ABSTRACT

Pre-literate children experience written text as a meaningless material object, the word-object, but the compulsory and institutional aspects of reading pedagogy make this an experience from which they cannot escape. Some children begin to associate their own negative experiential sense with the word-object before they are able to learn to read.

As reading pedagogy continues, these children begin to read back experiential sense which prevents them from converting the word-object to meaningful text. Experiential sense is repressed because it is psychically painful. It retains qualities of phenomena repressed from childhood: it is active and intractable to reason.

The result is an intractable illiteracy which may be interpreted as biologically based “dyslexia.” Further attempts at reading pedagogy in childhood and adulthood generally result in reproduction of the inability because this pedagogy requires learners to attempt to read linguistically which elicits experiential sense. As these children become adults, their avoidance of reading sometimes structures their social relations to accommodate and compound their problems.

The method to overcome the problem replaces experiential sense with positive feelings about written language. The power of language to denote emotions of pleasure and affirmation from learners’ lives is used. These emotions are enhanced through a technique of affirmative intersubjectivity. Short spoken affirmative texts are made by learners, tape recorded and reproduced as written texts by the literacy worker. Through allowing learners control and autonomy over their spoken and written texts, the positive emotions in them are associated by learners with the written texts.

Exercises on the affirmative written texts are used to demonstrate regularities about written language. Learners then progress to reading suitable independent texts and other activities. There are suggestions about how to enhance learners’ feelings as competent readers and writers.

The thesis uses a methodology of action research and includes five case studies of adults with literacy problems. Concepts from social theory, psychoanalysis and object relations theory are used and adapted to understand written language, schooling and illiteracy.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A problem with research such as that reported in this thesis is locating people who will participate and persevere with something that *might* help them. Stan, Jim, Philip, Mark and Margaret were such people. To them goes my thanks. The research could not have been completed without them.

My thanks also to Bob Connell whose deft skills as a research supervisor are legendary.

Thanks also to Stephan and Susanne for computer help.

Thesis writing is solitary, pre-occupying and time consuming. I now promise to return to something like my normal state. I make this promise especially to Ella Janneh.
The research described in the body of this thesis was conducted in accordance with the conditions of approval 97/3/9 & 97/8/2 of the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney.
## Introduction

**Adult Illiteracy as a Practical and Intellectual Problem**

- Incidence and definition of literacy problems in Australian society
- Broad approaches to adult literacy
- Compensatory pedagogy
- Special education
- Participation and outcomes in compensatory pedagogy
- Outcomes of special education
- Aims and structure of the research

## Chapter One

**The Word Taken For Granted**

### Part One

**The nature of written text for illiterate children**

- Pre-literate children and their relationship to written text
- The linguistic sign
- The production and consumption of written language
- Hegemony of the signifier
- The word-object as subversion of the linguistic signifier

### Part Two

**Illiterate children’s experience of written text**

- Marx’s concept of alienation
- Institutional qualities of schooling, reading and alienation
- Illiterate children’s experience of schooling
- The semiotic of alienation
- Concluding comments

## Chapter Two

**Psychoanalysis and Schooling**

- The Method: Version one
- Description of the subject
- Assessment session
- The sessions with Stan
- Conceptual discussion
- Redefining reading inability
- The ego’s experience of reading inability
- Alienation and overdetermination
- The super-ego and the word-object
- Repression and the word-object
- Repression, alienation and the method
- Pleasure as the negation of denial
- Concluding comments

## Chapter Three

**The Transitional Method**

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