A verbal clash at an international seminar between Harold Rosen of the United Kingdom, who for years had called for broader views of cultural literacy, and Robert Pattison of the United States, who also had called for a similar broadening of the definition of literacy, illustrates how perceptions of a shared ideology can be surprisingly incompatible, even between scholars from countries sharing a common heritage. Literacy problems of different countries, emerging as they have from different cultural and political histories, require different proposed solutions—different not only from country to country, but different within each country, according to changes in political agendas. In the case of Rosen and Pattison, the former's perceptions were based on the lived-through reality of a working-class Jewish boy from London's East End slum tenements, while Pattison's notions were academic in nature and derived from an Ivy League east coast American WASP background. Each viewpoint was also subtly affected by the different political histories of both countries, which resulted in cultural cycles of dependency for the one and independence for the other. The need for multiple literacies and multiple approaches is further illustrated by differences of class, race, and gender consciousness between England and Canada. In all three countries the looked-for quality of access to literacy is not manifested in the goals and intentions expressed in rhetoric, but in the reality of the institutions where scholars work and conduct their business transactions. (KEH)
CULTURAL LITERACY SHOCK: A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

Paper Presentation for the International Assembly Program
NCTE Spring Conference, 1989
Charleston, South Carolina

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Cultural Literacy Shock: A Drama in Three Acts

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The third of nine keynote addresses is about to be given, with Robert Pattison of the USA at the rostrum, and Harold Rosen of the UK in the reactor's seat. Pattison has just finished 1/3 of his address, entitled "Literacy: Confessions of a Heretic", when he turns to Rosen with the invitation to react to his ideas. As the pause stretches to an uncomfortable five, six, seven seconds, a perceptible tension engulfs the audience. Rosen begins to
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The audience was aghast; the harmonious unity of the conference almost irreparably smashed over ideology -- ideology which on the surface seemed generally compatible: Rosen for years has called for broader definitions and views of literacy, definitions which situate multiple literacies within historical, social, and cultural contexts; Pattison was calling for a similar broadening of our definition of literacy. In fact, shortly before being subjected to Rosen's tirade, he had uttered the following:

"Literacy must be "something different from mere reading and writing. Specifically, literacy must have to do with our ability to use language in our negotiations with the world....Literacy describes a relation between ourselves as language users and the world we inhabit"(Tchudi, 42). Surely, one would think, such a view of literacy would cross the international boundaries between the US and the UK with relative impunity, especially within the specialized culture of an international conference of scholars, at which the norm for disagreement is usually rigorous but polite debate.

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A possible answer: different cultural agendas for literacy, emerging from very different social and cultural histories, histories which were a lived-through reality to Rosen, working class Jewish boy from London's East end slum tenements, but only an academic reality to the Ivy League East coast WASP, Pattison. The American form of Liberal humanism espoused by Pattison—which, in programs such as Head Start, for example, identifies those children "at risk", separates them in their pre-school years from the others "not at risk", and "gives" them, with all benevolence, what the liberal humanists have decided they need -- is anathema to someone like Rosen, who would prefer to work towards developing educational and political systems wherein "at risk and "not at risk" designations would be superfluous.

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I am Canadian, brought up in the WASP hegemony of the largest urban city on the Canadian prairies, my assumptions of cultural literacy and literacy acquisition largely unquestioned until one day, in 1980, when I heard Harold Rosen, at a CCTE conference in Vancouver, berating the Conservative policies which had shaped his educational experiences in England. In response to my naive question: "How can you berate the system which has so effectively educated you?" he challenged me with, "You don't judge a system
by its successes; you judge it by those it fails." Motivated to explore this idea further, I began to read about literacy education in Britain.

When, three years later, I left Canada to undertake doctoral studies at the University of London Institute of Education, I took with me a considerable overload of paradoxical cultural baggage – a set of expectations based on a combination of my recent readings of Douglas Barnes, James Britten, John Dixon, and Nancy Martin combined with my, as yet unquestioned, culturally-shaped valorization of the British monarchy, the British intellect, and British accents, and the media-shaped valorization of Thatcherite policies in the wake of the war over the Falklands. I'm sure you can already predict my culture shock when these expectations and assumptions confronted reality.

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One of the most obvious, though not infallible indicators of class is accent and dialect, as first Pygmalian and then My Fair Lady brought to popular attention. BBC English, RP (Received Pronunciation - echoes from sources on high in that word "received"), and Grammar School English were (and still are) the power dialects in the Conservative hegemony. Imagine my surprise when, upon expressing a fondness for this BBC English accent, I was warned by Rosen, my tutor at the Institute, not to make any attempt to adopt that particular accent, or he would refuse to tutor me. Interestingly, during my research, I met several teenage children of middle-class parents who spoke perfect BBC English, who deliberately learned and spoke with Cockney or other working class dialect, in verbal protest against the class distinctions associated with language. Similarly, I came to understand the cultural impetus behind the British-born
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You may have noticed that race crept into my discussion of class when I wrote of the Rastifarian dialect. My next jolt into political awareness involved this combination of class, race, and gender as all parts of one issue, rather than, as had been my perceived experience in Canada, three separate, albeit often related, issues. Although publications might foreground one or two, such as The Tidy House by Carolyn Steedman, a story of women's roles in the home written by three white working class girls in the third grade, rarely were seminars or conferences devoted solely to gender issues, or racial issues, or class issues. Their interrelatedness, and the political agenda which grew out of that interrelatedness, were paramount in the conferences and sessions that I either attended or read about. This interrelatedness among class, race, and culture was evident
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Becoming aware of this intense government involvement in educational matters was another major jolt. During my three years in London, the Conservative Minister of Education dramatically intruded in the workings of the Inner London Education Authority, the University of London Institute of Education, and the multicultural London schools: the Inner London Education Authority, a powerful coterie of predominantly left-wing teachers on the cutting edge of pedagogy related to multicultural language and learning, was disbanded; Harold Rosen, staunch anti-Conservative defender of the education rights of cultural minorities and working class kids, was given early retirement and his power as both Professor and Chair of the English Department divided between two successors; and support for mother tongue teachers' aides and other multicultural assistance was marginalized. Tensions between the Thatcher government and those on the forefront of educational research and theory mounted, as a unified national curriculum and a new system of assessment of all schoolchildren at ages 7, 11, 14, and 16 was proposed. Three years later, in 1989, these legislative propositions have now become legislated impositions.

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the first time the struggles of teachers facing waves of immigrant children whose mother tongue was not English as well as increasing numbers of NativeCanadian children whose mother tongue was an English derived from the grammars of their tribal tongues. While supervising student teachers over a sixweek period in one innercity school, I could see the efforts of teachers and principal to establish a childcentered whole language environment diminished by the school board's insistence upon a divisionwide uniform assessment and reporting procedure, one which reduced the complexity of learning to letter grades and standard scores. I could see our educators trying in their --- classrooms to compensate for the historicalestrangement of our native population from their culture and heritage, just as the teachers in England were struggling in their classrooms to compensate for the empirebuilding greed of their forbears. I could see the growing success of cultural minorities in their struggle for language rights, particularly in the burgeoning immersion schools and classes, not only in French, but in German, Chinese, and Ukrainian. Paradoxically, at the same time, I could also see the growth of an ugly phenomenon called "Stan Can," (Standard Canadian English), our colonial response to BBC or Standard English. Since educational concerns are within provincial jurisdiction, we were free from powerful federal political control over curriculum and assessment. At the same time, while 12 14
the provincial Department of Education was encouraging pedagogy based on recent research into language and learning, it was simultaneously intensifying its program of regular standardized monitoring and assessing of language and mathematical skills.

It was not that I had not been aware of these trends before, but that I had perceived them as more or less benevolent differences of opinion, benevolent because, after all, the goals of all concerned were to increase literacy and cultural accommodation, and surely informed debate of all sides could only result in a better solution. That assumption had been the nub of my naivete, the reason that I could not at first understand Rosen's passionate denunciation of Pattison's Liberal humanist approach to solving problems of literacy. Exposure to British attempts to recover from centuries of their imperialist domination of other nations showed me that paternalistic intercession, however benevolently intended, maintains a separation which encourages dependency rather than independency. It therefore sets up a cycle of dependency which can become almost inescapable. Literacy programs and pedagogy which reaffirm a dependent-independent hierarchy will only perpetuate this cycle, and are therefore doomed to failure. I finally came to understand that Rosen's anger had been directed at the vision of a perpetual cycle of dependence that Pattison's talk had unintentionally evoked.
This emergent understanding shaped the questions I now bring to my new country - America. The British Conservative-Labor educational oppositions are not so evident in your Republican-Democratic tensions; at the state level in Indiana, there is little difference, for example, between the Republican A+ program and the Democratic "Excel", despite the apparent name focus on grades in one and action in the other. I see here as I did in Canada and Britain massive dissonance between rhetoric and reality. The new philosophies foregrounding qualitative aspects of learning clash with the traditional emphasis on quantitative assessments of that learning. I look for equality of access to literacy not in the goals and intentions expressed in rhetoric, but in the reality of the institutions where I work and conduct my business transactions. I look at my students and I look at my colleagues -- and we all, or at least most of us, match. I walk through the malls, go to the bank, walk down the streets of downtown Indianapolis, and there I see the multитextured fabric of cultural and class diversity. I am no longer shocked, just dismayed that with all we know and celebrate of cultural diversity, we have not come further.
A verbal clash at an international seminar between Harold Rosen of the United Kingdom, who for years had called for broader views of cultural literacy, and Robert Pattison of the United States, who also had called for a similar broadening of the definition of literacy, illustrates how perceptions of a shared ideology can be surprisingly incompatible, even between scholars from countries sharing a common heritage. Literacy problems of different countries, emerging as they have from different cultural and political histories, require different proposed solutions—different not only from country to country, but different within each country, according to changes in political agendas. In the case of Rosen and Pattison, the former's perceptions were based on the lived-through reality of a working class Jewish boy from London's East End slum tenements, while Pattison's notions were academic in nature and derived from an Ivy League east coast American WASP background. Each viewpoint was also subtly affected by the different political histories of both countries, which resulted in cultural cycles of dependency for the one and independence for the other. The need for multiple literacies and multiple approaches is further illustrated by differences of class, race, and gender consciousness between England and Canada. In all three countries the looked-for quality of access to literacy is not manifested in the goals and intentions expressed in rhetoric, but in the reality of the institutions where scholars work and conduct their business transactions. (KEH)
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increasing numbers of NativeCanadian children whose 
mother 
tongue was an English derived from 
the grammars of their 
tribal 
tongues. While supervising student 
teachers over a sixweek 
period in one innercity 
school, I could see the efforts of 
teachers and principal to 
establish a childcentered 
whole 
language environment diminished 
by the school board's 
insistence 
upon a divisionwide uniform 
assessment and reporting 
procedure, 
one which reduced the complexity 
of learning to letter 
grades and 
standard scores. I could see our educators trying in 
their 
classrooms to compensate for 
the historicalestrangement of our 
native population from their 
culture and heritage, 
just as the 
teachers in England 
were struggling in their classrooms 
to 
compensate for the empirebuilding 
greed of their forbears. 
I 
could see the growingsuccess of cultural minorities 
in their 
struggle for language 
rights, particularly in the burgeoning 
immersion schools and 
classes, not only in French, 
but in German, 
Chinese, and Ukrainian. 
Paradoxically, at the 
same time, I could 
also see the growth of an ugly phenomenon called "Stan 
Can," 
(Standard Canadian English), 
our colonial response to BBC 
or 
Standard English.

Since educational 
concerns are within provincial 
jurisdiction, we 
were free from powerful federal 
political 
control over curriculum and assessment. At the 
same time, while
the provincial Department of Education was encouraging pedagogy based on recent research into language and learning, it was simultaneously intensifying its program of regular standardized monitoring and assessing of language and mathematical skills.

It was not that I had not been aware of these trends before, but that I had perceived them as more or less benevolent differences of opinion, benevolent because, after all, the goals of all concerned were to increase literacy and cultural accommodation, and surely informed debate of all sides could only result in a better solution. That assumption had been the nub of my naivete, the reason that I could not at first understand Rosen's passionate denunciation of Pattison's Liberal humanist approach to solving problems of literacy. Exposure to British attempts to recover from centuries of their imperialist domination of other nations showed me that paternalistic intercession, however benevolently intended, maintains a separation which encourages dependancy rather than independency. It therefore sets up a cycle of dependency which can become almost inescapable. Literacy programs and pedagogy which reaffirm a dependent–independent hierarchy will only perpetuate this cycle, and are therefore doomed to failure. I finally came to understand that Rosen's anger had been directed at the vision of a perpetual cycle of dependence that Pattison's talk had unintentionally evoked.
This emergent understanding shaped the questions I now bring to my new country - America. The British Conservative-Labor educational oppositions are not so evident in your Republican-Democratic tensions; at the state level in Indiana, there is little difference, for example, between the Republican A+ program and the Democratic "Excel", despite the apparent same focus on grades in one and action in the other. I see here as I did in Canada and Britain massive dissonance between rhetoric and reality. The new philosophies foregrounding qualitative aspects of learning clash with the traditional emphasis on quantitative assessments of that learning. I look for equality of access to literacy not in the goals and intentions expressed in rhetoric, but in the reality of the institutions where I work and conduct my business transactions. I look at my students and I look at my colleagues -- and we all, or at least most of us, match. I walk through the malls, go to the bank, walk down the streets of downtown Indianapolis, and there I see the multitextured fabric of cultural and class diversity. I am no longer shocked, just dismayed that with all we know and celebrate of cultural diversity, we have not come further.