

Exploring the Role of Literacy in Students' Writing Development in the Further Education and Vocational Education Sector

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Abstract

This paper seeks to address an important issue in Further Education English studies: where the position of writing lies within instrumental models of literacy and how this can be challenged in a Further Education context by developing a more critical, pedagogical approach. Exploration of this issue is realised through discussions centred on the notion of 'Functional Skills', which explicate how a focus on 'text' types and skills acquisition fails to take into account the students' own literacies and socially-situated cultural resources that often lie outside of the dominant 'system' of school writing. Two case studies of student writing that are positioned outside of qualification-led assessment convention will serve to illustrate and emphasise the rich literacies that these students have command of, and are inducted into. The paper concludes by championing a socially-situated definition of literacy that offers students the opportunity to demonstrate their competency in language in a manner they are comfortable with.

Key Words

Literacy; Writing; Instrumental; Discourse; Functional Skills; Empowerment.

Introduction

In this paper, I will explore models of written literacy that exist in my own teaching context. I will critically reflect on my students' writing and investigate a nationally-employed assessment platform that seeks to assess 'competency'. The notion of competency itself is worthy of scrutiny, with Resnick proposing '*...that it might be helpful to reconceptualise literacy not in terms of competency or ability but rather as "a set of cultural practices that people engage in"*' (2000: p. 28). The paper argues that as long as there exists narrow views of what writing is and what it is for, students will experience difficulties in developing confidence, agency, or a belief that they 'have a voice' when writing.

In my current teaching context, I deliver Functional Skills English to 16 to 19-year-old students in a north-east London Further Education college. The college is a provider of vocational qualifications which allows students to study practical-based disciplines in teaching and learning contexts that aim to mirror real world applications. As part of their programme, all of the students between the ages of 16 and 18 develop their English and maths skills through taking an additional qualification at a level determined at the start of their programme. The *Wolf Report* (2011) recommends that students with a 'D' grade will re-sit their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications and those with an 'E' grade or below will work towards completing Functional Skills. Writing comprises a key aspect of these qualifications and the form(s) and scope these assessments employ will be of particular focus in this paper.

At the beginning of the academic year in September 2015, a fellow English teaching colleague and I were discussing how we develop strategies to teach writing skills. It was during this conversation that the question of 'do we really practise what we preach?' was raised. This is an important question, I would argue, because a high percentage of the working week is spent facilitating students in creating arguments, discourses and prose in a variety of contexts, whilst rarely acting as the sole composer of a variety of texts.

In a recent *Times Educational Supplement* article, Gilbert suggested:

'...there are two types of writing that many teachers do: the functional and the personal. Every teacher has to write functionally every day – usually boring, compulsory paperwork – but most want to write personally, to reflect on the extraordinary roller coaster ride they experience in and out of the classroom'.

(Gilbert, 2012: online)

I attribute my interest in writing to a series of positive experiences under the tutelage of an enthusiastic and engaging primary school teacher, but, despite those positive experiences, I would suggest that the abundance of writing I carry out in the professional aspect of my life is functional.

With an intention to explore the challenges I would encounter when faced with writing, I committed to contributing a piece to UKFEchat (Smith, 2015), an online blog for teachers that requested a piece of between 500 and 1,500 words with the topic of 'How to stay motivated as a teacher'. Below are the opening two paragraphs from my submission:

"I've got a secret. It's going to make me rich. I've managed to capture the essence of exactly what it is that motivates us front-line teachers. Would you like some? Well, here it is..."

Wouldn't it be great to have a magic answer? Sadly there is no secret and regrettably, in the world beyond my imagination, there is no panacea that can be prescribed to provide motivation. It's an abstract phenomenon, drifting around in the ether and coming and going as it pleases, sometimes curiously absent when you need it the most. We work in a profession in which intrinsic motivation is perhaps one of the most valuable assets available to us. But it's not a currency that we can spend or accrue and use at a later date. After a long, challenging day at the chalk face even the most experienced and passionate teachers can be found lacking. In spite of this, below are a few tips that I use to keep my motivation levels up which have aided me hugely during my first few years of teaching in FE."

(Smith, 2015: online)

Writing the piece was a challenge, but it felt liberating at the same time. Through critical reflection, I mused over how I could employ literary techniques to serve a purpose, and found myself pondering several key questions: 'What effect will the metaphors I use have on the reader?' and 'Could I use alliteration in this passage?' It

is interesting that I thought specific ‘techniques’ would automatically add up to ‘good writing’ and this is an aspect I have reflected upon since. This reflection led to posing the questions of where do these ideas about ‘good writing’ come from, and is there not a danger that this focus can constrain young people, or that they get the idea that ‘good writing’ is the accumulation of a number of literary or linguistic ‘features’? These considerations hint towards a ‘fine tuning’ of the text, which took a significant investment of time and was further aided by my working closely with the blog’s editor to hone the text further. Such conditions and collaborations are typical of ‘real world’ textual composition. Formalised assessment of writing strives to determine written competency in natural conditions and through non-contrived forms, but infringes on the ‘real world’ conditions noted above.

The important aspect related to my experience with the blog is that I felt I had embodied the role of a ‘writer’, something my students frequently find themselves being asked to do, but perhaps without the feeling of finding a voice which characterised my experience. Drawing on Locke (2015), it may be argued that successfully writing for a purpose requires the writer to make conscious decisions regarding, among other areas, ‘...*the reader (audience), meaning, language, technological mediation and social context*’ (Locke, 2015: p. 119). Experience from working with students informs me that this myriad of prerequisites can be daunting for those who are also subjected to the rigours of standardised assessment and prescriptive, narrowed curricula. Moreover, as Duckworth and Brzeski (2015) argue, the Further Education landscape is ‘...*aligned with a more instrumental approach to adult literacy that challenges an emancipatory approach to curriculum design and fails to take into account the history, background or needs of learners*’ (2015: p. 2).

Learning to Write and the Role of Literacy

Literacy can be positioned as pertaining to writing and reading of a mostly formative kind, as is often associated with literacy development in young children. I would argue it cannot be understood through only one interpretation, however. From an educational context, literacy is often considered in relation to ideas of understanding, interpreting and responding to different kinds of texts. Previous Adult Literacy Surveys define literacy to be ‘*The ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential*’ (National Adult Literacy Database, n.d.). Further to this, the survey assessed language literacy under the following categories:

‘Prose literacy: the ability to understand and use information from texts such as editorials, news stories, poems and fiction. Document literacy: the ability to locate and use information from documents such as job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and graphs’.

(National Adult Literacy Database, n.d.)

Whilst comprehensive, these definitions of literacy make no explicit reference to the production of language, instead championing the ability to comprehend information and act upon it. It is possible that this was not the intention but nonetheless characterises the tendency to favour reading comprehension over written production in such contexts (see PISA report, 2012). Parallels can be drawn here between

these two definitions, and Functional Skills qualifications, which contextualise tasks that employ scenarios that aim to mirror a 'professional' working environment, and move towards a reductive and instrumental approach to literacy.

What are Functional Skills?

Ofqual (2012) defines Functional Skills as '*...fundamental, applied skills in English [...] which help people to gain the most from life, learning and work*' (2012: p. 2). This definition puts forward an instrumental ideal of what literacy is. What remains unclear is what these applied skills constitute when explored in relation to contexts of life, learning and work. With regard to assessment, they stipulate that these qualifications:

- '5.1 provide realistic contexts, scenarios and problems*
- 5.2 specify tasks that are relevant to the context*
- 5.3 require application of knowledge, skills and understanding for a purpose*
- 5.4 require problem solving*
- 5.5 assess process skills and the outcome of their application in different contexts.'*

(Ofqual, 2012: pp. 2-3)

The Ofqual assessment guidelines serve as a contextualisation of the ideals proposed by the Adult Literacy Survey and, it can be assumed, a reaction to shortcomings of the previous qualification that preceded it, Key Skills, which assessed student writing through multiple choice questions on word and sentence grammar focus, structure and stylistic devices only. Key Skills did not place a significant emphasis on autonomous writing skills as Functional Skills does, illustrating a renewed valuing of whole text-written competency in these new qualifications. Whilst, in theory, this move seems like progress insofar that students are now required to produce whole texts for assessment, it is my experience that there exists a disparity between my students' reading literacy and writing literacy when assessed in specific contexts. This pertains to the level of text, which my students are able to comprehend, engage with and respond to when reading, and the 'level' of text my students compose when writing.

The above definitions are one iteration of literacy in context. In another, Gee (1996) discusses what he calls the '*...commodity myth*' (1996: p. 122), in which:

'literacy = functional literacy = skills necessary to function in "today's job market" = market economy = the market = the economy...Literacy is measured out and quantified, like time, work and money [...] We match jobs with "literacy skills" and skills with "economic needs". Literacy, thus, becomes intertranslatable with time, work, money, part of "the economy"...a commodity that can be measured, and thence bought and sold'.

(Gee, 1996: pp. 122-123)

This definition presents literacy as part of the wider society's investment in economic prosperity: literacy becomes a quantifiable, measurable skill. Systems of education, policy makers, and qualification accreditors shape, mould and package different

facets of literacy that they deem useful and relevant to the time, context and situation. Gee's assertion is that the commodity myth is a skewed view of literacy in that it fails to acknowledge the functions of literacy outside these contexts. Even so, and this is what I find problematic, it is clearly pervasive within institutionalised education. In my college, this is seen in the role that Functional Skills English plays. In such systems, emphasis is placed on standards of performance that can be assessed and levels or grades assigned. Policy dictating standards of performance in education is not a new occurrence but it is worth continuing to resist the marriage.

When searching for attempts to prescribe a uniform literacy and govern its dissemination, one does not have to look far. The beginning of the 2015/2016 academic year has seen more Further Education students than ever required to re-sit their maths and English GCSEs if they did not achieve a 'C' grade or above when at school. It could be argued that this 'C' grade in GCSE is the desired commodity, with those students unable to achieve this grade seemingly labelled as not being ready for work or not possessing the ability to effectively assimilate into society. Conclusions such as these are dangerous to draw, but persist nevertheless. As an approximation, of the 100 students I am teaching Functional Skills to this year, only 30 are working towards completing a Level 2 qualification, with the remaining working at levels below or well below this. Such a scenario posits the question: 'Are those remaining students ready for work and capable of effectively assimilating into society without having met the benchmark level of performance, as determined by the Functional Skills qualifications?' In order to answer the above question, what might be necessary is a wider exploration of what is meant by 'literacy', and how this in turn can be fairly and effectively 'assessed'.

As previously noted, Gee argues the commodification of literacy is not a true reflection on what literacy constitutes. Further to this, and with influence drawn from the work of other scholars associated with 'New Literacy Studies', Lea (2004) subscribes to the view that:

'...literacy is concerned with the acquisition of a particular set of cognitive skills [...] It takes as its starting point the position that literacy is not a unitary concept; reading and writing – literacies are cultural and social practices, and vary depending upon the particular context in which they occur'.

(Lea, 2004: p. 740)

Gee's view of literacy is significant: he argues it is malleable and has the propensity to change depending on the context. This suggests that any uniform definition of 'literacy' is going to narrow a very broad field to areas that are deemed relevant by those in power in that particular context and at that particular time.

Moreover, central in Gee's framework is the role of what he calls discourse:

'...a socially-accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expression, and "artifacts" of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially-meaningful group or "social network", or to signal a socially meaningful "role".'

(Gee, 1996: p. 131)

In my experience, my students are almost certainly all prolific writers. However, the platforms they use, the ‘social networks’ they subscribe to, and the conventions they have been inducted to, reflect the command of a literacy that does not correlate with those they are required to adopt in order to succeed in qualification assessment tasks.

Gee proposes that the effective mastery of a specific discourse requires its participants to be able to draw on their own experiences when authoring a literary text. Prevalent here is the role of social interaction and integration alongside references to cognitive and affective artefacts. Moreover, on a conceptual level, Wittgenstein’s (1922) famed maxim, ‘The limits of my language mean the limits of my world’, furthers this concept by proposing a symbiotic relationship between both language cognition and perception. What becomes abundantly clear when considering these points is that literacy is not merely bound to one specific domain or context, but to every domain and context in some manner. This broader, richer view of literacy suggests that all authored texts require consideration and are of merit if teachers want to understand a student’s ability (and strengths) as a writer. From an educational perspective, convention dictates that a student’s literacy is assessed through the use of a standardised task. To facilitate the discussion on this trend, below is an excerpt from a Functional Skills English Writing Level 2 example paper:

“Your local council is organising a weekend of sporting events to encourage people to take up sport and learn about the sports facilities in the area.

You read the leaflet and decide to apply as a volunteer to help the event run smoothly.

Your task: *is to write an application to your local council persuading them that you are the right person to be a volunteer. (26 marks)*

(City & Guilds, 2011: p. 8)

It can be assumed that this task provides an insight into what kind of writing students of Functional Skills English are required to produce at this level. In view of this, successful students will be able to adhere to stylistic conventions of a formal letter or email, and synthesise information from a written stimulus as a prompt for their writing. This output is critical when considering what comprises written literacy in the view of institutionalised systems of funding, policy and accreditation in the UK Further Education landscape.

Any narrowing of literacy such as this invites scrutiny, but ingrained tendencies within education to measure and quantify through levels, grades and standardised assessments mean that such an exercise is often resisted. Assessments like the one above are still deemed fit for purpose. Locke (2015) discusses different versions of English and writer orientation, as seen in the below table.

<i>Cultural heritage</i>	<i>Personal growth</i>
<i>Writer orientation:</i> • Appreciation and emulation	<i>Writer orientation:</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deference • Acculturation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-realization through meaning-making • Creative exploration • Personal integration
<i>Rhetorical or textual competence</i>	<i>Critical literacy</i>
<i>Writer orientation:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal mastery of textual practices • Pragmatic competence • Social adeptness 	<i>Writer orientation:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical linguistic analysis • Detachment • Social transformation

Table 1: Locke's written pedagogical domains, including writer orientation (2015: p. 79)

The language employed merits investigation here, with examples including '*creative exploration*', '*appreciation*' and '*pragmatic competence*' that gesture at the personal enrichment that can be attained from writing beyond the confines of prescribed standardised assessment. Moreover, '*acculturation*' and '*integration*' highlight the role of language in social assimilation and bear the hallmarks of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) and his work into cultural and linguistic capital. Through this overview, Locke (2015) proposes that, regardless of the writer's disposition, there exists a pedagogical alignment from which meaning and value can be ascertained. When comparing the above Functional Skills assessment task with Locke's proposed domains of writer orientation, it appears as though the greatest correlation in philosophies is rhetorical or textual competence. Locke continues by stating that in this version of written English, '*...students need to master a range of text-types or genres in order to be successful in the world; product is as important as process*' (2015: p. 124). Here, again, is the mention of a 'product', a term synonymous with commodity, as presented by Gee.

Locke does not subscribe to the view that each of these models is solitary; rather he recognises '*...the non-exclusive nature of the[se] elements*' (2015: p. 119). It could be argued that writer orientation can change between writer, or on a micro scale between different texts from the same author, or even within one text. However, Locke's work is shaped by the overarching commitment to a writing pedagogy that embraces a myriad of complex positions a student can find themselves in when authoring a text, of which assessment is only one. In my context, if a student does not pass their English qualification at the end of the academic year, it is viewed as a failure. As a result, a huge amount hinges on the student's ability to perform well in such an assessment. Significant preparation is made towards helping them ready themselves for the kind of writing they will need to replicate. As such, it might be argued that the teaching of writing can easily become an exercise in helping students to pass an assessment.

Locke's notion of '*...written pedagogical domains*' (2015: p. 79), by which he means the pluralistic interpretation of writing across various contexts, appears quite idealistic in light of this. If an assessment subscribes to a specific field of writing pedagogy, as could be argued with Functional Skills, this field is governed not by the overarching ideals Locke proposes, but rather by the end product they are measured by. The notion of formal mastery of textual practice needs to be considered due to

these implications. If it is known that students will need to write formal letters and emails in their summative assessment, how much attention is paid when teaching writing to documents such as autobiographies, memoirs, feature articles, creative narratives or any other variant of textual practice?

Case Studies

One of my first tasks when I begin to work with new students at the start of the academic year is to gauge their capabilities in writing. Convention might suggest the use of an 'assessment', consisting of a prescribed question, word length and mark scheme, however, my experiences have taught me that prescribing questions and briefs often have limited success. Examples I have previously used include: 'Write about your typical day in your life' and 'What would you do if you won the lottery?' What I often received was a written account that did little to inform me of who the person writing the piece was. I was often left asking: what purpose did the writing actually serve the writer? I was able to assess whether or not they could use pronouns correctly and their command of varying sentence types, but what rarely came through was their personality, their creativity and other 'softer' skills that had been sacrificed in the search for mechanistic, core, English skills.

As such, the task I chose for this year's cohort was informal in nature and not conducted under exam conditions, with the aim of providing students with a platform on which they could create a piece of writing that showed me what they could do; a piece of writing that had a sense of a 'voice'. Students were asked to write about something that interested them. My only conditions were that the work must be their own, that it would be completed over the course of a one and a half hour lesson, and was at least one half of A4 paper in length. Below is one of the submissions I received from one of my students, a football apprentice called Joel.

Case Study 1 - Joel

My Squaadd

Dave is our number one, (Gk)

He isn't much fun.

EJ's a tank, (Rb)

He's safer than a bank.

Ranson's rather crazy, (Cb)

Always going on a mazy.

Kalum's a bit of a loon, (Cb)

I think he supports the toon.

Then there's Charlie Mills, (Lb)

He has silky skills on wheels.

Frankie is our CDM, (CDM)

Last week he was my MoM.

Then of course there's me, (CAM)

I play at the top of three.

Was accompanied by Jake, (CAM)

Turns out he was a fake.

Then there's Luke on the wing, (RM)

He tackles like a dench king.

On the left there's Albert Barker, (LM)

He go's [sic] skiing and comes back darker.

My initial reaction when Joel handed the piece to me was “you’ve written a poem!?”. He responded by explaining that “this is English class, so I thought I’d write a poem”. Analysis of the text tells us a great deal about Joel as a writer. The poem is a narrative account introducing the reader to his teammates, with each player described in humorous or irreverent terms in a quest to adhere to the poetic convention of rhyming. He capably employs a diverse range of literary techniques and makes abundant use of vocabulary from his footballing sociolect. Joel’s confidence in his identity as a footballer meant he had a familiar platform grounded in experience on which to build his writing. Locke might suggest Joel has written through employing the domain of ‘*Personal Growth*’, in which ‘...*writing has a key role to play in a person’s individual growth: writing is a way of making sense of the world*’ (2015: p. 122). It can be assumed he may not have had as much enthusiasm and confidence in composing a poem on a prescribed topic.

Gee’s concept of discourse requires further exploration at this point. He argues that within the structure of discourse there exists two subcategories: primary discourses, which ‘...*are those to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialisation as members of particular families within their sociocultural settings*’ and secondary discourses, which ‘...*are those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socialisation within various local, state and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialisation – for example, churches, gangs, schools, offices*’ (1996: p. 137). Gee concludes by suggesting that literacy is often reduced to questions of mastery of these secondary discourses. I think Joel is doing much more in his writing than this.

It could be argued that Joel exhibited a flair and creativity in writing that indicates the mastery of a social discourse synonymous with his fledgling footballing career. His achievement is diminished if seeking to assess his work through other literacy discourse conventions, such as that imposed by his English qualification’s assessment criteria. It is mastery of the latter that will ultimately lead to certificated recognition of literate achievement. When considering this idea of multiple literacies, Locke notes that:

‘for other children, who have been apprenticed into different kinds of literate practice, the transition will not be so easy. In many cases, the school may not be sympathetic to their difficulties’.

(Locke, 2015: p. 28)

Reflecting on Joel’s writing led me to think how this could be developed further. Joel’s choice of subject matter, and subsequent employing of corresponding vocabulary, exemplifies his affinity for football as a social pursuit. One such means of developing his writing could involve firstly exploring a football match report, with an emphasis on reading analytically for stylistic and lexical choices the author has made, and secondly composing a match review for a game he himself has competed in. In the classroom, Joel would have access to resources, including peer and tutor support and collaboration, alongside exemplar text types, to aid in this process.

Case Study 2 - Shannon

The second piece of evidence I will be discussing in this paper is a text written by one of my students, Shannon. The text was written in response to a discussion she

had shared with her peers on human rights in a lesson. Also significant was the presence of a stimulus image, a photo of a 9/11 victim falling from the Twin Towers that Shannon had found on the internet.

"I wanted to cry. I wanted to scream but my throat was empty. I wanted to turn my back; I didn't want to see anymore. I wished darkness before my closed, teary eyes; such a comfortable view. It all happened so fast, all the fire and destruction. I went in the building thinking I was going to come back out again...well I did...just not the same way I went in. It was like death was offering me two ways to die and I had to choose which one I would prefer. Narrowed down to burning to death in excruciating pain or to throw myself to my own quick death.

So there I was, standing on the window ledge, all the rubble beneath me, all the fire that surrounded me. I couldn't hear anything. It was just like my ears had been blocked of all screams. I knew this was it for me, I knew this was going to be the end. I tried not to think about it too much...I just thought about my family and especially my daughter. All the happy moments we had together."

Through writing in the first person it is clear that the image played an important role in the creation of this text. Whilst rich in linguistic and literary artefacts, such as metaphor, imagery and suspenseful, well-paced sentences that provide us with insight into Shannon's command and application of language, most interesting for me is how Shannon engaged with and responded to the stimulus. Locke's point about a writing pedagogy comes to mind again. '*Personal growth*', Locke maintains, states that '*...craft is important, but so are such things as exploration, experimentation and process; process is more important than product*' (2015: p. 122). This point is important considering that text of this type permits creativity, flair and processes of trial and error when writing. In addition, the lack of a prescribed model or example answer for Shannon to refer to likely enhanced her writing, as she was not trying to replicate previously generated text. Rather, Shannon used the stimulus image available to her as a platform to base her writing, confidently composing on her own. I would argue here that an interpretation of Vygotsky's (1978; 1989) *Zone of Proximal Development* is aiding Shannon in her writing. The image she found is rich with socially and culturally poignant dialogues that Shannon has subconsciously consumed. Rather than receive support from the conventional tutor figure, her depiction of the 'falling man' has accessed the wider zeitgeist that has served to hone her understanding of the event. As such, whilst her efforts were internally generated, their foundations were forged through social interaction.

Shannon's exploration of an incredibly complex topic she has clearly engaged with, and is trying to make sense of, is apparent here. Moreover, she has demonstrated a command of 'softer' skills not immediately synonymous with literacy, including empathy. Locke notes '*...language is a means whereby inner meanings are communicated – a medium providing a clear window to the world and the possibility of shared meanings between human beings*' (2015: p. 122). If literacy is prevalent across a multitude of disciplines and contexts, then narrowing its definition and application, for assessment or any other educational purpose, will always exclude some students and favour others.

Conclusion

Everson argues that ‘...writing is a synthesis or pulling together of ideas, images and disarrayed facts, and fragments of experience. It should be taught naturally’ (2014: p. 5). I would suggest Everson means that the teaching of writing should enable students to draw from relics of their own memories, thoughts and concepts, rather than have to resort to contriving experiences. One can assume Everson would argue assessment should be undertaken in a similar manner. Functional Skills English qualifications require students to compose formal letters and emails to attain a specified level of literacy competence. For my students, these are documents that are not ‘natural’ to them, although, as seen above, they are highly literate when afforded some liberty in how they wish to demonstrate their command of language. Following on from this point is Doecke and Parr’s question 1: ‘...to what extent should a capacity to write essays be equated with “ability” in language and literacy?’ (2005: p. 4). Institutionalised education aside, the answer to this question might be ‘not a large extent’, however, due to the neoliberal drive of the curriculum, trends to assess through reductive models of assessment that link to employability and upskilling the workforce for the global economy in some educational circles persist, and the answer to Doecke and Parr’s question in consideration of the above is perhaps a more resounding ‘a significant extent’. I hope that the concept of literacy could be extended so as to include a greater appreciation of forms of writing that came into being simply as a result of a student engaging with an idea and articulating that into words. Freire (1973) argued that literacy could act as a liberator of the individual through the attaining of a critical consciousness, through which one achieves an in-depth understanding of the world, illustrating the profound influence literacy has on human experience and self-actualisation. Joel’s recovering of a fond past experience through language he felt comfortable in expressing himself, and Shannon’s embodying of a victim of the 9/11 attacks in a piece that embraced and explored mature, existential questions of what it is to be human, transcend standards that seek to pin down what literacy is.

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