed: Models of the Functions of Literacy.*** Cross-cultural research in literacy has suggested that when people write and read, they engage in an activity that is bounded to some extent by existing models of text and behavior toward text (Purves and Purves, 1986, Purves, 1988). I prefer the word *models* to "schemata," "frames," "scripts," or "preconceptions," although all four words suggest the strong visual basis to whatever it is that drives and controls our literacy. These models are dictated by people's previous experience of actual written texts (both those they have seen in their environment and those to which they have been exposed through instruction, particularly in school) and the ways in which those texts were handled by others. These models determine the habits of a literate society (Connerton) and help form the culture surrounding writers and readers (Heath; Scribner and Cole; Takala, Buckmaster, and Purves). These models of text have carefully delineated formal properties, as we shall see, but those forms are or were driven by the functions of text in a given community. At times the forms cease to be fully functional and either remain vestigial or are replaced. "RSVP" used to require a handwritten text centered on a vellum page; now a note or a telephone call suffices.

The variation in text models follows from an antecedent variation in what people perceive as the various functions of texts and literacy in a community. These perceptions can be divided into three aspects. The first of these aspects is the relative stress given to the functions of discourse: expressive of the writer, referential to the external world, conative or persuasive to the reader, metalingual or about the medium itself, poetic or to serve aesthetic ends, or phatic to maintain a link between writer and reader—(Jakobson and Sebeok). The aspect may also be seen in the particular function or combination of functions called for on a given occasion. To a certain extent, these functional demands of discourse dictate both the content of the text and the forms it will take.

The second aspect we may think of as the cognitive demand of the discourse (Vähäpassi), which is to say the degree to which the writer must "invent" either the content of the written text, the form of the text, or both, or to which the reader must note or more deeply ponder it. Written language can range from transcription, through organization or reorganization of material that is known to the writer, to invention or generation of both content and form or

structure. Reading can range from recognition, to following procedures, to interpretation or evaluation.

The third aspect concerns the social function of discourse: who is to write, when, and with respect to whom as audience and who is to read what with what intended outcome. The social function determines or is determined by who are the parties to a given text—a love letter excludes many people that a classified advertisement would not. The former involves one person at the writing end and one at the reading end (although in some societies there may be scribes or other interveners); the latter involves several writers to produce the final text and presumably a large number of readers. It also determines the amount of time spent upon the writing or reading, the occasion when the writing or the reading is to take place, and the outcome of the text, which includes the subsequent actions of the writer and the reader.

These three sociocognitive functions interact with each other in any given situation, which interaction in turn affects the text produced by changing the mental model held by the writer. That is to say that writing a letter in a business setting to a colleague differs from writing to the same colleague from the home. Reading a bedtime story to a child differs from reading the labels in a supermarket or the recipe on one of those labels in the kitchen. Reading a story to a child differs from reading a story in a classroom, and the stories may differ as well. School literacy, in particular, differs greatly from nonschool literacy and has its unique set of constraints and models; therein lies the “problem” of the “at risk” student (Heath). In school, literate acts must be put on display through talk or action, and school texts and reading and writing have their peculiar forms and structures (Purves, 1990).

I would represent the interaction of these aspects of the role of literacy as having their effects on text models as in Figure 1 (see Appendix). The three key features that bound text models are (1) the amount and type of information included in a given text; (2) the formal characteristics of the text including visual layout, discourse structures, and stylistic devices; and (3) the tools and constituent acts and operations in writing or reading (e.g., the kinds of implements selected and the surfaces upon which the text is placed and relevant operations such as spelling, revising, skimming, or criticizing). What binds each of these is what binds the functions of literacy, convention; which is to say that literate acts are always social acts and as social acts are constrained by the conventional models of a given community. The particular interaction helps to form both rhetorical and interpretive communities (Fish; Purves

1989), which together we might call literate or scribal communities, subgroups of the larger scribal society (Purves, 1990).

The models, I believe, are firmly determined by and, at the same time, define the cultures or the communities that people inhabit (a community may best be defined as a subgroup of a larger ethnic or literate culture), and the fact of cultural variety explains the seeming failure of some people to survive in what to them is an alien community. A student who comes to an academic setting from a workplace where certain kinds of texts are admired will soon find them scorned in an English classroom. So too will a student who does not understand that people are to discuss what they read or that they are to come up with the approved interpretation.

The communities of literates within a country as diverse as the United States may be as distant as the community of loggers and that of weekend woodcutters, despite the fact that the two may seem similar to an outsider. They even differ in the ways by which they tolerate others' expertise. Just as I hire a forester, so I hire an accountant, because I am not adept in that community; so, too, my wife hires an advertising consultant for her business. We do so without shame or guilt. In many English classrooms, however, hiring a writer or an editor is shrouded in shame and secrecy; the student is to do everything alone.

**IV. *What the Emperor Wears: A Functional Rhetoric of Text Models.*** Just as we can move from the functions of logging to the types of cuts made and the ways by which those cuts are performed, so we can move from the functions of literacy to a rhetoric of text models based not upon speech but upon a full understanding of text. The aspects of the text models that research has made apparent are outlined in Figure 1.

Clearly any text has a semantic and propositional content: it is about something and it presents words and arrangements of words in what is called discourse. There may be variation in the amount of information as well as in the selection from the total information on the topic. We may simply write "bread" on a shopping list rather than a minute description of the shape, size, and texture of the bread. On other occasions full depiction is preferred. There is also variation in the level of abstraction or detail in the text. There is further variation in the perspective from which the material is viewed, the degree of ostensible objectivity of the writing, or the degree to which figurative language is to be employed.

The forms of texts derive from their visual elements and appearance. Much of the writing about literacy has focused on the historical and cultural relationship between written and oral

language, and suggested that written language differs from conversation but resembles formal oral language in that both use certain stylized and conventional patterns and devices of language so as to make the relationship between speaker and hearer and writer and reader easier to manage (Olson; Ong; Akinnaso, 1982, 1985; Goody). Both types of language are more constrained by convention than is conversational oral language which relies on the face-to-face interchange of speaker and listener. But written language undergoes greater conventional constraints because it must mediate between writer and reader. Instruction in literacy, these writers have argued, needs to account for this relationship with formal and ritualized spoken language.

I would like to suggest that the distinguishing feature of written language has an antecedent that as strongly affects it: pictographic representation. Writing can be seen as a descendant from various pictorial or graphic representations of the world of the "painter," such as cave drawings, hieroglyphs, and petroglyphs, and various sorts of nonverbal signs and symbol systems (Gaur; Harris). These representations have clearly influenced such aspects of written language as its progression in Western systems from upper left to lower right, its use of size or boldness to indicate emphasis, and its use of white or blank space to indicate divisions between segments. The nature of many of these visual conventions is known to designers, as are the diverse rhetorical effects of typefaces, spacing, illustration, and other graphics. Some of this knowledge seems intuitively held by young readers and writers, many of whom are adept interpreters of comics and other graphic texts. Such knowledge is used in everyday literate acts such as making a list, using a directory, a calendar, or a timetable. There has as yet been little serious study by rhetoricians and educators of such matters as the visual conventions in written language, how these conventions are known by writers and readers, and how this knowledge might best be used in instruction.

It is apparent that written language or text has the characteristics of segmenting space with print in order to make meaning. Primarily this is done with the use of a set of conventional symbols called letters, which are combined into groupings called words, and the words into phrases, sentences, and other units. The spatial segmentation on the page, then, can be seen as demarcating units which have been assigned some sort of meaningfulness. Such is the case with the sentence that has just been written, which can be observed as containing a violation of the conventions of segmentation (known as a typo), and that sort of meaningfulness is often confounded with natural language.



But the meaningfulness of spatial segmentation is much more than the demarcation of word and sentence boundaries. The following texts provide examples of other demarcations (Figure 2 in Appendix). The letter and the poem are two obvious examples of text that give a clue as to their meaning from their placement of marks in relation to white space. In addition one of them uses another characteristic of written language, darkness to give an index of meaning. Meaning and rhetorical effect can also be portrayed by size of the writing, underlining, and other devices that are peculiar to written format.

Another aspect of the visual presentation of written language that cannot be overlooked is the use of diagrams and illustration as a part of the total text. These form a clear part of the impression and the meaning in magazines, textbooks, research reports, and other forms of writing, and they are often used in literary writing as well. Such visual forms constitute a part of the text model that helps writers determine when they have achieved the sort of text that they have been asked to produce (Purves and Purves, 1986; Purves, 1990).

Beyond these visual aspects of form are the various possible structures of content at either the level of the text or the level of discourse. By the former, I refer to the structure provided in lists and tables, by the latter I refer to what is traditionally thought of as arrangement or disposition of ideas.

Children are early exposed to the graphic and visual aspects of written texts, primarily through picture books, but also through the environment including television's presentation of text. In fact these images of what a text looks like may well exert a dominating effect on early writing and literacy, but curiously they are not made a part of instruction in writing except in the formation of letters and in early penmanship (Harste, Woodward, and Burke).

The final element of the models of text is a dual one concerning the production and reception of text. Texts are produced on surfaces and the particular marks and shapes are created by a variety of instruments which can render two-dimensional or three-dimensional texts. They can be as solid as wooden blocks or neon tubing or as evanescent as a wisp of smoke or a set of lights on a screen. The persons who produce texts produce both the palpable text and the discourse (Purves, 1990). Text-producing acts include the manual act of inscribing and the subsequent act of editing to insure the legibility of the text. Discourse-producing acts include what is called drafting and the subsequent act of revising what has been drafted to make sure it serves its purpose.

Parallel to these productive acts are the reproductive acts of



decoding or going from the graphic representations either to sounded or to unsounded language. At the same time the reader seeks to make meaning by summarizing, personalizing, interpreting, or evaluating the text (Purves and Rippere). These responses may take on a further social dimension, which at times can be ritualistic or further dictated by the situation. The responses can range from the tacit act of ignoring the text to more passive and social acts such as holding an extended discussion of the text. They may also lead to the act of producing another text that responds to, glosses, or comments upon the text just read.

Each of these models of text and the acts related to texts derives from the perceived function of the literate act in a given social context. No one is inherent in the fact of text, although the total sum may derive from that fact. At times, of course, the model has become divorced from the function; at times, too, the model tends to force a particular functional use upon the writer or reader. The model of the scholarly article in some fields is explained by a style sheet rather than by a discussion of the rules of evidence and proof in the discipline. Similarly the four-page letter in direct mail advertising becomes a constraint placed on the advertiser rather than being seen as a way of establishing a rapport with a reader. Both of these examples of models may be vestigial rather than functional.

**V. *The Emperor's Parade: The Controlling Role of Models.*** One may well assent to the idea that all of these models of text and of the acts involved in composing or reading and responding are highly conventional, but probably functional (Scribner and Cole; Goodman; Reder; Purves, 1991). One could probably argue that in this respect literacy is not unlike woodcutting, where much of what is done comes from the perceived functions of cutting and splitting modified by the demands for safety and productivity. These then take on a social aspect. So too with many of the functions of literacy within a society. Convention and need dictate the occasions for writing or reading as well as the functions and demand of discourse appropriate to those occasions. It is a convention to write a thank-you letter after a visit and this convention imposes constraints upon the content and form of the letter. The need for public records of meetings imposes a demand for minutes and the form is often that dictated by the potential for lawsuit.

From convention and need the writer or the reader then applies knowledge of both the content and form appropriate to a function on a particular occasion and conducts the appropriate search of the long-term memory. The writer goes on to certain text-producing as well as discourse-producing activities (Takala, 1983). The text-producing activities include the more mechanical or physical; the

discourse-producing activities include those related to the selection and arrangement of content. The reader goes on to both decoding activities and types of response to the text material ranging from discarding, to committing, to memory, to critical analysis. Again these activities are bounded by social convention and interact with text models (Purves, 1988). Within the scribal world, these activities help define rhetorical and interpretive communities. Such communities appear to exercise great control on the individual but some are more or less tolerant of deviation. A learned journal style is much more rigid than is that of a general interest magazine.

The idea of mental models, their conventionality, and the control they exert upon writers and readers is not new; it goes back as far as Aristotle's *Poetics*, but in many cases the models for specific kinds of texts have not been well-elaborated, and the result is that literates and their teachers and judges operate in a world that is ill-defined and therefore not easy to learn to manipulate. We are unclear with our students how the various aspects of text models coalesce in a given situation such as a classroom essay, a final examination, a summary of an experiment, or the like. We are also unclear with them how these specific exemplifications differ from a shopping list, a telephone directory, a letter from a grandparent, or a notice from the municipality. Furthermore, we are unsure how each of these manifestations serves its particular social and discursive functions. When we know more about these matters, the literacy curriculum becomes much easier to present to students.

As a profession we need to elaborate on models of literacy and text and to devise teaching strategies that will make them apparent to children and adults. Such an approach differs from current instructional practice because it approaches literacy as beginning with the knowledge of the functional and textual models of our society that underlie the ability to participate in a complex activity, rather than with a set of basic technical skills (which are only aspects of operation within that system).

**VI: *What the Little Boy Sees: By Way of a Polemical Conclusion.*** Teachers and students operate by models even though they are not clear about them. Students often see good writing in terms of inscribing (e.g., neatness and spelling) rather than discourse (structure and style), and reading in terms of decoding the sounds rather than meaning making; such is particularly the case of students who are not successful in schools (Shaughnessy). Teachers often label students "remedial," "marginal," "at risk," "basic," or "illiterate": labels given by the judges, not the judged. There is ample evidence that models of text are used by those who judge the reading and particularly the writing performance of students. The

first major study of this phenomenon nearly thirty years ago indicated the existence of powerful scribal communities, which often did not agree with each other as to the appropriate model (Diederich, French, and Carlton). They found that teachers' models of text differed from those of lawyers or editors or other professionals.

Most of the systematic research on the use of models in judgments of literacy has been performed at higher levels of education, although implicit models of grammaticality, spelling, and neatness, oral miscue, or malapropism serve to mark the judgments made of those who are younger or outside of the academic mainstream (Goodman; Applebee, et al.; Purves and Hawisher, 1990; Spandel and Stiggins). At the level of discourse, however, these judgmental levels are less explicit. In reading, at-risk students may be castigated for not pursuing elaborated interpretations (Heath). Purves and Hawisher (1990) suggest that the mental model behind such graders as those trained for The College Board and the Test of English as a Foreign Language can be operationalized as what, in textbooks and style manuals, are the desiderata of the infamous "five-paragraph theme," a mental model of academic writing as raters think it should be practiced by students.

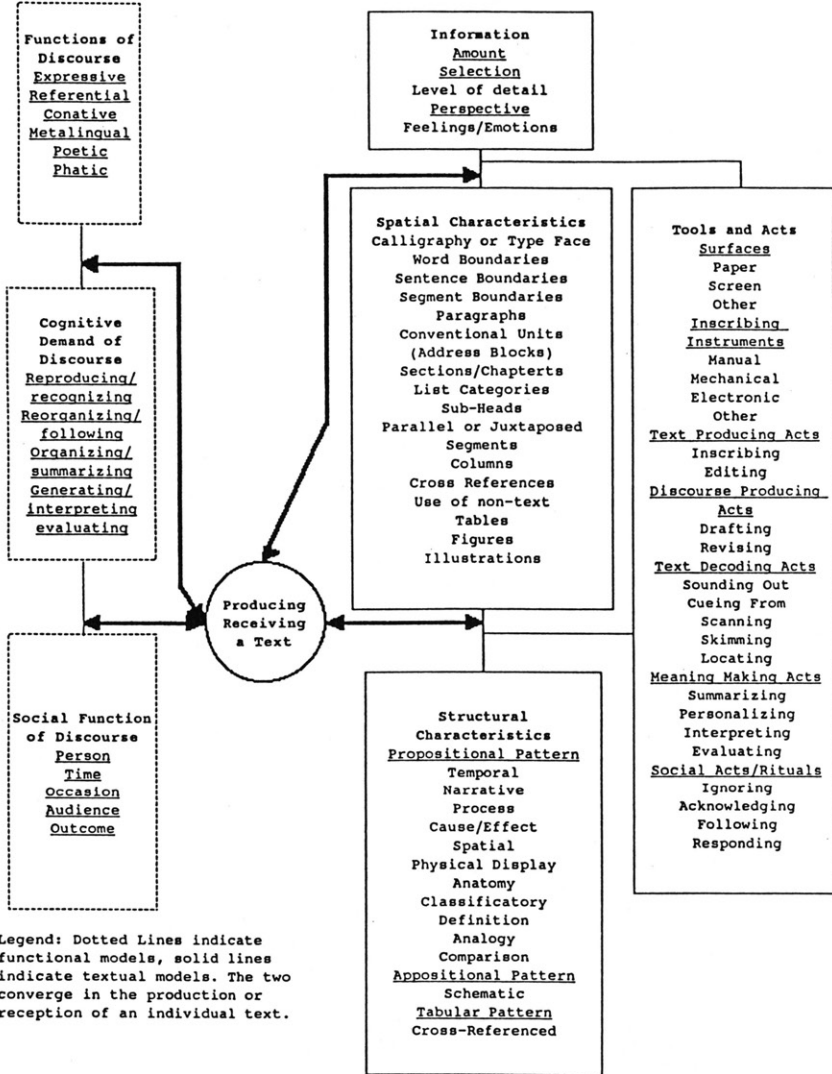
That text models exist in readers' heads and that these models form the basis both for their acceptance of particular texts into an appropriate generic group ("this is an essay," "this is an interpretation") and their evaluation of the sufficiency of the text to the model ("this is a good essay," "this is a valid interpretation"). Such text models appear to be culturally specific and they appear to affect the rating of student writing and to impose themselves as models on students and thus get passed on from generation to generation. They are used in the gatekeeping role of academic assessment of literacy and they exert an influence upon whom is admitted to the community and thereby upon student beliefs and ultimately upon their actual writing performance. These models of text derive from the sociocognitive models of the functions of academic literacy that pervade an educational system. The origins of our current models may be obscure but they were probably born of necessity rather than caprice. I wonder if the five-paragraph theme became popular because it could be written in a single hour's sitting. Once in the system, the models are often difficult to change.

I would urge teachers of literacy at any level to be honest about the sociocultural nature of literacy and its dependence on functional models that produce formal ones. I would urge teachers to be explicit about these aspects of text and literacy. I would urge an approach to literacy education that brings the whole textual

world into the school and places school literacy into a broader context; and that directly confronts the sociocultural nature of models of literacy and of text. I have argued that the curriculum should be bound to the concept of text in its myriad forms (Purves, 1990). I would reiterate that charge. All forms of text from graffiti to epic poems, from cereal boxes to telephone books should become part of the curriculum and should be explored in terms of their functions and forms. Academic literacy has become overly separated from real-world literacy and made a value in its own right. Teachers and their students need to see academic texts in the broad social matrix of junk mail, business letters, computer programs, greeting cards, and gothic romances.

Teachers and their students should explore this world as a fascinating human world whereby the various functional needs to store and retrieve information in print to serve particular rhetorical and social purposes has brought forth a complex array of textual models to meet those needs. They can explore how they succeed and where they fall short of their end; they can explore the human drama in creating this complex web of worlds that exists on paper and on the computer screen. It can be exciting, challenging, and it can have the payoff of bringing those who have been marginalized by academic literacy into the scribal society.

## Appendix



**Figure 1. The Interrelation of Functional Models and Text Models**

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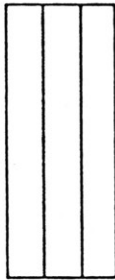
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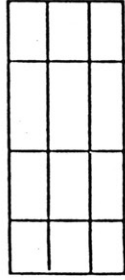
3



4



5



These are three pages. Which is meant to be read across only? Which across and down?  
**Figure 2. Five Typical Text Shapes**

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