AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORALITY AND LITERACY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR EARLY PRIMARY EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

The role of orality in early primary education and its relevance in the early acquisition of literacy is examined. The purpose of this study is to better understand the kinds of awareness which young children bring with them to school and to explore ways in which this might be put to better use in their early education.

In order to better understand the relationship of orality to literacy it proves useful to examine the historical and philosophical bases of the development of literacy in our society. The introduction of writing is reviewed to determine if this implies a different way of thinking and if it was instrumental in the schism which may be seen in Western thought between rationality and imagination or emotion. The writings of scholars like Ong and Havelock are covered as they have pursued Milman Parry's discovery that the thinking of oral societies is profound and sophisticated in its own right. An analysis of the quality of "oral thought" and the changes in thinking which occurred after the introduction of writing in early Greek society, are described.

This major historical transition is central to the present investigation of whether orality and writing imply two completely different approaches to the world. This fundamental difference has been observed also in the process

by which children acquire literacy, and in the manner in which they learn to think in school. Several works on childhood thinking also demonstrate that young children's thinking parallels that of oral societies in many ways. This thesis suggests that educators should be very cognizant of this development when leading the child from orality to literacy.

Relevant observations of young children at school are described along with a discussion of the problems implied by the orality/literacy transition. Some direct suggestions for the primary curriculum are included. A greater recognition by educators of the "oral" mentality in young children is recommended, which may not only ease their passage into school but also have beneficial long term consequences in the development of their cognitive map which will then encompass emotion and reason.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an exploration of orality and the emergence of literacy and rational thinking in Western Society and in particular its relevance in early Primary Education. In limiting my research to this area I in no way intended to ignore or depreciate the ideas and cultures of other civilizations in other parts of the world. My work is confined to the Western perspective simply because this is my personal experience and culture and it is therefore the context within which I can comment with some authority. The Greek development of an alphabet with precise sound/symbol correspondence may be said to be a unique form of literacy development and in this respect it has had an important defining influence on the way Western thinking has developed. The special problems, which I explore in the following chapters, associated with the gradual transference from an orally based society to an alphabetic, literate society may be unique to that experience. Be that as it may, the experiences of other cultures as they move from oral communication to literacy is not within the scope of this work. The children in our primary schools are, for the most part, still being educated with a Western cultural bias, and they must all learn to read alphabetically. In that respect, no matter what their country of origin, they will all experience a similar dissonance in that transition.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DILEMMA STATED

A crucial stage in the history of Western thought was marked by the development and use of the alphabet by the ancient Greeks. There are various theories which hypothesize the origins of the Greek alphabet but the most commonly held theory is that which traces it back to a North Semitic script coming to the Greeks through Phoenician traders as intermediaries (Havelock, 1986, pp. 59-61). Previous to this form of alphabetic writing, the inscriptions found in other ancient cultures include cuneiform, hieroglyphs and pictography. These forms of writing gave a pictorial representation of ideas and challenged the reader to interpret chunks of meaning in a holistic manner. Alphabetic representation involved a completely different approach to writing which entailed sound-symbol representation closely linking the symbols used to the sounds uttered in speech. The North Semitic writing, on which ancient Greek was based, dealt only with consonant sounds and left out the vowels. The Greeks developed this into a more accurate phonetic reproduction of human speech which included vowels and consonants (Ong, 1982, p.90). The implications of this development were huge. Human speech could be frozen in time and reflected upon in every detail. Thought was expressed now in a completely linear way, and actual speech was made visual. Until this time, ideas were closely associated with context and the environment in which

they were engendered and they could not be separated into small interchangeable elements. The written symbols invented before the alphabet mimicked the visual impressions of reality in the mind. For the first time the alphabet enabled people to examine those impressions and reflect upon them and even reassess them and change them. The mind could now control ideas instead of just reflecting and representing them. The alphabet also was more easily learned and thus made this powerful form of thought accessible to many.

The Greeks brought the invention of alphabetized writing more or less to the condition of elegance and efficiency that we know today. This development seems to me to have significantly influenced human thinking. Eric Havelock has explored this hypothesis in his work The Muse learns to Write, and he even goes as far as to say that thought patterns were changed in the transition to literacy.

> A special theory of Greek literacy involves the proposition that the way we use our senses and the way we think are connected, and that in the transition from Greek orality to Greek literacy the terms of this connection were altered, with the result that thought patterns were altered also, and have remained altered, as compared with the mentality of oralism, ever since. (Havelock, 1986, p. 98)

The advantages which alphabetic writing afforded were many, and include the ability to freeze an idea on a page and reflect on it, and the possibility of reading back and forth in text. This facilitated a reassessement of one's

understanding of the thoughts expressed. For the first time one could now share or contradict the thoughts of those not even present and consider also the ideas of the dead. Information could now be stored and also scrutinized and compared,(Goody, 1977, p.37). Although writing took a long time to infiltrate the whole of society because of the primitive nature of the implements of inscription, the intellectuals of sixth century Greece exploited this new tool in a dramatic way. One consequence of the new form of thinking which writing afforded was a gradual "objectivizing" of the word (Havelock, 1986, p.115). Before long, the abstract skills of logic and mathematics were closely linked with written expression. Writing enabled the thinker to reassess and manipulate ideas in a such a way that words and ideas were now thought of as concrete and objective.

This resulted in a proliferation of disciplines such as science and mathematics. Even the philosophers began to express their thoughts in concrete terms and to see the fixed nature of "the word" as indicative of its lasting truth. The ephemeral utterance of the individual self became insignificant compared to the "truth" expressed by the written word. This truth could be observed, compared, and laid in place as a element in the framework of ideas where it might be admired or reviled for ever; but it might also be examined and assigned a new place in that framework

at any time. Paradoxically, while becoming more concrete, language had also become more flexible and manipulable; while becoming more objective and static, it had also given the individual more power to immortalize his ideas and the ability to reflect on and consciously reassess the ideas of the past. Jack Goody lists some of the rationalistic modes of thought made possible by writing including logic, algebra, calculus and philosophy, and he attributes this to the availability of literacy tools rather than a change in mental habit.

> More generally, a concern with the rules of argument or the grounds for knowledge seems to arise, though less directly, out of the formalization of communication (and hence of statement and "belief") which is intrinsic to writing. Philosophic discourse is a formalization of just the kind one would expect with literacy. "Traditional" societies are marked not so much by the absence of reflective thinking as by the absence of the proper tools for constructive rumination. (Goody, 1977, p.44)

As we know from the soul-searching to which Plato subjected himself in The Republic, the wholesale acceptance of alphabetic expression was a position of compromise for many ancient Greeks. We understand from Plato's regretful rejection of oral poetic expression that this formalization of thought was a double edged sword. Plato was convinced that poetry was anathema to rational thought and must be banished because of its perversion of truth. However he almost wished that this was not so as he said to Glaucon,

> All the same, we ought to point out that if the kinds of poetry and representation which are designed merely to give pleasure can come up with a rational argument for their inclusion in a well-governed community, we'd be delighted- short of compromising the truth as we see it, which wouldn't be right- to bring them back from exile; after all, we know from our experience all about their spell, I mean, haven't you ever fallen under the spell of poetry, Glaucon, especially when the spectacle is provided by Homer? (Plato, The Republic, 607c)

Of course it is necessary to remember that "poetry" in Plato's time was the vehicle of social persuasion used most effectively by the rulers to maintain the status quo. Plato was aware of the danger of its emotional appeal and perceived in the written word a means of reexamining the conventions and reassessing the traditional assumptions of Greek society.

The effect of this powerful objectification of thought is to make it more disciplined and controllable and yet at the same time it also becomes fragmented and in some way less powerful than the totality of expression achieved by oral language. The individual words are now broken off and examined. Rather like the musician composing his work by carefully designing the piece note by note rather than hearing the melody in his head and participating in the emotive power of his composition, the writer may take each word and place it strategically but it is now isolated from the composition. Furthermore, once the word is separated from the voice, it loses much of the emotive and experiential richness of its meaning. Although it is powerful in its isolation, it is bereft of much of its dynamism and social and emotional context. Goody notes the

effect which this separation of words from context has on language.

> [Words] are no longer bound up directly with "reality"; the written word becomes a separate thing, abstracted to some extent from the flow of speech, shedding its close entailment with action, with power over matter. (Goody, 1977, p.46)

Although Plato wholeheartedly embraced writing to express his philosophy and although we can see it reflected, and even made possible his own theory of forms, he was aware at the same time of its dangers and the sacrifice which it dictated.

> The conflict wracked Plato's unconscious. For Plato expressed serious reservations in the Phaedrus and his Seventh Letter about writing, as a mechanical, inhuman way of processing knowledge, unresponsive to questions and destructive of memory, although, as we now know, the philosophical thinking Plato fought for depended entirely on writing. No wonder the implications here resisted surfacing for so long. The importance of ancient Greek civilization to all the world was beginning to show in an entirely new light: it marked the point in human history when deeply interiorized alphabetic literacy first clashed head on with orality. (Ong,1982, p.72)

The true split in the psyche which this initiated was hardly even suspected by Plato, however. He was totally engaged in the purposeful proliferation of the written word which held the promise of true knowledge as opposed to emotional invective freighted down by traditional dogma. Plato saw the need even to banish the poets because of their untoward influence on thinking. He discussed their excesses at

length with Glaucon in The Republic and contrasted their distorted expression with his view of the purity and clarity of rational thought. The poet represented the old oral way of thinking which writing was replacing with more objective analysis.

> [The poet] He destroys the rational part by feeding and fattening up the other part, and this is equivalent to someone destroying the more civilized members of community by presenting ruffians with political power. There's no difference, we'll claim, between this and what a representational poet does at a personal level, he establishes a bad system of government in people's minds by gratifying their irrational side- an object which at one moment it calls big, it might call small the next moment - by creating images, and by being far removed from truth.
> (Plato, Waterfield (Ed.),1993, The Republic(393a))

Plato, then, already set up the dichotomy between rational thought (represented by writing) and emotional expression which he characterized as misrepresentations of the poets. He reserved truth for the written word as the representative of pure reason. Havelock comments on the way Socrates also contributed to this compartmentalization of "truth" and the notion of its divorce from feeling and emotion. Havelock recognizes that it was Socrates who perceived the new form of expression as a way of encapsulating truth in a permanent form as opposed to what "fleetingly happened in the oral panorama",

> The linguistic formula in which such intellection expressed itself was par excellence the "is" statement in preference to the "doing" statement, the one literate, the other oralist, with a corresponding

> contrast between a "true" mental act of knowing and an oral act of feeling and responding. (Havelock, 1986, p.45)

Our civilization has never fully recovered from the psychic split initiated by the introduction of alphabetized writing. Educational philosophy has swung back and forth from Platonic idealism and exclusive respect for rationality, to the suspicion of theory, received knowledge and word based learning and greater preference for sense based, emotional expression. Educators may even be justified in attributing some difficulty in integrating the emotional, the sensual and the rational to the period when the Greeks embraced language as the instrument of reason. In the Middle Ages, philosophers became so convinced of the truth of the written word that they ceased to look for the confirmation of truth in reality. They became satisfied with a juxtaposition of words and symbols as proof enough of their mastery of knowledge. The Renaissance signaled a return to the observation of nature as the source of ideas but philosophers still did not waver from belief in the truth of mediating text.

> The ideal approach towards art, in that period, and towards the Renaissance itself, is characterized by a return to nature, in contention against the stereotyped symbolic forms of medieval art; that is, by a tendency to seek in nature and to represent in art the authentic aspects of nature herself, no longer mediated by the symbolic-linguistic forms that the Middle Ages had used.
> However the same Renaissance Aristotelianism that had flourished between 1400 and 1600, above all in the school of Padua, drew its sustenance from the texts

> rescued by the humanists, and from their researches and contributions to the affirmation of scientific naturalism; especially in their refusal to admit the possibility of miracles, and their insistence on the necessary order which governs all natural objects. (Abbagnano N., 1973, p.133)

The invention of the printing press in 1436 was an important milestone. If the invention of the alphabet objectified language in a new way, the invention of printing made the word even more permanent and daunting in its solidity. It also ensured finally, that the written word was dispersed far and wide and began the slow democratization of the art of reading. Walter Ong refers to the dramatic change in thinking presaged by this development and he indicates how this was confirmed by the rigid nature of print.

> Alphabetic writing had broken the word up into spatial equivalents of phonemic units (types) which preexist as units before the words which they will constitute. Print suggests that words are things far more than writing ever did. (Ong, 1982, p.119)

And so, in some degree, those who most fluently used the printed word tended to develop a creative arrogance. For them, the truth was in the power of the word and the word was within them.

Isaac Barrow (1630-77) said of Descartes,

> Descartes has inverted the order of philosophizing, it seemed good to him not to learn from things but to impose his own laws on things. He first collected truths which he thought suitable. Principles he had framed without consulting nature. (Rankin, 1993, p.77)

The scientists of the seventeenth century relied heavily on the inherent power of the mind and the received knowledge passed on from previous great minds. Newton's Opticks (first edition, 1704) implied that the mind makes its own impression of external reality which is not always implicit in the object itself. Colour and form are to a great extent the effects of the mind on reality. One consequence of this realization was an overdependence on intellectual resources at the expense of experiential knowledge. It was not long before the sterility of this approach became clear. Locke recognized limits on the value of received knowledge and turned away from the view of the learned man as exclusively a reader of books. For Locke true knowledge began with sensation and was incorporated into an intellectual schema by means of reflection. Although Locke turned the eye outward again, he was still preoccupied with the process of intellectualizing and verbalizing factual knowledge of the world. Locke was concerned primarily with the development of rational awareness in the child and this is intimately linked to the categorizing and naming of the objects the child perceives. This process of cataloguing the world in a sterile, objective way still has strong intimations of Plato's quest for objective truth. This is shown in Locke's step by step description of the learning process from sense perception to rational understanding.

> The senses at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet: and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names got to them. Afterwards the mind proceeding farther, abstracts them, and by degrees learns the use of general names. In this manner the mind comes to be furnished with ideas and language the materials about which to exercise its discursive faculty; and the use of reason becomes daily more visible, as these materials, that give it employment increase.(Locke, As Essay Concerning Human Understanding, 1924 version, p.22,(first published 1690)

Rousseau agreed wholeheartedly with Locke's turning away from book knowledge in favour of knowledge which comes from the senses and from experience. He expressed even more strongly than Locke his doubts about the validity of the written word. "To substitute books for all that is not to teach us to reason. It is to teach us to use the reason of others. It is to teach us to believe much and never to know anything" (Rousseau, Émile,1979 version, p.125, (first published 1762).

Rousseau perpetuated the confusion however. He recognized that the inward looking reflection of many philosophers was not cognizant enough of external reality. He had a feeling that an essential part of the equation was still missing, but he still could not resolve the dichotomy between subject and object which he perceived.

> I exist, and I have senses by which I am affected. This is the first truth that strikes me and to which I am forced to acquiesce. Do I have particular sentiment of my existence, or do I sense it only through my sensations? This is my first doubt, which it is for the present impossible for me to resolve: for as I am continually affected by sensations, whether immediate or by memory, how can I know whether the sentiment of

> the I is something outside these same sensations and whether it can be independent of them?
> (Rousseau, Émile, 1979 version, p.270 (first published 1762)

Rousseau still understood himself as separate from his universe and exiled from his knowledge. He expresses his alienation in this quotation and appears to seek a way to integrate self and perception. He did not accept himself as part of his cosmos in the way an oral thinker would do. His analysis of his situation presupposes a standing back, a cutting off from the truth which he analysed. Rousseau did, however, have an inkling of the problem. Although his educational method was in fact controlling and dictatorial he did pay lip service, in Émile, to the importance of emotion in learning. Unfortunately he limited his definition of emotion to the sexual awakening of the child and thus appeared to confine it to an experience of the adolescent. "It remains for us, in order to complete the man, only to make a loving and feeling being - that is to say, to perfect reason by sentiment". (Rousseau, Émile, 1979 version, p.203)

But at least Rousseau was seeking the missing link. He turned thought towards the emotion again and quite positively supported the affective role of language. Once again, however, Rousseau subscribed to the dualistic conflict between reason and emotion.

> Reason alone is not active. It sometimes restrains, it arouses rarely, and it has never done anything great. Always to reason is the mania of small minds. Strong souls have quite another language. It is with this language that one persuades and makes others act.(Rousseau, 1979 version, p. 231)

Rousseau began to bend the bow back again and the Romantic poets continued the trend. For Wordsworth the child was the ideal being unspoiled by rationality. The innocent emotion of the child, for him, is the closest human beings can get to perfect knowledge.

> Blest the infant Babe,
> (For with my best conjecture I would trace
> Our Being's earthly progress,) blest the Babe
> Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep
> Rocked on his Mother's breast, who with his soul
> Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!
> For him, in one dear Presence, there exists
> A virtue which irradiates and exalts
> Objects through widest intercourse of sense;
> No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:
> Along his infant veins are interfused
> The gravitation and the filial bond
> Of nature that connect him with the world.
> (Wordsworth, The Prelude, 231-244)

Coleridge and Wordsworth both realised the importance of emotion and imagination in the acquisition of knowledge. The creative power of poetry was for them the essential part of the educated mind.

> The mind is in a philosophical sense creative of the world it sees, because it does not see objects, it sees objects upon which it puts its own constructions, imposes its own categories. And certainly Coleridge prized the victory which this Kantian viewpoint gave him over "the sandy sophisms of Locke and the mechanical dogmatists"(Grigg, iv. 574); but his language is asking us to see it all in a far less humdrum context. The imagination is not merely

> creative (and godlike in its creation), but perceptive too; it is "the living power and prime agent of all human perception" including- or primarily- the perception of God. (J.Wordsworth, 1982, p.84)

Depending upon whether they wished to be creative or productive, empathetic or rational, doers or thinkers, artists or artisans, democratic or elitist, or any number of other dualisms they might have swung between according to the demands of society, educators have been inclined to vacillate between Plato and Rousseau throughout the history of educational thought. Since the World Wars, however, there has been, in many ways, a turning away from the Romantic ideal and a preference shown, in educational establishments, for "rational" thinking. The industrialization and technologization of the world has led to the high status of science and an exclusively experiential emphasis in education. Dewey advocated the use of experimental and "hands on" learning in the classroom and, although he did not reject received knowledge, he followed Rousseau in his ideas, allowing the child freedom to explore the environment and recommending the development of the scientific method as an integral part of learning. His emphasis on experience implies an integrated philosophy which takes into consideration the relationship of the learner with the environment. In fact Dewey has been very influential in this aspect of his philosophy and has, more than any other philosopher, encouraged the present trend towards "active" learning. However, he in no way advocated

the emotional engagement of the learner in this process. He moved away from language as the basis for learning but he sought to replace it with social action and a kind of scientific accounting of that action. There is no mention of the use of creative language or the explanation of the method of involving the learner in the process of discovery (Dewey, 1959, pp.20-25).

The adulation of the scientific method had among its consequences the implementation of intelligence tests in the early twentieth century. The psychological experiments of Skinner and Thorndike resulted in a notion that learning could be programmed in a scientific way and that outcomes could be controlled and predicted. This led to the conclusion that all learning could be measured and the aptitude of the learner could also be quantified. The first tests of intelligence were devised by Galton and Binet around 1910 and added fuel to the fire of quantitative reason which now seemed about to consume the whole enterprise of education. The course set was, however, not a steady and unwavering one. Recently the Year 2000 initiatives in British Columbia were an attempt to reintroduce a more holistic ideal of education, one in which the many facets of a child's being are considered in the learning process including the emotional and creative. It appears that, in spite of the apparent clarity of this message in the Year 2000 documents, it is not consistent

with the practical demands of society and the conflict between practical demands and emotional needs of the child continue to bring an impossible conflict into the educational equation. The urgency of the need for change may not have been well enough communicated and the way to access the affective and moral aspects of education may still not be clear to educators.

The faltering economy demands more competitive skills and the onus is once more on the education system to emphasize practical training at the expense of the cultivation of less definable imaginative and creative powers in children. Once again, education is to become the servant of a pragmatic master, the forces of reason drive it to a narrow place where there are no choices except to fulfil the economic needs of society.

I wish to suggest that the fragmentation of educational thought which I have attempted to sketch in the previous pages, has contributed to the disorientation of educators at the present time. The essential element missing from modern education is the affective engagement of many students in the learning process. The reintegration of learning with feeling and emotional expression is suggested by the earlier analysis to be the key to a more enlightened education system.

Recent discoveries about the human brain indicate strongly that emotion and feelings, together with reasoning abilities, are both essential to the decision-making process

in human beings and have an impact in several different areas of the brain. It seems possible, for instance, that the frontal lobes have an integrating and organizing ability which bring together reason and emotion and enable them both to have a part in our intra-personal and interpersonal decisions.

Antonio R Damascio has studied this phenomenon and found that

> ... there appears to be a collection of systems in the human brain consistently dedicated to the goal-oriented thinking process we call reasoning, and to the response selection we call decision making, with a special emphasis on the personal and social domain. This same collection of systems is also involved in emotion and feeling and is partly dedicated to processing body signals. (Damascio, 1994, p.74)

and further,

> I would like to propose that there is a particular region in the human brain where the systems concerned with emotion/feeling, attention and working memory interact so intimately that they constitute the source for the energy of both external action (movement) and internal action (thought, animation, reasoning). This fountainhead region is the anterior ungulate cortex, another piece of the limbic system puzzle. (Damascio, 1992, p.71)

The unfortunate experience of Phineas Gage, who suffered a traumatic injury to his brain from a railway bolt, supports this theory. He appeared to recover completely from the damage inflicted on his front cortical lobe. Mr Gage continued to live an apparently normal life and tried to return to his job, but he found himself unable to control emotional outbursts and was no longer motivated to look after his own welfare. He became without focus in his life

and work and could not make decisions crucially important to his well-being. He eventually become a poor drifter; a marked change from the conscientious worker and well organised individual which he had been. It is clear from this example that brain injury affecting the processing of emotions will also impact on rational and decision making areas of the personality, implying their close interrelationship.

Damascio is emphatic in his understanding of the primacy of feelings.

> I see feelings as having a truly privileged status. They are represented at many neural levels, including the neo-cortical, where they are the neuroanatomical and neurophysiological equals of whatever is appreciated by other sensory channels. But because of their inextricable ties to the body, they come first in development and retain a primacy that subtly pervades our mental life. Because the brain is the body's captive audience, feelings are winners among equals. And since what comes first constitutes a frame of reference for what comes after, feelings have a say on how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business. Their influence is immense (Damascio, 1994, p.159)

It appears then, that feelings are primary in the human organism and that they are intimately intertwined with the activity of the whole brain. This has dramatic implications when we consider the development of the immature brain. In the child, the brain is new and the pathways are relatively unformed by experience. Emotion then, appears to play a decisive role in our mental operations and it is thus clear that emotion should be a very important element in the

learning process. By engaging the feelings of the child we may find an important way to open the mind to all kinds of learning experiences. The creativity which may be accessed by affective engagement could prove to be a salient element in all kinds of understanding from moral to mathematical. In fact, emotion (tempered with reason) may may yet prove to be an essential part of a healthy and creative mind.

In the next chapter I will seek to trace the integration of emotion with expression in oral societies and try to demonstrate that this has parallels with the way a child learns in our own society. I will try to indicate the many similarities between a child in the infancy of language learning and what we now know of the oral societies and their characteristics which help us to understand the young child's concept of language and his view of reality.

CHAPTER 2.

ORAL THINKING.

The observations which I intend to describe suggesting similarities between children's thought and that of oral societies, are not intended to imply a general comparison between the adults of these societies and the children of our own. The comparison is interesting only as an indication of the qualities of preliterate thought and a means of approaching the kind of thinking which appears to precede the introduction of writing and reading.

If I am to deal with the parallels between the thinking of oral societies and that of young children I must first of all give an account of some of the scholarship which has recently offered previously unconsidered theories about preliterate thinking. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the father of modern linguistics, drew attention already to the primacy of oral speech "which underpins all verbal communication, as well as to the persistent tendency even among scholars to think of writing as the basic form of language." (W.J.Ong, 1982, p.5)

As early as 1926 in his work How Natives Think Lucien Lévy-Brühl indicated how scholars, in their overweening intellectualism, had consistently underestimated the mental ability of the "savage" mind.

> To quote but two works, both Ribot's Logique des Sentiments and Henrich Maier's Psychologie des Emotionalen Denkens show how narrow were the limits within which traditional psychology, under the influence of formal logic, sought to confine the life

> of thought. Mental processes are infinitely more elastic, complex, and subtle and they comprise more elements of the psychic life than a too simplistic intellectualism would allow. Yet we find that the languages spoken by peoples who are the least developed of any we know - Australian aborigines, Abipones, Andaman Islanders, Fuegians etc. - exhibit a good deal of complexity. They are far less "simple" than English, though much more primitive. (Lévy-Brühl, 1926, p.14)

Lévy-Brühl attributes the tendency of his time to think of early societies as primitive and simple, to the evolutionism of Herbert Spencer and like thinkers. The belief of evolutionists was that life is gradually evolving and improving and that each stage of evolution presents a more refined and, by definition, better organism. Extrapolated from this theory was the conclusion that human life is evolving in a similar way, and that every generation of humanity must be an improvement on the previous one. It was therefore assumed that cognitive power is constantly growing and becoming superior to that of previous generations and societies.

> Such a doctrine allowed them to present this development as an uninterrupted evolution, the stages of which would be noted, from animistic beliefs of "primitives" to the Newtonian conception of the universe. (Lévy-Brühl, 1926, p.24)

Lévy-Brühl speculates on some of the many ways in which the primitive mind may have processed thought and indicates the complexity and profundity of this process, which is, nevertheless, very different from our own thinking. He also however falls into the prelogical/logical way of analyzing

the primitive mind which is almost imposed on us by the linearity of the written word. Later writers have attempted to examine the preliterate consciousness in a more holistic way. I shall go on to explore some of these ideas later in this chapter.

Lévy-Brühl's theories were dramatically confirmed in 1928, by the work of Milman Parry, who studied the poetry of Homer and, in his doctoral thesis, came up with the then heretical notion that Homer's work was really a composite of previous oral compositions. Parry demonstrated this conclusion by by his analysis of the work, and consequently showed Homer to be a fruitful source of investigation into preliterate thinking. While acknowledging, then, that Homer, and indeed many early Greek writings, retain strong elements of orality and reveal much about the oral mind, we should note the caution of Havelock, who warns that a written thought, however close to the oral, is automatically changed by virtue of being written down. His warning extends to any analysis of orality, which he claims is employing a way of thinking anathema to its subject and inconsistent with its spirit.

> And even supposing texts can supply some sort of image of orality, how can that image be adequately verbalized in a textual description of it, which presumably employs a vocabulary and a syntax proper to textualization, not orality? (Havelock, 1986, p.44)

In a similar thought, Walter Ong points out that study itself, and learning, as it has been adopted by our

orthographic culture, has developed out of and because of writing, which is a medium demanding and encouraging reflection. Although oral thought may be in a sense abstract and analytic it does not allow for close examination and never had that purpose.

> Language study in all but recent decades has focused on orality for a readily assignable reason: the relationship of study itself to writing. All thought, including that in primary oral cultures, is to some degree analytic: it breaks its materials into various components. But abstractly sequential, classificatory, explanatory examination of phenomena or of stated truths is impossible without writing and reading. Human beings in primary oral cultures, those untouched by writing in any form, learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom, but they do not 'study'. (Ong, 1982, p.8)

The challenge to express the quality of oral thinking in literate terms is a daunting one and I have found it necessary to reference several authors and quote their words in an attempt to capture this illusive quality.

In spite of the difficulties inherent in an examination of oral thinking, scholars became fascinated with the challenge, and Milman Parry's work was followed boldly by Albert Lord and then Havelock and Goody and others. In an attempt to capture the elusive oral mind some of these scholars continued to examine early Greek literature which appeared to be still rich in oral characteristics.

> Once it is accepted that the oral situation had persisted through the fifth century, one faces the conclusion that there would also persist what one may call an oral state of mind as well, a mode of consciousness so to speak, and, as we shall see, a

> vocabulary and syntax, which were not that of a literate bookish culture. (Havelock, 1963, p.41)

Other scholars such as Luria, Lord and Finnegan sought to explore oral thought in more modern cultures such as the Baltic states, Albania, and African tribes. It has been observed that primary orality cannot be said to be pure in any modern environment, as the predominance of print has some influence on even those peoples most untouched by civilization. If they are living in a world controlled by print, their own environment is also, to some degree, controlled by this dimension. There no longer exists an African ~~tribe~~ people which is not subject to bureaucracy and government or media intrusion. This adds to the difficulties already alluded to, in studying the thinking of oral societies. In spite of the problems encountered in the study of orality, and the tentative nature of conclusions reached about thinking in oral societies, it is certain that Parry unlocked a very fruitful area of speculation. The mysteries of the oral mind have continued to fascinate some anthropologists, philosophers, and educators ever since. Cultures built on an oral tradition with no writing were now afforded a new respect. Some scholars recognized that advanced thinking does not require writing, and it was even acknowledged that since humanity had survived without writing for thousands of years, it was likely that there had existed an oral mind equal to that of Newton or Einstein. In other words, the greatness of the human mind is probably

not dependent on writing to unlock its power, although writing gives it another tool with which to express that power and makes it possible to build on and develop the ideas of others. However, as has been hinted already, the mentality of an oral culture is very different from that of an orthographic culture. Lévi-Strauss explains this not as two different stages of development, but rather as different ways of looking at the world. In the oral mind nature is immediately more accessible whereas the orthographic mind is removed from nature and observes it from outside. While this is an oversimplification of the two ways of thinking it is a useful juxtaposition in order to see clearly the possible incongruities between the two ways of thinking.

> These are certainly not a function of different stages of development of the human mind but rather of two strategic levels at which nature is accessible to scientific enquiry: one roughly adapted to that of perception and imagination: the other at a remove from it. (Levy-Strauss quoted by Goody, 1977, p.6)

Some scholars have argued that the oral mind is different in quality from the orthographic mind only inasmuch as the tools of communication are different. Ruth Finnegan (1970, p.37) declares that any differences "do not relate to differences of thought but to differences in the nature of communicative acts." Other writers delving into the oral consciousness have apparently discerned a different psychology which they perceive as lost with the advent of written culture. Havelock locates this major transformation

of the psyche at the fourth century in Greece, when writing was beginning to take over education and social communication. Havelock refers to the theory which attributes to this event a complete change in the consciousness of man from which we have never recovered.

> A special theory of Greek literacy involves the proposition that the way we use our senses and the way we think are connected, and that in the transition from Greek orality to Greek literacy the terms of this connection were altered, as compared with the mentality of oralism, ever since.(Havelock, 1986, p.98)

He perceives a schism arising in the soul as a result of this development.

> There was no warfare possible between body and spirit,[in oral society]. The pull between the pleasurable inclination to act in one way and the unpleasant duty to act in another way was relatively unknown. All this begins to change perhaps by the time the fourth century was underway. Such a change has already been noted by historians and interpreters of the Greek spirit. Is it not at least possible that the change was conditioned in part by a change in technology of communication and hence the technology of education. A psychological condition long encouraged by a purely oral culture was becoming no longer possible. (Havelock, 1963, p.158)

But Walter Ong declares that writing and print make it possible for us to access previously unexplored depths of the mind.

> Technologies of the word do not merely store what we know. They style what we know in ways which made it quite inaccessible and indeed unthinkable in an oral culture. (Ong, 1982, p.155)

In spite of the differences of opinion between scholars on the nature of orality and the true significance of the advent of writing and print, it seems clear that everyone agrees at least that orality generally implies a different approach to the world from that common in an orthographic culture. Whether this implies a permanent and significant change in brain use or a simple adaptation to the introduction of new tools, it would seem that there is some kind of transformation of thinking. This is not to say that the oral mentality died with the introduction of writing. Havelock notes that the oral "state of mind" persisted well into the literate age and its persistence created an inertia which troubled Plato (Havelock, 1963, p.41). In fact it can be said to be very much alive still in the modern world and is well represented by pop-culture and pop-music and may be found in cultural enclaves such as Cockney London and Celtic Ireland. The two ways of thinking and being may exist, and in fact do exist, side by side. Their coexistence may in fact prove to be a very important source of creativity in a rational society. Ong points out that, even in modern societies like that of the United States," readers in certain subcultures are still operating in a basically oral framework, performance oriented rather than information-oriented" (Ong, 1982, p.171).

In an attempt to explore the nature of that elusive quality of oral consciousness I will try to identify some of

its features and explore some of the differences in thought which appear to have emerged with the advent of writing and printing. I will go on to try to show parallels between the oral mentality and that of young children. I will also attempt to justify this comparison and eventually demonstrate its significance to the educator.

IS ORALITY RATIONAL?

It is important to try to avoid a simplistic conclusion about the non-rationality of primary orality. The use of any kind of language oral or written, implies a use of categories and the oral mind also will group words into manageable units. They may not be the universal generalization which aid our own thinking, but they usually provide an immediate and practical purpose to the primitive society which uses them. Luria's research on illiterate peasants in Uzbekistan showed that they had very little interest in abstract classification. They could not see the sense of it unless it aided them in their day-to-day living. It was not that they were not capable of reasoning in that way but that they saw no personal significance to such thinking. Ong describes Luria's efforts to teach the "illiterate subjects" some principles of abstract classification. " But their grasp was never firm and when they actually returned to working out a problem for themselves, they would revert to situational rather than

categorical thinking" (Ong, 1976, p.67). Similarly, Luria found that the Russian peasants he studied were incapable of self-analysis. Just as they could not stand outside a subject and see its universal significance they also could not observe themselves in any kind of objective fashion. Ong points out that they were prevented from examining self by virtue of the fact that their self was an inextricable part of the nucleus of their experience.

> Self-analysis requires a certain demolition of situational thinking. It calls for isolation of the self, around which the entire world swirls for each individual person, removal of the center of every situation from that situation enough to allow the center, the self, to be examined and described. (Ong, 1982, p.54)

It is important to emphasize that primary oral cultures are not incapable of rational thinking. Ruth Finnegan, in her examination of Limba poetry and communication, concludes that they are indeed able to reflect abstractly on their situation.

> First it is obvious that the crude picture with which we started is very far from the truth in the case of the Limba. Clearly, they are aware of the subtleties and depths of linguistic expression; they possess and exploit abstract terms and forms and they reflect on and about language and have media for standing back from the immediate scene or the immediate form of words through their terminology, their philosophy of language and their literature. (Finnegan, 1988, p.55)

But it does seem crucial to an understanding of oral thinking that the oral mind does not tolerate the separation

of mind from experience - the kind of separation and fragmentation which is essential to our modern thinking. The written word has given us the ability to analyze and break down thought into manageable units, examine and reassemble these fragments in a different way if necessary. In doing so, though, we may detract from the unified whole. We are able to assemble and reassemble our ideas but we lose the ability which primary oral cultures seem to have, of being part of a living, breathing and dynamic living organism.

THE ORAL ORGANISM.

Ong reminds us that oral societies are aware of knowledge only in a communal and holistic way. The individual is aware of himself only inasmuch as he is part of his tribe.

> For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic communal identification with the known. The individual's reaction is not expressed as simply individual or subjective but rather as encased in the communal reaction, the communal 'soul'. (Ong, 1982, p.45)

Lévy-Brühl expresses the nature of this collective consciousness in his introduction to How Natives Think (1926).

> The representations which are termed collective, defined as a whole without entering into detail, may be recognized by the following signs. They are common to

> the members of the group; they are transmitted from one generation to another; they impress themselves upon its individual members, and awaken in them sentiments of respect, fear, adoration, and so on, according to the circumstances of the case. Their existence does not depend upon the individual; not that they imply a collective unity distinct from the individuals comprising the social group, but because they present themselves in aspects which cannot be accounted for by considering individuals merely as such. (Lévy-Brühl, 1928, p.13)

He describes this phenomenon as a "collective representation" and, although some may say he exaggerates and simplifies the nature of the oral mind, he appears to capture well the strength of the connection with the tribe and the unquestioning identification with the immmediate environment which is common to "primitive" awareness.

> The primitive mind is not curious like our own - does not look for causes but accepts the collective representations. ... And since the collective representations as a rule, predominate most where the races are least advanced, the mind of the "primitive" has hardly any room for such questions as "how"? or "why"? The ensemble of collective representations which master him and excite in him an intensity of feeling which we cannot even imagine, is hardly compatible with that disinterested contemplation of a matter which a purely intellectual desire to probe into its cause would demand. (Lévy-Brühl, 1926, p.25)

The essential motivation in a primary oral culture is complete emotional and intellectual identification with the group identity. Havelock examines the way this was achieved in early Greek society. He points out that the poets and bards provided the ritualized vehicle for transmission of tradition which in turn provided the stability and continuity of the culture.

> When a society relies on a system of communications which is wholly oral it will, like ours, still have to rely on a tradition expressed in fixed statements and transmissible as such. What kind of language can supply this need and still remain oral? The answer would seem to lie in ritualized utterance, a traditional language which somehow becomes formally repeatable like a ritual in which the words remain in a fixed order. (Havelock, 1986, p.70)

MEMORIZATION.

The need to memorize the body of communicated lore which is to be passed on from one generation to another dictated the use of a very formalized language laden with cliche and familiar phrases which could be easily remembered and transposed from piece to piece. Ong tells us that this was an invaluable method for maintaining continuity in an oral culture.

> Homeric Greeks valued cliches because not only the poets but the entire noetic world or thought world relied upon the formulaic constitution of thought. In an oral culture, knowledge once acquired had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost; fixed, formulaic thought patterns were essential for wisdom and effective administration. (Ong, 1982, p.23)

Parry identified formulas in Homer's work as groups of words which were regularly employed by the poet under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea. He was able to track many of these and this was a crucial clue to the oral origin of this poetry. Walter Ong reiterates their importance in the oral way of thought, " They are incessant. They form the substance of thought itself.

Thought in any extended form is impossible without them, for it consists in them". (Ong, 1982, p.34)

The communicative style of the poets was then, of necessity constrained by repetitive language and the patterns of rhythm and meter which aided memory. The received knowledge of an oral society is limited to what can be recalled in this way and this imperative must influence all thought processes. Ong points out that the organizational structure of oral thinking determines the kind of thinking which is possible.

> Heavy patterning and communal fixed formulas in oral cultures serve some of the purposes of writing in chirographic cultures, but in doing so they of course determine the kind of thinking that can be done, the way experience is intellectually organized. In an oral culture, experience is intellectualized mnemonically. (Ong, 1982, p.36)

This may well lead us to reflect on the repetitive nature of human communication and indeed on the heavy-handed judgement which we pass on redundancy in thought and writing in our own society. The child and, indeed, the old person are perhaps more true to their oral essence, when they tell us the same story over and over.

> Redundancy, repetition of the just-said, keeps both speaker and hearer surely on the track. Since redundancy characterizes both thought and speech, it is in a profound sense, more natural to thought and speech than is sparse linearity. (Ong, 1982, p.40)

One of the consequences of this redundancy is that it may encourage a conservative state of mind and one in which the sayings and indeed "sooth sayers" of the past are accepted more readily as bearers of verity. Although the units of memorized text can be shifted around and reused in many different contexts, the weightiness of their form must lead to a certain amount of inertia. This can be seen in some ways as an advantage as it promotes social stability and consistency in society; at the same time it does not allow for new idioms and ideas to be accepted very quickly. Ong contrasts this situation with the orthographic culture which challenges traditional knowledge in favour of novelty.

> By storing knowledge outside the mind, writing and, even more, print downgrade the figures of the wise old man and the wise old woman, repeaters of the past, in favour of younger discoverers of something new. (Ong, 1982, p 41)

Ong has also pointed out that the imperative to memorize has many consequences in oral expression. The need for repetition also results in the attaching of certain adjectives always to the same noun. The use of rhyme, rhythm and meter gives a musical intonation to words which also aids recall. Characters are deliberately made one dimensional and representative of either good or evil. This creates a duality which structuralists have interpreted to be philosophically significant but which very likely had its origin simply in mnemonic and organizational purposes.

> The type character serves both to organize the story line itself and to manage the non-narrative elements that occur in narrative. Around Odysseus (or in other cultures, Brer Rabbit or the spider Anansi) the lore concerning cleverness can be made use of, around Nestor the lore about wisdom, and so on.(Ong, 1982, p.151)

An exaggeration of heroic qualities and evil characteristics as well as elaboration of noble and despicable deeds gave the performer less need to remember details and more scope for improvisation. He would not be brought to account in the way that a writer is, who must research and justify every fact which can be examined and reexamined for its verity. Accuracy is not demanded of the oral poet. In fact he would avoid making corrections in case it undermined his delivery and made him unconvincing (Ong, 1982, p.104). Ong also elaborates on the special qualities of narrative in the oral world. The narrator does not have to be original in his material, (in fact he always uses traditional tales), nor does he have to pay attention to the form of his work, as he may start in the middle of the story or change the sequence at will, but his main purpose is to gain and keep the attention and involvement of the audience in whatever way he can (Ong, 1982, p. 41).

Most importantly, there is a dramatic and emotional identification with the subject by both poet and audience. The poet uses all his body to communicate his meaning and the audience responds in an equally expressive way. The word is part of an existential experience which totally involves

all the participants. It is an experience still closely associated with ritual and ceremony in our own society. "From all over the world and from all periods of time traditional composition has been associated with hand activity." (Ong, 1982, p.67)

> The oral word, as we have noted, never exists in a simply verbal context as a written word does. Spoken words are always modifications of a total existential situation, which always engages the body. (Ong, 1982, p.67)

Ong takes this one step further and extrapolates that the oral world, being a world of sound, makes the audience and performer the centre of the experience. It is an inclusive and all encompassing experience. "Sight isolates, sound incorporates. Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer". (Ong, 1982, p.72). He contrasts this to the print experience which he claims to be isolating. It is a medium involving the eye only and it places the reader, or observer, outside of the experience. It is "reflective" and exteriorizing rather than "inflective" and involving.

> A sound-dominated verbal economy is consonant with aggregative (harmonizing) tendencies rather than analytic, dissecting tendencies (which would come with the inscribed, visualized word.(Ong, 1982, p.73)

TRADITION, CREATIVITY, AND EDUCATION.

Tradition in oral cultures is paramount and the verse and delivery of the bard serves it well. However, there has to be some accommodation for change. Although, as we have observed, redundancy was common, there was admittedly also a need to slough off some material which was no longer considered important. Although his skill was prodigious, there was a limit to the bard's memory, and so he had to sometimes sacrifice something to accommodate the new, and it became convenient, on occasion, to colour the message in a slightly different hue. It seems clear, though, that the changes he made were subtle and gradual and that he sounded out his audience while introducing any change. Tradition was never dramatically cast out but rather tenuously adapted and made to fit a new circumstance (Ong, 1982, p.42). Ruth Finnegan supports this but in her study of the more modern Yugoslavian and African cultures she observes that the story-teller, while true to the essence of the story, elaborates and changes it considerably to suit his own style. This gives the lie to the implication that oral poetry may be tedious in its repetition. She states that there is no requirement for complete accuracy in this tradition, but that the truth of the message lies rather in its immutable essence and the consistency of the underlying structure of the verse.

> Each person will tell the same story differently, since he has to make it personal, and not simply a mechanical repetition of what he has heard or narrated before. He becomes not only a "repeater" but also a "creative" originator of each story. The plot of the story and the sequence of its main parts remain the same but the narrator has to supply meat to this skeleton. This he will do in the choice of words, the speed of reciting, the imagery he uses, the varying of his voice, the gestures he makes with his face and hands, and the manner in which he will sing or merely recite the poetical portions. The narrator puts his personality into the story, thus making it uniquely his own creation.(Finnegan, 1988, p.69)

Goody also supports the notion of the creativity in the oral poet's use of the formula.

> The search for repeated "groups of words" in the work of either the Greek, Homer or Yugoslav Ugljanin would seem to be less important than the search for creative modifications, yet it is towards the repetitive rather than the creative that the term "formula" seems to push the analysis of oral forms. (Goody, 1977, p.117)

Havelock also concludes that the memorization tasks of the performer were not arduous but rather reminiscent of the singer of modern popular ballads and he extrapolates that the Greeks' recital of oral compositions were both instructional and entertaining, educational and recreational. This indeed supports the idea that oral societies did not break up the functions of education, religion and entertainment but that, in most oral societies, they comprise one and the same thing. Havelock reminds us that,

> ...the recital of the tribal encyclopaedia, because of the technology of the recital, was also a tribal recreation. In more familiar terms, the Muse, the voice of instruction, was also the voice of pleasure. (Havelock, 1963, p.152)

At the same time it should be clarified that an important purpose of Homer's work was didactic and that there is some danger in comparing very different oral traditions with somewhat different cultural imperatives. Havelock insists that the element of improvisation which is found in the poetry of the Balkans should not be assumed to have been present in Greek oral poetry (Havelock, 1963, p.93). He cautions that in Homer "the tale is made subservient to the task of accommodating the weight of educational material which lies within it." (Havelock, 1963, p.61)

Goody, on the other hand, points out that even the Greek oral poet had some degree of autonomy and that there was always a compromise between individual expression and cultural transmission.

> It is rather that the individual signature is always getting rubbed out in the process of generative transmission. And this process affects, though in a different degree, not merely what in its written form we would call "literature" , but more generally, the categories of the understanding and systems of classification themselves, for a dialectical relationship always exists between the individual as a creator and the culture as a given. (Goody, 1977, p.27)

It is clear that educational aims and methods in oral societies are generally quite consistent with the articulated culture. The children are involved in the communally shared experience of ritual and celebration

surrounding the poets' performance. The message of the story may be overt and even didactic but it is couched in a palatable form and easily remembered because of the mnemonic techniques already referred to. The learning is accomplished by listening and repeating the refrains and sayings and by apprenticeship or close association between the young poet and his mentor. We can imagine that young people felt a sense of belonging to their community or tribe as they gathered around the fire with their families to share the poets' performance. A bond is formed in the storyteller' circle between the audience and the bard and that identification extends to the whole group. Finnegan points out the importance of the part which the audience plays in the oral presentations of some African and Asian societies. "It contributes not only to the mode of delivery but to the actual words being used, by its overt reactions and additions, even by its passivity" (Finnegan, 1988, p.80). And the storyteller himself or herself has an equally important part to play.

> The good West African story-teller gave "new insight into the ways of human beings: the imprint of his individual personality, and his personal perception of the world and its artistic potentialities, were too striking to be forgotten.(Finnegan, 1988, p.73)

The participation of the whole group in song and dance is part of this tradition also. The story was at once a tale, a song and a dance; in fact a celebration of life. Finnegan

tells how this becomes the focus of a child's education in Yugoslavia.

> In Yugoslavia the future singer imbibes from childhood the complex oral artistry of epic song. The fact of narrative song is around him from birth: the technique of it is the possession of his elders and he falls heir to it. (Lord, 1968, p. 31, cited by Finnegan, 1988, p.68)

In Ancient Greece dance and song was an integral part of the education of noble youth. It involved them quite naturally in the tradition and culture of their society while at the same time ensuring their moral and ethical training.

> When performed as a chorus the dance also has the advantage of involving whole groups in shared recitations and so shared memorization, a practice which continued to inform and guide the mores of Athens down to the age of Pericles. A high proportion of the youth of the Athenian governing classes received its secondary education this way, as it was recruited for the choruses of tragedy and comedy.(Havelock, 1986,p.75)

Havelock again emphasizes that this education was by no means arduous. The festivals and rituals of dance and song were first and foremost a pleasurable experience. The whole community shared in a common joy; a communal high achieved by their oneness in the lifeworld and confirmed by the celebration of their shared oral culture.

> The natural proclivities of human beings to enjoy themselves - and here again the pleasure principle is brought into action to assist the social need - give rise to common festivals and common feelings, feelings shared by all oral societies and central to their

> successful functioning, as they provide the necessary instructional situations.
> (Havelock, 1986, p.77)

It appears then, that oral societies came close to achieving cultural cohesion.

> As in Palestine the oral tradition in Greece implied an emphasis on continuity. It created recognized standards and lasting moral and social institutions; it built up the soul of social organizations and maintained their continuity; and it developed ways of perpetuating itself. The oral tradition and religion served almost the same purpose. Language was the physiological basis of oral traditions, and religion was the sociological mechanism through which traditions were established, directing and enforcing the cooperation of individuals in the interest of the community, maintaining group life, and creating a lasting organization of society independent of a living leader. (Innis, 1951, p.105)

Why then would there be any change? The time for writing came with the expansion of this society which was, of necessity, small and inward looking. I will investigate some of the implications of this change in the following chapter. In subsequent chapters I hope to show how the shift from an orally based culture to a chirographic culture parallels the learning of the child and that many of the problems and challenges around the transition to writing in society may also be experienced by the young child in the education process. A greater awareness of the challenges which the young child may face should help educators greatly in planning curriculum suitable for this transition.

CHAPTER 3.

THE ORALITY/LITERACY RELATIONSHIP. LANGUAGE, AND POWER.

The Greek situation has been an ideal one to study because it affords a rare opportunity to examine the transition from orality to writing over many generations, for the process of change was a slow one. Oral language continued to have great influence throughout Greek society even after the introduction of writing. As Harold Innis has observed, it provided the ideal vehicle for the control of a small society; for the issue of language in oral times, had already become one of power. The ruling class in Greece had developed the skills of oratory and persuasion and this was an essential part of the education of the rulers. The oral voice had moved away from the fireside and into the chambers of government and it proved a useful and malleable tool; hypnotic and convincing to the people and easily adapted and changed when necessary.

> The oral as compared with the written transmission of tradition was inherently more consistent and logical in its results because of the constant sifting, refining and modifying of what did not fit into the tradition. In the cumulative effects of the oral tradition the pieces of an edifice were carried to another site and worked into the structure of a different novel. Fact sifted into legend, legend into myth. Facts worked loose and became detached from their roots in space and time. The story was moulded and remoulded by imagination, passion, prejudice, religious presumption, or aesthetic instinct. (Albright, 1957, pp190-200)

The eventual reason for the acceptance of the new alphabet developed from North Semitic, was a practical one. The Greeks expanded their empire into the Mediterranean and it became necessary to govern and manage the conquered. In order to do this a bureaucracy became necessary and records needed to be kept. For a while the prophets and minstrels retained their influence and there was a period of coexistence with the new writing developing gradually and the oral tradition continuing to exist by its side. Power was still wielded by the religious element of society. The musicians, seers and bards still held sway using the formulaic incantation as kind of magic spell over the people (Innis, 1986, p.73). Even after the sayings were written down the oral idiom continued to be used. Harold Innis describes how the oral seers were eventually usurped, and because their lore was now written, it could be taken over by bureaucrats. He tells how the ancient oracles or "chresmoi" were interpreted by an elite group of individuals of Eupatrid descent. In this way, at first, the continuity of Greek tradition was maintained even after the migration into foreign territory was underway. However this was a short lived stability and soon found not to be expedient. The survival of these guardians of tradition was impossible and Innis describes how their infallibility was challenged by the new bureaucracy.

> The failure of the Sicilian expedition destroyed their unlimited pretensions to expert knowledge. They were under continued attack from the old comedy poets from 410 to 400 BC and following revision of the laws of Solon in 399 BC were probably replaced by official exegetes who were given limited but undisputed authority to expound the non-statutory sacred law. The Eupatridae were stripped of the last tool by which they could exert pressure on political life. Their right to authoritative exegesis was put on a clear basis but their special influence was limited to the religious and moral fields. (Innis, 1951, p.109)

PHILOSOPHERS ACCEPT THE ALPHABET.

Educators and philosophers were also beguiled by the power of the written word. The strength which philosophers such as Plato brought to their arguments through the reflective power of writing was, even to them, worth the sacrifice of the tenuous and less dogmatic quality of oral debate.

The power of thought which writing afforded soon became clear. The intellectual could now reflect on his thoughts and the thoughts of others, recombine ideas, build on previous ideas, incorporate past discoveries in his own and finally reflect at length on his own ideas and become self aware. This was irresistible to the philosopher as it gave him the opportunity to build academe; his own empire of the mind. Unfortunately Plato and his school found it necessary to choose between poetic oral expression and the new idiom. In rejecting poetry he chose to accept wholeheartedly divisive linear thinking which would now introduce schisms in the intellectual world as well as in society. The techniques of argument being developed in the

Socratic dialogues were already leaning towards the dialectic and this kind of exploration of ideas implied a right and wrong answer. In a way this made them the perfect vehicle for writing, and the perfect first step to linear, either\or type thinking.

EDUCATOR, PHILOSOPHER AND BUREAUCRAT ; WORKING TOGETHER TO DIVIDE

By the time the alphabet was adopted in Greece by about 700 B.C. language had already become an instrument of power. The expanding and increasingly beleaguered Greek ruling class found the rigidity and precision of writing finally to be a more reliable means of holding on to their power.

Innis tells us how the oral tradition made for a "flexible civilization" which however could not be "disciplined to the point of effective political unity" (Innis, 1951, p.10). Innis has traced in some detail the steady march forward of bureaucracy in Greece and the uncomfortable coexistence of religion and government. The religious and traditional power in society finally gave way to the secular and the written word became a instrument of that demise. The time came around 200 BC when the library could even be seen as a bastion of the ruling classes. Only the most educated in society were able to read and understand the writings therein and the masses were no longer capable of participating in or even comprehending the procedures of government and the management of their society.

> The period had arrived when a great book was regarded as a great evil. Books were written for those who had read all existing books and were scarcely intelligible to those who had not. Literature was divorced from life. In the words of Gilbert Murray, Homer in the Alexandrine period came under, "the false glamour of false knowledge diffused by the printed text." Alexandria broke the link between science and philosophy. The library was an imperial instrument to offset the influence of Egyptian priesthood. Greek advances in mathematics were consolidated and the work of Aristotle as the great biologist extended. (Innis, 1951, p.10)

RHETORIC LIVES ON

As the Greek power gave way to the Roman empire the oral tradition was officially put to rest. Innis tells us how the state took over the functions of knowledge and in doing so subjected real substance to the limitations of form.

> As the Empire followed the Republic, restrictions were imposed on the senate and on the oral tradition. Disappearance of political activity through censorship meant the increased importance of law and rhetoric. The literature of knowledge was divorced from the literature of form which eventually became panegyric. (Innis, 1951, p.12)

The breakdown of language into different forms for specific purposes was a process which occurred over many centuries and was linked to the need for control and administration. It does also provide insight to the origin of the schisms between the different uses of language in our own culture. The specialist now requires his\her own articulation to validate his\her position in society. The lawyer speaks a

different jargon from the professor, who in turn speaks differently from the computer scientist. The vernacular even can be divided up into media-speak, sports-speak, movie-speak etc. Of course oral language did not ever die, but it seems clear that the official forms of oral language became immediately rigidified after they were written down. The language of modern government retains still many of the repetitive phrases and traditional mannerisms of oral times. The language thus retains the ponderous influence of tradition without the flexibility by which oral societies incorporated change. Law is a domain still loaded down with redundant language used now, as then, to impress with its weighty phrases. The language of the rhetorician is still heard in the speeches of parliament and the declarative language of officialdom. But now that the phrases are written they have become archaic and meaningless and they have ceased to adapt to the needs of the society, as they did in oral times. The language of bureaucracy and rhetoric are now very closely linked and together seek to freeze "truth" in time and space. By the analysis of Innis, written language can be seen as an instrument of power imposed on the people and used as a means of control. According to him this has resulted in a monopoly in language and knowledge which continues to divide society.
"The large scale mechanization of knowledge is characterized by imperfect competition and the active creation of

monopolies in language which prevent understanding and hasten appeals to force."(Innis, 1951, p.29)

Innis goes so far as to attribute the turmoil of the twentieth century to the control of communication made possible by alphabetized writing. " Application of power to communication industries hastened the consolidation of vernaculars, the rise of nationalism, revolution, and new outbreaks of savagery in the twentieth century" (Innis, 1951, p.29). The official style of government communiques and the law maker represent a sterile form of language which has become divorced from the vernacular. As it lost the flexibility of the oral tradition it froze into a manageable but irrelevant corpse. It is not surprising that politicians are finding it increasingly difficult to engage the emotional commitment or understanding of the populace.

RHETORIC, LITANY AND POETRY.

The Christian church continued to maintain the incantation and verse of oral times and it lives on yet in the Bible and in the ceremony of high church services. Many older translations of the Bible retain oral language patterns used to aid memory such as the stringing together of a list of names or phrases joined by "and" (for example):-

> And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the

> earth; and the mule that was under him went away.(II Samuel 18,v.9, King James Bible. 1954)

Robert Alter (quoted by Havelock, 1986, p.72), talks about the semantic parallelism, echoing and building on a previous idea which is also reminiscent of oral patterns.

The Christian church sought to capture its originally oral form in a written format. Unlike the ancient Greeks who claimed that truth was embodied by the word, Christianity endeavored to incorporate truth with divine revelation in its writings.

> In a sense, the Christian focus was more narrow and sharp than the Greek, and entailed less need for educational breadth. The highest metaphysical truth was the fact of the Incarnation; the miraculous divine intervention into human history, the effect of which was to liberate humanity and reunite the material world with the spiritual, the mortal with the immortal, creature with Creator. The mere grasp of that stupendous fact was enough to satisfy the philosophical quest, and that fact was fully described in the Church scriptures. (Tarnas, 1991, p.113)

Logos combined with lack of questioning which divine revelation implied led to some narrowing of intellect. On the other hand, the Christian emphasis on individual redemption and the power of the individual spirit may have been one of the seeds in the revival of poetic expression and humanism in the Middle Ages. The role of Christianity in the development of Western thinking is by no means a simple one, and the examination of its many facets are beyond the scope of this thesis. I hope only to demonstrate

again that the encoding of oral expression into an alphabetic form changes its influence and even its purpose. As with the rhetoric of government, Biblical incantation and verse became at the same time monumental and archaic once they were entrusted to the page. Chanting and hymns and the ceremonies of rites of passage like marriage are probably some areas of sacred oral tradition which maintain influence in our society. Sacred writing may have been more accessible to the people for a long time because it had an oral expression and it continued to tell stories and engage the feelings. It still retains extensive social significance partly because of its ritualistic and emotional appeal and in spite of the rigidity of its written text.

It may be concluded from these statements that language generally, after it is written down, seems to lose the emotional appeal and total involvement of its oral counterpart. The appeal of written language to Plato was the capturing of a fact as permanent truth, and this continues to be its appeal for rulers and church leaders alike. It appears to take on an indestructible quality and may then stand as an icon for leaders of all kinds who are seeking to impress others with the significance of their message.

The "poetic" use of language (and I use the word to mean writing which engages feelings and appeals to emotion and not language used by poets) became intellectually redundant and was considered generally, by philosophers and

scholars, to be irrelevant and distracting. Vestiges of the oral appeal to emotion continued to manifest itself, as we have seen, in church ceremony and rhetoric, and this was retained, perhaps, because it continued to have such an engaging hold on both priests and people. Charismatic leaders continued to exploit this power throughout the ages and rhetoric was not always tempered with reason to achieve balance. Winston Churchill and the invective of Hitler had the power to inspire national pride and individual sacrifice. In both cases, they may be seen as a source of lies and manipulation and Plato would no doubt, have bewailed the effect of their "poetry", but their appeal to emotion assured an easy popular approval of their actions. In a sense, the powerful oral skill which Hitler demonstrated may be said to have been instrumental in the perversion of a nation and may have contributed further to the mistrust of orality and rhetoric among intellectuals.

However, the influence of "oral" culture continues to impinge on the culture of ordinary people in many ways. We may imagine that the fireside stories told by families to each other have continued throughout the ages as they continue, in some communities, even now. It is interesting therefore to speculate, that much of the significant populist cultural transmission in our society is continuing as a direct progression from the oral tradition through Bible stories, fairy tales and traditional stories, games and rhymes, passed on from generation to generation, to

young children, usually by women and often not even written down.

Even in our schools there is a marked division between the practical, scientific and technological skills passed on through the rational tradition inherited from Plato and the poetic, artistic, humanistic learning which still owes much to the oral tradition. The conflict between these two philosophies is still marked in educational circles and may be traced directly back to the split in our psyche engendered by the turning away from orality in Greek times. The schools gradually took on more practical accountability and humanistic educators even now, have to fight for a voice. Ong tells us how the "bookish" took over from orally based education in classical times.

> The three Rs - reading, 'riting, 'rithmentic - representing an essentially non-rhetorical, bookish, commercial and domestic education gradually took over from the traditionally , orally grounded, heroic, agonistic education that had generally prepared young men in the past for teaching and professional ecclesiastical or political ~~public~~ service. (Ong, 1967, p.241)

THE EDUCATIONAL IMPERATIVE

In the following pages I will argue that educators ~~do~~ not serve children well by continuing to deepen this rift between reason and emotion. It is not practical, or even desirable to call for a complete return to oral thinking. It is clear that writing affords us an invaluable tool to intellectual thought, which must be offered to all. By the

same token, however, we must not continue to deny the other faculties of the human brain. We need to reincorporate our entire consciousness into the education process and indeed reintegrate our bicameral mind. The education of a child should engage the emotion and involve the whole being in the same way that people in an oral culture participated in their environment. I will argue that there are many aspects of society which reflect oral mentality and in fact it has been argued that modern media culture is a return to that mind-set. That aside, there are many groups of people who never learn to think in a linear fashion and who are not open to this way of perceiving the world. Many students who pass through our schools are living in an oral world. Their culture is one of talk and pictures and the written word is very foreign to them. As educators we should be aware of this and learn to respect their perspective. We must also find a way to engage them in educational pursuits which speak to the oral mentality. We need to recognize the great leap of faith which it is often necessary for the young child to make in crossing that abyss to reading and writing. The transition is crucial if we wish to engage the young mind in more than a compulsory training. The importance of these ideas will become clear as I explore the thinking of young children and try to demonstrate how greatly it differs from the rational and linear thinking which we try to teach. I hope to show that it has much more in common with the oral consciousness and that, if we can find a way to incorporate

oral and rational thinking in our educational process, we may be able to avoid the alienation of our youth and their disenchantment with a schooling which often appears irrelevant to them. As I have argued, the written word was originally the tool of the list maker and the bureaucrat and only later became the philosopher's route to logical thought. The crucial point though, is that it has been an instrument of control ever since it was captured in a written form. I will argue that it behooves us, as educators to find a place for the stories and songs of all cultures and to reach small children through the profound understanding which they already bring to school: the oral understanding.

CHAPTER 4.

PRIMARY EDUCATION TODAY

WHAT IS WRONG WITH WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING?

I do not hope to offer a comprehensive survey of the huge amount of research on children's thinking and early literacy which has been completed during recent decades. It will perhaps be sufficient to quote a few of these studies and look at some of the concerns and conclusions drawn by many of them about the inadequacy of our previous approaches to teaching literacy to young children. Even as early as 1944 Watt observed that educators were failing to prepare children for the modern age.

> The results of our systematic instruction over a period of nine years of child life during the past half-century have not been altogether satisfying: indeed, there is ground for the fear that we may be training the vast majority of our children just well enough to enable them to occupy themselves with the tawdriest reading material and yet not well enough to ensure that they will wish to enter into and enjoy their rightful intellectual and spiritual heritage or even that they will be able to withstand the word-magic of the advertiser and that of the propagandist.(Mackinnon A.R., 1963, p. 5)

Even more alarming are the conclusions of Marilyn Jager Adams as she examines the recent statistics on literacy in the USA.

> But even as we come to recognize this situation, we are confronted with statistics that the ability of our students to read advanced materials is slowly but steadily declining; that among industrial nations, American student's reading achievement is average or even below; that compared to its industrial

> competitors, the United States is raising a disproportionate number of poor readers; that already one out of five adult Americans is functionally illiterate and that these ranks are swelling by 2.3 million each year.
> According to the Orton Dyslexia Society, illiterate adults account for 75 percent of the unemployed, one-third of the mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent children, 85 percent of the juveniles who appear in court, 60 percent of the prison inmates, and nearly 40 percent of minority youth etc.(Jager Adams, M.J., 1990, p.26)

Clearly there is something wrong with the way we are teaching young children to read and it appears to have consequences not only in their literacy achievement but also in their social and personal adjustment in life. Throughout the English speaking world from New Zealand to Canada there has been widespread concern about the many young children who have great difficulty in becoming literate. A raft of early reading emergency recovery programs has been developed recently such as Reading Recovery (Marie Clay), Success for All, Prevention of Learning Disabilities (Silver and Hagin (1990), the Wallach Tutoring Program (Wallach and Wallach 1976); and Programmed Tutorial Reading (Ellson, Barber, Eagle, and Kampwerth, 1965).

Marie Clay is the principal exponent of Reading Recovery, one of the remedial programs which appears to have most success. She advocates the use of this intense training to very young children who already show a reluctance to learn to read in grade one. The method demonstrates that many of the failing readers can be put on

the track to successful reading with enough concentrated training. This is the significant indicator that most reluctant young readers are not at all lacking in intelligence but just not motivated or prepared in some way to see the world in a literate way.

> Reading Recovery has also created systemic changes in New Zealand since the early 1980's when it became a national program. Government figures from 1988 revealed that with approximately 20% coverage of the 6-year-old age cohort, over 90% of the children were successfully released as independent readers. A more astounding figure is that only 0.8% of the entire age cohort needed further referral and special help. (Clay, M.,1993, p. 29)

Clay expresses well the despair of educators who feel compelled to create these remedial measures which, although successful in a limited degree, are nevertheless a band-aid solution and there is no indication of the long term effects of such solutions. We still have not any long term evidence of whether these young people go on to be successful in school and life.

> Is it possible that a young child can feel the weight of failure in the first year of school? It was so for 6-year old David, who said, " It's too late. Everyone is reading in my class but me. I tried to learn the letters and sounds, but I could never remember anything." And it was so for Thomas, who pretended to read, telling wonderful stories, but avoided to match up his "reading" to the print on the page and ultimately also saw himself as a failure. And it was so for Michelle , who struggled over each word, making sounds to go with letters in such a laborious fashion that she seemed to produce nonsensical prose.
> Our interest in Reading Recovery was fired by our awareness of the large numbers of young children who daily find themselves failing in school situations.

> That almost always means failure in learning to read. While reading and writing do not guarantee success, literacy is a first and necessary factor that has profound effects on children's achievement, potential, and self-esteem for the rest of their school careers and lives.(Clay M., 1993. p.2)

SOME INDICATIONS OF THE CONFUSION

How can it be that educators have got it so wrong for so many and that we do not seem to be able to get it right? It seems, indeed, that we cannot even decide on the educational potential of the small child. Modern educators have vacillated between the view of Michael Oakshott, who seems to view the young mind as an "empty vessel" still quite incapable of adult,(i.e.superior) understanding. He claims that "nobody is born a human being" (Oakeshott, 1971, p.46) and that children are "postulants to the human condition" who must be "initiated " into the "inheritance of human understandings" (Oakshott, 1971, pp.46,47); and, at the other extreme, the notion of the competent child of the 1960s. Harvard psychologist Jerome Bruner published "The process of Education" in 1960, which proposed the hypothesis that "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest way to any child at any stage of development."

In Miseducation (Elkind, 1987, p.57), David Elkind points out the fallacy in this point of view, which was seized on by American educators to imply that children should be taught much more at an early stage. This gave them the opportunity to overload early primary curriculum in an

attempt to equip American youth with the competitive edge needed to beat the Russians at the space race. Elkind sees this as a problem in understanding child development (Elkind, 1987,p. 58,59.). He notes that because children have the potential to learn many things it does not follow that we should therefore teach them everything at once. "Young children learn in a different manner from that of older children and adults, yet we can teach them many things if we adapt our materials and mode of instruction to their level of ability" (Elkind, 1987, p.58).

I see it rather as a confusion about the quality of the small child's intelligence and a lack of appreciation of its richness and profundity. As Kieran Egan has suggested, the child cannot be understood in comparison to the adult. The child's mind has qualities which raise it above that of adult perception in many ways and we must be sensitive to the qualities which are surrendered in the process of conforming to the rationalistic educational experience which we offer. Egan refers to the child autobiographers such as Thomas Traherne who remember childhood as a time of "abundance and fullness of meaning" (Egan, 1988, p.42), and Wordsworth of course, who recalls early childhood as a time of connectedness with the natural world.

> No outcast he, bewildered and depressed
> Along his infant veins are interfused
> The gratification and the filial bond
> Of nature that connect him with the world.
>
> (Wordsworth, The Prelude,Bk. II, 241-244)

Egan preempts critics who would assert that these different views of childhood competency are attributable to the fact that educators, autobiographers and poets are talking about different qualities of mind. Egan is concerned, as I am, in dissolving these false distinctions and if we can accomplish this it may indeed go a long way to resolving our confusion.

> Now clearly it will be pointed out that Oakeshott and the autobiographers of childhood are referring to different things; Oakeshott to rational thought, these others to sensations and feelings. A part of my purpose is to undermine the appropriateness of this distinction, particularly when dealing with young children's understanding, and I will be arguing that they are not referring to different things, just that some have a much better and more accurate idea of that thing than others. (Egan, 1988, p.42)

THE DIFFICULT TRANSITION FROM ORALITY TO LITERACY AND RATIONALITY.

It is true that there has been a great deal of inspired and thoughtful work on childhood learning by philosophers and psychologists such as Piaget and Dewey whose ideas have been incorporated into the curriculum. However, in spite of the many studies by various education departments and eminent educators, there are still a large number of children who, even at the beginning of their education, fail to engage mentally and emotionally in the process. Howard Gardner has examined some of the possible historical reasons for this. He shows that the schools of the Middle Ages were still very much part of the community and although they already emphasized skill acquisition, (memorization,

reading, and Latin) at the expense of intrapersonal skills, the values of the society were still incorporated into the content. The schools were mostly administered by the clergy, and the teacher and his moral status were greatly respected by the students. There was an emotional identification by the students for the teacher and the material taught. The school and the students were part of the life-world and relevant to the community and they were an intrinsic part of the social web. Just as in oral societies the tribe exhibited a social cohesion, there is the sense that children in early traditional schools felt a similar connection with their community. Today educators have become more and more concerned with preparing children for the adult world without actually giving them a place in it or showing them how this preparation is relevant to them. The small child coming into a grade-one classroom is faced immediately with the urgent need to read as quickly as possible. There is also an urgency to teach the child "to think" - to develop "thinking skills" so that he /she can be ready to make the decisions demanded of adults in an ever more complicated world, and of course he/she must learn computer skills. There is an immediate pressure to be logical and practical and the unstated implication that there is no time for play, for fun, or even for music, art and stories. We wonder why we turn many off by this approach.

Educators have become overwhelmed by the demands of a secular and technological society. Gardner points out that traditional societies required to make the transition to this production-oriented education will show signs of extreme stress.

> Traditional schools replaced the "direct methods"of spatial and bodily intelligences, with a stress on linguistic facility, while retaining much of the interpersonal element; the modern school places increasing premium on logical-mathematical ability and on certain aspects of linguistic intelligence, along with a newly found premium on intrapersonal intelligence. The remaining intellectual capacities are, for the most part, consigned to after-school or recreational activities, it they are taken notice of at all. It is no wonder that individuals living in societies that had only traditional schooling exhibit severe strain when they are expected to make a rapid transition to a computer centred educational system. (Gardner, 1993, p.353)

I suggest further that small children are also not ready for this. They have just been born into a fascinating world full of spoken language (which they all master in just a few years without much effort). They are delighted by an environment of song, music, birds, animals, flowers and play, and we expect them to compromise this new learning with math drills and phonics. The lack of motivation and interest in scholastic learning which many young children exhibit may simply be due to a reluctance to abandon the experience of feeling close to their life-world. After all, they are still learning to understand what it means to be part of humanity. Like the participant in the oral society,

their emotions are very much involved in this learning process and educators must know how to tap into this emotional quality if they are even to begin to make contact.

Gardner has observed the difficulties inherent in approaching a young mind. He alludes to "constraints research" which has shown that the child, on entering school, has already formed entrenched attitudes to the world which cannot be drastically altered:

> Surprisingly, and in contradiction to the claims of the great developmentalist Jean Piaget (Mussen and Klassen 1983), these naive "conceptions" and "theories" prove difficult to alter, despite years of schooling. And so it often happens that the "mind of the five year old" ends up unaffected by the experiences of school. (Gardner, 1993, p.xviii)

Gardner recognizes also that educators are not on the right track with their sequential approach and their urge to measure and compare the achievement of children. He attempts to correct this by reviewing our notion of what intelligence is and begins by asserting that it is not necessarily a linear and quantifiable quality. Gardner sees the challenge as a need to widen our view of human cognition to include many previously undervalued competencies which indeed do not, "lend themselves to measurement by standard verbal methods, which rely heavily on a blend of logical and linguistic abilities" (Gardner, 1993, p.X).

Gardner has offered a critique of our previous notion of intelligence and his theory is interesting since it suggests that our education system has developed a rational bias which has resulted in the neglect of other facets of the mind. He presents a different picture in his book Frames of Mind, which tries to take account of the many other previously neglected abilities. His analysis breaks down intelligence into several domains and looks at ways to enhance those domains. Although dealing with the mind as separate entities does result in fragmentation rather than the integration which the model of oral intelligence suggests, several of the domains which he considers are very close to the sympathies of the oral mind, and therefore a useful object of reflection at this time.

HOW GARDNER'S DOMAINS LINK TO THE ORAL MENTALITY

Gardner supports the notion that our education system has developed a very linear bias at the expense of other ways of conceptualizing. He attributes much of this tendency to the ideas of Piaget and the Western bent towards scientific thinking.

> While Piaget has painted a redoubtable picture of development, it is still only one sort of development centered on the intellectual agenda addressed by the young scientist, Piaget's model of development assumes relatively less importance in non-Western and pre-literate contexts and may, in fact be applicable only to a minority of individuals even in the West. The steps entailed in achieving other forms of competence -

> those of an artist, a lawyer, an athlete, or a political leader - are ignored in Piaget's monolithic emphasis upon a certain form of thinking. (Gardner, 1983, p.20)

Gardner goes on to demonstrate how the medium of learning has a great influence on the kind of thinking which is produced. The symbol systems offered to the child determine how he will learn.

> David Olson, a cognitive developmental psychologist at the Ontario Institute for Studies on Education, pioneered in this area by showing that, even in a task as simple as creating a diagonal, the medium of presentation exerts a profound influence on a child's performance. Recently, Olson has focussed more on the role of the symbol systems of literacy. He has accrued evidence that individuals reared in a society where literacy is highlighted, learn, (and reason) differently from those who employ other kinds of symbol systems in nonschooled settings. (Gardner, 1983, p.28)

As a result, Gardner concludes that children should be offered many different media of learning to enhance the different abilities and competences latent within them. He postulates that there may be many children who do not learn well within the constraints of a rational and linear thinking model. He, too, sees as a mistake the too rapid push towards linear symbol forms in primary education, and recognizes the profound difference between these, which must be assimilated by young children if they are to succeed even at this elementary level of learning to read, and the more natural innate abilities.

> Also, while the emphasis in traditional cultures still falls very much on oral language, rhetoric, and word play, our culture places relatively greater emphasis on

> the written word - on securing information from reading and on expressing oneself properly through the written word. (Gardner, 1983, p.95)

Gardner points out that the oral context is provided with a number of non-linguistic supports for the child which make communication so much easier.

> The individual must learn to supply that context that in spoken communication is evident from nonlinguistic sources (like gestures, tone of voice, and the surrounding situations); one must be able to indicate through words alone just what point one wants to make. These challenges often elude individuals when they are first attempting to write. (Gardner, 1983, p.95)

Gardner's research also supports the dominance of oral thinking in the mind and the fact that this is a very different kind of thinking from that imposed by literacy. He supports the view that it involves a different part of the brain.

> My belief in the centrality of the auditory - and oral - elements of language has motivated my focus upon the poet as the user of language par excellence and my citation of the evidence from aphasia as a strong argument in favor of the autonomy of language. To the extent that language were to be considered a visual medium, it would flow much more directly into spatial forms of intelligence; that this is not the case is underscored by the fact that reading is invariably disturbed by injury to the language system, while, amazingly, this linguistic decoding capacity proves robust despite massive injury to the visual-spatial centers of the brain. (Gardner, 1983, p.98)

In his detailed exploration of previously neglected forms of understanding Gardner pays considerable attention to some of the modes familiar to oral cultures, and indeed, he implies that these are inherently accessible to the small child.

He refers to music as one of the earliest abilities to emerge in the child and quotes sources to support the view that some musical response as an innate ability. This intuitive response gradually becomes refined into a social response. Infants even appear to "sing as well as babble" and "match the pitch, loudness, and melodic contour of their mother's songs". Mechthild Papousek and Hanus Papousek have claimed also that infants as young as two months

> ...are especially predisposed to pick up these aspects of music - far more than they are sensitive to the core properties of speech - and that they can also engage in sound play that clearly exhibits creative, or generative properties. (Gardner, 1983, p.108)

Gardner describes how children make a transition during their second year of life and begin to invent their own sounds and music. This precedes the phase in which they begin to imitate the songs heard around them and eventually assume the music of the dominant culture .

> They begin to produce small sections ("characteristic bits") of familiar songs heard around them- such as the "El-El-O" from "Old Macdonald" or "All fall down" from "Ring around the Rosie". For a year or so, there exists a tension between the spontaneous songs and the production of "characteristic bits" from familiar tunes; but by the age of three or four, the melodies of the dominant culture have won out and the production of spontaneous songs and of exploratory play generally wanes.(Gardner,1983, p.108)

A very interesting transition is noted by Gardner, as the child learns more about the notation and composition of music. He points out that, at least for a while, there is often a loss of appreciation; a cost to be paid for

increased awareness. The rational awareness of the principles behind music seems to detract from the child's natural, intuitive musical ability.

> The approach is intuitive, based solely on what is heard irrespective of any theoretical knowledge about music. In contrast, the individual with a formal mode of thought can conceptualize his musical experience in a principled manner.
> ...
> Ultimately, any individual in our culture who would wish to gain musical competence should master formal musical analysis and representation; but at least initially, this move to the level of "knowledge about music" may involve a cost. Certain important aspects of music that are "naturally" perceived according to the initial "figural" mode of processing may be at least temporarily obscured ("wiped out") as an individual attempts to assess and classify everything according to a formal mode of analysis- to superimpose propositional knowledge upon figural intuitions. (Gardner, 1983, p.111)

Gardner goes on to tell of cases of young prodigies who have shown great talent at a very young age and become alienated from music by the "bringing to consciousness" of this intuitive ability. If this is what happens to the innate musical ability of the young child when it is made to fit into a cognitive mould one cannot help but ask if a similar process may occur in the minds of young children as they are forced from an innate oral use of language to a more conscious and reflective literacy in their early schooling. Both music and spoken language, natural to the oral mind, appear to change in nature, and indeed sometimes lose their facility when they become objects of instruction and transformed into a self-conscious and rational mode.

Another ability natural to the oral culture, and also to the young child, is the facility for dance. Gardner explores the deep primal origins of this form. " Dance goes back many thousand of years, in all probability to Paleolithic times". (Gardner, 1983, p.222). Gardner goes on to delineate the value of this medium to the traditional society.

> Dance can reflect and validate social organization. It can serve as a vehicle of secular or religious expression; as a social diversion or recreational activity; as a psychological outlet and release; as a statement of aesthetic values or an aesthetic value in itself. (Gardner, 1983, p.223)

Gardner quotes John Martin, a student of performance, who believes that the "body kinesthetic" domain of intelligence occurs automatically (Gardner, 1983, p.228) and that we are born with an involuntary capacity to mimic which leads into performance arts of all kinds and even connects us primally with a sense of humour which is so basic to all human societies.

The link between innate language and musical ability, dance and humour are demonstrated by Gardner and incorporated into his cognitive schemata for human thinking. It is notable that these are all elements of the oral consciousness to which we are paying less and less attention in our primary schools. It may not be surprising then, that these elemental facets of the child's makeup are foremost in

his/her learning style when he or she enters school. It should also not surprise us that children show pleasure and respond positively when allowed to express these aspects of mind. It should lead us to serious consideration of drama, song, mime, etc as an essential, not extra, part of the primary curriculum, as well as point us to the importance of fun and humour in the classroom environment. Once again we are led back to the emotional link between the children and what they are learning in school. This persists as the most salient feature common to communal learning in oral cultures and often sadly missing from the educational experience for our children. The dancers and the musicians quoted by Gardner reiterated again and again the importance of their medium for expressing feeling. John Martin says,

> It is the dancer's whole function to lead us into imitating his actions with our faculty for inner mimicry in order that we may experience his feelings. Facts he could tell us, but feelings he cannot convey in any other way than by arousing them in us through sympathetic action. (Gardner, 1983, p.228)

Gardner spends considerable time investigating " the personal intelligences" which he calls "intra- and inter-personal" intelligences. The inter-personal abilities are those which enable a person to relate to others and the intra-personal are the skills which permit one to access one's own inner self. These are especially interesting because they both encompass the salient features of orality which we have been emphasizing over and over. The intra-

personal is the facility to access and express or understand ones own feelings - they are the next step to emotional identification with the life-world- the understanding of that identification. The inter-personal, on the other hand is the expression of that emotion in a social context - the relationship of self to community, which is so integral a part of oral mentality. Gardner makes it clear that the development of "intra-personal" intelligence is very dependent on our richness of metaphor and symbol in our cognitive make-up.

> At its most advanced level, intra-personal knowledge allows one to detect and to symbolize complex and highly differentiated sets of feelings. One finds this form of intelligence developed in the novelist (like Proust) who can write introspectively about feelings ... (Gardner, 1983, p.238)

Like Gardner, I consider metaphoric symbolization to be one of the important ways the human psyche accesses the myth and understanding of ancient cultures. It provides the identification with past cultures which all societies need: it provides a sense of continuity with what has gone before and helps us to make sense of it all.

> I deem symbolization to be of the essence in the personal intelligences. Without a symbolic code supplied by the culture, the individual is confronted with only his most elementary and unorganized discrimination of feelings; but armed with such a scheme of interpretation, he has the potential to make sense of the full range of experiences which he and others in his community can undergo. In addition, it seems legitimate to construe rituals, religious codes, mythic and totemic systems as symbolic codes that capture and convey crucial aspects of personal intelligence.(Gardner, 1983, p.242)

My sense is that children are developing this deep intrapersonal ability already in the early years of childhood and that the stories and myths which we tell them, are crucially important as one source of this knowledge. This behooves us, as educators, to choose wisely the narrative which we share and one criterion for this choice should be the metaphorical and mythical richness which it offers to the child. In a later section on children's narrative I will explore further the function of myth and narrative and its link with oral culture.

Gardner refers to some of the theories dealing with the development of the self knowledge of the child. He refers to Piaget as the proponent of the theory that small children are in a phase of egocentrism which prevents them from appreciating the point of view of others. This view appears to be supported by the theories of Freud, who sees the young ego as establishing its dominance in relation to others; a purely selfish motive. In contrast, the theories of Vygotsky, and Luria and the American "symbolic-interactionist" school of George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley see the process as a less linear one. They claim that the child gets to know himself only by knowing others and that the process is constantly two way. This makes a lot of sense when considered with the model of the oral society where the personal skills are developed alongside the social skills and where there is no breakdown of

personality into artificial cognitive compartments and in which the child is an integrated being learning both to interact with the world and to know him or herself concomitantly. As Gardner says,

> Accordingly, knowledge of one's place among others can come only from the external community: the child is inextricably impelled to focus on others, as a clue to himself. Stated most strongly, without a community to provide the relevant categories, individuals (like feral children) would never discover that they are persons. (Gardner, 1983, p.247)

Gardner observes that the personal skills, so naturally demonstrated by the oral mentality, are becoming less and less a focus of attention in our schools. As we become driven to produce the technologically competent student even primary school educators begin to lose touch with the foundations of education; we must remind ourselves constantly that the small child is still forming a basic mental and emotional map and that we are playing an essential part in the drawing of that map during the early primary years.

> To begin with, the relative importance of interpersonal intelligence has been reduced in the contemporary educational scene: one's capacity to form a close tie to a single mentor, one's ability to get along with others, to read their signals and respond appropriately assumes less importance now than it did in centuries past. In contrast, intrapersonal skills are continually - even increasingly - germane, as the individual must monitor his own reactions and plan his future course of study and indeed, the rest of his life. (Gardner, 1983, p.352)

VYGOTSKY ON CHILDREN'S THINKING

To further support the idea that children develop concepts about self and others through emotionally satisfying experiences in a social context let us examine some of the theories of Lev Vygotsky.

Vygotsky explains the progression of understanding from childhood to adulthood as a gradual refinement of generalization. The child cannot fully understand the meanings which adults bring to a word simply because of lack of experience with that word and its many connotations. He is critical of Piaget's developmental view that children's thought develops from an egocentric point of view into a social awareness. He sees the process as much more interconnected and rather proceeding from social contact to self-talk and inner knowledge, rather than the other way round. According to Vygotsky the mental progress of the child depends on a relationship and interaction with society, which he/she then reflects on and processes internally by means of inner speech, and which then contributes to both the social adjustment and inner growth of the child.

> We consider that the total development runs as follows; the primary function of speech, in both children and adults, is communication, social contact. The earliest speech of the child is therefore essentially social. At first it is global and multifunctional; later its functions become differentiated. At a certain age the social speech of the child is quite sharply divided into egocentric and communicative speech. - From our point of view, the two forms, communicative and egocentric, are both social though their functions differ. Egocentric speech emerges when the child

> transfers social collaborative forms of behaviour to the sphere of inner- personal psychic functions. Egocentric speech, splintered off from general social speech, in time leads to inner speech. (Vygotsky, 1962, p.19)

Vygotsky develops these ideas in an interesting and complicated discussion in his book Thought and Language. It is not feasible within the scope of this work to do justice to this profound discussion. It must suffice merely to say that Vygotsky leans towards an integrative model of learning by which a child adds meaning to his mind-map gradually by means of accretion and rejection. This is a very gradual process, according to Vygotsky , in which each word develops a slightly idiosyncratic meaning for each child depending on the experiences he/she encounters around that word. The complexity of this process leads us to doubt that we are really helping a child to become literate by accelerated early reading training. It seems, if we are to believe this model, that the meanings of a word are so gradually understood by the young mind, that many will not have a mental slot for the words they are reading and will simply be going through a mechanical process of decoding without understanding. Some details in Vygotsky's analysis will remind us again of the oral characteristics which he agrees are a crucial element of the immature mind. He too, points out the importance of conceiving understanding as part and parcel with feeling and experience, and warns of the danger of not considering them together.

> We have in mind the relation between intellect and affect. Their separation as subjects of study is a major weakness of traditional psychology since it makes the thought process appear as an autonomous flow of "thoughts thinking themselves" segregated from the fullness of life, from the personal needs and interests, the inclinations and impulses of the thinker. (Vygotsky, 1962, p.8)

Another interesting fact from Vygotsky's observations supports the oral agonistic use of contrasting qualities of character which we referred to as a mnemonic aid in poetry. The dualistic inclination of the mind to mediate between opposites like good/bad, hot/cold etc. is referred to by Vygotsky as an important technique used by young children to aid the negotiation of meaning."Association by contrast, rather than by similarity, guides the child in compiling a collection" (of complexes) (Vygotsky, 1962, p.63).

Kieran Egan has a similar view of the need in the child to use "binary opposites" to make sense of the world. He discusses the implications of this idea in his book Primary Understanding and I will deal again in a later section on the association of these ideas with the importance of myth in early learning. At this point it must suffice to refer to this concept in support of the integrative model of learning in which participation in all aspects of meaning, social and personal, positive and negative, are as important for the child as they were for the oral society.

> It is easy to see why the process of forming binary opposites is so useful in beginning to make sense of the world or of experience: "When once an opposition is

> established and its principle understood, then either opposite, or any intermediate term, can be at once defined by opposition or by degree" (Ogdon, 1967, p.20) . Some basic discriminations , perceptual and cognitive, between figure and ground and self/world seem to be evident near the beginnings of life (see, for example, Banks and Salaparek, 1983; Gibson, 1969). (Egan, 1988, p.133)

Egan also makes clear that opposition in the child's mind does not imply contradiction or rejection of one element of the equation. As in the oral mentality, opposition is a unifying principle in which the two contrasting qualities are part of the whole. This way of thinking is found also in Eastern societies where the Ying and the Yang are both part of the whole and some languages even use the same word to express opposite meanings.

Vygotsky is quite explicit in his differentiation of written from oral speech and he also emphasizes the change in viewpoint necessary for the young child to make the transition.

> Our investigation has shown that the development of writing does not repeat the developmental history of speaking. Written speech is a separate linguistic function differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning. Even its minimal development requires a high level of abstraction. It is speech in thought and image only lacking the musical, expressive, intonational qualities of oral speech. In learning to write , the child must disengage himself from the sensory aspect of speech and replace words by images of words.
>
> ...
>
> Our studies show that it is the abstract quality of written language that is the main stumbling block. (Vygotsky, 1958, p.98)

OTHER EDUCATIONAL THINKERS WHO PLACE A HIGH VALUE ON ORALITY

In The Social Construction of Literacy (1986) Jenny Cook-Gumperz also draws attention to the difficulties children must have in converting oral language to written code. She makes the point that they must suddenly pay attention to form which must seem at first to have little connection to the spoken language which they learn so effortlessly. She also deals with the great differences in experience with language which young children bring to the classroom. Very relevant to their acceptance or lack of acceptance of formal literacy is the prevalence of books in their home culture as well as the dialect which they speak. Some children's oral language bears little resemblance to the conventional English of the classroom and even their pronunciation of words may be an obstacle to learning to read phonologically. The child who comes to school with little language experience common to the teacher and middle class students may need extra time to become used to conventional oral patterns before he/she is introduced to the written language. Simons, Murphy and Gumperz have pointed out that children must change their focus on language in order to learn the printed form. It involves a greater emphasis on form rather than meaning and an attention to phonological segments which may not be easy for children with limited oral experience.

> The acquisition of metalinguistic skills in school requires children to use language in a different manner than in their normal communication. Instead of focusing on the content or meaning of language they must focus on its form, particularly at the phonological level, in order to acquire decoding skills, and since most beginning reading programs focus on decoding to some degree, almost all children need to develop phonological awareness. There are of course great individual, social class, and ethnic differences in the possession of these skills among children entering school. These differences may in part be due to exposure to literacy and literate- like activities. Thus some children may have previous experiences that make meeting these new demands easier.(Simons, Murphy, Gumperz,1986, p.194)

Highlighted here is the problem many children must have in emerging from an oral world. The oral language is entirely situation dependent and socially relevant. The child responds to and mimics the sounds around him/ her. When called upon to put this participatory experience into a code which is suddenly mostly visual in nature, and achieved without immediate social interaction, the relevance must be hard to grasp. The consequences of this in the child's early writing attempts will be examined in the next chapter, where I will explore some of the orality/literacy events in my own classroom. Catherine Snow and Anat Nino (1981, p.121), also outline some of the difficulties for children in making the transition to literacy. They talk about the "scaffolding" which exists for the child in an oral environment where the inflection of voice, and gesture aid comprehension, and where the other speaker may fill in words or suggest alternative expressions when the child has difficulty.

> The contrast between face-to-face communication and literate communication is especially sharp for the young child for whom face-to-face communication typically requires bridging only the distance between two very close and similar social worlds. By virtue of knowing a great deal about the child's life, recent activities, control of language, and likes and dislikes, and by virtue of great willingness to compensate in comprehension for the child's shortcomings in production, the adult caregiver typically merges his/her own social world or viewpoint with that of the child thus ensuring effective communication. No such scaffolding is available when he faces a written text. (William H. Teale and Elizabeth Sulzby, 1981, p. 121).

An interesting educational scenario is presented by Sarah Michaels' research involving the "Show and Tell" in an early primary classroom (Sarah Michaels, Cook-Gumperz (Ed.), 1986). In the situation which she describes, Michaels shows how one particular teacher attempts to guide the responses of the students into a literate and rational mode of question and answer. One might think that this would be a good exercise for the children to prepare them for the kind of thinking which writing will require. It is interesting, however, that to the non-white members of the class the responses of the teacher are generally inappropriate and completely miss the point of their intended communication. Their oral communication style is fluent and yet quite foreign to the teacher and she is unable to negotiate a shared meaning in this case. This is an example of a situation where the teacher needed to listen much more carefully to the students and to mediate their

meaning in some way, so that she did not negate their medium, but rather confirmed it and then echoed it in her more literate terminology. One cannot help but feel that a teacher more sensitive to the importance of these children's oral culture would have made more attempt to validate their attempts at communication.

> It may be that one of the reasons that black / lower class children have trouble learning to read is that they use more situation dependent language as part of a verbal style, which makes it harder for them to profit from those language activities such as sharing which are implicitly designed to facilitate the transition to text-dependent language use. (Jenny Cook-Gumperz, 1986, P.205).

Yetta Goodman has also observed the cultural inhibitions some children may bring to the literacy experience. Her statements raise also the question of the different kinds of literacy in society. She brings to our attention the fact that "situationally embedded print" is accessible to everyone and will therefore be most readily learned by all children. I believe that it is rather the narrative and "connected" discourse which is more often a problem to children and this may arise from the poor connections made between the oral experience and the literacy experience.

> The variety of written language available to any child will depend on the family and community culture. A particular child's experience with connected written discourse will, therefore, probably be more idiosyncratic than that child's experience with situationally embedded print, which is more universally a part of all children's environments. Children learn

> early whether the connected discourse has significance for their daily lives. (Goodman, Y., Teale, W.H. and Sulzby,E., Eds. 1981, pp.8,9)

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "LITERACY' ANYWAY?

It seems likely that the environmental print which children encounter will prove to be the least difficult for them to learn. The transition which is so difficult for so many is more likely to be to the academic style of language and even to the narrative style which is so much more stylized and unfamiliar to many of them. The easy way out will be taken by some educators who insist that knowledge of print in the environment is the basic literacy knowledge required by small children. They then concentrate on labels, signs and utilitarian language and are able to congratulate most children on their success in developing this functional literacy. The theory may be that their self-esteem is enhanced by their success and they can then build to higher levels of knowledge now that the children have developed confidence in their ability. But do we really introduce children to the magic and power of the written language by this approach? My feeling is that educators must find a better way to connect to the feelings of the children if they are to truly capture their interest and convince them that literacy is worth the effort involved to participate in it. They are first and foremost fascinated by larger questions than the sign outside MacDonalds although this may occupy a fraction of their

attention when they are hungry. The true key to literacy is surely through the oral culture of children by which they have made their first emotional connections with the world. This is the essence of what really involves them. As small human beings they wish to understand the mystery of the world and their place in the universe. It is the unknown which beckons them through traditional stories and rhymes which echo their own questions and lead them to metaphoric and mythic depths of consciousness. This is, of course, not a conscious need in the young child, but, as I hope to clarify later, it is essential to satisfy if he/she is to become truly literate. Ivan Illich has made an interesting condemnation of the utilitarian bent of literacy in our schools today. He claims that educators now serve the state, "that has now turned into a computer" and that they now "program people so that they come to lose that 'distality ' between 'self' and 'I' which has come to flower within literate space." (Illich. Interchange vol. 18 no 1/2 1987). According to Illich the true mentality of literacy is not a quality of reading or writing, but a inexpressible richness of understanding. One suspects that this may be achieved rather through poetry than precision; better in song than in lists and labels; more significantly in fairy-tales than in flow charts. Illich is passionate in his castigation of the sterility resulting from an education which stops at teaching the code.

> You can see that my world is literacy. I am at home only on the island of the alphabet. I share this island with many who can neither read nor write but whose mind-set, like mine, is fundamentally literate. And they are threatened, as I am by the betrayal of those clerics who dissolve the words of the book into just one communication code. First, is there any reason to believe that the new intense concern of the educational establishment with universal "clerical" literacy can, in fact, strengthen and spread the literate mind? And, second, has schooling now become an initiation ritual introducing participants to the cybernetic mind by hiding from them the contradiction between the literate ideas they pretend to serve and the computer-image they sell? (Illich, 1987, pp.21,22)

There are indeed almost as many definitions of literacy as there are writers, and many slants on the way literacy is perceived. Gordon Wells highlights the confusion.

> On one thing all the contending parties are agreed: that literacy involves mastery of the written language. However, that is about the extent of the agreement. For precisely what it is that has to be mastered is one of the major issues on which educators differ.(Wells, 1887, p.109)

Many, like Illich, distinguish learning to write from becoming literate. E. Closs Traugott attempts to define the difference, and it is notable, that she, like Illich, includes the oral in her concept of literacy.

> First, in my view, literacy is not the same as the ability to write or the presence of a writing system. Writing is an enabling factor, perhaps a prerequisite (Pattison, 1982), but not the same thing. Writing is a technology. Literacy involves a special use of writing: it is a register associated with linear, non-interactive strategies, and may be expressed orally as well as in writing (Chafe, 1980; Tannen 1982); it is typified by "objectification" of the subject matter, by talk about texts, and by self-conscious attention to distinctions between what a text asserts and its

> interpretation. In other words by certain kinds of attitude toward language. (Traugott, 1987, p.33)

The kind of literacy which Traugott discusses here appears to be entirely analytic and to involve only left-brain thinking however. She does not distinguish between the more intuitive and emotional uses of language and the linear objective uses of language. James Britton recognizes the importance of seeing the two separate functions as distinct. He assigns to the utilitarian and poetic uses of language his labels "participant" and "spectator". Although he concedes that the two roles of language blend in many cases, he feels that it is important for us to be aware of the different function and form of these two roles. In his view the "spectator" role is the one involving feeling and personal expression. This is the role which should emerge from an oral understanding and which makes the transition to writing in such a dislocated and inadequate way. This is the role which has so much importance for the child in reaching true "emotional" understanding of his society and himself, and yet is so often neglected in his/her schooling. The role of the "participant" is so much easier to teach in our rationalistic world.

> Informing people, instructing people, persuading people, arguing , explaining, planning, setting forth the pros and cons and coming to a conclusion-these are participant uses of language, uses of language to get things done. Make believe, play, day-dreaming aloud, chatting about our experiences, gossip, traveller's tales and other story-telling, fiction, the novel, drama, poetry - these are uses of language in the spectator role. (Britton, p.170, p.122)

Britton explains further how he sees the two functions. One of the chief differences which he distinguishes are that the participant role involves an expository imperative outside ourselves and the emphasis of the spectator role is to please ourselves first and then to involve others in our pleasure. The focus is very different.

> When we use language in the participant role we select and order our material according to the demands made by something outside ourselves, something that exists in the situation; ...
> But in language in the role of the spectator we operate on a different principle. We select and arrange our material first to please ourselves; and secondly, not to please other people, but to enable others to share our pleasure.(Britton, 1970, p.124)

THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

Although it seems too obvious to state, the importance of giving and receiving pleasure in the language experience is an essential one to the young child, and one to which the educator often does not pay enough attention. In oral societies, as we have seen, the child takes part in the celebrations and stories, rhymes and songs of the tribe. Language is then an organic and living medium of expression and playing with sound, experimenting with its effect, using language in a musical way, must have been an important feature of its dynamic relevance. George Steiner goes some way to expressing the special nature of this kind of language so orally grounded in all cultures.

> By a gradual loosening or transcendence of its own forms, the poem strives to escape from the linear,

> denotative logically determined bonds of linguistic syntax into what the poet takes to be the simultaneities, immediacies, and free play of musical form. (George Steiner, 1967, p.43)

Steiner singles out Shakespeare as the epitome of literacy, in this sense of the word. His description of the power of language to express thought and emotion should remind us of the eventual purpose for literacy education of the young child. Perhaps the understanding and depth of consciousness of a Shakespeare is impossible to achieve, but this is the possibility which we should offer the child. This is the height of the mountain which he/she should aspire to climb. "More than any other human intellect of which we have adequate record, Shakespeare used language in a condition of total possibility" (Steiner, 1967, p.206). The sheer delight in playing with language for its own sake, the musical implications of words and their resonances of meaning which interplay in a kaleidoscope of sound and meaning - these are some of the qualities of the master of language and they appear to find their genesis in the oral origin of society and the oral experimentation of the child. The awareness of musical relationships between words and playing with words to explore the possibilities of rhyme, rhythm and alliteration have been observed by Luria and other observers of young children. Britton notes that the first interest of the child with language comes from an attention to sound rather than meaning.

> Experiments show that young children are not free to choose: words are predominantly physical stimuli for them and only gradually does the instrumental value, the meaning, come to dominate. Luria found that children under three tended to associate together words that sounded alike (e.g."drum"and "thumb") but children over three tended to group together words of similar meaning ("drum" and "flute") . Their response to sound does not however, disappear with this change of dominance.(Britton, 1970, p.78)

The pleasure which children take in the sound of words also appears to facilitate verbal memory. This again is reminiscent of the bard of the oral culture who, as we discussed, used similar mnemonic aids to guide his recall.

> It is partly because of the rhythm of speech in childhood and partly because of the central role of memory in elementary learning, that sequential and rhythmical catalogues, from the multiplication table to the monarchs of England, are easier for children than for most adults. In this respect children resemble the poets of primitive societies, who are culturally in a parallel situation unlocking their word hoards to chant their memorized songs of ancestral legends, place names, neighboring tribes and alliterating lungs. (Frye, 1963, p.54)

Britton observes also the tendency that children have to enjoy any activity for its own sake and language is a prime example of this. Children do not conceive of an objective purpose of language. Like the member of an oral society, the child is not self conscious in his use of language but rather explores its potential like a new toy.
As in oral societies, language has a performative function to the young child. Britton has observed the young child's

early verbal amusement based on playing with sound and rhythm and involving the whole body.

> The fact that it is a performance is indicated in several ways: it may be said in a sing-song voice, intoned or even sung; it is often accompanied by rhythmical movements - from pacing to and fro, to and fro, to something near to a dance. Since children are unlikely to have heard their elders using language in this fashion - the strong rhythmic beat - the sing-song - we may well ask why they do it and perhaps we can best explain it as one more example of the "play principle" - the tendency children have of investing any achievement with value for its own sake. (Britton, 1970, p.84)

Britton shows how this often translates into a propensity for absurdity. How language experimentation by the young child may lead into mistakes, and then deliberate mistakes which become jokes (Britton, 1970, p. 85). This freedom to play with and experiment with words is one way the child explores language and learns to use it creatively.

PLAYING WITH MEANING: RHYME AND TALE.

The propensity the young child has to play and experiment with oral language and its meaning and sound is found abundantly in the playground games and rhymes which have been found by investigators such as Iona and Peter Opie to be a rich source of childhood lore. It has been remarked also that these games echo the highly structured form of oral epic and contain a kind of moral code

apparently invented by the young people as their own template for living.

They appear to have an almost unaccountable continuity across cultures and time and an astonishing relevance for children of all lands. " The singing games that little girls play are an evolving dynamic form, adaptable and innovative, whilst maintaining an amazing continuity" (Grugeon, Ed. Margaret Mcclure, 1988, pp.164,167). Elizabeth Grugeon wonders at the consistency of the transmission of these games in different cultures and the fact that they seem to be most commonly found in children who are "just about to enter into literacy" (Cook-Gumperz, 1981).

> At this stage in their lives they seem particularly receptive to the highly structured and rule-governed oral activity of these highly textured rhymes which play with language in formulaic ways. All the games are emotionally charged involving elaborate dramatic routines in which the text controls the players. (Grugeon, Mcclure, Phillips, & Wilkinson (Eds.), 1988, pp.164,167)

Opie and Opie, in their 1985 work The Singing Game found that the singing games were mostly a creation of the female playground culture. There was a remarkable similarity between the rhymes over an eight year period, with some slight changes occurring and some new rhymes being introduced. (The continuity and flexibility also common in primary oral cultures.) Another interesting element of many of them was a rebellious or subversive theme which appeared to challenge adult rules. These games, in Grugeon's view,

are, important in the socialization and enculturation of children as well as providing a harmless outlet for rebellion and resistance. (Grugeon, Mcclure, Phillips, & Wilkinson (Eds.), 1988, p.167). Maurice Leyden, in his collection of Irish singing games, has noted the moral and didactic context of many songs which give the children "an introduction to the rites of passage" (Leyden, 1993, p.7).

Britton has observed also that the child has not created the dichotomy between feeling and meaning which is so common in adult thinking. The young child's system of categorization, according to Britton, is very much based on feelings, yet it is, like the categories found by Luria in the oral cultures, both logical and self consistent.

> Children's classification system can be seen as "the way things are". We did observe, however, that our representation of the world is affected also by the projection of our individual feelings, our needs and desires: let us regard this now as involving an alternative mode of classifying - a classification in accordance with "the way I feel about things".- Though not a great deal is known about the process of establishing these feeling based categories, it is clear that learning is involved. Or to put it another way, we influence each other in our feeling about things, and nobody is more amply or more rapidly influenced in this respect than the young child. (Britton, 1970, p.105)

The child, like the adult, is most concerned with making sense of his/her world. One way in which the ground rules and the structure of society are made some sense of is through the playground culture. Another way in which

children explore the strange social patterns which are woven around them, is through the oblique and mysterious looking-glass of the folk and fairy tale. Without exception, students of childhood learning have concurred in the value of reading stories to children for their later educational development. (Teale (1984), Doake (1981), Wells, 1987, p.118).

However this is not the whole story, I suspect. Children will listen entranced to any story if it is told with feeling and if the story-teller connects emotionally with the audience, but the small child of seven or eight has shown consistent preference for the fairy tale, the tale of magic and mysterious forces, the traditional story which resurfaces in many forms across many cultures and emerges from the oral culture to say different things to different children. In Child and the Tale André Favat quotes studies by Uhl (1921), Terman and Luria (1931) and Rogers and Robinson (1963) which demonstrate that early school aged children showed a marked preference for magic and fantasy over realistic stories. For instance,

> Rogers and Robinson (1963) showed that while first graders appeared to have a wide variety of likes, they ranked first such fairy-tale items as "an animal who could talk"; "a prince and a princess"; and "a magic ring"; they ranked last such real world items as "what an astronaut does"; " a person on T.V."; and "building a bridge". (Favat, 1977,p.4)

The reason for this proclivity in young children is a complicated question and not within the scope of this work.

However, it may throw into doubt the tendency of modern educators to present real problems like divorce and death to children in a realistic story setting. The suggestion is presented to us by this choice which children make, that they prefer a more symbolic and less direct way of dealing with the larger emotional problems of life.

Simply put by Favat (1977, p.42),

> there seems to be a similarity between the mind of the primitive and the mind of the child. Given this similarity, it is then but a small step to the explanation that children's interest in the tale occurs because their conception of the world and the conception of the world reflected in the tale, the primitive's conception, are the same.

Some elements of Favat's reasoning are interesting at this juncture. He hypothesizes that children share the "participation" alluded to by Levy-Bruhl, and thus see no clear distinctions between themselves and inanimate objects or animals. Animism (referred to by Fraser and others as a quality of primitive consciousness) is therefore acceptable in the child's universe. Favat also suggests three other aspects of fairy tales which may appeal to children. Firstly there is a simple morality very graphically demonstrating good and evil and the punishment ensuing from breaking the rules. Children like to think that things can be set right in his world by expiatory punishment. They will accept the judgement of the adult and fully believe that this represents justice. This belief leads them to accept the inevitability of retributive justice in the tale. The

traditional tale, and the small child, do not ask for reasons in the workings of fate. The events play out with relentless inevitability. Secondly, the hero of the tale, like the child, is the centre of his universe and all events and magical outcomes revolve around him\her. And thirdly, to the child, and the oral society, the fairy tale "encapsulates and stabilizes certain customs and practices of an earlier age" (Favat, 1977,p.3) which ensures the continuity of life and the immortality of the small child.

There is much speculation around the differences between myth and fairy-tales and the relative significance of both in our culture. It is much too large a subject to deal with adequately here. My intention at the moment is just to point out the parallels between the place of the traditional tale in an oral culture and its place in the culture of the small child and to suggests that this provides some context for reflection in the development of curriculum for small children. It suggests, at least, that teachers should be selecting from the rich source of fairy and folk tales found in all cultures. This area is a very fruitful one for further study which would be valuable in narrowing down more specifically the aspects of myth and fairy tale which are so important for early learning. Jung and Bettelheim are among many who have perceived a symbolic and archetypal richness in these tales which resonate in the child's soul, and Freud also saw them as a key to resolving inner conflicts. Marie Louise von Franz confirms this

conviction that fairy tales speak to the innermost being of the child.

> Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes. Therefore their value for the scientific investigation of the unconscious exceeds that of all other material. They represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest and most concise form. In this pure form, the archetypal images afford us the best clues to the understanding of the processes going on in the collective psyche. In myths or legends, or any other more elaborate mythological material, we get at the basic patterns of the human psyche through an overlay of cultural material. But in fairy tales there is much less specific conscious cultural material and therefore they mirror the basic patterns of the psche more clearly. (von Franz, 1978, p.1)

Bettelheim understands the power of the fairy tale to be in the help it gives the small child in acknowledging and accessing his feelings: even those feeling which he cannot admit to having to parents and caregivers.

> More can be learned from them about the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society, than from any other type of story within a child's comprehension. Since the child at every moment of his life is exposed to the society in which he lives, he will certainly learn to cope with its conditions provided his inner resources permit him to do so. (Bettelheim, 1977, p.5)

Bettelheim goes on to demonstrate that the fairy tale also helps the child to deal with the evil that men do.

> There is a widespread refusal to let children know that the source of much that goes wrong in life is due to our own natures - the propensity of all men for acting aggressively, asocially, selfishly, out of anger and anxiety. Instead, we want our children to believe that, inherently, all men are good. But children know

> that they are not always good; and often even when they are they would prefer not to be. (Bettelheim, 1977, p.7)

I suggest that the fairy and folk tale provide the child with metaphors to begin to objectify his inner world. The function of myth may be seen as a transitional coping mechanism between two phases of a society. The myths of Greece may have served partly as an transitional coping mechanism between the unquestioning belief in the gods and the challenge offered this early belief system by the rationalist arguments of Plato and the philosophers. The myth may have helped confirm the link with earlier times and at the same time provide a picture to look upon and an image to revere. It was a metaphor to grow beyond and yet which confirms and validates what was. In a similar way, the fairy tale may serve as the transitional vehicle between orality and literacy. It looks back to the child's ideals of an animistic and participatory world, where nature is one with man and good and evil resolve themselves, but at the same time, it deals with large questions and doubts about life and captures metaphors of emotional crises which the child can then begin to deal with psychically and imaginatively before he has to face them in reality. One might see the fairy tale as the introduction to a symbolic conception of life which might help the child to achieve healthy mental integration.

There are those who challenge the influence which fairy tales have had in society and point out that they were

generally collected by men (notable Grimm and Perrault) and committed to a characteristically chauvinistic writing style. Some will challenge the image of woman presented by the domestic figure of Cinderella and the languishing love-lorn or even abused heroines typical of the fairy tale. They point out the conquering hero is always male and the female frequently has the less powerful role in the story. To those who would correct this picture of women's role in the stories, I would urge them to look beyond the obvious to the more subtle pictures presented. Even the small child will see in Cinderella not only the child who is expected to conform to unfair rules of an imperious adult (the step-mother), but also the person who transcends an apparently impossible situation and eventually may be seen as triumphing in some way over adversity. Many of the tales which apparently depict the female as weak, may be seen also in another light. The individual child may take from it what she needs. The underlying purpose of the fairy tale then, could be to empower the child and to reassure him/her that all is as it should be in the world.

To those who condemn the fairy tale however, I will concede that there are other forms of narrative which are perhaps even deeper rooted in oral tradition, and which are equally important to the small child. Before a story became a favorite and took on group ownership it must have been an individual experience at some point. The original oral story still has its prototype in the pubs of England and

Ireland. The rambling and riotously amusing tales of working class people must be very typical of the original stories told to primitive communities from the earliest of times. I listened to stories told by friends and family as I grew up. The development was slow and the scene was set carefully. The characters were introduced as necessary, the action did not progress logically but the tale went off on many tangents on the way. The climax was often sidesplitting funny or wrenchingly tragic and the whole audience was entranced and involved by the whole process. These are the kind of stories which we can encourage children to tell. Educators must convince them all that they have a voice and a story worth telling and we can best do this at first simply by listening to what they have to say and validating their experiences, however trivial they seem to us, since this is the stuff of which they are made and it is therefore the material for their beginning literacy. Cook-Gumpertz has bewailed the lack of research into the value of children's own narrative. (Maclure, (Ed.), 1988, p.15). She considers that the assessment model by which children's literacy is judged does not allow for its development.

> Research on oral story-telling has ... been concerned with the structure of story narratives ... In experimental work, children do not have to make any story-telling contributions; that is , their task is to evaluate, reproduce, recall or sequence stories presented to them. Researchers then assess children's comprehension, not children's ability to produce or

> contribute to narratives spontaneously. (Cook-Gumperz and Green,(1984), p.204, cited by Maclure, 1988, p15)

By allowing children to develop their own narratives educators will achieve many things. They will not only validate the small child's interests but also the home culture of that child. The idiom which the child brings to school will be uncritically accepted and incorporated into the school culture. By giving children a real voice we can more realistically hope to win them over. By showing them a way to integrate their culture into the school culture we can lead them into even more powerful and exciting means to true self expression. This may even be a way to bring together oral and literate cultures in the way Shakespeare may be said to have done. The power of the written word may perhaps be truly incorporated with the sensitivity and imagination of the oral word if educators can be responsive to the child's own culture and then show him/her an even richer way of expressing it in writing.

RETHINKING THE ENTRY TO LITERACY

As I have attempted to show at the beginning of this chapter, there is a serious need for educators to rethink the teaching of literacy and reexamine what motivates young children as we have not succeeded in helping many to make a satisfactory transition between orality and literacy. It has been demonstrated that this is by no means an easy transition for most children. The key to understanding the

process appears to be the deeper knowledge and validation of the oral understanding of young children. Gardner, Vygotsky and other thinkers have given us some insights into this; and the fairy tale and narrative form seem to hold some part of the key to resolving this problem. It is a huge and serious question, however, and one which deserves further study, for the introduction of small children to literacy is the crucial process by which they learn to think about their place in society. If they do not make an adequate and smooth transition into literacy one wonders if they ever "learn to think" with their hearts and minds in spite of the instruction on thinking which we give them with charts and sequential models to follow.

> I am not saying that writers should stop writing. This would be fatuous. I am asking whether they are not writing too much, whether the deluge of print in which we seek our deafened way is not itself a subversion of meaning . *A civilization of words is a civilization distraught*. It is one in which the constant inflation of verbal counters has so devalued the once numinous act of written communication that there is almost no way for the valid and the genuinely new to make themselves heard. (Steiner, 1967, p.53)

I hope, in my grade one classroom, to go some way to correcting the imbalance which I perceive in our modern educational aims and methods and to provide an environment which will allow the young child to move towards literacy at his/her own rate while, at the same time, continuing to develop and use the oral skills which have helped to form the immature preschool universe. I hope, in the following

chapter, to point to some of the features of orality which I have observed in children and some of the educational techniques, which, in my view, are essential to help the child in the difficult transition to writing and reading.

CHAPTER FIVE.

ORALITY AND EARLY LITERACY IN A GRADE ONE CLASSROOM.

I plan to explore, firstly, some of the features of oral societies which I have noticed in children during their early school years. I hope to show also how children demonstrate some reluctance and inertia when it comes to transferring to a written culture similar to that which has been observed in transition to writing in Ancient Greek and primitive cultures. My observation is taken from four years of teaching kindergarten and grade one classes in a Fraser Valley elementary school. The population of this school is mainly white working-class with a few South American, Eastern European and Chinese children. There are a few children who have lived in the area for several years and have the traditional family structure. There are also many children raised by single parents, stepparents, and grandparents in difficult circumstances and some who move in and out of our area very quickly - giving teachers little time to observe and support their literacy development. The patterns of orality and literacy which I note in this chapter are sometimes generalizations, which, of course, do not apply to every individual case. I will try to specify, when applicable, some of the differences in early literacy development which I have noted and I will also use some particular cases; the names of these children will be changed to preserve their anonymity.

PERFORMANCE

It is soon clear to most teachers of young children that their learning must occur in an active and participatory setting. There are many instances in the classroom where I have observed children's intense need to be a part of the action. My class is structured so that the children may come in at the beginning of the day and share their stories and news in a sharing circle. Even before they get to the sharing circle, many have already come to me and asked to have a turn to tell a story at this time. Several girls in my class this year often asked to show us a play which they had made up at home, or a song which they had learned. Mary and her sister both had autistic tendencies but excelled at the recall of songs and were always eager to share this with us all. They would often teach their songs to us, and the whole class was soon familiar with the score of "The Lion King" which we would all sing complete with actions. It was amazing to watch and feel the emotion which this generated. There was no difficulty in learning here. An emotionally disturbed girl, who had witnessed an attack by her father on her mother, was a joy to behold. Her face was always lit up with smiles at this time and her whole being articulated the music. In a few days, my class of lion cubs could have performed the whole movie with every word and action accurate enough to satisfy a demanding director. As a teacher, all I did was allow this to happen and participate in the joy it

generated. What did it teach? It was an affirmation of oral language, music, and movement and the creative energy which a community of children can produce. It was a means of communal identification and celebration which must be reminiscent of the traditional experiences in an oral culture.

Songs were always a favorite with my class and were usually learned easily. Popular ones were Charlotte Diamond's "I wish I were a dog", "Slippery fish" and "Dicky Dicky Dinosaur". These were all sung over and over, word perfect, and with the same actions and movements to accompany them each time. I found that chanting was also a popular way to learn facts. The rhymes which we used to learn the alphabet and letter sounds and the times-table rap song were the generally the most reliable and frequently repeated mnemonic aids. The children loved them and asked to say them every day.

Poetry was enjoyed together also with group chanting and action. Blake's "Tyger, Tyger burning bright" was a favorite which lent itself to dramatic participation. The acting out of emotions provided a valuable counselling tool for emotionally disturbed children and this was one poem which allowed for this. The more direct and obvious role playing activities, where the children pretended to disagree with each other and had to find a real resolution to their problems, proved often a less powerful way to access their

feelings. Jane, who had seen her mother abused, was not ready to act this out in front of us all, but by feeling the emotion through poetry and story she might have found some catharsis for her confused emotions. At any rate, I often saw her identify emotionally with poetry, art and music in a way in which she did not respond to non-metaphoric and more prosaic help which was offered to her.

Even science concepts could be taught easily with music and dance. An example of this was the development of a plant from seed to flower. To the music of "Spring" from "The Four Seasons" by Vivaldi the children grew from seed to plant and then distributed their own seeds in the wind. This was done by them crouching down as though they were a seed tucked away snugly in the soil. They were encouraged to imagine the warm sun shining on the soil and warming them, as they began to grow, they would stand up gradually and then their flower emerged and their hands stretched up towards the sun. Their bodies, like plants, moved in the wind, and their seeds were scattered as their fingers became the fluttering flower. The children loved this dance and they contributed their own features. For instance, they might decide to be a large tree with many branches, or a small delicate flower. Only after we had enjoyed the dance several times did we talk about the scientific ideas behind it.

My class has always been arranged to allow the children to perform. If factual learning can be incorporated with

music, dance and poetry, I have found it a very enjoyable route and one in which the children will readily participate. The arrangement of the desks is important, for we often gather in a large circle in the middle of the room and we need space to move around. The desks and tables in my class are often pushed back to the walls and the physical lay-out encourages this kind of interaction. Our circle meetings are also conducive to the telling of stories, and much of my class is devoted to this.

STORIES AND NARRATIVE

I have already mentioned that the children are encouraged to tell their own stories when they come to school in the morning - and they are full of stories. In this case, in true oral tradition, I do not guide or limit the form of the stories, but encourage all to give time to listening, and only to take their turn at telling - for they will interrupt each other very readily. The tales ramble and repeat each other. Repetition and echoing techniques may remind us of oral societies, for the children do not seek originality, rather they try to find as many similarities with each other as possible. Many stories are almost identical:

Jill: "I found a bird's nest in my Mom's hanging basket"

Peter: "I found one too, in the garage roof."

Mary: " We found a bird's nest with three eggs in it".

Peter: " Ours had four eggs in it."

Mary: " But you shouldn't touch the nest or the Mom bird will not come back."

The tendency to repeat the idea of the previous speaker but to change it just slightly and embellish it a little, may be remembered as one of the features of traditional oral poetry by which the bard made his story just slightly different from the one heard before to capture the interest of the audience. The children appear to identify strongly with the group in this way, and at the same time they put an individual mark on the group participation. They are at the same time creating a social and individual identity with these group sharing sessions. It is important to facilitate this event so that it generates such organic stories.

Sarah Michael's account of a sharing session where the teacher intervened and guided the discussion very firmly, is an example of too premature teaching of linearity and form to the small child, who is not yet ready for this (Michaels, Cook-Gumperz (Ed.), 1986, pp.100-122). The child at six and seven is still immersed in an oral understanding. He/she is building a framework which involves the beginning of an understanding of social interaction and at the same time gradually feeling for his/her own place in the scheme of things. This is a very complicated process for the child which involves emotions, ideas, and a myriad of interactions

with the environment. Children are reaching out in many directions to find clues to their understanding of the kaleidoscope which the world presents to their senses and emotions. They are not yet ready to squeeze the rainbow down to one or two colours ; the prism is still reflecting the whole spectrum and linear thinking narrows the perspective before it is ~~yet fully expanded.~~

The sharing of personal stories can be extended to include the stories of teachers and parents and even grandparents. I have often invited families in to share their stories with us and the children particularly love to hear about the childhood of parents and grandparents. They are entranced by accounts of childhood mischief in a previous time and like to find things which they have in common with parents (such as taking time walking to school and arriving late for first class!) This is another means by which the children's membership in their community is confirmed. It is particularly valuable to hear the stories of other cultures and the different traditions which they enjoy. Some of the Christmas traditions of England, Holland, Mexico and Rumania were presented to my class last year through stories and demonstrations by parents and children in the class. This particular year it just happened that all the children in the class were from a Christian tradition; we would otherwise have shared also stories of non-Christian origin. The important thing, however, was not the ethnic origin of the story but that the

experience expressed the particular home culture of each child. The wealth of different customs shared by the children and their parents demonstrated to all of us the variety and richness of our origins. The stories which the children shared with their family at this time were the essence of the tradition and the nature of the celebration was less important than the family culture which the story-telling ritual affirmed.

An important bridge between orality and literacy is provided by the adult story-teller and the reading of stories to children. The adult story-teller does not necessarily read from a book, and a very different effect is produced by story telling as opposed to story reading. But the stories we are considering now are not personal stories, they are the traditional tales of all cultures.
The story-teller has gained in popularity in recent years and is to be found at children's festivals and fair grounds as well as in classrooms. The art of story telling, coming from the oral tradition, is more than ever, a vigorous art form. The power of this was felt by the children when we were visited by a lady story-teller who had developed this art to perfection. She set the scene of her stories by involving the children from the start; she would look directly at them and draw them in with her eyes and her gestures, always staying at about eye level with the children. She modulated her voice skilfully to reflect the mood of the story and the rhythm of the language and her

slight hesitation encouraged the children to tune in with the repetitive phrasing of some of the patterned stories. She gave attention to the crescendo of the action, and created tension at the point of conflict. She injected humour into the delivery to break the tension and she involved all the children in the resolution by encouraging some kind of hand action or vocal participation. Her performance involved the children emotionally, intellectually and even physically. One little girl from another class was pulled out by her teacher because she was in tears and the teacher thought she was feeling ill. The story was not particularly sad but it turned out that she had identified so completely with the experience, that she responded with such strong emotion. These are the experiences which the children remember. These are the stories which they will never forget. This kind of total involvement will provide them with the true lessons of their early formative years and we, like Plato, must be cognizant of the kind of stories which we tell with such powerful potential.

Plato was concerned that stories told to small children are true. He discussed with Adeimantus the need to eliminate fantasy from stories which will give small children the wrong impression of their universe and their gods.

> But we'd better not admit into our community the story of Hera being tied up by her son, or the episode when

> Hephaestus is hurled away by his father for trying to save his mother from a beating, or any of the battles between the gods which Homer has in his poetry, whether or not their intention is allegorical. The point is that a young person can't tell when something is allegorical and when it isn't, and any idea admitted by a person of that age tends to become almost ineradicable and permanent. All things considered, then, that is why a very great deal of importance should be placed upon ensuring that the first stories they hear are best adapted for their moral improvement.(Plato, Waterfield (Ed.), 1993, p.73d.e)

I disagree with Plato and concur rather with Bettelheim when he refers to stories as a mechanism for children to work out their fears and frustrations (Bettelheim, 1977, p.5). In my view stories have as much a metaphorical function for children as they do for adults. I do not believe that children are any more literal in their interpretation of fairy tales and fantasy than adults would be. It is true that they cannot articulate the effect that the story has on them as they do not have the skills necessary to do that, but that is not to say that the story does not have more than a superficial effect on them. This explains the fascination which fairy tales have for small children as they paint a picture of dangerous and incomprehensible extremes, brave and bold heroes, beautiful and good heroines and ugly evil witches and giants. The real world which they are coming to know and grappling to understand is also filled with apparent extremes of goodness and evil too far beyond their grasp to fully understand. Children (and some adults) find in fairy tales one method of mediating these extremes; a method of coping with the incomprehensible and

the incongruent in the confusing world around them. Kieran Egan has expounded on this process in his book manuscript, The development of understanding in Cultural History and in Education Today. (1994).

> So the absence of the awareness of abstractions in young children, or their lack of articulation of, or ability to consciously manipulate abstractions is not a sign that abstractions are not at work in their thinking. The absence signifies that their language has not developed the tools of reflexiveness that will lead to greater awareness of their own thinking and language use. So the later appearance of abstractions in our language development is not due to their genetically following the concrete, but it represents discoveries of our long active mental operations by reflection on them. (Egan, 1994, p.9)

With this in mind, and the conviction that children do appreciate metaphor and see in fairy tale and myth a mystical abstraction of their own existence as it relates to the larger story of humanity, teachers should select stories which are rich in interpretation and suggestion, and which are open to several readings. In these, children may see reflected the choice and opportunity, the dangers and pitfalls, of real life. Presenting them with an explicit moral tale of modern life is to belittle their intelligence and to underestimate their needs. In my own experience children hate the story with an obvious didactic agenda as much as we do and for the same reasons. I have read to children stories designed to teach them how to handle their feelings in situations like bereavement or divorce. One which comes to mind, tells of a child whose father and

mother now live apart and who has to adjust to visiting them in separate homes (Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Anymore, 1984, Stinson K.). It spells out the message that feelings of sadness and regret are OK at these times. I think this patronizes children who have much more complicated responses to a situation like this. The children's common reaction to such stories, I have found, is complete indifference. The tale of Hansel and Gretel, however, which deals with abandonment of children in a very graphic way and depicts a world in which adults may choose their own comfort and needs over those of their children, may seem a more honest, and, in some sense, a truer representation of real life than the literal modern story. The fairy tale shows one-dimensional characters with qualities either of good or evil. The characters may not be really lifelike and believable and they are caricatures of real people but the situations they face and the choices they make are real. A child is quite aware of the hypocrisy of the adult who does not admit to the cruelty to children which does occur in all societies and it may be easier for to them to deal with this in an allegorical way. The child is interested in the fairy tale because it suggests to him/her the possibility of truths which are not discussed or even considered by the adults in their world. Like the oral story, the fairy tale provides cultural continuity and moral framework for the child either to embrace or reject for herself. It does not imply the wholesale acceptance of any particular ethic, but

it provides the mechanism for fitting in, or adjusting to one's culture and presents the child with an emotional context.

There are many things about the fairy tale which appeal to young children. The most popular tales in my class dealt with heros and heroines, fantasy, witches and fairies, and animals. Animism was usually a source of great pleasure and entertainment. We adopted a toy bear which we named "Winnie" and which became part of our story circle. Some of the more prosaic children (usually boys) did not enjoy the animistic tales such as Winnie the Pooh, however, and I wondered whether this was due to the very English idiom in which they are written, rather than the fact that they are animals dressed and behaving like people. These same children were prepared to suspend disbelief and identify with talking dinosaurs in a very different kind of story. The dualism common to oral cultures is also common to children and may explain partially their identification with the agonistic structure of the fairy tale. The one dimensional characters depicting the extremes of human qualities are helpful to children (as Egan has noted, 1988, pp.132-134) in mediating and forming a manageable mental map of the world. I have observed that children like to use a small selection of adjectives in describing feelings and people. They simplify the world into extremes in their own mind before they are ready to deal with the fine differences in qualities. If you ask them how a character might feel if

faced with a crisis they will invariably answer "sad". If asked how the hero might feel when he wins a battle or conquers the giant they usually answer, "happy". They are not able to articulate feelings and find it strange to be asked to do so. I recently read to them a story telling of the coming of whales to an island every year and the events of the humans on the island in parallel to this (Waiting for the Whales). The story deals with the death of a grandfather and the response of a child to this. The whales help the child to resolve her grief. The story is touching and full of evocative language and descriptive scenes. The children in my audience were absorbed throughout and seemed to listen with interest. They were quiet and reflective at the end. I tried to get them (in rationalistic mode) to retell what they had understood from the story. Not one child could retell the events (they were really not as important to the story as the feelings and emotional interplay of animal and human) and I understand now that they felt they were irrelevant. I set about helping them to do as I had asked and found that they had fully understood everything which had occurred and remembered all the events. As I talked about the feelings invoked by the story and suggested some of my reactions to it the children were more forthcoming in articulating their own response. The response did not involve a linear retelling of the story but an emotional reaction to the situations in which the child found himself. On reflection, I realised that the

children had indeed probably understood the story more deeply than I imagined. They knew that the events were unimportant and did not understand why they were being asked to retell them. The story had a strong emotional content to which they had responded, as to poetry, but they could not reproduce that impression to me, only their reaction to it. Their oral awareness had intuitively understood but they could not yet cognitively explain this understanding.

Young children are quite accepting of the inexplicable and do not ask for everything to be made explicit. Magic to them, as to the oral man, is an acceptable and indeed welcome, way of accounting for things too mysterious or obscure to otherwise explain. Children's belief in the Tooth Fairy and Santa Claus is not at all literal. They go along with the charade in a semi-ironical fashion. They do not challenge the practicality of Santa coming down the modern chimney, or the logic of the Tooth Fairy entering the house which is all locked at night, not because it does not occur to them, but because they enjoy participating in the game. It is a kind of ritual which they do not ask to be real. They enjoy being players in the game of deception and magic and go along with it, I believe, because it is a kind of rite of passage, a role of childhood which their society allocates to them and a joke which they can act out with their community of caregivers and which gives them a sense of belonging to a social entity. Humour is an essential

part of the game. This has always been part of human culture and is found in the folk literature of all nations. It appears to be an important element also of our preliterate mentality. The power of humour to reach small children is not to be underestimated. Of course they do not appreciate the subtleties of word play and irony found in adult humour but they respond to language games of another kind. They particularly enjoy using their own name in poems or playing rhyming games with words and creating nonsense rhymes. Another teaching technique which I have found they respond to with gales of laughter is "find the teacher's mistakes". When writing the news up on chart paper in our sharing circle I will ask if they want me to make mistakes. The children take great pleasure in identifying my writing gaffes and at the same time they are confirming their own knowledge. This both reassures them that they are learning the writing conventions and that adults also make mistakes in writing.

FEAR OF WRITING AND READING

I have observed again and again the reluctance which some children have to learn to write and read. Many who have been read to since they were babies and have had paper and pencil around them at home and preschool have less trouble adapting to the literacy thrust on them in grade one. However, even among this group, there are some who appear to feel that writing should come upon them naturally

in the same way that they learned their spoken language. I have had children, again and again, say to me, one month into the year when urged to try to put pen to paper, or to decode a simple word, "But I can't read " or "I can't write". When asked how they expect to learn if they will not try, they seem to be surprised that it involves effort on their part. I have had children say, "You are supposed to teach me it" as though it involves the magical transfer of some kind of invisible gift from teacher to child. The concept of deliberately learning a skill is not common to the six year old who has readily learned to walk and talk simply by mimicking those around him. When children are persuaded to put pen to paper, they are not, at first, willing to trust themselves. They will constantly check for the spelling of every word, and many will erase letters over and over again because they do not seem perfect enough to them. They will hold back on writing a wonderful story which they have told you, because they "Do not know how", or, "Can't spell those words." Even when you assure them that correct spelling is not important, they will not be convinced that this is true. It is as if they perceive writing and reading as an adult skill and part of the adult game of life which they are not yet ready to learn to play. Language to them is still new and joyful oral skill which has given them a means to interact with humanity. If they are urged to participate in the written culture they feel that they must do it right straight away, and cannot accept

easily the long and arduous apprenticeship which this involves. My feeling is, too, that they need to be convinced that it will all be worthwhile and that there is a purpose to all their effort. Only by reading to them powerful literature with which they can make a strong emotional connection will they gain the motivation to learn to read and then they may also find something which they want to commit to printed form themselves. Educators need to spend a great deal of time developing a preliterate comfort zone before children will enter it readily and go beyond it into literacy. This involves a lot of oral reading, story telling, a lot of exploration of books and talking about pictures and, most important, playing with and having fun with written and oral language. Children should not be urged to begin decoding words until this groundwork has been done and the need to read and write has become urgent enough in the child to motivate him/her strongly enough to want to overcome any difficulties he may have.

When children do begin to decode, educators should be aware of some of the difficulties inherent in the reading process. The dialect or pronunciation which the child has learned at home may be very different from that of the teacher. This is a common difficulty particularly in teaching vowels, which may sound quite similar to a child whose family does not clearly distinguish " a" and " o" or " e" and " a". There is also a problem of attention which comes from the child's difficulty in distinguishing

words or hearing the difference between words. In the oral context there is no division between letters and words and, in fact, the establishment of those boundaries took many years to become fixed in the history of writing. It is not an easy thing for a child to realize that words can be written sequentially, let alone understand the very idea of what a word is and why it is divided off in such a way from other words. Adults have thought in this linear fashion and divided up our thinking for so long that is hard for us to imagine the unifying tendency of the child's mind. No wonder they have problems when we urge them to write down their thoughts. No wonder they write their letters joined together as though there are no gaps between words. In their mind of course, the gaps do not exist; the words are part of the living entity of language and for them are still experientially located. They do not see the significance of isolating words from experience and splitting them up to look at. Until they understand why we do this, until their mind is ready to accept the shackles of literacy in order to conform to the linearity of rationalism, until they understand the power which this affords them and the different doors which this skill opens to them, they will find our demands to read and write incomprehensible.

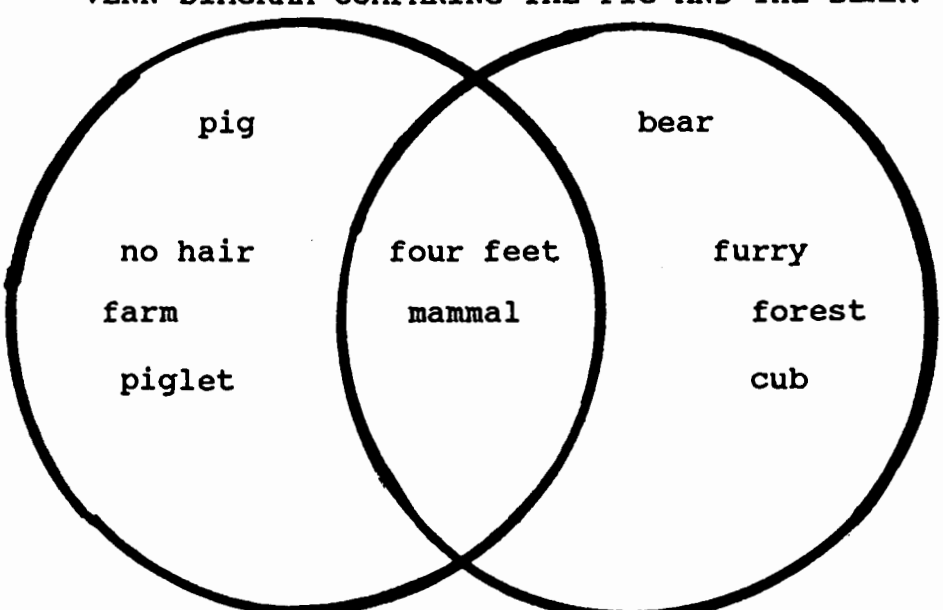
TEACHING FOR THINKING

There are also problems which arise, resulting from immature cognition of small children, when we are too eager

to teach them adult reasoning techniques. It is assumed that the grade one child should begin, as early as possible to group and categorize and we soon have them sorting objects and developing graphs for grouping those objects. I would caution that, bearing in mind the different logic of the oral mind and the need to be more flexible and practical in forming categories, educators should allow children a great deal of freedom in these activities. When we set children the task of sorting objects we should be careful to allow them to form their own groups and be aware that their groups may not be consistent with our own idea of logical categories. It is perhaps important to allow children some flexibility in this activity before they are ready to assume the rigidity of adult thinking. The ability to play with and change around categories, to experiment with different groups and alternative ways of seeing things is very important for the developing thinking of the child. The assumption that there is only one correct way to see a problem or sort facts into manageable units may lead children to facile and simplistic reasoning which then becomes an easily assumed tool to get them through school, but not a useful way of making decisions in life. As I have indicated, literature which is rich in allusion and metaphor may be a more useful model for children which enables them to chart and gradually create for themselves a flexible and profound and individually appropriate, decision-making life map.

most appropriately with the oral way of thinking. The Venn gives the children the opportunity to compare opposites which can be allowed to exist together. It identifies qualities of objects which are different from each other, and then it allows for the mediation process to begin, by providing a middle ground; the children also have to think of aspects of both objects which are the same. This method of thinking makes concession to the bipolar thinking so common in small children and it also shows them that similarity can exist along with difference. The Venn diagram might be used, for example, to compare two different kinds of animal. The children might come up with something like the following:

VENN DIAGRAM COMPARING THE PIG AND THE BEAR.



This example shows only a few of the many ideas the children may have.

In my experience, young children really enjoy doing Venn diagrams, and I believe it is because it fits in with their oral world view. I teach them, first of all, with hoops on the ground, representing the lines of the Venn, and small pieces of paper on which the children are helped to write the features of the chosen objects of comparison. (Early in the year they dictate them to me and I do the actual writing). On the paper they indicate qualities which are the same and different. The children take turns putting the papers on to the Hoop-Venn, in the places which they deem appropriate, and they justify their choice in each case. Johnny may have a paper on which he has written "furry" and he will place this on the "BEAR" side of the Venn. Jane has a paper which says, "No hair", and this she will place on the "PIG" side. Mary has "four feet" on her paper, and this she will place in the middle. When they have done it in this way as a class a few times, they find it easy to do themselves. It is one of the first categorizing activities which they really enjoy .

SOME CONCLUSIONS

My own limited investigation has brought to light some important considerations for educators in introducing schooling to young children. I believe the study of orality gives us many insights to the way children think, before they are given the literacy toolkit. My own

experience indicates the importance of story-telling and the reading of rich literature and poetry to children; the need to incorporate music, song, dance, humour and performance with learning; the care which needs to be given to the teaching of reading, writing and thinking to young children and the consideration which must be given to their oral mentality when introducing learning in these areas. If we keep these orally based elements of learning in mind we may have more success in providing children with a motivational and useful educational model to serve as a basis for their whole lives.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the preceding pages I have attempted to outline the means by which writing was introduced to Western society and to indicate the changes in thought habits and attitude which proceeded from this. I have tried also to show that the transition between orality and writing was not a comfortable one and that it led to a schism in mental activity which has never been healed and which has parallels still in many areas of modern society. Specifically my discussion involved the learning of young children and particularly their introduction to literacy. The transition to literacy in young children appears to mimic in many ways the historical transition to literacy in society and I have tried to show that educators may be setting up a situation for children which reflects the divisive tendencies of this historical process. I have suggested some ways in which we might begin to address the problem and some curriculum adjustments which could easily be made to accommodate the oral mentality of the young child.

The uncomfortable transition between orality and literacy in society has been shown to be linked with the splitting of consciousness between organic and individual expression, between imagination and practicality, between tradition and novelty, between feeling and rationality.

When writing was introduced, language was harnessed by government to label and catalogue and to control and it was also seized on by philosophers and politicians to represent permanent truth. By thus raising the prestige of written language we have surrendered much of the flexibility and expressiveness which orality afforded and we have degraded the imaginative function of language. As a result, educators have found it difficult to negotiate a course between the rationalistic truth of Plato and the practical demands of a technocracy and to moderate them both with the emotional needs of the child. I suggest that we have surrendered too much and that we may fairly easily recoup some of the ground we have lost by adjusting our approach to early childhood literacy. Children are soon given the subliminal message that writing and print contain the secrets of the universe in one way or the other. Their early forays into language experimentation are discouraged much too early when they enter school and they come to understand very quickly that orality is not scholarly or clever and therefore not desirable. My suggestion is that we should encourage children to continue to develop the richness of orality and the imaginative skills which this affords while we also ease them comfortably into literacy by means of story telling and literature rich in metaphor. Kieran Egan has referred to this foundation in oral language as the important base on which educators must build. The

implication is that it provides a substantial foundation which is essential if the structure is not to crumble.

> The implication of this discussion, then, is that the foundations of education are poetic. We begin as poets. The *logographoi* in our cultural history, the wielders of rational prose, came long after and built upon a heritage of poetic insight, organization of consciousness, and techniques for thinking. To become subtle wielders of rational prose and the mathematical language that accompanied its development - in history, science, mathematics, social studies, and so on- we must first develop the poet in each child. "Poet" is perhaps a dangerous word to use because of its varied modern associations to different people; I mean what Vico saw and what other scholars whose work I have drawn on in this chapter have tried to describe. Perhaps it might be better to settle for "imagination". By this I mean the *bonnes a penser* explored above. The sermonizing here has been to stress that in early childhood we are concerned with the foundations of education. To build them properly, we need to be clear about the top floors, of course, but we also need to build proper foundations out of appropriate material and not to be so enamored of the decorations and embellishments of the penthouse suites of rationality that we skimp on the foundations or try to build them out of the delicate material of the pinnacles of the building.
> The *bonnes a penser* of orality that we will seek to develop must be influenced by the literacy and rational modes of inquiry and consciousness that are to succeed them, but also our conception of that literacy and rationality must be shaped by the orality from which they emerge. (Egan, 1988, p.125)

It may be important here also to mention that even scientific thinkers have been found to rely very much on pictorial and oral thinking patterns when they are at their most creative and original. The Nobel prizewinner Richard Feynmann is said to have disliked intensely writing his ideas down. He was invited to visit friends on one occasion for the weekend and was expounding (orally) one of his

latest breakthroughs. The hostess was impressed and surprised that the ideas were not in published form. Feynmann expressed his reluctance to write a paper and his hostess insisted that he did. He was given a typewriter and told that it must be written before she would serve him any food. This was enough incentive to get him to do as she asked - but it certainly was not by choice. Einstein also spoke of the necessity for him to see a physical idea in a graphic way before he could abstract it into mathematics and language.

> The words of the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The physical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be "voluntarily" reproduced and combined... From a psychological viewpoint this combinatory play seems to be the essential feature in productive thought... The ... elements are, in my case, of visual and some of muscular type. Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously only in a secondary stage, when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will. (Einstein cited by Ghiselin, 1952, p.43)

The grounding of the imagination appears to be an important precursor to creative and original thought. Before we symbolize we need to explore concepts in a fluid way and allow them to have free play in the network of images which our mind is forming. The flexible interplay of image and sound cannot even be fully communicated in any way until it has danced a little. Even oral communication is a first and tentative stage to freezing an idea; when it is put into

writing it may be said, in some sense, to be dead. Narrative, rhythm, image and emotion all appear to be important elements in the dance . We must engage the emotion of children in a profound and meaningful experience which allows them the freedom to dance and connects with their present world view. The narrative may be of the most important feature of oral learning which can incorporate all the motivating factors just mentioned. Early childhood educators need to consider carefully the kinds of stories chosen to read to young children considering carefully not only the content, but, even more importantly, the richness of the language and metaphor used. And we need also to bring our own emotion into the telling or reading of stories, so that, by our voices and our expression the children can tell that we care about what we tell. Martin Buber suggests that a good story is one that inspires us to action in a meaningful way.

> A rabbi, whose grandfather had been a disciple of the Baal Shem, was asked to tell a story. "A story," he said, "must be told in such a way that it constitutes help in itself." and he told: "My grandfather was lame. Once they asked him to tell a story about his teacher. And he related how the holy Baal shem used to hop and dance while he prayed. My grandfather rose as he spoke, and he was so swept away by his story that he himself began to hop and dance to show how the master had done. From that hour on he was cured of his lameness. That's the way to tell a story!"(cited by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, 1988, p.2)

It would be fruitful to investigate and discuss further the educational benefits of story telling and particularly

the significance of myth in learning and its role or its desirability in the affirmation of morality in society. I look forward to having the opportunity to examine this in relation to the learning of small children. I would also like the opportunity to explore further the prevalence of orality in modern society and its role in the technological world in which we are now living. The oral aspects of modern communication and media are very influential in the forming of children's cognitive map. The implications for education are immense and must have a great impact on literacy. Considerations of how educators should deal with this are not touched on in this paper, but should be a consideration for further study.

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