The History of Literacy

The story and the discourse of literacy was once a simple, positive narrative, at least until recent times. Although reading and writing could be seen as complicated activities, their advancement and their contributions to people and nations were not. In recent years our understanding of literacy and its relationships to ongoing societies, cultures, and social change has been challenged and revised. The challenge came from many directions. The “new literacy studies,” as they are often called, attest to major shifts in approaches and knowledge, and a search today for new understandings. Many traditional notions about literacy and its presumed importance no longer influence scholarly and critical conceptions. The gap that too often exists between scholarly and more popular and applied conceptions is a major problem. It is one of the topics we will consider. It often includes the topics of schools and policy.

Among other important currents, historical scholarship and critical theories stand out, by themselves and together. Historical research on literacy has been unusually important in encouraging a reconstruction of the fields that contribute to literacy studies, the design and conduct of research, the role of theory and generalization in efforts to comprehend literacy and, as we say increasingly, literacies (plural). Drawing on a number of disciplines, it has insisted on new understandings of “literacy in context,” including historical context, as a requirement for making general statements about literacy, and for testing them. It carries great implications for new critical theories—literary, rhetorical, and discursive—that reflect on literacy.

This course considers these and related changes. Taking a historical approach, we will seek a general understanding of the history of literacy mainly but not only in the West since classical antiquity, with an emphasis on the early modern and modern eras. At the same time, we examine critically literacy’s contributions to the shaping of the modern world and the impacts on literacy from fundamental historical social changes. Among many topics, we will explore communications, language, expression, family and demographic behavior, economic development, urbanization, institutions, literacy campaigns, political and personal changes, and the uses of reading and writing. A new understanding of the place of literacy and literacies in social development is our overarching goal.

Objectives
The course has a number of goals:
learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and interpretations, and practicing analysis and critical evaluation

developing and practicing skills in written and oral expression

engaging in an interdisciplinary conversation about literacy studies, including but not limited to the historical study of literacy and critical approaches to literacy/ies followed in different disciplines and professions

developing new understandings of literacy’s many and complicated roles and connections in the development of modern societies, cultures, polities, and economies

comparing and evaluating different approaches, conceptualizations, theories, methods, and sources that relate to the study and understanding of literacy in its many contexts

[When approved: This course meets the GEC requirement for Diversity]

Assignments & Evaluation

a. Regular reading, attendance, and preparation for each class meeting. Attendance and participation are expected and taken into account in evaluation. Coming to class regularly, on time, and prepared. Frequent unexcused absences will result in lowered grades and possibly in failure (3 or more absences). When possible, notify the instructor about absences. Your work must be completed and submitted at class time on the announced due dates. Late submission of major assignments will result in deductions from your grade.

b. Writing weekly questions for discussion by working groups or the class. Questions should be based on that week’s reading, and can include connections to earlier weeks. 1 page statements may include a brief response to the reading (or film) followed by several discussion questions. Each student will turn in questions for four of the first eight weeks. Informal presentation.

c. Depending on the size of the class, groups may be responsible for leading one or more seminar sessions. There may also be opportunities to work on Graff’s Literacy Studies @OSU “initiative”

a, b, & c together=25% of final grade

d. 2 6-8 page (double-spaced) critical essays, based on course materials

1st paper=25%; 2nd paper=30%  Due on weeks 6/7 & 13/14

Improvement on second paper is taken into account

Paper 1. Drawing on a subject or theme of your own choice from class reading and discussions, critically explore the roles and power of assumptions, expectations, myths, and history in the study, acquisition, practice, uses, and understanding of literacy/ies. Be specific; use course materials; define key terms. Consider the “issues to explore” for each week in the course. Due in class: Week 6/7

Paper 2. Drawing on the individual lives presented in different ways in Ginzburg’s The Cheese and the Worms; Eggleston’s The Hoosier Schoolmaster; Brandt’s Literacy in American Lives; and Sapphire’s PUSH, consider the different ways that literacy has been valued, acquired, and used since the early modern years. What is the balance between changes and continuities? What difference does a focus on particular individuals make? What are the problems and possibilities of different sources and approaches? What light does history shed on key questions in the early 21st century? How has your own understanding of literacy changed. Due in class: Week 13/14
Among the many general topics to consider—in more specific terms—for either paper are: literacy—myth, expectation, theory; literacy myths; literacy: relationships, associations, consequences, meaning; theory and practice; uses of literacy; uses of history; literacy in context(s); policy and practice in history of literacy; many literacies; old literacy/ies v. new literacy/ies; discourses of literacy; representations of literacy; alternative narratives of change/history/evolutions with respect to literacy; future of literacy.

e. group project: planning and carrying out an “active” study of literacy in historical perspective=20%

Working with members of your group, select one of several possible approaches to or modes of research on literacy. The choices are designed to take you, in part, outside the library or study and to provide an intellectual experience that is more “active” (for lack of another term). Consider these possibilities: 1) an ethnographic study of peoples’ uses and practices of literacy, aimed at testing, comparing, or clarifying some general ideas or hypotheses in the field of study; 2) surveys of individuals’ (including your own, if you wish) own uses and evaluations of reading and writing; for example, by keeping literacy or reading/writing journals or diaries, then comparing a number of them, as the basis for your interpretation or conclusions; 3) a study of the portrayals and representations of reading and writing, and readers and writers in literature, films, visual arts, popular and other cultures; 4) a study of the place(s)—physical, cultural, psychological, etc.—of reading and writing in U.S. (or possibly, other) culture(s). There are other possible projects too including more traditional research projects. In each, consider your research and your conclusions with the historical perspective taken from this course.

Each group will define a topic and propose an approach to it. Brief research proposals of 1 page will be circulated (with a copy to the instructor) around the middle of the quarter (week 7), with brief presentations to the class for comments and questions. We may schedule sessions with the Library or the Digital Union. During the final two weeks, fuller presentations will be made, with written reports due in Week 14: outlines, bibliographies, critical reflections. There will be an opportunity to evaluate the contributions of your group’s members.

Assigned reading. An upper-level discussion course is pointless, and painful, unless the participants have read the assigned material with care. I expect you to read the material assigned for each week's discussion. Copies of some readings are available on carmen. Plan ahead as necessary. I encourage you to think about useful questions for discussion, or issues that occur to you after each class meeting.

Roles of learning groups
Groups will discuss readings and assignments; generate questions for class discussion; report back to the class; brainstorm, plan and conduct a research project; share sources and other “finds” with classmates; prepare final presentations and written reports. Some class time will be available for project work.

Each student is expected to contribute actively to the work of his or her group. Attendance and preparation count. 3 or more unexcused absences may result in a lowered grade. At the end of the semester, you will have an opportunity to evaluate the members of your group.
Turning in assignments
All work that is turned in for evaluation or grading should be typed, usually double-spaced, with margins of 1-1 ½ inches on all sides; printed in 12 point font, in a legible typeface. Be sure that your printer ribbon or toner allows you to produce clear copies. No covers or folders needed. Follow page or word limits and meet deadlines. Follow any specific assignment requirements (formatting or endnotes or bibliography, for example). Use footnotes and endnotes as necessary and use them appropriately according to the style guide of your basic field. Your writing should be gender neutral as well as clear and to the point. If you have a problem, see me, if at all possible, in advance of due dates. Unacceptable work will be returned, ungraded, to you. Submitting work late without excuse will result in lowered grades.

Civility
Mutual respect and cooperation, during the time we spend together each week and the time you work on group assignments, are the basis for successful conduct of this course. The class is a learning community that depends on respect, cooperation, and communication among all of us. This includes coming to class on time, prepared for each day’s work: reading and assignments complete, focusing on primary classroom activity, and participating. It also includes polite and respectful expression of agreement or disagreement—with support for your point of view and arguments—with other students and with the professor. It does not include arriving late or leaving early, or behavior or talking that distracts other students. Please turn off all telephones, beepers, electronic devices, etc.

Class cancellation
In the unlikely event of class cancellation due to emergency, I will contact you via email and request that a note on department letterhead be placed on the classroom door. In addition, I will contact you as soon as possible following the cancellation to let you know what will be expected of you for our next class meeting.

Academic Honesty
Scholastic honesty is expected and required. It is a major part of university life, and contributes to the value of your university degree. All work submitted for this class must be your own. Copying or representing the work of anyone else (in print or from another student) is plagiarism and cheating. This includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person’s work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person’s ideas. This is unacceptable in this class and also prohibited by the University. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, must be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. For information on plagiarism, see http://cstw.osu.edu/ especially http://cstw.osu.edu/writing_center/handouts/index.htm.

Writing Center
All members of the OSU community are invited to discuss their writing with a trained consultant at the Writing Center. The Center offers the following free services: Help with any assignment; One-to-one tutorials; one-to-one online tutorials via an Internet Messenger-like system (no ads or downloads); online appointment scheduling. Visit www.cstw.org or call 688-4291 to make an appointment.
Disabilities Services
The Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 2-3307

Books:
David Barton, Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language. 2nd ed. Blackwell, 2006 (1405111437) (available on Carmen)
Harvey J. Graff, The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City. Transaction, 1987 (1979) (0887388841)
Edward Eggleston, The Hoosier Schoolmaster. 1871 (used copies or Google Books on line)
Deborah Brandt, Literacy in American Lives. Cambridge, 2001 (0521003067)

Optional/Reserve:
Harvey J. Graff, ed., Literacy and Historical Development: A Reader. SIU Press, 2007 (0809327821) (chapters on Carmen)

When possible, copies of these books will be on Closed Reserve in the Library
Other readings: journal articles and book chapters are available on carmen.osu.edu, marked with *

Films (tentative list):
“The Return of Martin Guerre”
“The Wild Child”
“Children and Schools in 19th Century Canada”
“My Brilliant Career”
“High School”
The History of Literacy/Literacy Past and Present

Syllabus

Tues.

Jan. 8, 10  Week 1  In the beginning . . . Thinking about literacy, old and new

*David Barton, Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language, 2nd ed. (Blackwell, 2006), chaps 1,2,3, skim 4-7

Optional: *Harvey J. Graff, ed., Literacy and Historical Development (SIU Press, 2007), Ch. 1 by Graff [LHD]

Issues to explore: what is literacy? how do we think about literacy? why? what differences it makes

Jan. 15, 17  Week 2  In another beginning: Literacy and the question of origins: ancient foundings, ideas, traditions & practices; Transitions to literacy

*David Barton, Literacy, chaps 8,11,14; skim 9,10,12,13
*Graff and Duffy, “Literacy Myths”

Weeks 2-3:

Issues to explore: literacy’s origins and powers, including the powers of origins; literacy's history in theory and in fact [sic]: finding and probing narratives of literacy; ancient or classical literacy as foundation? peak? standard?

Workshop Jan. ___ in Thompson Library

Jan. 22, 24  Week 3  Literacy and culture(s): From ancient foundings, traditions, and practices to medieval and early modern transitions to literacy: From script to print, oral to written, classical to vernacular, among other familiar, formulaic transformations of literacy in the passages from traditional to modern

Jan. 29, 31  Week 4 Between traditional and modern; Ideological origins of modern western literacy—16th-19th centuries

Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms. (Johns Hopkins UP 1980), first half
Optional: *LHD: Chs. by Eisenstein, Grafton

Week 3 or 4 Film: “The Return of Martin Guerre” (123)

Issues to explore: lexicon and lesson in the narratives and theorizations of literacy—formulas for great changes—from oral to written, written to printed; classical to vernacular, sacred to secular; credo to ideology; elite to popular cultures; restricted to mass ... among asserted transformations in the passages from traditional to modern; technologies; associations and correlates of literacy

Feb. 5, 7  Week 5 Between traditional and modern; Ideological origins of modern western literacy—16th-19th centuries

Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms, second half
Harvey J. Graff, The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City (Transaction, 1987 [1979]), Introduction, ch.1
Optional: *LHD: Chs. by Davis, Scribner, Spufford

Film: “The Wild Child” (85)

Issues to explore: new ideas, philosophies, theories, including prominently those associated with the Enlightenment and its precursors; aspirations for “science”, psychology, and progress; competing assumptions about human nature and learning; dreams different worlds; social and economic change; challenges of tradition v. modern

Workshop Date ___ a.m.: meet in _____]
Feb. 12, 14  Week 6  The literacy myth: Toward modern ways

Graff, *The Literacy Myth*, Introduction, chs. 1-5


OR


Week 6 or 7 “Children and Schools in 19th Century Canada” (Canada’s Visual History)

**Issues to explore:** literacy & social, cultural, economic, and political change—

theory v. experience; institutions & ideologies; relations and consequences:

slavery, equality, democracy, citizenship, religion or belief, & literacy; class, race, gender, ethnicity, generation, geography, & literacy: literacy in the making of modern social relations, social structures, political systems

Week 6/7  1st paper assignment due

Feb. 19, 21  Week 7  Uses of literacy: Literacy, reading, and cultures; traditional, modern, or other?

Graff, *The Literacy Myth*, chs. 6-7

**Select 2-3:**


*Jan Radway, “Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies,” *Daedalus* 113 (Summer 1984), 49-73

**Optional:** *Harvey J. Graff, “The Literacy Myth at 30,” Journal of Social History, 43 (2010), 635-661

Week 7 or 8  Film: “My Brilliant Career” (101)

**Week 7 Group project proposals (1 page) due**

Feb. 26, 28  Week 8  Race and Gender: Reading Women and African Americans

*Barbara Sicherman, “Reading and Ambition: M. Carey Thomas and Female Heroism,” *American Quarterly*, 45 (1993) 73-103

*_____, “Sense and Sensibility: A Case Study of Women’s Reading in Late-
Nineteenth-Century America,” in Reading in America, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (JHUP, 1989), 201-225 [also in LHD]


from week 6:


Mar. 5, 7  Week 9 Uses of literacy, community literacy, continued

Edward Eggleston, The Hoosier Schoolmaster (1871)

Issues to explore: making and reforming people and cultures; gender, class, generation, race, ethnicity, and geography & literacy: reading, writing, culture/s: relationships, differences, and correlates; uses of literacy: making meaning; homogeneous v. difference, unity, uniformity v. fragmentation & hierarchy

Mar. 11-15  Spring Break

Mar.19, 21  Week 10 20th century lives and literacies

Deborah Brandt, Literacy in American Lives. (Cambridge, 2001), Introduction -ch. 4
Film: “High School” (75)

Issues to explore: the 20th century in the history of literacy: heir v. alien; continuities v. change; schools & other institutions; equality v. inequalities: race, ethnicity, class, gender, generations; families & the life course; democratization, social and economic opportunities; mass society & popular culture; literacy & literacies

Mar. 26, 28  Week 11 The twentieth century in historical context: Myths of decline & the future of literacy/ies

Deborah Brandt, Literacy in American Lives, Chs. 4-Conclusion
Sapphire, PUSH (Vintage, 1997 [1996])

Apr. 2, 4  Week 12 The twentieth century in historical context (cont.)
Sapphire, PUSH (Vintage, 1997 [1996])  
*Mike Rose, “In Search of a Fresh Language of Schooling,” Education Week, Sept. 7, 2005  

**Apr. 9, 11 Week 13 New Media, New Literacies?**

Jobs: See Week 12 esp. Freire, Madrick, Henwood
Optional: LHD: Ch. by Dyson

**Issues to explore:** rising or declining literacy levels or standards; threat or fear of illiteracy; technological imperatives; changing means of expression and modes of communication; keeping up, getting ahead, or falling behind; shifting needs and standards--how to tell & what differences it makes

**Week 13/14 2nd papers due**

**Apr. 16, 18 Week 14 Report Presentations**

**Group projects/presentations**

**Group projects due**

**Present & Future readings**
Optional reading for Weeks 13 & 14 These works may be useful in your group projects, or serve as additional readings for today and tomorrow.
Harvey J. Graff, Literacy Myths, Lessons, and Legacies. Transaction, 2011
Robert F. Arnove and Harvey J. Graff, ed., National Literacy Campaigns in Historical and Comparative Perspective. Plenum, 1987
Mike Rose, “Intelligence, Knowledge, and the Hand/Brain Divide,” Phi Delta Kappan, 89, 9 (2008), 632-639
Andrea A. Lunsford, Helene Moglen, and James S. Slevin, eds., The Right to Literacy (MLA, 1990), Introduction, sample other chapters
In Future Libraries, ed. R. Howard Bloch and Carla Hesse (California, 1995), 13-37
(California, 1996), 21-36
Ted Stripas, The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to
Control (Columbia UP, 2009)
Cynthia L. Selfe, Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The
Importance of Paying Attention (Southern Illinois UP, 1999, Introduction
and Part One., xix-42
Andrea A. diSessa, Changing Minds: Computers, Learning, and Literacy. MIT 2000
Colin Lankshear and Peter L. McLaren, eds., Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the
Postmodern (SUNY Press, 1993), 1-56
Ira Shor, Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change (Chicago, 1992),
129-134, 187-199, 237-263
Ramona Fernandez, Imagining Literacy. Texas 2001
Sonja Lanehart, Sista Speak! Black Women Kinfolk Talk about Language and Literacy
Texas 2002

Note: *required or optional reading, available on Carmen and/or Reserve