



ROUTLEDGE
HANDBOOKS



The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies

Edited by Jennifer Rowsell and Kate Pahl

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF LITERACY STUDIES

The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies offers a comprehensive view of the field of language and literacy studies. With forty-three chapters reflecting new research from leading scholars in the field, the *Handbook* pushes at the boundaries of existing fields and combines with related fields and disciplines to develop a lens on contemporary scholarship and emergent fields of inquiry.

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- Making meaning from the everyday
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INTRODUCTION¹

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Literacy studies is a field that permeates all aspects of life. Literacy exists in homes with the varied ways that people live, speak and practice the everyday. Literacy takes place in communities to support people and to bridge different practices and perspectives. Literacy can act as an agent of change and can encourage new forms of activism, resistance and revolution. Literacy happens in workplaces to fulfil tasks and services that keep economies moving. In schools, literacy fosters in children and young people a desire to communicate and bolster competencies and, ideally, ignites interests and passions. Literacy is aesthetic, material and multimodal. Literacy is both local and global, evident in rural as well as in urban settings. Literacy changes with practices, and transmutes across borders, languages and modes. Literacy is digital, immersive and networked. Literacy is felt, sensed and associated with place. *The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies* covers all of these disparate, complex instantiations of literacy to widen the scope and vision of the field and, ultimately, to re-imagine its future across the humanities and the social sciences.

An understanding of literacy that rests on the everyday and accounts for the diverse ways it is understood and used is still emerging. Books like Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* (1957) and Williams' *The Long Revolution* (1971) prefigured the insights of Heath (1983) and Street (1984) that literacy is ideologically and culturally situated, and that literacy practices are not fixed and static but complex, changing and contingent on identities, locality, time, space, context, culture and practice (Rowsell and Pahl 2007). A focus on the acquisition of literacy and the forms of literacy associated with schooling led to the dominance of cognitive science and psychological approaches in education. At the same time, non-standard and complex forms of literacy and language were also being explored by anthropologists, ethnographers, linguists and folklorists to produce a more situated account of literacy and language development (Finnegan 2007; Gee 1996; Heath 1983; Hymes 1996). Researchers in these disciplines paid attention to the ways in which literacy and language practices were framed and recognized and, more importantly, provided a challenge to the dominant, "schooled" conceptualizations of literacy (Street and Street 1991) to question whether in fact these versions of literacy also worked in educational contexts. The split between the fields came to a head when Gee and Snow (Gee 1999; Snow 2000) debated whether the premise of literacy should be changed: Gee argued that it was no longer possible to hold to an 'autonomous' view of literacy as fixed and stable, and Snow argued that children need to learn "schooled" literacy to survive in educational settings. The work of Street (1984, 1993, 2000) helped resolve the impasse by unpicking the ways in which all

literacies are ideologically situated. As a result, the concept of fixity in literacy studies is no longer tenable. Literacies are contingent, complex and framed through the eyes of those engaged in particular practices. Literacy is always dependent on “local practice” and, for many, there is the question about whether it can ever be ‘not local’ (Kell 2006). A key question raised by Brandt and Clinton (2002) asked where the local stopped, and wider, more ‘autonomous’ forms could be recognized.

Literacy studies contains and is often closely associated with the literacies of schooling. Within schooling, curricula constructions and pedagogical concerns have developed a conservative, powerful discourse of regularity and normativity compared with literacy as it is lived in daily lives which flow, sometimes invisibly, across the day and involve a number of complex, interlinked practices. The history, present and future of literacy tends to be linked to schooled, book-ruled literacy which, in our view, limits literacy’s power and potential. Part of the explanation for this lies in the limits and constraints of particular disciplines. Disciplines that recognize and study variation, complexity and the everyday have opened up literacy to a wide conceptual framework. By contrast, regimes of testing and measuring have been more associated with randomized control trials and quasi-scientific language including words like ‘validity’ and ‘evidence-based’ that come from a medical model. Literacy studies is informed by theories of acquisition, cognition and individual achievement and has long been associated with studies of phonics and standardized tests. In this handbook, however, we argue that literacy practices are vernacular, networked and embodied. Casting literacy as existing within formalized structures, the *Handbook* takes on an awareness of these tensions across the fields of literacy in creative, innovative and forward-looking ways. The volume makes sense of literacy from the perspective of the wider field of literacy beyond schooling, a field that still needs description, interpretation, analysis and, most importantly, that should be grounded *in practice*.

Although literacy as a pursuit and expression of meaning and form of communication has existed for centuries, literacy became formalized within the contexts of public schooling. With formalized schooling, literacy as a field became reified and the fluid connections between oral talk, writing, gesture and visual and embodied forms of communication silted up. It was not until the 1980s when researchers such as Heath (1983) and Street (1984) questioned mainstream notions of literacy that the field began to connect literacy with other disciplines and domains of thought and experience. Site-specific work such as the studies carried out by Scribner and Cole (1981) in Liberia and Barton and Hamilton (1998) in Lancaster opened up a discussion about the relationship between literacies and place and the concept of ‘domains’ of literacy became a useful heuristic with which to explore ways of documenting literacy within homes, community centres, faith settings, prisons, parks, allotments and streets, as well as within schooling. Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) observed young children in everyday settings and recognized the plethora of literacies that lay around them as they went through streets, shopping centres and homes. Observing language and literacy practices in everyday settings was also an interest of Kress (1997) who brought a way of seeing the social-semiotic from systemic functional linguistics to consider how young children made meaning from a variety of modes. This opened up a large field of studies that considered literacy as nested within a much broader range of communicative practices (Flewitt 2008; Kenner 2004; Lancaster 2003; Pahl 1999). Within the field of social linguistics, Maybin (2013) argued that it is no longer possible to be monomodal when thinking about language and literacy. The task of this handbook is to open up the variegated field of literacy to scrutiny and scholarship and make sense of this turn based on how literacy is lived today.

Literacy in the everyday

The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies returns to an understanding of the ways in which literacy is experienced, located and practiced within regular contexts. This involves acknowledging specific literacy practices and recognizing their potential and how they are carrying schools of thought and epistemologies. These particular ideologies can get lost because of the formalizing processes of schooling, in which literacy is inscribed into bound books, and naturalized, so that particular forms of inscription such as handwriting and certain forms of communication become privileged over others, for example, writing over digital drawing. If these communicative practices are understood to be more equivalent, the field looks different.

Literacy is an unusual field, crossing the domains of education, anthropology, literature, language, linguistics, psychology, sociology, cultural studies and everyday practice. It is not wholly owned by academics but is also important to community development workers, librarians, youth workers, teachers and activists. It has become a space which people can enter and have something to say concerning its presence or absence. It is a place where new forms of research practice have emerged. These include a focus on co-curation of practices, co-production and the opening up of knowledge so that the process of research is participatory and inclusive. It is possible to see this, in particular, through critical literacy and the field of participatory action research as well as in collaborative ethnography and relational arts practice (Lassiter 2005; Pahl and Pool 2011; see also Stille, Chapter 40 this volume). Literacy has potential as a field; it is not static because it is worked on by teachers and practitioners as well as by people who think about literacy, such as ethnographers and literary theorists. This means that literacy as a field sits at a disciplinary crossroads and provides the opportunity for theorists to choreograph the process of knowledge mapping. The knowledge structures required to recognize and then understand literacy come both from practice as well as theory and research. Understanding this constellation of theory and practice requires a commitment to engaged scholarship and listening methodology (Back 2007), as well as a commitment to working alongside teachers and practitioners to make sense of emergent forms of literacy.

We created this handbook to look ahead and imagine a future of literacy studies which is both cross- and interdisciplinary and speaks to the everyday as well as to people who are interested in accessing wider practices and texts. Rather than continuing the focus on schooling that characterized the twentieth century, we have tried to capture different aspects of literacy through a focus on the foundations of literacy, space, time, digital and hermeneutic approaches as well as attention to the literacy of communities and the everyday. In this way we are redressing the balance. We have conceptualized the field of literacy studies in this way.

Table 0.1 shows how disciplines map onto particular approaches to literacy. What is interesting to us is how few quantitative scholars are working within a diverse literacies paradigm, yet there is a scope within that paradigm for scholars working with big data (such as those focusing on Twitter) and bio-data to intersect with small-scale qualitative studies of literacy in the everyday. Conversely, we recognize that much poststructuralist theory does not reach classroom practice, but where there is a link to concepts of not knowing and emergence, new structures of activism can emerge (see Vasudevan *et al.*, Chapter 13 this volume). Likewise, a focus on acquisition of skills, as typified by quadrant one, might need a focus on what it is that is required to succeed and how these systems work, but might also require a focus on small change, activism and the shifting of paradigms across those structures of power (Hamdi 2004). A concern worldwide is the way in which global structures are tightening what kinds of literacy count and for what reason, making it harder for those who have complex, variegated, multilingual and multimodal communicative repertoires to be heard equitably. This is a central concern within contemporary scholarship.

Table 0.1 A conceptual framework for the field of Literacy Studies

	<i>Equality of access</i>	<i>Non-equality of access</i>
Tight framing of literacy (schooled literacy)	Scholars who focus on supporting students to access a schooled literacy curriculum. Disciplines include psychology, cognitive science, education.	Scholars who focus on standardized testing and hierarchical structures of knowledge. Disciplines include psychology, cognitive science, education.
Open framing of literacy (diverse literacies, multimodal, multilingual, everyday, community)	Scholars who consider practice, movement, open and unbounded forms of knowledge creation. Disciplines include anthropology, sociolinguistics, cultural studies, literary theory, sociology, education. Practitioners, educators as researchers.	Scholars who work in academic contexts that are relatively closed to educators and practitioners. Disciplines or approaches might include postmodernism, poststructuralism, philosophy, hermeneutics, literary and critical theory.

We also recognize the work of key people in both opening up equality of access but also providing a more open definition of literacy. Freire (1970) began that process, then scholars such as Janks (2000) and Stein (2006) in South Africa, Freebody and Luke (1990) in Australia and Morrell (2000) and Schwartz and Gutiérrez (Chapter 38, this volume) in the US, focusing on ways of providing access to education but at the same time acknowledging diversity. This openness contrasts with approaches that might be open and appear to be questioning, but remain fairly closed within academic circles, only surfacing in popular discourses. Examples of these could include the Occupy movement of the early 2010s or the widespread use of Twitter in protest movements, which have become important sites for the ‘not yet’ (Daniel and Moylan 1997) and represent possible future research within literacy studies.

Literacy studies remains, however, a site for the ‘not yet’ as a space of openness and possibility. In that spirit, the handbook offers the sense of an opening up and a possibility for resilience within the field. The process of making sense of the field of literacy is that it is dialogic, and involves conversations between disciplines and between practice, schooling, learning and pedagogy and the practices of exploring which include ethnography, literary theory, and phenomenological, embodied and sensory approaches. We conceive of literacy as a space of the ‘not yet’ and a space that is yet to be. This involves dialogue with arts, humanities and social science disciplines as diverse as architecture, English literature, fine art, geography, history, philosophy, sociology, and town and regional planning as well as the sciences. It also involves engaged scholarship and is always done in interaction with the field of practice. We have constructed this handbook in the form of a conversation across different scholars and perspectives as to how the field is constructed, framed, understood and perceived. Below we provide a more detailed rationale for our inclusion of particular perspectives over others, beginning with an account of the field of literacy studies from a historical perspective.

Framing the field of literacy studies

As handbook editors, we recognize that a handbook is first and foremost a view of the field and is inherently projecting a particular ideology with incumbent structuring of power relations in doing so. We therefore understand that this framing is ideologically situated. The field of literacy studies is a hybrid of different disciplines and it has been since its beginning – heavily contested, highly political – and in many ways the term ‘literacy’ itself has become an open sign system. By this we mean that literacy by its nature involves so many fields and disciplines and it can be taken in so many directions (beyond schooling) that it is hard to confine it to one area.

As handbook editors we have selected authors who present new, fresh perspectives and research agendas together with mid-career researchers who are pushing the field in important ways and established, well-cited academics who approach the field with a longer history. Building on the expertise of the advisory board and chapter authors, the handbook attempts to capture the multifarious nature of thinkers coupled with the emergent character of contemporary literacy studies.

Stepping back to review the field of literacy studies, one way of understanding the framing of literacy is to see that historically, literacy studies has been divided into three themes:

- 1 One derivative of Goody (1975) and Olson (1994) in which literacy is assumed to be linked with particular kinds of social organization and cognitive development, a sort of literacy as technological determinacy;
- 2 A second derivative of Scribner and Cole (1981), Street (1984), Barton and Hamilton (1998), Hoggart (1957), Williams (1971), Akinnaso (1992), Szwed (1981), Bauman (1986), Gumperz (1982) and Cook-Gumperz (2006 [1986]), Heath (1983) and Bloome (2007) who all framed literacy as diverse sets of contextualized social practices and events involving the at times non-trivial use of written language; and,
- 3 A third derivative of Freire (1970), Douglass (1989), and Woodson (1969 [1933]) in which literacy is linked closely with political action.²

Some people connect the second and third themes under Street’s autonomous models of literacy (theme #1) and ideological models of literacy (themes #2 and #3, with the understanding that autonomous models are really ideological models pretending not to be ideological), but many would not view the second and third themes as constituting one theme.

We have considered ways of conceptualizing literacy through this lens, and recognize the importance of themes #1 and #3 as key sites for literacy activism and practice. However, we think that the emergence of new scholarship in the field of literacy as a social practice requires further attention. We therefore present, below, our vision for literacy studies. When we devised and confirmed our advisory board and handbook chapter authors, we strove to include new, emerging and established scholars in the field of literacy studies. This deliberate process of advisor and author selection signals an articulation of the field as burgeoning, messy and, most important, unfinished and contingent on the shifting tide of everyday practice and ways of knowing.

Part I: The foundations of literacy studies

Given how much the field has expanded over the past decade, our framing of literacy studies has taken account of the evolution of perspectives, the creation of new frameworks and approaches to literacy, and the merging of related fields with literacy. The handbook begins

with Bloome and Green; they launch the handbook by looking at the social turn in literacy in conjunction with the linguistic turn in the social sciences. Providing a landscape view of shifts in thinking and framing literacy, Bloome and Green provide a backdrop for the many positions on contemporary literacy. Gee then provides a clear account of the ways in which the New Literacy Studies (NLS) offered an alternative lens to psychology. He shows how psychology itself has shifted and become more fundamentally social, particularly through the discipline of Situated Cognition Studies. This new disciplinary interaction is enlivened by Gee's use of examples from practice to make sense of the everyday through the world of experience. For those new to New Literacy Studies, this chapter provides an accessible account of the field through three foundational studies or four theorists – Heath (1983), Scribner and Cole (1981) and Street (1984) – but makes a clear challenge for new work that takes account of recent social turns in other related disciplines. Gee opens up a new space for a conversation to happen between cognitive science and cultural understandings of literacy, which is an exciting and much needed new turn in literacy studies.

Critical literacy offers a particular way into both accounting for access and vibrant opportunities for research to open up a space for action and social change. As an approach, it provides a scholarly lens on the diasporic nature of language, meaning making and identities in practice. Naqvi's chapter on post-colonial studies pushes researchers to think about existing assumptions as well as discursive and ideological agendas. Naqvi's interpretation adds yet another layer to the integral role of critical optics on literacy processes and practices. Spanning across two decades, critical literacy is a rich field of research and inquiry and it is important to spotlight what critical work has done for literacy studies. In a North American context, Rogers and O'Daniels begin their chapter with the work of Freire (1970) to provide a context for practical action and then move to the work of Freebody and Luke (1990) with their Four Resources Model to create a framework from which people can access meaning making in different ways. By surveying the field as a whole, they map knowledge on critical literacy across the globe and account for shifts in the field. Their conclusion, that the field needs to recursively learn from itself and to reflect on what is being articulated as well as the gaps, presents a glimpse of the 'not yet' field of critical literacy in action. Critical literacy as an approach has the potential to be global in reach and, in addition, encompasses out-of-school as well as in-school scholarship renderings of practice, therefore offering an example of engaged scholarship that is both practical and clear in its potential for theoretically enhancing the field. Luke *et al.* (2007) reflect that critical literacy has the potential to address some of the hidden governance structures of the new global order. They advocate focusing on issues such as scale, invisibility, personification and specialized registers in order to unpack critically taken for granted practices within globalized contexts. These have several implications for educational work and for literacy education. A post-colonial perspective united with critical literacy as a perspective creates a vitally important space of possibility within literacy studies (see also Kinloch, Chapter 9 this volume; de Souza, Chapter 10 this volume).

As a coda for this part, Lin and Li present a textured picture of transcultural and translingual identities by historically framing bi/multilingual literacies juxtaposed with present-day transcultural and multilingual practices in Hong Kong. Drawing on the work of Hornberger, Lin and Li show a movement from bilingual research to translingual research. Through illustrative examples within vernacular and media texts from streetscapes in Hong Kong, Lin and Li break apart how heteroglossic practices take place across local contexts. Framed as a landscape view of the handbook, each chapter within the first part touches on themes, theories and issues interwoven in the rest of the chapters in this compendium of work in literacy studies.

Part II: Space-focused approaches

The turn to the spatial has become a focal theme in literacy studies, with foundational texts including *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Soja 2010) and Leander and Sheehy's (2004) *Spatializing Literacy Research and Practice*. These well-cited texts took from Lefebvre (1991) that space is produced in societal contexts. Leander and Sheehy's insight that literacy practices produce space (2004: 4) accounts for a shift in ways of understanding the meshing of spatial research with a contemporaneous interest in literacy practices in communities. Harking back to research that examined community hubs and notions of spatiality within contexts, scholars like Neuman and Celano (2001, 2006) and more recently Nichols *et al.* (2012) contributed to the field by mapping out where literacy is privileged and the sorts of ideologies that circulate within community hubs. Taking a spatial approach to literacy throws into relief not only differential access to resources, but also and perhaps more importantly how much literacies shape communities. This part begins with an account of the spatial turn by Mills and Comber who present adjacent disciplines in relation to each other. Demonstrating that literacy research can be generated through these intersections and developments, Mills and Comber move across, between and beneath space-based approaches to produce new understandings of how everyday literacies are experienced in open and experiential ways.

Likewise, Nichols challenges scholars and practitioners to consider ecological approaches from the foundational perspective of Bronfenbrenner's model but by opening out this perspective to invite researchers to develop the field further. Nichols also sees the researchers as productive sources of understanding, "contributing to the production of the network through making connections between parts of the ecology whether these be texts, places, people, objects or ideas" (p. 121). Making connections with postmodern theories such as Deleuze's brings an immanence to ecological literacy research that enables things to move and transmute across borders. Research as active practice, or praxis here, emerges as a key category within literacy studies.

The unpacking of the field further continues with Corbett's chapter on rural literacies, which is informed by both social science and post-colonial perspectives to examine how disciplinary silos are being bridged but also problematized through a focus on the rural. The felt experience of living in a rural space is acknowledged to be contradictory and not easily reduced to simplistic tropes of the better life, much as the field itself cannot easily be squeezed into a disciplinary space of practice. Again, an emergent focus is prevalent in this account.

Hope and power are the themes of Kinloch's chapter, with a focus on the process of walking through spaces. Participation is a key theme running through the handbook and here the story of urban education is told through and with two African-American male students. Their voices become the space of urban literacies and thereby the field becomes a site of possibility and decolonization. This process of walking with people doing literacy surfaces a fundamental understanding of literacy as an experience through, between and betwixt spaces in contexts of globalization, power, control and resistance. The role of literacies in this struggle is clearly articulated. Like Nichols, Kinloch argues for a methodology for literacy research that is engaged, collaborative and sustained through interaction and reflection with a focus on participation. History, time and space come together in an intersection where young people reflect on their experience of gentrification and educational inequity yet have hope for action.

De Souza's chapter commands a different sense of space-focused literacies by focusing on the nature and properties of what is an often under-theorized area of scholarship, indigenous literacies. Attending to the situatedness of literacies and indigeneity, de Souza considers historical intercultural epistemological inequalities and conflicts that relegated certain world communities

to the marginalized status of being ‘indigenous’ and not possessing so-called ‘literate’ practices. Focusing on the Americas, de Souza’s chapter provocatively illustrates how indigenous literacies have had to submit and resist assimilation to dominant surrounding communities through literacy practices.

In the final chapter of the section, Rosowsky signals ways in which faith literacies sit under the umbrella of space-focused literacies. Rosowsky describes and theorizes faith literacies as literacy events and practices that take place in religious contexts or settings. Taking account of the spaces where faith literacies are located, Rosowsky looks at a wide range of faith literacies, from reciting aloud, sotto voce prayer, listening and responding to utterances, chants and incantations of performed ritual, together with the pedagogical and socializing processes that accompany their acquisition. Such rites and practices as these depict how much regularly occurring recontextualizations of sacred texts are pivotal to making sense within spaces and contexts. Collectively, the chapters in this section remind readers of how space and place navigate ways of thinking and making meaning.

Part III: Time-focused approaches

In tandem with a spatial turn in literacy, there has also been a temporal turn. Time as a category has been disrupted within literacy studies, as scholars both situate and unsettle their ways of knowing with a focus on narrative, time, embodied and fluid approaches to literacy. Time can be framed in multiple ways and this part gives readers an array of interpretations. Starting with Green and Cormack, time is seen through an historical lens. Noting that literacy studies has tended to sideline historical perspectives and imaginings, Green and Cormack redress this trend by surveying literature on the history of literacy and how it reflects upon dynamics in the contemporary globalized world. Drawing on Graff and others, Green and Cormack remind readers that the history of literacy provides essential lessons about how literacy has been reshaped and reconstituted.

Moving from the historical into the present day, Vasudevan *et al.* step back to unravel the turn to the postmodern as a significant shift in literacy studies and from this a number of emergent strands have developed within literacy research. Vasudevan begins with a survey of these trends and considers what it might mean to be a literacy scholar in a field that is also suffused with lack of knowing and shifting sands of knowability. Following Vasudevan, Compton-Lilly presents ways in which literacy research becomes richer and also more complex through sustained engagement within the field. This presence allows the documentation of social and historical change over time as well as an attentiveness to lived lives and ways in which research participants can shape research agendas and concerns. Research itself is subject to question as Compton-Lilly points out that “longitudinal research draws our attention to the fragility and tentative nature of our research findings” (p. 224). The process of doing literacy research becomes a subject as well as an object of the inquiry. This folding back onto itself creates new problems and questions in the process.

As a concluding chapter in the section, Cummins clearly outlines how time and historical tensions have been waged in literacy policy and curriculum. Starting with what has come to be known as ‘the reading wars’, Cummins analyses how two sets of opposing ideologies have riddled policy and curriculum development and the vicissitudes of how these types of ideological fractures have evolved over time. As a well-established thinker in the field of language education, Cummins recalls important debates and tensions that remain, to a large extent, unresolved. Taking a journey across time to reflect upon swings in the pendulum and how intertwined literacy is with politics, Cummins provides the reader with a different perspective on time and

the passage of time in this chapter. This time-focused part of the handbook deepens approaches to literacy by identifying how patterns solidify, sediment and get reconstituted across time and place.

Part IV: Multimodal approaches

As a popular and growing field of literacy research, the multimodal approaches part of the handbook features key thinkers in the field but also evolving theories and frameworks for thinking about how modes function in society. In the first chapter, Domingo *et al.* examine multimodality in online contexts, drawing specific examples from food blogs as a genre indicative of modal production and reception. Investigating technology within the social orientation of food blogs establishes how design potentials and constraints of a platform function to help readers to appreciate what a multimodal approach can do for understandings about writing. After this framing of multimodality in digital environments, Newfield explores semiotic mobility across texts. Newfield gives the reader a detailed perspective on the process of transduction by looking at how multimodal texts get redesigned and modes shift in varied ways. The chapter offers different theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of multimodality with a focus on modal shifts across contexts.

Drawing on detailed work investigating chains of semiosis and transduction, Mavers' chapter attends to how meaning is made as individuals move across modes. The chapter focuses on the literacy classroom where, unsurprisingly, attention is on the objectives of the curriculum (e.g. how well a poem is read aloud or experimental methods are recorded) rather than the process of how one thing is remade as another, just as, elsewhere, interest is in the quality, accuracy or effectiveness of outcomes. Moving from transmodal meaning making, Hackett's chapter combines multimodality with sensory perceptions and sensory ethnography. Building on her research in communities and taking a sensory ethnography approach (Pink 2009) to data collection, Hackett explores the possibilities of combining an embodied, sensory approach to multimodal theorizing of literacy practices within literacy studies. Moving on from Hackett, Yamada-Rice draws on a lens derived from immersion in the linguistic landscapes of Japan to look at how the visual mode is constructed both culturally and through the process of walking and inhabiting a linguistic landscape. The methodologies she draws on include asking children to take photographs as well as walking with them through landscapes that could be apprehended anew through their eyes. The importance of the visual mode in recognizing signage and language in place becomes a salient part of Yamada-Rice's analytic frame, opening up new questions for the field of literacy landscapes.

Lemke and van Helden conclude the multimodality handbook part with a visionary chapter about the possibilities and potential of alternative models for learning and thinking about literacy and meaning making. Premised on studio models and the concept of the Change Lab, which is where mixed-age groups of people confront real-world opportunities for change, this approach leads to a change of paradigm, towards learning that everything is one option among many, whose value depends on its context of use. Lemke and van Helden invite readers in this way to think about radically different ways of creating knowledge together.

The multimodal part in the handbook combines accepted languages of description and frameworks with burgeoning ways of complicating, maybe even contesting, current understandings of how multiple modes function in the everyday.

Part V: Digital approaches

After framing multimodal approaches to literacy research, the handbook moves into digital approaches to literacy studies. Beginning with Chik's chapter on popular culture and digital worlds, Chik looks at linguistic landscapes in Hong Kong analysing how adolescents and teenagers move across different vernacular and pop culture texts fluidly code-switching from one language to the next as a part of their repertoires of literacy practices. The chapter couples well with Abrams' chapter on videogames and layered literacies. Abrams gives the reader a retrospective on the genesis and fast-moving evolution of the videogame industry. Working across gaming platforms and genres, Abrams presents a comprehensive view of gaming and concludes her chapter with a theoretical framework for thinking about videogaming by taking a layered literacies approach (Abrams 2015). Next, Gillen delves into virtual worlds, their history and current issues. She then challenges more traditional notions of literacy in the face of the variety and volume of material within virtual worlds. Gillen examines how virtual spaces open up opportunities for novel ways of mediating identities online so that users can project subjectivities that would not be possible otherwise. Spanning around the globe, citing a work that considers the promise and power of virtual worlds, Gillen gives the handbook a comprehensive review of where the virtual sits within literacy studies.

Willett then probes the domain of virtual worlds and asks how children's consumer literacies play out in these worlds. She excavates the hidden literacies in these spaces, drawing on the work of scholars such as Marsh (2010, 2011) who observed the intersections between commercial concerns and children's own identities and ruling passions played out on sites such as Club Penguin. Davies' chapter on Facebook narratives artfully ends the section by looking at ways in which individuals leverage identities on social networking sites. Applying the work of Propp (1968 [1928]) and his analysis of the finite number of possible fairytale narrative stories, Davies shows how individuals tell stories about themselves through rhetorical framing and narrative devices on Facebook. The choices made linguistically, visually and hypertextually on Facebook tell certain stories and point to larger ways in which identity is performed across virtual spaces. Although there is robust and significant work on digital domains in literacy studies, it is still in a nascent stage and the future holds great promise in terms of what the digital will mean for literacy studies. A new focus on forms of co-curation and co-production in new literacies research will lead to ways of understanding digital moments that are both online and offline, imbued with subjectivities and ways of knowing that are both specific and distributed (Burnett *et al.* 2014; Burnett, Chapter 34 this volume).

Part VI: Hermeneutic approaches

New Literacy Studies researchers have not traditionally engaged with literary theory. While New Literacy Studies has derived a lens from sociolinguistics, linguistic ethnography and social anthropology, literary theory has remained peripheral to that lens, only occasionally moving in under the banner of cultural studies or critical theory. Steadman-Jones writing with Pahl, together discuss Barton and Hamilton's iconic book *Local Literacies* and ask, what would happen if the texts featured in *Local Literacies* had more focus? What would be different for the field? They draw on recent research that employed literary theory to look at ethnographic texts in context, including some from *Local Literacies*, and some from Pahl's research sites. Literary theory here offers a lens in which to explore questions of what reading and writing actually do for readers and writers and how different forms of expression make a difference to people. They

write this as a conversation and, like Gallagher, prefer to explore their topic outside the social scientific trope of the ‘handbook style’.

Moving from links between literary theory and the landscape of literacy, van Leeuwen delves into present-day fixations on ‘looking good’ and aesthetics. Framing his discussion around such semiotic, aesthetic concepts as modal crossing or provenance, van Leeuwen encourages researchers to think beyond a looking good mindset to a bridging of modal features and affordances informed by the Bourdieusian notion of thinking about beauty in terms of *what* is depicted rather than *how* it is depicted.

Gallagher creates a literacy studies approach cast around the concept of *literacy as a philosophical act*. Focusing on two different cities, Toronto and Lucknow, Gallagher depicts literacy studies as fundamentally about the poetic and about the philosophical. Unlike other chapters in the handbook, Gallagher’s is filled with poems and philosophical musings about life and learning – pushing back from the tendency to fall in line with more conventional approaches to situating an area within a large research topic such as literacy studies. Heydon and Rowsell then complement this more prosaic, embodied and sensory-led approach by combining literacy studies with the field of phenomenology. Heydon and Rowsell build their argument around a research study that brought together elders and young children to produce multimodal compositions. Resurrecting memories, senses and feelings, elders and children met once a week to compose texts on iPads or drew pictures or sing songs. Heydon and Rowsell illustrate the strength of combining multimodal theory with phenomenology with its emphasis on in-the-moments feelings and reactions as participants at either end of life (Heydon 2013) engage in creativity and play.

Following Heydon and Rowsell, Simon and Campano combine hermeneutics with literacy studies. Ending the section with hermeneutics reinforces the overall theme of the everyday meaning making around us that the handbook regards as a core process of being human. Starting with a research study featuring adolescent students’ artwork as a response to Wiesel’s *Night*, Simon and Campano show the degree to which literacy studies relies on a circular process of making sense of creative, intellectual and aesthetic dimensions of texts. Hermeneutics and literacy studies combined gives meaning makers more repertoires and sensibilities to draw upon. A hermeneutical approach gives literacy studies more flexibility and valence in that the process of interpretation is ongoing and perpetually unfinished.

Part VII: Making meaning from the everyday

An area of scholarship that has remained in the background of literacy research for some time is understanding how literacy infuses the everyday. The first chapter in the section foregrounds the everyday in detailed ways that invite readers to rethink how literacy exists in contexts that include youth clubs, schools, community contexts and home settings.

Indeed, Pahl and Escott offer the concept of ‘materializing literacies’ thinking particularly about the nature and role of writing across contexts. Thinking about the spaces people live in as material worlds, Pahl and Escott draw on extensive research that illustrate writing landscapes full of stories that are denuded by a tendency to view the written word as scripted and schooled. Following naturally from this refreshing, different take on the everyday, Hamilton’s chapter focuses on public representations of literacy as indicative of ways to justify and legitimate policy interventions. Listening to the voices within public texts and whom they represent (and do not represent) within the domain of adult literacy makes Hamilton’s chapter a powerful and vital challenge to governments that would wish to depolitize adult literacy and deny adults a wider voice in the political sphere.

Burnett then moves the reader into how fluidly individuals move in and out of material spaces and immaterial spaces. In her chapter, Burnett argues that there are material literacies which relate to physically present objects and texts that coexist and seep into more immaterial literacies. Although these literacies are materially absent and intangible they are nevertheless integral to meaning making such as memories, feelings, even virtual worlds. The chapter decentres work that focuses on a more mechanistic take on digital environments as a panacea or as a tool and through data from her research and other research, Burnett maintains how complicated and rhizomatic moving between online and offline worlds can be. Yaman Ntelioglou takes us into the domain of young people's engagement and how equally immersed they are in multimodal worlds *and* embodied, felt worlds. Yaman Ntelioglou shows here, using participatory ethnography, how phenomenology is an ideal vehicle to dig deeper into young people's work in drama and literacy.

Wohlwend's chapter brings us back to classrooms and children's tacit movements in and out of official schooled practices (Street and Street 1991) and the vivid, specific and deliberate imaginings of young children. Wohlwend captures the imaginative and creative worlds of children as they pull on popular culture, media and digital technologies when they exist in everyday worlds – even worlds that are quite formalized and sanctioned like many early years contexts. As a coda to the part, Stornaiuolo combines multimodal epistemologies with a sense of cosmopolitanism. Thinking about individuals' capacities for transforming the world through symbolic, multimodal work, Stornaiuolo relates issues of multimodal production and reception to forging global worlds and global identities and their relationships to literacy studies. As editors, we have argued for more lived, material and holistic definitions of literacy (Pahl and Rowsell 2005, 2006, 2011) and this part in the handbook has allowed us through the diverse perspectives of colleagues to extend this more grounded approach to literacy.

Part VIII: Co-constructing literacies with communities

There is a general turn in social science and arts research to considering methodology critically, and beginning to break down barriers across methodological silos. This could mean a move to embracing 'big data' in research terms, or an awareness of how methodologies themselves construct the field they purport to investigate (Law 2004). Words like co-production, participatory research and engaged practice have become much more mainstream and funded projects are growing in this field (see for example, the UK's AHRC-run Connected Communities programme). Integral to the final part of the handbook is our goal as editors: to buttress work in the field that is critical and that stirs readers for change in literacy policy and practice. Starting with Schwartz and Gutiérrez, having followed the work of Gutiérrez for some time, we wanted to profile her research within communities and what such work does for the field. In their chapter, Schwartz and Gutiérrez present literacy studies through the lens of Latino families living in a particular context and recruiting technologies, texts, and language practices in their everyday. Schwartz and Gutiérrez give examples of situating literacies in communities from their research that is part of the Connected Learning Research Network. Documenting digital literacy practices, specifically mobile phones, Schwartz and Gutiérrez theorized shared rules, gendered participation and mediated practice in Latino familial spaces.

Following situated literacies within Latino families, there is a chapter by Janesick that opens up literacy studies to the world of oral history. In her chapter on oral history, Janesick uncovers the strength of stories and of the age-old art of oral histories. Citing Tutu (1999), Janesick illustrates how oral stories give people factual truth, personal truth, social and cultural truth, and healing and restorative truth. Contemporizing the ancient notion of oral stories by locating

them in digital worlds and realms, Janesick reminds us that communities can be constructed through oral retellings and oral histories.

Following Janesick's work in oral history, Stille's chapter examines participatory methods and how they have drawn out different ways of knowing in her research with immigrant families in Toronto. Stille's chapter identifies ways of situating literacy research within ethnically diverse contexts in Canada. Participatory methods are becoming more popular as a way of flattening power dynamics in research and of communicating and negotiating data collection and analyses with participants. Stille's chapter foregrounds how to engage and take up participatory methods that allow researchers to recognize counter discourses embedded within research on diverse populations.

Moving into the next chapter, Kendrick looks at how much visual methods need rethinking in the twenty-first century. Kendrick makes a case for using visual methods to gain access to what she describes as, "accretive layers of literacy practices" (p. 619). Illustrating her argument about visual methods with data from her longitudinal work in Uganda, Kendrick points out that visual methods need to be more settled and privileged and require collaborative and hybrid approaches as a way into understanding images and what they can tell us about meaning making and human nature more broadly.

In the next chapter, Muller *et al.* paint a stark picture of what they term 'mLiteracy'. mLiteracy combines mobile with literacy, encouraging researchers to think about how in many parts of the world people do not have easy access to mobile technologies and how creative and innovative individuals can be with more primitive, simple technologies. Often under-researched within literacy studies, Muller *et al.* underscore the practices and thinking that happen when one engages in mLiteracies, giving rich examples from their research together.

As a fitting final chapter of the part and the collection, Mitchell and Burkholder's chapter usher readers into an activist space and how activism can inform literacy studies. Drawing on participatory research, Mitchell and Burkholder locate the marriage of literacy with activism in South Africa and the concept of co-creating knowledge as a way into making meaning with language and texts.

Final thoughts

This handbook challenges the notion that literacy is uniform, normative and tied exclusively with schooling. A transformation and pluralization has occurred that invites other fields, domains and disciplines to enter into a dialogue with literacy researchers. Rather than thinking about literacy as yoked with formal education, literacy studies has moved on to be an area of scholarship that explains how meaning is made in everyday lives. As handbook editors, we structured the collection and selected authors and advisors who could help us navigate and render the complexity of literacy studies as a field and discipline. Thinking across the parts, we foreground the blending that has happened in literacy studies by spotlighting how researchers have blended theoretical perspectives with literacy studies in helpful, compelling ways. With a merging of other fields into literacy studies, several 'turns' have ensured that we have signalled in the parts: a temporal turn, a spatial turn, even a sensory, embodied turn. At the same time, as editors, we acknowledge the historical roots and evolution of such fields as New Literacy Studies and multimodality by featuring the work of well-known scholars who deepen and re-consider familiar terms and practices in new contexts and with different tools and technologies. An overriding goal for us has been to make literacy studies critical and a change agent. Several chapters show how literacy has joined with activism and with race, social class, religion, history and politics to be rendered part of the fabric of what it means to be human.

In this handbook, we acknowledge that literacy studies is a field in transit. We hope that the handbook helps readers to see literacy as a work in progress: up for reconceptualization and re-thinking in response to major global challenges. We conclude by highlighting some trends that we think might need addressing by literacy researchers in the future. First, we acknowledge the effect of the understanding and recognition of new structures of knowledge has had on the field of literacy. Literacy is no longer the provenance of people who are ‘experts’ but has been subject to a decolonizing process which means that ways of knowing, methodologies and epistemologies from different perspectives, such as the global south and situated and embodied ways of knowing, are recognized and acknowledged in scholarship. Second, we see literacy as a field that intersects profoundly with other communicative modalities, including the visual, the sensory, the felt and the embodied. This means that literacy can be apprehended as an ensemble of communicative practices, and print literacies can be subsumed within a much broader meshwork of practices. Third, literacy has become subject to similar shifts in ways of doing things and everyday practices as other forms of knowledge production. Digital understandings, and their embeddedness in mobile, diffuse and moving technologies, will continue to shift our understandings of what literacy is. Ways of experiencing the digital, such as wearable devices, and ways of conceptualizing the digital, such as contestations over whose knowledge counts in digital spaces, will provide challenges for literacy scholars. Finally, the world is coming to terms with new challenges, which include a focus on what it means to be human. How this is ‘read’ and understood will require new ways of knowing and listening. Within this, literacy becomes a site of reconceptualization but also a space where dialogue and intersections can flourish. Both within and outside of education there are broad implications for these re-thinking processes and we hope that this handbook provides some pointers to aid this endeavour.

Notes

- 1 We would like to thank Professor Ilana Snyder for her careful, incisive review and commentary on our *Handbook* Introduction.
- 2 We would like to thank Professor David Bloome for helping us conceptualize these three themes in the history of literacy studies.

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PART I

The foundations of literacy studies

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1

THE SOCIAL AND LINGUISTIC TURNS IN STUDYING LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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Introduction

Shifts in the fundamental framing of intellectual inquiry can alter both the conduct of scholarship and the practice of everyday life (cf., Kuhn 1962). Here, we consider the implications of two such shifts in the study of literacy. The first is the social turn in the study of language and literacy (see Bartlett 2008; Baynham and Prinsloo 2001; Gee 1999; Street 2003) and the second is the application of the linguistic turn in the social sciences (cf., Benjamin 1996; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Habermas 2001; Pecheux 1982; Rorty 1992; Said 1978; Wittgenstein 2009 [1953]) to the study of language and literacy (cf., Baker and Luke 1991; Cazden *et al.* 1972; Cook-Gumperz *et al.* 1981; Gumperz 1982, 1986a, 1986b; Hymes 1974, 1980, 1981).

We begin this chapter by discussing the implications of these “turns.” We then briefly discuss implications of framing literacy education as marketization and commodification as opposed to a framework of dialectics and dialogue.

The social turn in the study of literacy

Definitions of literacy vary widely; and as historians (e.g., Ginzburg 1980; Graff 1979), sociologists (e.g., Luke 1995, 2003), anthropologists (e.g., Bartlett 2008; Collins 1995; Collins and Blot 2003; Heath 1982b, 1983, 2012; Long 1993) and others have shown, the interpretation of texts has been a cultural, social, political, and theological matter in which the stakes can be severe (e.g., Ginzburg 1980; Lankshear 1998; Macedo 1996). Nonetheless, in modern educational institutions in the U.S., Europe, and regions influenced by them, literacy (reading and writing) has overwhelmingly been defined as a set of cognitive processes and skills. It is a definition of literacy that has been enforced by the state, and upon which literacy education curricula, instruction, and evaluations are often based (Allington 2002; Goodman *et al.* 2013; Krashen 2001; Prendergast 2003). Until recently, research on literacy, especially that connected to schooling, has overwhelmingly focused on identification of the psychological processes within the individual that constitute being able to

read and write. It is a view of literacy widespread in popular culture and media (e.g., Johnson and Finlay 2001; Williams and Zenger 2007), so much so that, with the exception of perhaps the academic field of literacy studies, this definition of literacy has become hegemonic.

This view is challenged by the social turn in the study of literacy, a turn that can be connected to the social turn in the study of language more generally. Rather than viewing language as an idealized and abstract system (cf., Chomsky 1961; Saussure 1959 [1915]) or as a set of cognitive and psycholinguistic processes located in the mind of the individual (cf., Fodor *et al.* 1974; Miller 1965; Pinker 1994), language (spoken, written, signed, etc.) is viewed as essentially social and situated in the interactions among people; that is, as more so a set of contextualized social practices and social events than a thing in-and-of-itself. From the perspective of the social turn in the study of literacy, literacy is viewed as the non-trivial use of written language in a social event (cf., Heath 1980) or social practice (cf., Street 1984). Therefore, literacy cannot be separated from what people are doing, how they are doing it, when, where, under what conditions and with whom they are doing it; metaphorically, there is no separation of the dancer from the dance¹ (cf., Yeats 1962).

Street (1984, 1995) describes these views of literacy as a distinction between an autonomous model of literacy and an ideological model. In an autonomous model of literacy, the individual employs cognitive and linguistic skills, strategies, and processes that are mostly autonomous of the social context in which the reading or writing occurs. A person has, or does not have, those cognitive and linguistic skills, strategies, and processes that enable him/her to read or write; and is thus literate or illiterate, respectively. Literacy education is the acquisition of those cognitive and linguistic skills, strategies, and processes that define reading and writing. What has been called a 'Great Divide' exists between those societies that have achieved literacy and those that have not, involving fundamental differences in thinking processes, the organization of knowledge, and engagement in modern civil organization including orientation to law and government (Goody 1986; Goody and Watt 1968; Havelock 1982, 1991; Ong 1982; for criticism of the 'Great Divide' see Gee 1996; Reder and Davilla 2005; Scribner and Cole 1981; Street 1995; Tannen 1982).

By contrast, an ideological model is defined as situated, shared cultural frameworks and models that inform when, where, and how written language should be used (i.e., what counts as appropriate use within the social event) as well as how written language means within and across social situations. Considered within an ideological model, literacy does not exist as a thing in-and-of-itself. Rather it is the situated, contextualized use of written language by people as they interact with each other within the social institutions and social spaces in which they live their lives. Literacy practices and events are embedded in, and constitutive of cultural ideologies. That is, a cultural ideology informs, and is informed by, what literacy practices are used in what social situations when, by whom, with what meanings, and with what social consequences.

As such, a literacy practice (like any social practice) exists not in isolation but rather is intimately connected to a field (cf., Bourdieu 1977; Grenfell *et al.* 2012), such that participants in a particular situation could expect to find particular orthographies, texts, configurations of people, participation structures, physical and material environments, etc., as well as expectations for particular ways of using and making meaning with written language. Thus, what constitutes a literacy practice is not just a mental framework or cultural schema for using written language that an individual might hold (perhaps in common with others). Rather, what constitutes literacy practices are the in situ and particular constellation of actions and interactions in and of the material environment.

Literacy practices, therefore, are realized in literacy events, as the actual embodiment, engagement, and interaction among people in real time as they make their everyday lives within

institutional, social, cultural, and economic contexts. Within a literacy event, a literacy practice is adapted to the in situ circumstances in which people find themselves. This may include interactions with others of diverse cultural backgrounds, who may not fully share specific literacy practices, or who may have different goals for the social events. It may also include multiple layers of diverse and even contradictory contexts and social agendas. Additionally, it may include unusual and changing situations influenced by other events near and far; and/or, it may involve shifting power relations among people and among social institutions. And, all of this is *material* (cf., Volosinov 1973 [1929]; see also Pahl and Rowsell 2010). That is, the actions people take both individually and collectively are embodied, and located in a particular place at a particular time within a particular material environment. The words they use have material presence either as sound waves, body and hand movements (i.e., sign language), or as marks on a surface (whether it is a screen, a piece of paper, a wall, or a rock, etc.). Out of this material presence and place (what Scollon and Scollon (2003) call geosemiotics), people act and react to each other, creating meaning, social relationships, social identities, aesthetics, histories and futures, change and continuity as well as the broad range of human emotions and feelings that constitute social life.

From the perspective of the social turn in the study of literacy, the teaching and learning of literacy is better characterized as the teaching and learning of a set of literacy practices and the cultural ideologies and fields that a particular set of literacy practices index. The teaching and learning of literacy are not culturally or politically neutral endeavors (cf., Luke 1988). In those cases where teaching and learning cross cultural boundaries, the teaching and learning of literacy may involve the attempted imposition of a set of literacy practices by one group upon another (e.g., Kulick and Stroud 1993). In such instances (cases), those members of the dominant group, holding an autonomous model of literacy, may assume that they are being beneficent in bringing literacy and its accompanying benefits of 'literate thought' (cf., Olson 1977; Ong 1982) to the illiterate, non-dominant group. To the extent that non-dominant groups accept an autonomous view of literacy, like the dominant group, the non-dominant group may view themselves, their way of life, and their society as deficit and needing to be 'saved' (cf., Scribner 1984).

By contrast, framed within the social turn in the study of literacy, literacy education in cross-cultural contexts requires a more complex and nuanced understanding. Even in cases where there may be the supplanting of the cultural practices and ideologies of a non-dominant group by those of the dominant group, Kulick and Stroud (1993) show that people do not necessarily adopt the imposed literacy practices. Rather, they adapt them in ways that reflect their indigenous way of life, even if they do so in ways that are invisible to the dominant group.

Educators sensitive to the deficit-oriented assumptions of an autonomous model of literacy may bring a different set of foundational assumptions to literacy education in a cross-cultural situation. People, and the communities in which they live (perhaps defined by race, class, language, ethnicity, language, or geography), may be viewed as already having and engaging in literacy practices and literacy events (e.g., Kirkland 2013; Rabi *et al.* 2009). From this perspective, literacy education, built on that foundation, develops ways that enable people to cross cultural and institutional boundaries without denigrating their own cultures, histories, and cultural identities (e.g., González *et al.* 2005; Lee 2007; McCarty 2010; Moll and Diaz 1987). Such a literacy education may also involve teaching and learning a set of literacy practices that foreground the use of written language to critically interrogate the world in which people live in order to make visible, and act on, oppressive power relations (e.g., Blackburn 2005; Blackburn and Clark 2007; Freire 2000; Freire and Macedo 1987; Willis 2008). These directions, guided by the social turn, have led literacy researchers and educators to seek ways of generating new, hybridized literacy practices at a nexus of the diverse groups that create new interpretive frameworks and social contexts (e.g., Gutiérrez 2008; Souto-Manning 2010).

To summarize this section, we quote Robinson on the impact of the social turn in literacy studies:

It will no longer do, I think, to consider literacy as some abstract, absolute quality attainable through tutelage and the accumulation of knowledge and experience. It will no longer do to think of reading as a solitary act in which a mainly passive reader responds to cues in a text to find meaning. It will no longer do to think of writing as a mechanical manipulation of grammatical codes and formal structures leading to the production of perfect or perfectible texts. Reading and writing are not unitary skills nor are they reducible to sets of component skills falling neatly under discrete categories (linguistic, cognitive); rather, they are complex human activities taking place in complex human relationships.

(1987: 329)

Viewed in this way, the social turn in defining literacy has had, and continues to have, profound implications for the study of literacy, most especially in how history, culture, personhood, place, social relationships, and conceptions of the 'mind' are taken up as a framework for the study of literacy practices and literacy events in educational contexts (e.g., Bloome *et al.* 2005; Gee and Green 1998). The social turn in the study of literacy is a shift from a view of autonomous skills and of written language as a tool that influences (or determines) what people do, how they think, and who they are (literate or illiterate) to a view of written language as actions that people take with others and in relation to others as they make and re-make the events, structures, institutions, and interpretive frameworks of their lives.

The linguistic turn in the study of literacy

The linguistic turn in social science and philosophy (hereafter, the linguistic turn) begins with recognition that the representation and organization of the social world is accomplished primarily through language (e.g., Habermas 2001; Rorty 1992; Said 1978). Inasmuch as language itself is a social construction (cf., Williams 1977), and any use of language is an imposition on and production of the social world, questions can be asked about how language is used to structure social relationships and social institutions, construct epistemologies and ontologies, define rationality, morality, and justice, and otherwise provide the social fabric of and meaningfulness for people's lives. The linguistic turn provides an avenue for deconstruction and reconstruction of disciplinary bodies of knowledge (e.g., Bazerman 1992; Becher 1987; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Kelly and Chen 1999; Lea 2008; Lea and Street 2006), the taken-for-granted and naturalized representations of the state and dominant institutions as well as the established *ways of knowing* associated with academic/disciplinary inquiry and other dominant institutions (Rorty 1992).

Here, we focus on how the linguistic turn has redefined the ethnographic study of literacy events and practices in classrooms as well as bringing new ways of conceptualizing how literacy processes and practices are discursive as well as social constructions. Agar (1994, 2006) captures ways in which the linguistic turn has (re)formulated views of the relationship of language and culture from an argument about ethnography as epistemology, not method. Agar argues that language and culture are conceptually inseparable, leading him to coin the term 'languaculture' to foreground the interdependent relationship between 'language' and 'culture.' He argues that:

Language, in all its varieties, in all the ways it appears in everyday life, builds a world of meanings. When you run into different meanings, when you become aware of your own work to build a bridge to the others, 'culture' is what you're up to. Language fills the spaces between us with sound; culture forges the human connection through them. Culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture.

(1994: 28)

From this perspective, the ethnographer explores the processes, practices, meanings, and conceptual worlds of those he/she seeks to study by seeking an emic, or insider's perspective. The ethnographer seeks to uncover the ways of acting, believing, feeling, thinking, valuing and languaging, norms and expectations, roles and relationships, and rights and obligations that Heath (1982a) argues members need to know, understand, produce, and predict in order to participate in the developing cultural, language, and literacy events of life in classrooms as well as other social settings (Heath 1983, 2012). As such, the linguistic turn has influenced ways of knowing, such as epistemological perspectives at the intersection of ethnography and literacy in educational settings, both in school and in other educational settings (e.g., families, communities, disciplines, among others).

In this section, we explore this relationship further by examining a range of conceptual perspectives that explore *how* literacy events are discursively constructed in and through the ways in which participants in social events reference and engage with previous literacy events and practices, and how within these developing social events, participants construct uses of written language as simultaneously they discursively construct what counts as literacy processes and practices. The settings, in which such inquiries have been conducted, include school settings (e.g., Bloome 1987, 1989; Bloome *et al.* 2005; Castanheira *et al.* 2001; Green and Harker 1988; Hicks 1995; Rex 2001; Wilkinson 1982), and non-school settings (e.g., Cook-Gumperz 2006 [1986]; Gilmore and Glatthorn 1982; Heath 1983, 2012; John-Steiner *et al.* 1994; Solsken 1993). Underlying such studies is a series of conceptual arguments about how participants, within particular social groups, discursively and interactionally construct the ways of knowing, being, and doing that define *what counts as literacy* (cf., Heap 1980). At the center of this perspective on literacy as a discursive and interactional construction is a view of language as constitutive of, as well as constituted by, the social interactions among members of a social group.

Researchers guided by this perspective draw on theoretical and epistemological developments within and across disciplines and fields including anthropology, education, literary studies, folklore studies, interactional sociolinguistics, and sociology. These developments have led to a range of conceptualizations about the nature of language-in-use, and how, through language-in-use, members of social groups construct locally significant ways of knowing, being, and doing literacy in the local setting.

To make visible how literacy researchers view the constitutive nature of language-in-use, we identify key conceptual arguments about the discursive construction of literacy as a social accomplishment that have developed within the linguistic turn in the ethnographic study of literacy across different programs of research. That is, we identify a series of epistemological and conceptual arguments that guide researchers focused on studying how language is used to accomplish social and academic life in classrooms (and other social settings). Through exploration of language-in-use, researchers have explored how, and in what ways, participants in particular social groups, in particular situations, draw on and reference particular artifacts and resources for particular purpose(s), as they interact with particular actors, under particular conditions, at particular points in time, in particular places, leading to particular literacy processes and practices (Bloome and Green 1991; Graddol *et al.* 1994; Green *et al.* 2003; Heath 1982b; Street 1984).²

By focusing on what members propose to each other, recognize, and acknowledge as they interact with others across times and events, the researchers construct accounts of what is socially significant to members both in a particular moment in time as well as across times and events (cf., Bloome and Bailey 1992; Bloome and Egan-Robertson 1993). Thus, by examining how particular ways of using language (linguaging) in different events lead to differences in the social, cultural, and linguistic resources of a group, ethnographic researchers make visible the social, cultural, and linguistic presuppositions that participants bring to and draw on to interpret what is happening as well as what is proposed in a particular context (Gumperz 1986a).

From this perspective, everyday life in classrooms, and the literacy processes and practices accomplished in classrooms and other educational settings, are talked into being (e.g., Barnes and Todd 1977, 1995; Bloome *et al.* 2005; Green and Dixon 1993; Green and Harker 1988; Mercer and Hodgkinson 2008; Weade 1987) within and across discipline areas, including language arts (e.g., Bloome 1989; Carter 2007; Green and Dixon 1993; Wilkinson 1982), the arts (e.g., Baker *et al.* 2008; Gadsden 2008), mathematics (e.g., Moschkovich 2010) and science (e.g., Gee *et al.* 2005; Kelly and Chen 1999; Lemke 1990), among others. Of particular interest to ethnographically guided researchers is how such differences support and constrain both what is being accomplished and the broader issue of access to literacy processes and practices in classrooms.

Underlying these programs of research, therefore, is a set of conceptual views of language-in-use and its relationship to social life; a view that makes visible the intersection of the linguistic turn and the social turn in the study of literacy discussed earlier. Heap (1980, 1991, 1995) argues that a sociological approach to understanding discourse-as-action (what we have called here language-in-use and linguaging) can illuminate what might otherwise be considered hidden dimensions and relationships, if we accept that:

- The individual is defined as an actor in a social system.
- It is imperative to define the situation as formulated by the actors.
- An actor defines his/her situation through interactions with others.
- An actor acts consciously.
- An actor has preferences.
- Each actor aligns his/her actions to the actions of others by ascertaining what they are doing or intend to do – in other words, by ‘getting at’ the meaning of their acts.
- Social structures are stable and governed by rules (norms, values), which may, or may not, be complete and are observable through the actions of others.

This theoretical argument implicates a series of actions required of ethnographers and others seeking to uncover and/or construct warranted accounts of what counts as literacy in classrooms and other social settings. It requires the researcher to examine how and in what ways members are signaling to each other (and thus making visible to the researcher) what is being socially accomplished; that is, as Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) argue, what is socially significant.

For example, in a study of reading instruction in a primary classroom, Heap (1980) observed a chain of interactions between the teacher and a group of second grade students about a text they were reading. The teacher asked the students, “Who helped the queen?” M (a student) raised her hand, and the teacher called on her to answer. M answered with “Rumpelstiltskin.” The teacher accepted the answer but then told the students that they had not come to his name in the story yet. Heap argues that this exchange signals to the students what counted as answering this question as well as reading the story. Through ethnographic interviews of the students Heap learned that they had seen Rumpelstiltskin in the previous year, and, therefore, brought their prior knowledge and this prior text to bear on the present story. In this example, Heap made visible what counted

to the teacher as the socially (re)constructed nature of literacy processes and practices through this particular chain of interactions. Heap's interpretation is further supported by Gumperz's (1986a) argument that participants bring linguistic, cultural, and social presuppositions (forms of knowledge) and texts (cf., Becker 1988) from one situation to another. Without the ethnographic base for his research, Heap would have been unable to know where the student's knowledge of the character's name came from, given the teacher's argument that they had not come to it in the story yet. His example also provides support for McHoul's (1991) argument that what is accomplished in such events is accomplished as 'readingS,' not reading.

Golden (1988), in a literary analysis of a reading comprehension event in an early elementary grade classroom (Grades 1–3) provides a related argument about how to conceptualize what counts as text at particular moments in a developing literacy event. She argues that to understand what counts as text in particular interactional moments of a lesson involves exploring the life history of the particular text being produced at particular points in time. In her analysis of the relationships between spoken and written discourse in a twenty-minute lesson, which was part of an eighteen-month study of reading comprehension within a teacher study group, she identified a series of texts that were drawn on and interactionally present within and across chains of interaction (see Figure 1.1).

Golden's (1988: 75) representation of the multiple texts constructed provides evidence of Bloome and Egan-Robertson's (1993) argument about intertextuality as socially accomplished as well as support for Heap's (1980, 1991) and McHoul's (1991) ethnomethodological perspective that what is produced are readingS, not reading.

Researchers seeking to explore literacy-in-the-making in classrooms and other educational settings need not only explore what is being interactionally accomplished but also what texts are being referenced within and across events. By studying what members propose to each other, what they recognize and acknowledge in their talk and interactions, and what they orient to and hold each other accountable for, ethnographers and others are able to construct grounded accounts of what counts as literacy processes and practices within and across events in particular social groups (e.g., Bloome and Egan-Robertson 1993; Green *et al.* 2012; Heap 1980, 1991).

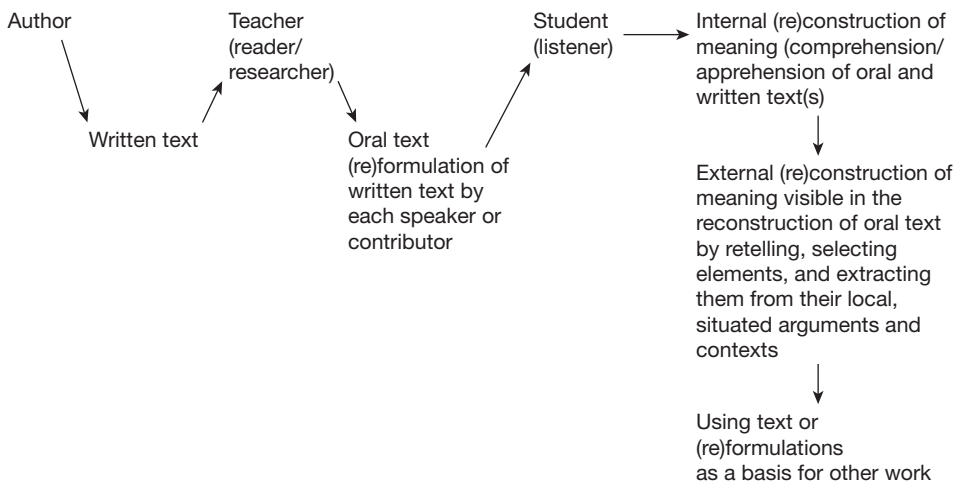


Figure 1.1 Life history of a text: single text, multiple (re)formulations (adapted from Golden 1988: 75).

To more fully understand the communicative nature of language-in-use and how literacy events with their situated processes and practices are constructed, we turn to theoretical arguments by the Bakhtin Circle (Bakhtin 1981, 1986 [1953]; Bakhtin and Medvedev 1991; Volosinov 1973 [1929]). Bakhtin argues that:

any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely. Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker. ... An actively responsive understanding of what is heard ... can be directly realized in action ..., or it can remain for the time being, a silent responsive understanding (certain speech genres are intended for this kind of responsive understanding...), but this is, so to speak, responsive understanding with a delayed reaction.

(1986 [1953]: 59–60)

Based on such arguments, studying the social construction of literacy involves examining not only how and what members communicate at a particular point in a conversation or propose and exchange meanings but also the complex processes of when, how, and in what ways members take up and use what was dialogically constructed at one point in time in subsequent dialogues. Through this in-time and over-time process, an ethnographer is able to trace what members propose, take up, acknowledge, and construct as literacy events as well as the social, cultural, cognitive, and linguistic processes that constitute such events. Bloome and Bailey (1992) capture this complex language–literacy relationship and make visible how these arguments apply to a broad range of ways that literacy events are socially constructed in and through language-in-use. They argue:

Whenever people engage in a language event, whether it is a conversation, the reading of a book, or diary writing, they are engaged in intertextual juxtapositions of various conversational and written texts. ... Intertextuality is a social construction in that these juxtapositions must be interactionally recognized by the participants in an event, acknowledged by those participants, and have social significance within the event.

(1992: 198)

Embedded in the arguments above is the need to identify rich points (cf., Agar 1994) that can serve as anchors to trace past, present, and future references that support analysis of developing literacy processes and practices across times, events, and actors. By focusing on levels of analytic scale, and tracing particular actors, events, processes, or practices across times and events within a social group (e.g., Baker *et al.* 2008; Castanheira *et al.* 2001; Cochran-Smith 1984; Rex 2001, 2006), the ethnographer is able to make visible the connections that people in interaction with each other have constructed that lay a basis for developing an evolving ‘web of meanings’ (cf., Geertz 1973) that produce the meaningfulness of in situ literacy practices and events.

A critical aspect of the linguistic turn has been a focus on the language of ethnographic studies and related texts (e.g., Atkinson 1990; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Tyler 1978). On one hand, such examinations were focused on how such language represented people and their lives and how those representations positioned them with regard to others. On the other hand, acknowledgment of the way that the language of ethnographic and related studies positioned people and their lives provided an additional dimension to ethnographers’ reflexive moves (see

Atkinson 1990; Tyler 1978). It is not just that researchers need to be aware of the cultural bias, backgrounds, and experiences that they bring to an ethnographic study, they need to acknowledge that despite whatever fairness, orientation to emic description, and reflexivity they attempt with the language of their research, there is no such thing as neutral uses of language. One is always constructing social relationships and cultural ideologies with language that have consequences for people's lives; and it is no less so for researchers than for anyone else.

From this perspective, the ethnographer constructs particular understandings and views of literacy as a social process through the languacultures guiding their own social worlds. As Clifford and Marcus (1986) argue, the ethnographer writes culture, not finds culture, a process that requires reflexivity in reporting the processes of inquiry as well as what is (re)presented through the language used to construct the accounts of what counts as literacy in the particular social group. This argument was further elaborated by Atkinson (1990), who brought this argument to work in sociology that further showed how authors position self in the text as well as positioning and representing participants in their study. These arguments are often referred to as a third turn, the *reflexive turn*, in social science.

Commodification and marketization/dialectics and dialogue

The social turn in literacy studies and the linguistic turn in the social sciences and philosophy, as discussed in the previous sections, provide a set of heuristics for exploring how literacy is taken up in everyday life. In this section, we briefly discuss one additional set of heuristics that frame ways of examining how definitions of literacy help constitute, reflect, and/or refract cultural, social, political, and economic ideologies for, and of, everyday life. The heuristic approach presented in this section involves contrasting two frames: the frame of commodification and marketization; and the frame of dialectics and dialogue.

The commodification of literacy refers both to the practice of parsing of literacy into components that can be owned, and to the restriction of both those components and the reading material (e.g., books, newspapers, digital texts, etc.). The marketization refers to treating literacy as a form of cultural capital that can be distributed and exchanged for other forms of capital (cf., Bourdieu 1977). That literacy is big business is visible in the hundreds of displays by publishers, technology companies, and others at professional education conferences. Perhaps more important is the acceptance by policy makers of the argument by economists that literacy attainment is one of the factors considered in assessing the strength of a country's economic promise (Bartlett 2008). This perceived connection between literacy acquisition and economic development has been a long-standing argument that applies to individuals, communities, and nations, especially with regard to nations considered in need of economic development. However, Graff (1979, 2008) has challenged this argument, arguing that the connection between literacy and economic development is more myth than reality given that complex, fluid, and situational factors are implicated and that what is taken as literacy is often confounded with other factors (such as schooling).

The commodification and marketization of literacy is grounded in an autonomous model of literacy. Literacy can be parsed into cognitive and linguistic processes that in educational contexts are often referred to as skills and organized as levels (Bloome and Carter 2001). The skills of literacy are taught, and as people acquire those skills, they become 'literate.' To acquire those skills people not only need educational programs, they need literacy materials (e.g., books, tools for writing, etc.). Yet, the commodities of literacy are not equally distributed with issues of race, class, language, and gender skewing distribution (Elsasser and Irvine 1992; Rockhill 1993). Elsasser and Irvine (1992) argue that the unequal distribution of and access to literacy can

become a warrant for labeling some people and some communities as illiterate, less literate and as having no interest in literacy learning. From this perspective, the task of education is to find a way to increase individual students' acquisition of the bits of literacy processes and materials. Additionally, the argument goes, if the bits and materials are made accessible, then the task is one of the motivation, time, and effort of the individual student.

When this argument is viewed from the perspective of the social turn in literacy studies and the linguistic turn in the social sciences and philosophy, the commodification and marketization of literacy can be understood as being as much about the promulgation of a cultural ideology as it is about the acquisition of literacy as a technical skill. That is, it is an ideology connected with individualism, individual achievement, and values defined by a market (i.e., exchange value and meritocracy). Thus, once the bits and materials of literacy are made accessible, acquisition becomes an individual responsibility constrained by the cultural, social, and economic capital one can individually employ.

By contrast, a framework of dialectics and dialogue assumes that any communicative act is by definition a social act taking place in a social context and that is situated within a particular social system. This argument holds regardless of whether the communicative act involves spoken, written, signed language, or some combination thereof. Grounded in an ideological model of literacy, the isolated individual becomes a non sequitur. Rather, every interaction of communication inherently involves reflection and refraction (what we call dialectics and dialogue) of what went (was communicated) before and what will come after (cf., Volosinov 1973 [1929]). The histories of these communicative interactions become layered, each layer adding new, particular situated meanings, building intertextually on what came before and will come after.

In Bakhtinian terms (1981), each communicative event can be described as heteroglossic, implicating multiple voices. Whether these voices come together in harmony, reciprocity, and eloquence or whether they are cacophonous, conflicting, indeterminate, and dispersing depends on how the people themselves engage each other, what they build together, and on the degree to which they are oriented to a communicative rationality (cf., Habermas 2001) and uses of written language that critically deconstruct and reconstruct the worlds in which they live (cf., Christensen 2000; Comber and Nixon 2000; Freire 2000; Kinloch 2010). From this perspective, literacy education is not about acquiring the bits and materials of literacy but rather acting upon the world with others in an effort to understand it and change it. Pedagogically, it is through the use of language that such acting is accomplished.

Future directions

This chapter examined the ideological nature of different philosophic turns on defining what counts as literacy, and in turn, how the different conceptual perspectives are consequential for literacy education. By grounding the exploration in three philosophic turns – the social turn, the linguistic turn, and the reflexive turn – we framed the need to make transparent not only the assumptions or presuppositions about what counts as literacy but also the need to examine the social, political, economic, and cultural systems through which particular definitions of 'literacy' are defined. The arguments in this chapter point to the need for researchers to examine what counts as literacy in particular contexts, when particular kinds of literacy processes and practices count, who has access to what kinds of practices, and whose historical literacy practices count, as well as how the literacy processes and practices developed at one point in time within a particular group, are consequential for what is possible in subsequent literacy events. In bringing together the social and linguistic turns in literacy and social science, we made visible

the need to examine how literacy processes and practices are talked into being as participants in a developing event interact with current and prior texts.

These arguments lay a foundation for exploring how literacy processes and practices are proposed to students, and how students' actions in relationship to what was proposed by the teacher and/or textual resources (e.g., written, spoken, signed, graphic texts) become a basis for identifying what becomes socially significant. This argument can be applied to all situations in which uses of written language are being proposed to students in classrooms or other educational settings (e.g., family, home, peer group, industry). That is, by examining moments in which students are engaged in literacy events, what becomes possible is the identification of what students are being given access to and what kinds of uses of written language are being taken up and used, as well as what factors support and/or constrain what students have an opportunity to learn. The social and linguistic turns frame the need to explore not only what is happening in classrooms but also the consequential nature of selecting particular underlying philosophic perspectives on the ways that literacy education is conceptualized.

The future challenge for scholars engaged in the study of literacy events and practices (especially in educational settings) is, on one hand, to be engaged "in the practical struggle to change reality, to change that thing or class of things" (Hymes 1974: 209) while also articulating the dialectic between change and stability in the individual, in social institutions, social and economic structures, social relationships, definitions of personhood, social and cultural ideologies, etc. Scholars so engaged in such literacy research need to struggle with the tension between what counts as good and progressive 'practical action to change reality' as defined from their etic perspectives, while simultaneously embracing the social and linguistic turns discussed earlier in concert with emic perspectives on what counts as good and progressive change.

Notes

- 1 The line is from William Butler Yeats' poem, "Among Schoolchildren": "O body swayed to music / O brightening glance / How can we know the dancer from the dance?"
- 2 Our use of 'particular' here derives from Becker's (1988) discussion of a humanistic linguistics – a philology – that eschews inquiry grounded in rules and instances and embraces cases and interpretation (cf., Geertz 1983). For Becker, particularity is a theoretical and ontological stance foregrounding the importance and meaningfulness of the unique, distinct, prior texts that inform the languaging (cf., Gadamer 1976) people do in their daily lives as they make those personal and particular lives.

Related topics

Literacy Practices, Ethnography, Discourse, New Literacy Studies.

Further reading

Freire, P. (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition, New York, NY: Continuum.

Although labeled a pedagogy, Freire provides a philosophy and theoretical frame for crafting literacy education as the use of written language for interrogating the worlds in which students live and taking action on those worlds to relieve and reduce human suffering and to increase the agency of people who have been socially, politically, and economically marginalized.

Heath, S. B. (1983) *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heath, S. B. (2012) *Words at Work and Play: Three Decades in Family and Community Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Although each book can be read separately as defining ethnography of language and literacy, together they articulate the complexities of multiple levels of context over time and generations and the dual location of the ethnographic study of language and literacy in both the social sciences and humanities.

Rorty, R. M. (ed.) (1992) *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Rorty provides an extensive discussion of the linguistic turn in the social sciences and philosophy.

Street, B. V. (1995) *Social Literacies*, London: Longman.

Street articulates the distinction between an autonomous model of literacy and an ideological model and shows how these models play out in a range of everyday and educational situations.

Volosinov, V. (1973 [1929]) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. L. Matejka and I. Titunik, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Volosinov provides the theoretical and philosophical foundations for viewing language and literacy as social and historical.

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2

THE NEW LITERACY STUDIES¹

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Introduction: The New Literacy Studies

‘The New Literacy Studies’ (sometimes just referred to as the NLS) names a body of work that started in the 1980s (Brandt and Clinton 2002; Gee 2000b; Hull and Schultz 2001; Pahl and Rowsell 2005, 2006; Prinsloo and Breier 1996; Street 1993, 1997, 2005). This work came from linguistics, history, anthropology, rhetoric and composition studies, cultural psychology, education, and other areas (e.g., Barton 1994; Barton and Hamilton 1998; Bazerman 1989; Cazden 1988; Cook–Gumperz 1986; Gee 1987; Graff 1979; Gumperz 1982a, 1982b; Heath 1983; Kress 1985; Michaels 1981; Scollon and Scollon 1981; Scribner and Cole 1981; Street 1984, 1995; Wells 1986; Wertsch 1985). The work not only came from different disciplines but was written in different theoretical languages that never became unified. Nonetheless, such work seemed to be converging on a shared view about literacy.

Historical perspectives

The NLS opposed the then traditional psychological approach to literacy. This traditional approach viewed literacy as a ‘mental’ or ‘cognitive’ phenomenon and defined literacy in terms of mental states and mental processing. Reading and writing were treated as things people did inside their heads.

The NLS argued that literacy was something people did in the world and in society, not just inside their heads, and should be studied as such. It saw literacy as primarily a sociocultural phenomenon, rather than a mental phenomenon. Literacy was a social and cultural achievement centered in social and cultural practices. It was about distinctive ways of participating in social and cultural groups. Thus, it was argued, literacy should be studied in an integrated way in its full range of contexts and practices, not just cognitive, but social, cultural, historical, and institutional, as well.

Psychology at the time saw readers and writers as primarily engaged in mental processes like decoding, retrieving information, comprehension, inferencing, and so forth. The NLS saw readers and writers as primarily engaged in social or cultural *practices*. Written language is used differently in different practices and used in different ways by different social and cultural groups. In these practices, written language never sits all by itself and it is rarely if ever fully cut

off from oral language and action. Rather, within different practices, it is integrated with different ways of (1) using oral language; (2) of acting and interacting; (3) of knowing, valuing, and believing; and, too, often (4) of using various sorts of tools and technologies.

People read and write religious texts differently than they do legal ones and differently again than they do biology texts or texts in popular culture like video game strategy guides or fan fiction. And, too, people can read the same text in different ways for different purposes. For example, they can read the Bible as theology, literature, history, or as a self-help guide. They can read a comic book as entertainment, as insider details for expert fans, as cultural critique, or as heroic mythology.

People do not just read and write texts; they *do* things with them, things that often involve more than just reading and writing. They do them with other people – often people who share a socially significant identity – people like fundamentalists, lawyers, biologists, manga otaku, gamers, or whatever. These people often make judgments about who are ‘insiders’ and who are not.

So what determines how one ‘correctly’ reads or writes in a given case? Not what is in one’s head, but, rather, the conventions, norms, values, and practices of different social and cultural groups: lawyers, gamers, historians, religious groups, and schools, for instance, or larger cultural groups like (certain types of) Native Americans, African-Americans, or ‘middle class’ people. (By the way, Wittgenstein’s famous ‘beetle in the box’ argument – Wittgenstein 1953: par. 293 – makes this same point about language and meaning in general.)

So ‘literacy’ is plural: ‘literacies.’ There are many different social, historical, and cultural practices which incorporate literacy, so, too, there are many different ‘literacies’ (legal literacy, gamer literacy, country music literacy, academic literacy of many different types). People do not just read and write in general. They read and write specific sorts of ‘texts’ in specific ways. And these ways are determined by the values and practices of different social and cultural groups.

That is the reason the NLS tended to study not literacy itself directly, but such things as ‘activity systems’ (Engeström 1987); ‘Discourses’ (Gee 2011 [1990], 2014 [1999]); ‘discourse communities’ (Bizzell 1992); ‘cultures’ (Street 1995); ‘communities of practices’ (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998); ‘actor-actant networks’ (Latour 2005); ‘collectives’ (Latour 2004); ‘affinity groups’ or ‘affinity spaces’ (Gee 2004) – the names differed and there are others – but they are all names for ways in which people socioculturally organize themselves to engage in activities. The moral of the NLS was: follow the social, cultural, institutional, and historical organizations of people (whatever you call them) first and then see how literacy is taken up and used in these organizations, along with action, interaction, values, and tools and technologies.

The NLS – thanks to its opposition to traditional cognitive psychology – had little or nothing to say about the mind or cognition. It paid attention mostly to the social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts of literacy. It had little to say about the individual apart from the individual’s ‘membership’ in various social and cultural groups. It, thus, too, had little to say about learning as an individual phenomenon. Learning was treated – if it was treated at all – as changing patterns of participation in ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Critical issues and topics

In the 1980s psychology itself changed. New movements in ‘cognitive science’ and ‘the learning sciences’ began to argue that the mind is furnished not primarily by abstract concepts, but by records of actual experience (e.g., Barsalou 1999a, 1999b; Churchland and Sejnowski 1992; Clark 1989, 1993, 1997; Damasio 1994; Gee 1992; Glenberg 1997; Kolodner 1993, 2006).

Earlier work in cognitive psychology – often based on a metaphor that saw the human mind as like a digital computer – argued that memory (as in a digital computer) was severely limited (Newell and Simon 1972). The newer work on situated cognition argued that human memory is nearly limitless and that we can and do store almost all our actual experiences in our heads and use these experiences to reason about similar experiences or new ones in the future (Churchland 1986, 1989; Churchland and Sejnowski 1992; Gee 2004).

This newer work comes in many different varieties and constitutes a ‘family’ of related but not identical viewpoints. For want of a better name, we might call the family ‘Situating Cognition Studies’ (see also Brown *et al.* 1989; Hawkins 2005; Hutchins 1995; Lave and Wenger 1991). These viewpoints all believe that thinking is connected to, and changes across, actual situations and is not usually a process of applying abstract generalizations, definitions, or rules.

Situating Cognition Studies argues that thinking is tied to *people’s experiences of goal-oriented action in the material and social world*. Furthermore, these experiences are stored in the mind/brain not in terms of abstract concepts, but in something like dynamic images tied to perception both of the world and of our own bodies, internal states, and feelings (Churchland 1986; Damasio 1994; Gee 1992). Thus, consider the following quotes, which give the flavor of what it means to say that cognition is situated in embodied experience:

comprehension is grounded in perceptual simulations that prepare agents for situated action.

(Barsalou 1999a: 77)

to a particular person, the meaning of an object, event, or sentence is what that person can do with the object, event, or sentence.

(Glenberg 1997: 3)

Increasing evidence suggests that perceptual simulation is indeed central to comprehension.

(Barsalou 1999a: 74)

higher intelligence is not a different kind of process from perceptual intelligence.

(Hawkins 2005: 96)

On this viewpoint, humans think, understand, and learn best when they use their prior experiences (so they must have had some) as a guide to prepare themselves for action. The argument is that humans look for patterns in the elements of their experiences in the world and, as they have more and more experiences, find deeper and more subtle patterns, patterns that help predict what might happen in the future when they act to accomplish goals (this is, of course, a dynamic version of schema theory; see Gee 1992).

You can see the mind connecting language to experience in the following simple example. If I say ‘The coffee spilled, go get a mop’ you bring to bear an association with coffee as a liquid, but if I say ‘The coffee spilled, go get a broom’ you bring to bear an association with coffee as grains. Compare also: ‘The coffee spilled, stack it again’ (Clark 1993).

Despite the fact that the NLS had little interest in the mind, there is a natural affinity between Situating Cognition Studies and the NLS. This affinity has, for the most part, not been

much built on from either side. Situated Cognition Studies argues that we think through paying attention to elements of our experiences. While this is a claim about the mind, we can ask ‘What determines what experiences a person has and how they pay attention to those experiences (i.e., how they find patterns in their experiences or what patterns they pay attention to)?’ The answer to this question is this: What determines what experiences a person has and how they pay attention to the elements of these experiences is their participation in the practices of various social and cultural groups. And these practices are mediated by various tools and technologies whether these be literacy or digital media or other tools. And, of course, this was just what the NLS wanted to study.

For example, bird watching clubs and expert bird watchers shape how new bird watchers pay attention to their experience of birds and environments in the field (Gee 1992). And these experiences are mediated in important ways by various tools and technologies such as bird books, scopes, and binoculars. Obviously one experiences a wood duck in a vastly different way when looking at it through a powerful scope than through unaided vision. Furthermore, such technologies allow distinctive social practices to arise that could not otherwise exist (e.g., debating the details of tiny aspects of feathers on hard-to-tell-apart gulls).

Thus, a situated view of the mind leads us to social and cultural groups and their tools and technologies. Both Situated Cognition Studies and the NLS point not to the ‘private mind’ but to the world of experience – and that experience is almost always shared in social and cultural groups – as the core of human learning, thinking, problem solving, and literacy (where literacy is defined as getting and giving meanings using written language). This was the argument I made in my book, *The Social Mind* (1992) at a time when I was trying to integrate learning into the NLS and to link Situated Cognition Studies and the NLS.

Founding works in the NLS

Several founding works helped initiate the NLS. I will briefly discuss three of these here: Ronald and Suzanne Scollon’s *Narrative, Literacy and Face in Interethnic Communication* (1981); Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words* (1983); and Brian Street’s *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984). What I want to make clear in my discussion below of these three founding works – all now ‘old’ – is the ways in which from the outset work in the NLS melded the study of culture, discourse, language, literacy, and often history and politics.

Scollon and Scollon

The Scollons believe that discourse patterns – ways of using language to communicate, whether in speech or writing – in different cultures reflect particular reality sets or world views adopted by these cultures. Discourse patterns are among the strongest expressions of personal and cultural identity. The Scollons argue that changes in a person’s discourse patterns – for example, in acquiring a new form of literacy – may involve change in identity. They provide a detailed study of the discourse practices and world view of Athabaskans in Alaska and northern Canada, and contrast these with the discourse patterns and world view in much of Anglo-Canadian and Anglo-American society (see also Wieder and Pratt 1990).

Literacy as it is practiced in European-based education (“essay-text literacy” in the Scollons’ phrase) is connected to a reality set or world view the Scollons term “modern consciousness.” This reality set is consonant with particular discourse patterns, ones quite different from the discourse patterns used by the Athabaskans. As a result, the acquisition of this sort of literacy is

not simply a matter of learning a new technology; it involves complicity with values, social practices, and ways of knowing that conflict with those of the Athabaskans.

Athabaskans differ at various points from mainstream Canadian and American English speakers in how they engage in discourse. A few examples: (1) Athabaskans have a high degree of respect for the individuality of others and a careful guarding of their own individuality. Thus, they prefer to avoid conversation except when the point of view of all participants is well known. On the other hand, English speakers feel that the main way to get to know the point of view of people is through conversation with them. (2) For Athabaskans, people in subordinate positions do not display, rather they observe the person in the superordinate position. For instance, adults as either parents or teachers are supposed to display abilities and qualities for the child to learn. However, in mainstream American society, children are supposed to show off their abilities for teachers and other adults. (3) The English idea of 'putting your best foot forward' conflicts directly with an Athabaskan taboo. It is normal in situations of unequal status relations, for an English speaker, to display oneself in the best light possible. One will speak highly of the future, as well. It is normal to present a career or life trajectory of success and planning. This English system is very different from the Athabaskan system in which it is considered inappropriate and bad luck to anticipate good luck, to display oneself in a good light, to predict the future, or to speak badly of another's luck.

The Scollons list many other differences, including differences in systems of pausing that ensure that English speakers select most of the topics and do most of the talking in interethnic encounters. The net result of these communication problems is that each group ethnically stereotypes the other. English speakers come to believe that Athabaskans are unsure, aimless, incompetent, and withdrawn. Athabaskans come to believe that English speakers are boastful, sure they can predict the future, careless with luck, and far too talkative.

The Scollons, as I mentioned above, characterize the different discourse practices of Athabaskans and English speakers in terms of two different world views or "forms of consciousness": bush consciousness (connected with survival values in the bush) and modern consciousness. These forms of consciousness are 'reality sets' in the sense that they are cognitive orientations toward the everyday world including learning in that world.

Anglo-Canadian and American mainstream culture has adopted a model of literacy, based on the values of essayist prose style, a model that is highly compatible with modern consciousness. In essayist prose, the important relationships to be signaled are those between sentence and sentence, not those between speakers, nor those between sentence and speaker. For a reader this requires a constant monitoring of grammatical and lexical information. With the heightened emphasis on truth value rather than social or rhetorical conditions comes the necessity to be explicit about logical implications.

A further significant aspect of essayist prose style is the fictionalization of both the audience and the author. The 'reader' of an essayist text is not an ordinary human being, but an idealization, a rational mind formed by the rational body of knowledge of which the essay is a part. By the same token the author is a fiction, since the process of writing and editing essayist texts leads to an effacement of individual and idiosyncratic identity. The Scollons show the relation of these essayist values to modern consciousness by demonstrating that they are variants of the defining properties of the modern consciousness as given by Berger *et al.* (1973).

For the Athabaskan, writing in this essayist mode can constitute a crisis in ethnic identity. To produce an essay would require the Athabaskan to produce a major display, which would be appropriate only if the Athabaskan was in a position of dominance in relation to the audience. But the audience, and the author, are fictionalized in essayist prose and the text becomes decontextualized. This means that a contextualized, social relationship of dominance

is obscured. Where the relationship of the communicants is unknown, the Athabaskan prefers silence.

The paradox of prose for the Athabaskan then is that if it is communication between known author and audience it is contextualized and compatible with Athabaskan values, but not good essayist prose. To the extent that it becomes decontextualized and thus good essayist prose, it becomes uncharacteristic of Athabaskans to seek to communicate. The Athabaskan set of discourse patterns are to a large extent mutually exclusive of the discourse patterns of essayist prose.

Shirley Brice Heath

Shirley Brice Heath's classic *Ways with Words* (1983) is an ethnographic study of the ways in which literacy is embedded in the cultural context of three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas in the U.S.: Roadville, a white working-class community that has been part of mill life for four generations; Trackton, a working-class African-American community whose older generation were brought up on the land, but which now is also connected to mill life and other light industry; and mainstream middle-class urban-oriented African-Americans and whites (see also Heath 1994).

Heath analyzes the ways these different social groups 'take' knowledge from the environment, with particular concern for how 'types of literacy events' are involved in this taking. Literacy events are any event involving print, such as group negotiation of meaning in written texts (e.g., an ad), individuals 'looking things up' in reference books, writing family records in the Bible, and dozens of other types of occasions when books or other written materials are integral to interpretation in an interaction.

Heath interprets these literacy events in relation to the larger sociocultural patterns which they may exemplify or reflect, such as patterns of care-giving roles, uses of space and time, age and sex segregation, and so forth. Since language learning and socialization are two sides of the same coin (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986), Heath concentrates on how children in each community acquire language and literacy in the process of becoming socialized into the norms and values of their communities.

As school-oriented, middle-class parents and their children interact in the pre-school years, adults give their children, through modeling and specific instruction, ways of using language and of taking knowledge from books which seem natural in school and in numerous other institutional settings such as banks, post offices, businesses, or government offices. To exemplify this point, Heath analyzes the bedtime story as an example of a major literacy event in mainstream homes (Heath 1982, all page references below are to this article).

The bedtime story sets patterns of behavior that recur repeatedly through the life of mainstream children and adults at school and in other institutions. In the bedtime story routine, the parent sets up a 'scaffolding' dialogue (Cazden 1979) with the child by asking questions like 'What is X?' and then supplying verbal feedback and a label after the child has vocalized or given a pre-school response. Before the age of two, the child is thus socialized into the 'initiation-reply-evaluation' sequences so typical of classroom lessons (Mehan 1979).

In addition, reading with comprehension involves an internal replaying of the same types of questions adults ask children of bedtime stories. Further, 'What is X?' questions and explanations are replayed in the school setting in learning to pick out topic-sentences, write outlines, and answer standardized tests. Through the bedtime story routine, and similar practices, in which children learn not only how to take meaning from books, but also how to talk about it, children repeatedly practice routines which parallel those of classroom interaction: "Thus, there is a deep

continuity between patterns of socialization and language learning in the home culture and what goes on at school” (56).

Children in both Roadville and Trackton are unsuccessful in school despite the fact that both communities place a high value on success in school. Roadville adults do read books to their children, but they do not extend the habits of literacy events beyond book reading. For instance, they do not, upon seeing an event in the real world, remind children of similar events in a book, or comment on such similarities and differences between book and real events.

The strong religious Fundamentalist bent of Roadville tends to make parents view any fictionalized account of a real event as a lie; reality is better than fiction and they do not encourage the shifting of the context of items and events characteristic of fictionalization and abstraction. They tend to choose books that emphasize nursery rhymes, alphabet learning, and simplified Bible stories. Even the oral stories that Roadville adults tell, and that children model, are grounded in the actual. The sources of these stories are personal experience. They are tales of transgression which make the point of reiterating the expected norms of behavior.

Thus, Roadville children are not practiced in decontextualizing their knowledge or fictionalizing events known to them, shifting them about into other frames. In school, they are rarely able to take knowledge learned in one context and shift it to another; they do not compare two items or events and point out similarities and differences.

Trackton presents a quite different language and social environment. Babies in Trackton, who are almost always held during their waking hours, are constantly in the midst of a rich stream of verbal and nonverbal communication that goes on around them. Aside from Sunday School materials, there are no reading materials in the home just for children; adults do not sit and read to children. Children do, however, constantly interact verbally with peers and adults.

Adults do not ask children ‘What is X?’ questions, but rather analogical questions which call for non-specific comparisons of one item, event, or person with another (e.g., ‘What’s that like?’). Though children can answer such questions, they can rarely name the specific feature or features which make two items or events alike.

Parents do not believe they have a tutoring role, and they do not simplify their language for children, as mainstream parents do, nor do they label items or features of objects in either books or the environment at large. They believe children learn when they are provided with experiences from which they can draw global, rather than analytically specific knowledge. Heath claims that children in Trackton seem to develop connections between situations or items by gestalt patterns, analogs, or general configuration links, not by specification of labels and discrete features in the situation. They do not decontextualize, rather they heavily contextualize nonverbal and verbal language.

Trackton children learn to tell stories by rendering a context and calling on the audience’s participation to join in the imaginative creation of the story. In an environment rich with imaginative talk and verbal play, they must be aggressive in inserting their stories into an ongoing stream of discourse. Imagination and verbal dexterity are encouraged.

Indeed, group negotiation and participation is a prevalent feature of the social group as a whole. Adults read not alone but in a group. For example, someone may read from a brochure on a new car while listeners relate the text’s meaning to their experiences, asking questions and expressing opinions. The group as a whole synthesizes the written text and the associated oral discourse to construct a meaning for the brochure.

At school, most Trackton children not only fail to learn the content of lessons, they also do not adopt the social interactional rules for school literacy events. Print in isolation bears little authority in their world and the kinds of questions asked of reading books are unfamiliar (for example, what-explanations). The children’s abilities to metaphorically link two events or

situations and to recreate scenes are not tapped in the school. In fact, these abilities often cause difficulties, because they enable children to see parallels teachers did not intend, and indeed, may not recognize until the children point them out. By the time in their education, after the elementary years for the most part, when their imaginative skills and verbal dexterity could really pay off, they have failed to gain the necessary written composition skills they would need to translate their analogical skills into a channel teachers could accept.

Heath's characterization of Trackton, Roadville, and Mainstreamers leads us to see not a binary (oral–literate) contrast, but a set of features that cross-classifies the three groups in various ways. The groups share various features with each other group, and differ from them in yet other regards. The Mainstream group and Trackton both value imagination and fictionalization, while Roadville does not; Roadville and Trackton both share a disregard for decontextualization not shared by Mainstreamers. Both Mainstreamers and Roadville, but not Trackton, believe parents have a tutoring role in language and literacy acquisition (they read to their children and ask questions that require labels), but Roadville shares with Trackton, not the Mainstream, an experiential, non-analytic view of learning (children learn by doing and watching, not by having the process broken down into its smallest parts). As we added more groups to the comparison, e.g., the Athabaskans (which share with Trackton a regard for gestalt learning and storage of knowledge, but differ from them in the degree of self-display they allow) we would get more complex cross-classifications.

Heath suggests that in order for a non-Mainstream social group to acquire Mainstream, school-based literacy practices, with all the oral and written language skills this implies, individuals, whether children or adults, must 'recapitulate,' at an appropriate level for their age, of course, the sorts of literacy experiences the Mainstream child has had at home. Unfortunately, schools as currently constituted tend to be good places to practice Mainstream literacy once you have its foundations, but they are often not good places to acquire those foundations (for example, to engage in the sorts of emergent literacy practices common in many middle-class homes).

Heath also suggests that this foundation, when it has not been set at home, can be acquired by apprenticing the individual to a school-based literate person, e.g., the teacher, in a new and expanded role. Heath has had students, at a variety of ages, engage in ethnographic research with teachers, studying, for instance, the uses of language or languages, or of writing and reading, in their own communities. This serves as one way for students to learn and practice in a meaningful context the various sub-skills of essay-text literacy, e.g., asking questions, note-taking, discussion of various points of view, as well as writing discursive prose and revising it with feedback, often from non-present readers.

This approach fits perfectly with Scribner and Cole's (1981) practice account of literacy. And, in line with Street's ideological approach to literacy (see below), it claims that individuals who have not been socialized into the discourse practices that constitute mainstream school-based literacy must eventually be socialized into them if they are ever to acquire them. The component skills of this form of literacy must be practiced, and one cannot practice a skill one has not been exposed to, cannot engage in a social practice one has not been socialized into, which is what most non-mainstream children are expected to do in school. But at the same time we must remember the Scollons' warning that for many social groups this practice may well mean a change of identity and the adoption of a reality set at odds with their own at various points. There is a deep paradox here and there is no facile way of removing it, short of changing our hierarchical social structure and the school systems that by and large perpetuate it.

Brian Street

The work of Scribner and Cole – another founding work in the NLS – calls into question what Brian Street, in his book *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984), calls “the autonomous model” of literacy: the claim that literacy (or schooling for that matter) has cognitive effects apart from the context in which it exists and the uses to which it is put in a given culture. This is also sometimes called ‘the literacy myth.’ Claims for literacy, in particular for essay-text literacy values, whether in speech or writing, are thus ‘ideological.’ They are part of an armory of concepts, conventions, and practices that privilege one social formation as if it were natural, universal, or, at the least, the end point of a normal developmental progression (achieved only by some cultures, thanks either to their intelligence or their technology).

Street proposes, in opposition to the “autonomous model” of literacy, an “ideological model.” The ideological model attempts to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorize it in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded. Literacy – of whatever type – only has consequences as it acts together with a large number of other social factors, including political and economic conditions, social structure, and local ideologies.

Any technology, including writing, is a cultural form, a social product whose shape and influence depend upon prior political and ideological factors. Despite Eric Havelock’s (1976) brilliant characterization of the transition from orality to literacy in ancient Greece, for example, it now appears that the Greek situation has rarely if ever been replicated. The particular social, political, economic, and ideological circumstances in which literacy (of a particular sort) was embedded in Greece explain what happened there. Abstracting literacy from its social setting in order to make claims for literacy as an autonomous force in shaping the mind or a culture simply leads to a dead end. This is so because literacy’s effects always flow from its social and cultural contexts and vary across those contexts.

There is, however, a last refuge for someone who wants to see literacy as an autonomous force. One could claim that essay-text literacy and the uses of language connected with it, lead, if not to general cognitive consequences, to social mobility and success in the society. While this argument may be true, there is precious little evidence that literacy in history or across cultures has had this effect either.

Street discusses, in this regard, Harvey Graff’s (1979) study of the role of literacy in nineteenth-century Canada. While some individuals did gain through the acquisition of literacy, Graff demonstrates that this was not a statistically significant effect and that deprived classes and ethnic groups as a whole were, if anything, further oppressed through literacy. Greater literacy did not correlate with increased equality and democracy nor with better conditions for the working class, but in fact with continuing social stratification.

Graff argues that the teaching of literacy in fact involved a contradiction: illiterates were considered dangerous to the social order, thus they must be made literate; yet the potentialities of reading and writing for an underclass could well be radical and inflammatory. So the framework for the teaching of literacy had to be severely controlled, and this involved specific forms of control of the pedagogic process and specific ideological associations of the literacy being purveyed.

While the workers were led to believe that acquiring literacy was in their benefit, Graff produces statistics that show that in reality this literacy was not advantageous to the poorer groups in terms of either income or power. The extent to which literacy was an advantage or not in relation to job opportunities depended on ethnicity. It was not because you were ‘illiterate’ that you finished up in the worst jobs but because of your background (e.g., being

black or an Irish Catholic rendered literacy much less efficacious than it was for English Protestants).

The story Graff tells can be repeated for many other societies, including Britain and the United States (Donald 1983; Levine 1986). In all these societies literacy served as a socializing tool for the poor, was seen as a possible threat if misused by the poor (for an analysis of their oppression and to make demands for power), and served as a technology for the continued selection of members of one class for the best positions in the society. Yoshio Sugimoto (2003) talks about a parallel situation in Japan, where social class strongly dictates ‘success’ in society, despite the nation’s high literacy rates and the mainstream acceptance of Japan as an egalitarian society with equal opportunities.

The New Literacies Studies

The NLS argued that written language was a technology for giving and getting meaning. In turn, what written language meant was a matter determined by the social, cultural, historical, and institutional practices of different groups of people.

A related and slightly later movement, which we can call ‘The New Literacies Studies,’ simply carries over the NLS argument about written language to new digital technologies. By the way, ‘The New Literacies Studies’ is parsed grammatically differently than ‘the New Literacy Studies.’ The NLS was about studying literacy in a new way. ‘The New Literacies Studies’ is about studying new types of literacy beyond print literacy, especially ‘digital literacies’ and literacy practices embedded in popular culture.

The New Literacies Studies views different digital tools as technologies for giving and getting meaning, just like language (Alvermann *et al.* 1999; Buckingham 2003, 2007; Coiro *et al.* 2008; Gee 2004, 2013; Hobbs 1997; Jenkins 2006; Kist 2004; Knobel and Lankshear 2007; Kress 2003; Lankshear 1997; Lankshear and Knobel 2006; New London Group 1996). Like the NLS, the New Literacies Studies also argues that the meanings to which these technologies give rise are determined by the social, cultural, historical, and institutional practices of different groups of people. And, as with the NLS, these practices almost always involve more than just using a digital tool – they involve, as well, ways of acting, interacting, valuing, believing, and knowing, as well as often using other sorts of tools and technologies, including very often oral and written language.

Just as the NLS wanted to talk about different literacies in the plural – that is, different ways of using written language within different sorts of sociocultural practices – so, too, the New Literacies Studies wants to talk about different ‘digital literacies’ – that is, different ways of using digital tools within different sorts of sociocultural practices. In this sense, the New Literacies Studies is a natural offshoot of the NLS, though the two fields do not contain just the same people by any means.

The New Literacies Studies has had an important historical relationship with the NLS, from which it partly stems.

Future directions

I have concentrated in this chapter on three founding documents in the NLS to give readers a feel for the basic ideas and approaches that formed the NLS. There are, of course, other equally important pieces of early work I could have surveyed. And, too, the work I have surveyed is now dated, though it still incorporates the core arguments for and approaches to literacy as social and cultural which are the foundations of the NLS.

For another discussion of the foundations of the NLS and some more current applications see Hull and Schultz (2001). Current work has continued along the lines of the foundational work I have surveyed (e.g., Gee 2011; Larson and Marsh 2005; Pahl and Rowsell 2005, 2006), though today NLS work is commonly combined with the New Literacies Studies to incorporate new forms of literacy, forms which often use not just (or even) the technology of print but digital media (e.g., Gee 2004; Knobel and Lankshear 2007).

I have also pointed out the failures of the NLS to deal more broadly with learning and the mind beyond ‘communities of practice.’ Early work sometimes verged on generalizations about groups that today sound like they are verging on stereotypes. These limitations meant, in practice, that the NLS sometimes had a hard time intervening in some of the core controversies around learning in school that arose in the post-NCLB (No Child Left Behind) era and in contemporary work on situated and embodied cognition. Work in the New Literacies Studies has focused more on changing, negotiated, contested, and hybrid social identities and social positioning and not just ‘groups’ with clear borders (Gee 2000a; Gee and Hayes 2010, 2011; Jenkins *et al.* 2006; Lankshear 1997; Shirky 2008). This has, in some respects, mitigated some of the earlier rigidities in NLS work.

Note

- 1 This paper discusses ideas more fully developed in Gee (2010, 2011 [1990], and 2012).

Related topics

Literacy, Learning, Technology, Sociolinguistics.

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3

POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES TO LITERACY

Understanding the ‘Other’

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It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others.

(Du Bois 1903)

I was raised in Pakistan where I attended a convent school run by missionaries. The mornings would begin with a little prayer in English and would be led by a nun “Oh my Lord I offer thee all my thoughts, words, actions, joys and sufferings for this day...” This was immediately followed by a group chant of the national anthem in Urdu. My schooling included narratives of British colonialization, the bloody war of independence, classics of Western literature, accompanied by sermons on the basics of Islam and the virtues of being a Muslim. My education was a faithful reflection of the ‘two nation theory.’ These experiences were complemented by a multilingual educational model and an introduction to other scripts of the world, which meant Persian and Arabic. I grew up hearing stories of my grandparents crossing the borders of India and Pakistan on camelback and train to begin a new life. They left behind their families and homes in the region of Uttar Pradesh and never went back. These were tales of spirituality and sacrifice. I learned very early on to navigate these spaces deliberately and carefully...

Introduction: definition and context

As I write this chapter I am mindful of the precarious nature of human existence. Russia has invaded Crimea in an attempt to exert cultural dominance. Violence is rife in Syria, with many people finding themselves displaced refugees. Youth unemployment is a new norm in many parts of Europe. Civil unrest and conflict continues in the Middle East. I am reminded of my own experiences across various continents and ask readers to consider two key questions: What does literacy mean in a postcolonial context? And how might we engage with new generations to offer them more sustainable and socially just lives and futures?

Charles Taylor's (2004) concept of modern social imaginaries provides a useful starting point. He describes social imaginaries as theories about how the social world operates. Yet theories can only become parts of our daily lives when they are incorporated into everyday life and cultural

practice. As Taylor states, “the social imaginaries describe ideas that have been taken up by entire societies to shape the way they view themselves and thereby act in the world” (p. 107).

My focus in this chapter is on the social imaginaries at play in postcolonial worlds. What theories, everyday practices and forms of life have been so ingrained that we no longer notice their impacts on our lives? What effect do these social imaginaries have on our stances toward different cultures, and how does this shape the way people are educated and introduced to cultures? My argument here is that the social imaginaries in the field of education need to be re-examined and re-grounded. The focus of the teaching of critical literacy is to generate alternatives to dominant and taken-for-granted social imaginaries.

Critical literacy reflects a fundamentally different view of knowledge and learning than has been seen in literacy instruction in the past. Textual meaning is reframed in the context of social, historical and power relations. It emphasizes the importance of reading the world as well as the word (Freire 1983 [1970]) and serves as a means of creating a fairer and more just society for all people regardless of race, culture, class, religion, sexual orientation, gender or language.

The concept of literacy had, for many decades, centered on psychologically defined writing and reading skills; in short, the ability to recognize, recall and reproduce information in the manner it was presented, as well as the ability to comprehend the language of the educational institution so that an individual could read, write and speak sufficiently to recognize and comply with institutional and social conventions governing work, consumption, leisure and citizenship.

Luke (2004: 21) argues that,

As recently as a decade ago, the term ‘critical’ referred to higher order reading comprehension and sophisticated personal response to literature. Today it refers to the diversity of approaches to textual practice ... in relation to what can be said and done about texts and discourses, identities, histories, and about ... institutions.

To be critically literate is to be able to do more than produce and represent information in the same form it was absorbed. The aim is the development of human capacity to use texts to analyze and transform social relations and material conditions. Yet various approaches to critical literacy are inevitably confronted with the challenge of normativity: Of whose reading or rewriting of a text will count, of whose version of the world will count and on what grounds.

Where does critical literacy come into play in a postcolonial context? More importantly, what is considered postcolonial? In simple terms, postcolonialism was constituted in the late twentieth century as a political and theoretical position by scholars and activists throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas. It manifests itself as ‘speaking back’ to European colonial powers, often appropriating and reframing the language, intellect and strategies of the colonizer (Canagarajah 1997). European colonization of Asia, the Americas, Africa, the Pacific Islands and the Middle East was rationalized in terms of prevailing discourses that viewed non-Western people as “inferior, child-like or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves (despite having done so perfectly well for millennia), and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own interests” (Young 2003: 2). In this sense, our discussion of critical literacy begins from rudimentary questions of the colonized toward colonial institutional doctrines and cultural practices. It reflects a desire to deconstruct and critique the social imaginaries of colonialism and turn toward more inclusive epistemological, political and aesthetic strategies that begin from the assumption of multiple cultures and multiple viewpoints.

Paulo Freire’s model of critical pedagogy, accordingly, stands as remarkable ‘point of decolonization’ theorizing (Luke 2004). Freire (1983 [1970]) made the case that literacy was a potential tool for problematizing, critiquing and transforming the relations between

colonializing subjects and colonized objects, between ‘oppressors’ and ‘oppressed.’ This approach to critical literacy, then, was conceived by Freire as a strategy of decolonizing human subjects and for the pursuit of new social imaginaries.

I have recently been exploring how and where Islam might figure in these models of critical literacy through a reengagement with the works of fourteenth-century philosopher Ibn Khaldun. Four hundred years before Auguste Comte’s ‘invention’ of sociology, Ibn Khaldun unveiled his ‘science of culture’ (Katsiaficas 1999). Malay sociologist Alatas (2011) describes this work as a progenitor of sociological thought: Khaldun focused on group identity and the place of an individual. My view is that Muslim philosophy might provide a new dimension in our thinking about literacy in postcolonial contexts.

Ibn Khaldun’s Aristotelian typology attends to group feeling and spiritual values. This is one reason why his understanding of human beings is appropriate to a creative synthesis of tradition and modernity: “Today it is cultures and identities that are the subjects (and objects) of history; it is groups – not gods or individuals – that produce and situate our future” (Katsiaficas 1999: 57). George Katsiaficas further explains this perspective by giving the example of the May 1968 revolt in France. According to him it is in such moments of crisis that individuals come together and create a new group feeling that is not tribal or national but “a newly emergent species of self-consciousness” (p. 56). Keeping in mind Khaldun’s idea of a synthesized tradition and modernity, we might refocus critical literacy programs to encompass the following: Do changing media images, political statements, news reports, internet websites, laws, workplace language and everyday face to face talk, have material effect upon people’s lives, work and quality of social relationships, as well as access to and use of traditional cultural resources? How do we successfully create a synthesis of tradition and modernity while trying to sort through the complexities of a text-saturated environment? In what way can deconstruction of these texts be facilitated to successfully create a combination of cultural traditions and emergent social and cultural conditions?

Teaching and learning can focus on multiple approaches to a topic, improving understanding of various viewpoints and appreciating contributions of information that may be from a source that is parallel or perpendicular to that which is considered the dominant view. Dominant cultures typically set the grounds for normative ideologies and educational frameworks, and the subordinated, diasporic cultures offer differing norms and epistemological frameworks. An integrative approach to learning would encompass all cultures and viewpoints, allowing for cultural exchange rather than domination.

As well, critical literacy facilitates the self-examination of a culture in an attempt to come to a deeper knowledge of why a culture is the way it is, its histories, practices and structures of belief. To critique a culture outside of dominant and taken-for-granted social imaginaries is a focal goal of critical literacy. In this way, the approach can be enlisted as part of a broader postcolonial educational project of cultural understanding and exchange: *not* an assimilation of culture, but an integration of ideas, values and viewpoints, essentially blending the precepts of tradition with the concepts of the modern, as Khaldun proposed.

To date, critical literacy education has been successfully implemented with disengaged, minority youth who are already turned away from traditional print literacy pathways (Morrell 2006), and with adults who have been politically or economically marginalized (Hull 2008). As mentioned in Katsiaficas (1999: 57) “as we destroy ... our own natural identities, our problems increasingly demand the reformulation of first principles.” It would therefore make sense that those individuals with diasporic or marginalized social positions are actually well positioned to embrace an approach to literacy that entails the reformation of dominant social imaginaries. This applies, most obviously, to culturally and economically marginal immigrant communities,

which at once are attempting to engage with and understand the texts and messages of dominant cultures, while retaining and using traditional values, cultural and social practices. This attempt to conjoin originary and adopted culture is a potential nodal point for the development of a critical literacy.

The following vignette about an Easter egg exemplifies the need for critical literacy, as well as the ways in which it might facilitate an improved enmeshing of the traditional and the modern social imaginaries.

“Mum, look what I got for you from school,” said my seven-year-old daughter, as she entered the house excitedly. She shoved an oval object into my hand as she spoke. I probably looked a little lost and she added, impatiently: “Mum, it’s an Easter Egg.”

On another occasion, when I went to pick up my younger daughter from preschool around the same time as the arrival of Maria’s egg, her teacher arrived at the door wearing rabbit ears. This may not seem like such an unusual occurrence in most Canadian households, however having immigrated to Canada almost ten years ago with my husband, these Western traditions jump out at me as strange. What is the meaning behind the ears, and the painted eggs? None of this is explained to my young daughters, whose understanding of this holiday encompasses more or less that it involves art and candy.

There is an unspoken agreement that to understand the meaning behind the actions in Anglo-European, Christian culture is to be unceremoniously part of an inclusive group of people who are already integrated into the culture. To be a newcomer to this group is a difficult place to inhabit: I didn’t ask the teacher about the rabbit ears. She may have welcomed such a question with open arms. She may have had much to say about such matters, much knowledge to impart, many questions to ask. Shall I move outwards toward asking and engaging and risk the bewildered stares? Or should I just forgo for now?

As an immigrant attempting to enter into the life of a dominant culture other than my own, my family and I face an interesting reality. Asking for an articulation of these ‘traditions’ is precisely a sign of ‘not belonging.’ The answers to these questions: ‘It’s Easter’ or ‘This is what we do’ or ‘You know? Red and green? Christmas?’ are fully adequate answers from within the condition of belonging, and an immigrant voice from outside of that sphere sounds almost inevitably ‘out of place.’

This is precarious because one’s own culture remains the culture of one’s origin, even though we are engaged with Canadian everyday life, work and institutions. At the same time, white Anglo-Saxon culture in North America seems premised on a strange and silent distance from its own ancestral roots. It seems that the strangest and most estranged thing in Canada is not, for example, Islam or Pakistan, but those silent yet predominant things that ‘go without saying.’

In its most basic form, literacy encompasses the ability to read and write; however in this context, literacy is the ability to fluently understand and question that which is taught; to critically analyze educational norms and assumptions in order to deepen understanding of a given cultural narrative. In this case, Maria does not understand the significance or symbolism of the Easter egg. She accepts these symbols and rituals simply because, like so many other aspects of a dominant culture, to question is to betray naiveté, and to show naiveté is to

demonstrate that one is not a native of the dominant culture (Jardine and Naqvi 2008). Cultural assimilation is viewed as a necessity in order to be involved and be accepted in the culture that has precedence over others. Khaldun would argue however, that cultural assimilation is not the same as pursuing group values and integration of tradition and modernity. Assimilation entails nothing less than the annihilation of the 'Other' (Giroux 1992); the submission of the subordinated to the dominant. This is not the path to be pursued. Rather, a path of critical analysis of points where tradition and modernity can mesh into a new social imaginary.

Allan Luke (2005) suggests approaches to critical literacy have the potential to enable postcolonial people to access a new and different form of capital. By his account, critical capital sets the grounds for individuals to deconstruct and critique the narratives of dominant cultures. Critical literacy, then, is one way in which to facilitate understanding through mindful exchange between dominant and subordinate cultures, exploring the possibilities of amalgamation instead of assimilation.

Historical perspectives

In the last two decades there has been an abundance of qualitative ethnographic research that underlines the importance of understanding social contexts of literacy. As well, there has been a stronger focus on documenting everyday cultural practices associated with consuming and producing texts. The emergence of multimodal approaches to literacy teaching and learning provide evidence that diverse and new media enable varying approaches to learning beyond traditional print pathways. However, perhaps one of the most important developments has been acknowledgement of the role that power plays in how literacy is understood and consumed (Barton *et al.* 2000; Dyson 1997; Gee 1996; Kress 2000; Prinsloo and Breier 1996; Street 1984). Power is defined in this context as differences in access to and the capacity to mobilize cultural, economic, social and material resources between dominant and subordinated cultures. Through institutions like governments, corporations and, ultimately, schools – dominant cultures shape how literacy is produced. Some versions of the social imaginary are included, others excluded. This is precisely what needs to be questioned.

One of the strongest formative ideas in the field has been attributed to postcolonial philosopher and critic Homi Bhabha (1999). Bhabha highlights the importance of a reformulated cultural identity in postcolonial societies. He specifically uses the term "third space" to define interstices between colliding cultures, areas where new and intriguing developments can take place. In this "in-between" space, the collision of cultural traditions and ways of knowing allow new cultural identities to be formed, reformed, in a constant state of becoming. In terms of critical literacy, we might envision the third space as the pedagogic setting where new social imaginaries can be developed. Students from diasporic or migrant cultures by definition work in classrooms from 'Other' epistemic perspectives and cultural standpoints, working in 'contact' and exchange with the dominant narratives and practices of textbooks and classroom talk. However, this cultural reappropriation is only possible if the student truly integrates all aspects of their multicultural world, following Khaldun's suggestion of traditional and modern integration.

What is to be done to facilitate cultural integration? Part of the task is to redefine culture from models affiliated with segregation and difference. According to Bhabha (1990), postcolonial contexts generate unique forms of interdependence and integration, specifically "mimicry" – deliberately ironic and critical appropriations of dominant cultural forms and practices, and "hybridity," the blending of colonial and indigenous cultures into new, postcolonial forms and practices. Following Bhabha, perhaps it is not integration per se that is the goal, but the

development of a space where communication and understanding can happen. Ted Aoki (2005 [1979]) used the metaphor of a bridge to illustrate this idea: a place where cultures meet, but do not necessarily cross one into the other.

Granted, as mentioned above, critical literacy does not always lead to cultural enlightenment; as often as not the most literate individuals can also be the most close-minded. However, who is to challenge these close-minded values without similar literate development? Critical literacy provides individuals with a knowledge base as well as a means of evaluating power structures (equities and inequities) within textual and cultural practices (Shor 1999). One of the most essential steps in this analyzing what necessitates change is being able to determine the significance of cultural contributions, from which point cultural interdependence and integration is a natural progression. In the example of Maria's egg, Easter presents an exemplary moment for questions to be asked and cultures to be shared. Teachers must be able to facilitate discussion of not only who might celebrate Easter, but why it is celebrated; and for those who do not traditionally celebrate Easter, what they might do instead. A typical comparison is made between the Christian holiday of Christmas and the Muslim holiday of Eid. The ability to compare and contrast various cultural traditions and activities allows students, as well as teachers, to gain deeper insight into cultures that are not their own. This in turn begins the process of what Edward Said (2001) referred to as "interdependence."

Cultures cannot co-exist without learning to be interdependent, without learning to share experiences and learn from each other. Pratt (1998) discusses the idea of negotiating the contact of cultures. This allows for the development of interdependence in the sense that people may use their cultural counterparts as a reference point for new experiences. Returning to Maria's story, it is apparent that had Maria received a more in-depth explanation of the story of Easter, she would be able to use that knowledge in future interaction with those individuals of Judeo-Christian background. Conversely, Maria's schoolmates could use her knowledge of Islamic traditions as a reference point for comparative analysis. These kinds of pedagogic moves would initiate the processes described by Bhabha (1999), providing students with practical curricular opportunities to understand their own culture from the perspective of the other. In this regard, the postcolonial approach to critical literacy envisioned here would provide a critical and comparative pedagogy that would encourage cultural exchange and analysis.

Critical issues and topics

Giroux (1992: 1) argues that literacy is not a finite educational goal or outcome, but it is:

an enabling condition for forms of citizenship, in which members of dominant and subordinate groups are offered subject-positions that address what it means to live in a society in which they have the opportunity to shape history in emancipatory terms, rather than be the subject or object of its oppressive and colonizing practices.

In this way, Giroux suggests that to be literate is to question the very nature of power relations between dominant and subordinate cultures. The instance of Maria's egg is an indicative example of the dominant culture exerting its influence on a subordinate culture; this subtle domination is unmarked and unremarkable, taken as 'natural' by teachers and students. It does not occur to Maria to question the relevance of the actions in which she is partaking, as this would demonstrate a naiveté about the culture that she is tasked with entering through the portal of public schooling. Yet in multicultural and postcolonial state educational systems, we

can ask: Why should it be permissible for one culture to monopolize the instruction and development of literacy, while simultaneously neglecting to provide explanations of the relevance of their own cultural practices?

Giroux further suggests that the idea of being literate is much more complicated than the meaning it implies in the colloquial usage of the term. He argues that to be called *literate* means to “undertake a dialogue with the multiple languages, discourses, and texts of others who speak from different histories, locations, and experiences” (1992: 2). He suggests that to explore complete literacy, an individual must understand from where the information is coming, what the background is, and how someone who is not a native to the dominant culture might interpret this information. Thus, in order to achieve complete literacy, there must be a desire to create a new social imaginary including all aspects of dominant and subordinate cultures.

In an official statement, the Alberta Education system summarizes its goals: “Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to respect, support and collaborate with others” (Alberta Education 2006: 87). What follows is an example of this pursuit of student integration through respect, support and collaboration. Fatima’s story is an example of literacy development through an understanding of the need for integration of various and differing cultures.

Fatima is a student in the teacher education program at the University of Calgary. Her parents emigrated from Pakistan in the 1970s and have lived in Alberta since that time. Fatima was born and raised in Calgary. She grew up speaking Urdu at home and English in school. Fatima’s parents speak very little English. Her father drives a cab in Calgary and her mother is a housewife. She attended a neighborhood elementary and secondary school. During those years her mother and father rarely came to any school meetings. She recalls parent teacher interviews as being embarrassing and quiet where her parents tried to understand what the teacher said to them. She would often translate for them. Fatima decided early in her life that she wanted to become a teacher. As she makes her way through the program she finds herself focusing on mainstream literacy instruction and empowerment strategies for minority groups. In her work as a student teacher she used dual language books with Grade 1 students and invited parents to read to the children in their mother tongue. She shared her thoughts on the process:

These books have truly empowered some of the parents ... and despite their language barrier they are welcome to be involved in the school environment. If I compare that experience to my own experience growing up I feel that often times the language barrier disconnected my own parents from my school. What I would want to say to that is, my parents know just as much as every other parent, however they were just not able to communicate.

Fatima’s story is representative of the intention and purpose with which anyone embarks on a literary endeavor; the journey itself is of significant importance, because it allows the individual to develop an appreciation for the culture they are entering, rather than just entering in without substantial background. Following Giroux, we can conceptualize her literacy as a negotiated process of cultural engagement with the ‘Other,’ as against a finite set of skills or achievements. Not unlike the questions raised by Maria’s egg, the process of literacy can cause an individual

to examine their culture on a deeper level than simply the acts, which can be taken for granted. Had questions been asked about Maria's egg, the teacher might have had many great explanations that would have developed Maria's understanding. By posing questions that cause an individual to reflect, often the dominant culture is forced to come to a deeper understanding of itself, changing the epistemological and procedural nature of literacy.

When Giroux discusses the concept of 'otherness,' he is suggesting that the current methods of teaching literacy focus so unproblematically on the removal of the 'otherness,' presenting the argument that "cultural power play is at work latently if not manifest, at all points with the 'inclusion and exclusion, of the 'other'" (1992: 7). This academic imbalance and the equation of the dominant history as the 'truth,' and the dominant's form of life as the ultimately civilized form of society, is problematic and might also be viewed as neocolonialism. If the 'otherness' is to subside to a reasonable extent, with the possibility of multiple truths and forms of knowledge, the educational context must be expanded to include more than one approach to culture, and accept more than one culture as having possible contributions to learning.

Cummins (2012: 2, original emphasis) discusses the steps necessary to establish a culture of multiple literacies: "two key variables have been neglected and/or misinterpreted not just by policy-makers but also by many researchers; (a) *literacy engagement*, (b) *identity affirmation*. Both are critical for... students' academic success but are totally absent from current policy discussions."

Cummins (2012) presents the necessity of identity affirmation first and foremost, as it is a keystone for literacy engagement; "Students who come from social groups whose identities (culture, language, religion, etc.) have been devalued in the wider society tend to experience disproportionate academic failure" (Ogbu 1992: 8).

This point on valuing identity relates to Giroux, suggesting the development of an 'Other' arrives due to devaluation of the subordinate culture by the dominate. If a student feels justified in their feeling justified (or confident) in expressing his/her cultural identity in relation to others who may have different identities and feels accepted for who they are, they are more likely to engage in their learning process (Cummins and Early 2011). Fatima's story is a clear example that allowing individuals to explore the potential contributions of their culture encourages critical engagement between cultures, and particularly offers a way to critique the distinctions between dominant and subordinate cultures. This engagement sets the grounds for a critical literacy, defined by students' acceptance of not only their own diverse cultural heritage, but also the cultural heritage of their peers. Critical literacy in this sense then, is the ability to understand the contributions of various cultures and how these contributions directly or indirectly affect other cultures that come into contact with each other.

Current contributions and research

Rather than attempt to eliminate the 'other,' both the dominant and the subordinate cultures should make efforts to recognize that the other has much to offer in terms of new points of view and ways of knowing. In other words, interactivity and dynamism lead to recognition of contributions to civil society. By acknowledging that another culture has useful and unique experiences affecting the way they view society, cultural differences can begin to be seen less as differences, and more as complementary aspects (Naqvi 2008).

Another key feature of cultural awareness is that it must be applied by a culture to its own self. An example of this is seen in the story of Maria's egg. She received the egg and naturally does not understand the significance, however nowhere in the story does the teacher, who is supposedly a member of the 'egg culture,' divulge the meaning behind the act. Oftentimes, a

culture does not fully recognize its own contributions to society, or its own building blocks of existence. Essentially, erasure with the passage of time has made destitute the meaning of cultural traditions. This creates a starved culture, a culture that fails to understand where its traditions came from; the acts do not relate to the meaning. Only by understanding their origin culture can individuals hope to divulge their heritage in a manner that provides material sufficient to facilitate recognition, understanding and appreciation in a multicultural community. Essentially, an understanding of one's own culture is embracing the idea that each individual carries a sense of more than one culture in terms of their identity. It also entails acknowledging that a self can be made up of more than one cultural background, and that all cultural histories contribute to the development of an identity.

Recommendations for practice

Critical literacy in a postcolonial context is a process that is no small undertaking. The current misunderstandings associated with lack of knowledge-sharing between the dominant and subordinate cultures can be effectively mediated by implementing the process outlined in the community figure. Culturally speaking, the concept of avoiding 'otherness,' as defined by Giroux, must now be applied to the newest wave of immigration changes, so that the dominant culture can learn from historical examples and create a larger effort to recognize these new cultures. Education about diverse cultures and interculturality is necessary in order to bring about the cultural integration. In order to understand what needs to develop educationally, it is important to review the previous models used to measure literacy success. As mentioned by Cummins, students must feel encouraged to ask questions concerning multiculturalism and not feel constrained by standardized methods of teaching.

How can we promote critical literacy in all of our classrooms?

A useful way to initiate a critically literate populace from a young age is to encourage critical questioning, to introduce texts that express alternative or marginalized points of view, as well as to demonstrate promotion of active social justice. When young people are encouraged to analyze their surroundings and the content in which they are being instructed, they begin to form their own opinions and texts that will break the barriers that deny both the realities of difference and the possibilities for bridging those differences and begin to balance power relations between the dominant and subordinate cultures. Young people develop a basic knowledge about immigrant cultures, allowing them to question and acquire knowledge about these groups as it applies toward recognition of cultural diversity. The point here is that it is not that some literacy teaching methods work and others do not. They all work to shape and construct different literate repertoires in classrooms. They all have outcomes visible in practices and motivation. However, integration of a more critical standpoint, with more opportunities for question making and answering, will provide classrooms that are open-minded and instructive in culture relations, rather than continuing to promote cultural practice that has been in place since colonialism.

The monocultural model of education mentioned by Cummins places great emphasis on the individual learner's cognitive and behavioral performance, rather than the achievements of community, culture or cohort (Luke 2014). This detracts from students' ability to recognize diversity, multiculturalism and civil contributions of other cultures, in turn lessening their acquisition of basic knowledge about immigrant groups. Placing performance virtue as the object of analysis and accountability drive curriculum development to focus on measurable

aspects of education, leading to stock testing. The clear focus through this method is quantifiable contributions to an established market of tangible business (Luke 2014). While this is by no means an expressly negative endeavor, it does ignore the more intangible but no less important developments in the areas of community and culture. Is it not equally important for individuals to understand all facets of the community to which they are contributing, rather than simply becoming another gear in the machine of enterprise? Developing an understanding of culture and the way it shapes community will only serve to enhance. Supporting those quantifiable measures of literacy with the intangible measures of community and culture will create well-rounded individuals who are able to achieve success in more ways than simply mastery of the dominant culture.

Literacy, specifically language instruction, could change the way culture is viewed (Luke 2004). Language instruction can focus on incorporating studies on various subordinate cultures, teaching these studies in the language of the dominant culture. Or, vice versa, the subordinate culture can learn about the dominant culture, but in the language that is not the dominant. For example, studying Islam, but in English, incorporates multicultural aspects. This allows individuals to access other people's funds of knowledge and realize greater education that may not have been experienced otherwise. Incorporation of ways of learning that recognize diversity of cultures and how those are experienced, and the nurturing of communication that allows for experiences of recognition and apprehension of the "other," is distinctly different from the unilateral, behaviorist model that has been in place for decades. In order to initiate such a model, and truly pursue critical literacy, all aspects of the curriculum must be analyzed and reformed to include multilingual, diverse and intercultural learning techniques. In his article, Luke (forthcoming) details areas for analysis and change:

- textbooks and student learning materials
- syllabus
- teacher's guidebooks, in-service materials and guidelines
- classroom interaction
- assessment/evaluation

Once these areas begin to incorporate the necessary cultural overlaps and integrations, true critical literacy can begin to be achieved, and rather than observe a solely tangible measurement of literacy, the classroom will become an area of multicultural exploration.

In the postcolonial context, cultural literacy teaching has been one of the last aspects to move forward into a new era, dispensing with antiquated ideas of literacy as being circled by and taught from the viewpoint of the dominant culture, a perspective that is not in line with the interculturality present in today's society. With rapid changes in demographics worldwide, educational contexts face the challenge of working with ethnically and culturally diverse students and families. The following questions must be answered to begin the process of developing multiliteracies which enable the capability to communicate both within and across cultural differences:

- How do we engage children from various backgrounds in mainstream schooling?
- How should 'identity and difference' be acknowledged in our everyday work with educational institutions?
- What kinds of literacy-engagement techniques can be effective in creating a cohesive and collaborative community?

- In what combinations and emphases do these techniques work, with specific communities of students?
- In what ways do these literacy pursuits prepare students for life experience, politically, ideologically and practically?

Conclusion

From Giroux's concept of the 'other,' to Taylor's thoughts on social imaginaries, from Luke's premises of post-postcolonialism to Khaldun's tradition and modernity; all of these address the issue of where a subordinate culture stands in a dominant culture world. Where does the immigrant find them self in the world of western culture?

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others.

(Du Bois 1903)

Clearly, to be part of the subordinate is to find within oneself a duality of culture; the roots of one's own traditions and values, alongside the new, foreign entities of the culture into which one is entering. The goal is to maintain awareness of this dual consciousness, but in a way that integrates the selves. Personal cultural integration leads to integration on a larger community level. A projection of this successful dual consciousness can be shared in such a way that people cannot help but notice the unique contributions presented by the existence of diverse cultures and languages. Immigrant culture may be defined by its duality, however in this multicultural, postcolonial age perhaps duality of culture is the path to be taken since, after all, we all have a story; it is simply how we live that story that defines who we are.

Acknowledgements

This piece is dedicated to all immigrant children. May they find empowerment in their 'double-consciousness' and live their lives fully.

Related topics

Critical Literacy, Postcolonialism, Cultural Studies, Identity, Multiculturalism.

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4

CRITICAL LITERACY EDUCATION

A kaleidoscopic view of the field

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Introduction

One might think that in an era of accountability, standards based reform, and shrinking education budgets that critical literacy education would be in danger. Yet, it appears as if these times have created urgency for educators to pry open spaces for inquiry into power and discourses. Indeed, in the past twenty years, critical literacy education has not only been sustained but has flourished around the world. Critical literacy refers to the practice of using technologies (from print to digital technologies) to analyze, critique, and redesign structures that influence daily life. The potential of critical literacy is reflected in the diversity of topics, methodologies, and educational levels represented in the field.

In this chapter, we present a kaleidoscopic view of critical literacy scholarship from 1990–2012, foregrounding the discourses of and in critical literacy education from different angles and perspectives. We begin with an overview of widely recognized approaches. Next, we discuss the methods used to generate our reading of the field. We share the broad contours of a review of critical literacy scholarship from 1990–2012, providing a macro-view of the field. We then narrow the focus to scholarship published between 2010–2012 to present a snapshot of current trends. Honing in on 2012, we provide a case study of the enactments, methodologies, and influential scholarship from a year-at-a-glance. Finally, we discuss these contributions and identify directions ripe for future research.

Pedagogical and theoretical approaches

Much has been written about the intellectual roots of critical literacy (e.g., Comber 2012; Freebody and Freiberg 2011; Janks 2010; Luke 2012; Morrell 2008). Critical literacy scholarship has been influenced by social linguistics and literacies (Barton *et al.* 1999; Street 1985); critical language awareness and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992; Janks 2001); sociologies of literacy (Luke 1988; Shannon 1989); and early studies of language, power, and representation (Dyson 1993; Gregory and Williams 2000). Critical literacy is clearly an evolving concept that takes on the flavor of the context in which it is practiced. By its very nature, critical literacy

resists being defined and categorized. Yet, at this point in the history of practice, well-formed traditions exist and are steadily drawn upon.

Reading the word and the world

Paulo Freire engaged disenfranchised adult literacy learners in Brazil in the process of reading the *word* and the *world* (Freire and Macedo 1987). According to Freire (1993 [1970]), as people name their experiences of being exploited (e.g., as workers, as women) and link these stories with grapho-phonetic representations (moving from oral to written narratives), they develop *conscientization*, or the unearthing of social contradictions that are the cause of their exploitation. They can then learn how to act against this oppression. This process has been referred to as a ‘problem-posing/problem-solving’ model of education. Both teacher and student are learners, expanding in their knowledge through dialogue and mutual respect. This approach has been taken up in other parts of the world, especially during times when groups of people are economically and politically repressed (e.g., Nicaraguan literacy campaign, the Citizenship schools in the United States). Researchers and educators like Ira Shor, Donaldo Macedo, Ernest Morrell, Antonia Darder, and Peter McLaren have worked to bring Freirean-inspired praxis into communities, schools, and classrooms. Examples of empirical work drawing on a Freirean model of critical literacy include Bartlett (2005), Desai and Marsh (2005), Morrell (2009), Raja (2005), and Yosso (2002).

The four resources model

One criticism waged against critical literacy is that it fails to address the needs of learners as they are developing as readers and writers. Stemming from the Australian context, Freebody and Luke (1990) developed an approach that responds to this critique. The four resources model attends to both cognitive and social dimensions of literacy learning and includes four roles that are “necessary but not sufficient sets of social practices requisite for critical literacy” (Luke 2000: 454). *Code breakers* decode and encode written texts using sound/symbol relationships, spelling and structural patterns, and conventions. *Text participants* combine text with personal knowledge and experiences in order to design and construct meaning. *Text users* understand and act upon the different functions of text across various contexts and semiotic systems. *Text analysts and critics* name the ideological aspects of text, while critiquing and transforming texts. Luke (2000: 454) asserts that the four elements are not developmental, stating, “In classrooms, lessons can address these different dimensions simultaneously at the earliest stages of literacy education.” This model has been integrated into policy and curriculum in Australia. Dooley (2009), Iyer (2007), Luke *et al.* (2011), O’Brien (1994) and Rush (2004) are examples of scholarship that has drawn on the four resources model of critical literacy.

Domination, access, diversity, and design

Hilary Janks (2000, 2010) developed a critical literacy framework in response to the struggles against Apartheid in South Africa. She imagined four concepts central to understanding language and power: *domination*, *access*, *diversity*, and *design*. This framework draws on Fairclough’s (1992) notion of critical language awareness, emphasizing the analysis of texts to determine the choices made by the writer/speaker. *Domination* refers to the idea that discourse plays an important role in the maintenance of power relationships. *Access* focuses on providing students with the tools of dominant discourses, without devaluing primary discourses. *Diversity* embraces engagement

with various literacies and a range of modalities, which facilitates experimentation with different social identities. *Design* – or the productive and creative potential of power – is conceptualized as a way to challenge and change existing discourses. Janks (2000: 177) stresses,

Students have to be taught how to use and select from all the available semiotic resources for representation in order to make meaning, while at the same time combining and recombining these resources so as to create possibilities for transformation and reconstruction.

Examples of scholarship that draws on Janks' framework include Hall (2011), Janks and Adogoke (2011) and Reid (2011).

Four dimensions of critical literacy

U.S. researchers Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2008) describe a model of critical literacy that considers instructional practices including *disrupting the commonplace*, *interrogating multiple viewpoints*, *considering the sociopolitical*, and *taking action for social justice*. The goal of such instruction is to promote meaningful inquiry through student–teacher partnerships, while giving voice to marginalized groups of people. This creates “a curriculum that honors and highlights difference rather than one that strives for consensus and conformity” (Lewison *et al.* 2008: 10). They advocate the use of literacy to promote social justice, writing, “Enacting critical social practices in the classroom means using language and other sign systems to get things done in the world” (p. 12). They also emphasize the importance of a critical stance wherein educators become aware of the unconscious frames under which they operate, recognize multiple literacies, inquire, and reflect. Lewison *et al.* (2008: 18) write, “It is not enough to be aware of our own complicity; we also need to engage in an active and systematic process of questioning and evaluating our critical practices.” Examples of empirical work that have drawn on this framework include Benedict (2012), Flint and Laman (2012), and Scherff (2012).

Main research methods

We draw on a literature review we conducted of the field of critical literacy education from 1990 to 2012. We identified 495 articles through a survey of major databases including ERIC, PsychInfo and Web of Science hosted through EBSCO. We used the search terms *critical literacy* OR *critical literacy education* and limited our search to peer-reviewed journals. We also used a genealogical approach to uncover scholarship and engaged in bibliographic branching. We conducted a separate search of African journals through African Journals Online. These efforts resulted in an additional fifty articles.

Our total database includes 545 articles. We entered information about each article into a spreadsheet for ease of access and counting. Next, we analyzed patterns in the scholarship including type of article, pace and place of publication, topics studied, educational levels and contexts, definitions of critical literacy, methodologies of critical literacy research, and frequently cited scholars. We also examined the scholarship to identify active areas of inquiry.

Due to the complexity of critical literacy and the interdisciplinary way in which it is enacted and studied, any review will be a cultural production. There are noted limitations with the scope of the search because of the geopolitics of the databases and the vendors that own them. Thus, our review must be read as an artifact of the databases.

Current contributions and research

We provide a kaleidoscopic view of critical literacy education. Starting with a wide angle, we provide a picture of over twenty years of scholarship ($n=545$) to give a sense of the field as a whole. We then adjust our angle to hone in on empirical studies conducted within a three-year range, 2010–2012 ($n=84$), a timeframe that represents the largest increase in empirical articles across the database. Here, we consider where in the world scholars are carrying out studies of critical literacy, the educational levels they focus on and the topics that capture people's imaginations. Adjusting our perspective once again, we look at just the empirical articles published in 2012 ($n=28$). We show how scholars are conceptualizing critical literacy, the methodologies they are using, and the scholarship that has made the biggest mark on the field.

Critical literacy education, 1990–2012

The amount of scholarship in critical literacy education continues to trend upward. During the last decade of the twentieth century (1990–1999), just 16 percent ($N=88$) of the 545 articles in the database were published. Between the years of 2000–2009, this number tripled, accounting for almost 60 percent ($N=310$) of the articles in the database. This upward trend continues in the early part of the current decade with 147 articles published in just three years (2010–2012), representing nearly half of the total number of articles published in the preceding decade.

We identified six genres of scholarship in the database: classroom practice, conceptual, empirical studies, essays, reviews, and speeches/interviews. This diversity of scholarship speaks to the different ways scholars imagine the purpose and audience of their work. Early scholarship in the field reflected a balance of classroom applications over empirical articles whereas the more contemporary scholarship shows a marked shift toward empirical studies (only 26 percent of the studies in the 1990s were empirical whereas 40 percent of the articles from 2000–2009 were empirical). From 2010–2012, close to 60 percent of the articles were reports of empirical research. Conceptual articles accounted for 16 percent of the articles, an increase from previous decades.

We also looked at trends in the journals publishing research on critical literacy practices. Hundreds of journals routinely publish articles related to critical literacy. However, almost half of the articles published between the years 1990–2012 were published in fourteen journals, ten of which are published by major professional organizations devoted to literacy, including International Reading Association (IRA); National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE); Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA); Literacy Research Association (LRA); and United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA). The two largest contributors were *The Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* (IRA) with forty-seven articles and *Language Arts* (NCTE) with twenty-nine articles. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, a journal published by University of Waikato in New Zealand, had the third most publications with twenty-four articles. We identified seven themed issues related to critical literacy published in the following journals: *Theory into Practice*; *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*; *Voices from the Middle*; *English Education*; *New England Reading Association Journal*; *Language Arts*; and *Primary Voices*, published in 2012, 2011, 2009, 2009, 2007, 2002, and 2000 respectively.

Critical literacy education, 2010–2012

Shifting the angle to the years 2010–2012 illuminates patterns that characterize contemporary work in the field. We chose this time period because it reflects two important shifts in the database. First, the largest increase in number of critical literacy articles was published during

2010–2012. Second, there is a radical shifting of the kind of article published during this time period. Between 2010 and 2012, almost 60 percent of the articles were empirical and only 18 percent were classroom practice based. We adjust the angle of our gaze to focus on just empirical articles ($n = 84$).

Seventy-one percent ($n = 60$) of the eighty-four empirical studies published between 2010 and 2012 took up work in the United States. Nine studies (11 percent) were located in Oceania (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Islands). No more than two or three studies analyzed critical literacy in any other region including Africa, United Kingdom, Asia, Continental Europe, Middle East, or Canada.

Table 4.1 highlights the distribution of researchers' attention to educational level. We see two areas of emphasis between 2010 and 2012. Studies done with participants in higher education ($n = 30$, nineteen in teacher education and eleven in higher education) made up 36 percent of the studies. The second most represented area was the secondary context with 26 percent of the studies ($n = 22$). Taken together, these studies far outnumber the studies conducted among other educational levels.

Researchers in secondary settings studied how students' out-of-school literacies might bolster academic literacy (Cridland-Hughes 2012; Turner 2012; Wright and Mahiri 2012). For instance, in Wright and Mahiri's (2012) study, youth involved in a Positive Youth Development program engaged in participatory action research to develop academic literacy through community action projects. Interest was also high in exploring the multimodal dimensions of learning and associated identity work (Cridland-Hughes 2012; Hall 2011; Hayik 2012; Johnson and Vasudevan 2012; Turner 2012).

Turning to the post-secondary context, researchers examined the intersection of critical literacy with other curricular areas, including English-as-a-foreign-language (Huang 2012; Park 2011), research seminar (Tate 2011), professional writing (McGrady 2010), and biology (Gleason *et al.* 2010). New media, such as blogging (Stevens and Brown 2011) and Facebook (Barden 2012; Reid 2011; Skerrett 2010) were integrated into various studies as part of students' engagement with critical literacy. Researchers also studied the use of critical literacy as a tool to promote educational equity (Souto-Manning and Price-Dennis 2012; Tate 2011) and engage with issues considered controversial (Ashcraft 2012; Smith and Lennon 2011). Other researchers analyzed the planning and implementation of critical literacy and social justice related teacher education curriculum (Berta-Avila and William-White 2010; Mosley 2010; Scherff 2012; Wolfe 2010).

We identified seventeen sociopolitical categories ranging from language ideologies to writing, from disabilities to gender and sexualities. Table 4.1 illustrates the diversity of sociopolitical foci of the empirical studies across three years (2010–2012).

The three topics represented with most frequency in research from 2010–2012 included:

- Cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and racial diversity or discrimination (e.g., Boatright 2010; Enciso 2011; Gove *et al.* 2011; Hayik 2012; Labadie *et al.* 2012; Masuda 2012; Silvers *et al.* 2010)
- Critical media literacy which emphasized all forms and uses of communication technologies from billboards and popular culture to multimedia/digital environments (e.g., Locke and Cleary 2011; Skerrett 2010; Souto-Manning and Price-Dennis 2012; Turner 2012)
- Attitudes, beliefs, orientations, dispositions, tensions, and learning about critical literacy (e.g., Cridland-Hughes 2012; Mosley 2010; Wolfe 2010).

Table 4.1 Comprehensive table of results

<i>Educational level</i> <i>n = 84</i>	<i>Social-political</i> <i>focus n = 84</i>	<i>2012, frequently cited scholars</i> <i>(cited five or more times)</i>	<i>2012, frequently cited publications</i> <i>(cited three or more times)</i>
Early Childhood	3 Cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic and racial diversity or discrimination	Freire, Paulo	Freire, P. (1993 [1970]) <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i> , New York, NY: Continuum.
Elementary	12 Critical Media Literacy	15 Luke, Allan	16 Gee, J. P. (1996) <i>Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideologies in Discourses</i> , London: Taylor & Francis.
Secondary	22 Attitudes, beliefs, orientations, dispositions, tensions and learning about critical literacy	10 Morrell, Ernest	12 Lewison, M., Leland, C., and Harste, J. C. (2008) <i>Creating Critical Classrooms: K-8 Reading and Writing with an Edge</i> , Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
PK-12	5 Literary studies, reading processes, motivation, engagement, models of literary theory (e.g., genre studies, reader response)	7 Comber, Barbara	9 Shor, I. (1999) What is critical literacy? in I. Shor and C. Pari (eds.), <i>Critical Literacy in Action: Writing Words, Changing Worlds</i> , Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, pp. 1-30.
Higher Ed.	11 Gender and sexualities	6 Lewison, Mitzi	9 Freire, P. (1987) The importance of the act of reading, in P. Freire and D. Macedo (eds.), <i>Literacy: Reading the Word and the World</i> , South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, pp. 5-11.
Middle School	6 Justification, relevance, examples and possibilities of/for critical literacy	5	Kamler, B. (2001) <i>Relocating the Personal: A Critical Writing Pedagogy</i> , Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
Teacher Ed.	19 Drama, performative literacies, theatre, embodied literacies, images	4 Shor, Ira	3 Luke, A. and Freebody, P. (1997) The social practices of reading, in S. Muspratt, A. Luke and P. Freebody (eds.), <i>Constructing Critical Literacies: Teaching and Learning Textual Practice</i> , Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, pp. 185-226.

Table 4.1 continued

Educational level <i>n</i> = 84	Social-political focus <i>n</i> = 84	2012 frequently cited scholars (cited five or more times)	2012 frequently cited publications (cited three or more times)
Adult Ed.	4 Language ideologies, standard language education and national language choices	4 Freebody, Peter	7 McLaghlin, M. and Devoogd, G. I. (2004) <i>Critical Literacy: Enhancing Students' Comprehension of Texts</i> , New York, NY: Scholastic.
Community	1 Writing	4 Vasquez, Vivian	6 Vasquez, V. (2004) <i>Negotiating Critical Literacies with Young Children</i> , Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
-	- Democracy, citizenship, civil rights and human rights	3 Gee, James Paul	5
	Environment, ecology, science and health	3	
	Standards, assessment, evaluation, outcomes, curriculum	2	
	Conceptions of literacy	1	
	Disabilities	1	
	Prisons, criminalization, school-to-prison pipeline	1	
	Social class, neoliberalism, economics, gentrification, globalization	1	
	Violence, war, genocide, bullying	1	

A snapshot of research on critical literacy education, 2012

Shifting our perspective yet again, we provide a more targeted look at the scholarship produced during 2012 and ask about the state of critical literacy education. What methodologies are being used to understand critical literacy practices? How are scholars conceptualizing critical literacy? Which scholars are cited most frequently in reference to critical literacy?

Methodologies for studying critical literacy practices

There were 28 empirical studies published between 2010–2012. Almost all of the studies draw on qualitative research designs, differentiated by the length of time and the nature of the researcher's participation in the field. Only two studies used a survey or mixed methods design (e.g., Dedeoglu *et al.* 2012; McClune *et al.* 2012). Nearly a third of the studies used a practitioner research design (e.g., Barden 2012; Cooper and White 2012; Hayik 2012; Huang 2012; Labadie *et al.* 2012; McCloskey 2012; Scherff 2012; Souto-Manning and Price-Dennis 2012). Many of the studies were longitudinal, lasting a year or more in time ($n = 11$). Several studies were two (e.g., Laman *et al.* 2012; Staples 2012) and three years in length (e.g., Cooper and White 2012; McCloskey 2012).

What analytic tools did researchers use to understand critical literacy practices? We learned that critical literacy scholars frequently turn to discourse analysis to slow down interactions and pull apart texts, examining how discourses are constructed, resisted, and transformed. Indeed, over half of the studies published in 2012 used some form of discourse analysis to understand critical literacy practices (15/28 studies). Other authors described more general, inductive analyses. Interestingly, the majority of authors drawing on discourse analysis drew on the theories and methods post facto; that is, after the data had been collected. Only three studies explicitly discussed using discourse analysis to inform the data generation (e.g., Ashcraft 2012; Masuda 2012; Waterhouse 2012). These three studies show how discourse analysis holds the potential to study texts of the past and also understand and inform the unfolding life of the classroom, a point we return to in the discussion.

Conceptualization of critical literacy

Looking across the 2012 studies, we generated three conceptual themes that characterize active areas of inquiry: *critical literacies as a bridge to access and transform codes of power*, *critical literacy as social justice*, and *critical literacy as dialogic engagement*. Although these categories overlap, we separate them below to illustrate each conceptualization of critical literacy, focusing on those aspects that have been foregrounded.

CRITICAL LITERACIES AS A BRIDGE TO ACCESS AND TRANSFORM CODES OF POWER

The New London Group (1996) called for new forms of literacy made possible by digital technologies and globalized communication networks. Through the research published in 2012, we see how scholars use and critique diverse literacies to build critical literacy practices. For example, Johnson and Vasudevan (2012) call for the recognition of “critical performances” as a form of critical literacy noting:

What counts as critical literacy might be speaking, dressing, or gesturing to express a particular way of being that belies, subverts, and exposes social norms and power

imbalances. Such performances are critical because they allow youth to explore and expose ways power circulates.

(pp. 35–36)

Learning to participate in dominant institutions increasingly involves using digital and multimodal texts, which we see in studies conducted by Barden (2012) and Turner (2012). Popular culture (e.g., Lapayese 2012) and “everyday texts” (e.g., McCloskey 2012) can also serve as gateways to critical and academic literacy. For example, Barden’s (2012) research focused on his sixth-form college students with dyslexia using Facebook as an educational resource to develop a page to represent their research about dyslexia. His findings suggest that the use of online technologies motivated students to take control over their own learning which, in turn, led to their reading, synthesis, and critique of different perspectives, expanding their understanding of disability.

Janks (2000) reminds us to consider how to provide access to dominant discourses without devaluing students’ primary discourses and ways of being. She writes of the paradox this creates by noting:

If we provide students with access to dominant forms, this contributes to maintaining their dominance. If, on the other hand, we deny students access, we perpetuate their marginalization in a society that continues to recognize the value and importance of these forms.

(p. 176)

CRITICAL LITERACY AS SOCIAL JUSTICE

When considering critical literacy as intimately connected to social justice, scholars emphasize the ways literacy can be used to read both the *word* and the *world* (Freire 1993 [1970]). This includes a focus on critical dialogue, which draws on learners’ own narratives while engaging them in “constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing knowledge of status quo discourses” (Laman *et al.* 2012: 199). Scholarship within this approach moves from critical analysis to social action with an explicit emphasis on working toward social justice (Flint and Laman 2012; Simmons 2012).

Through an examination of a program designed to provide youth with exposure to debate pedagogies, Cridland-Hughes (2012) described debate pedagogy as a critical literacy practice that involves personal responsibility, reflection, and agency as students use “the critical acquisition of knowledge as a precursor to thoughtful action” (p. 197). In another study, Flint and Laman (2012) studied the practices of elementary teachers in two schools who integrated social justice issues into a unit on poetry. According to Flint and Laman (2012: 13), “Critical literacy invites teachers and students to consider the varied ways that literacy practices matter to the participants and their places in the world.” Huang (2012) also emphasized the transformative potential of writing in an EFL university classroom. She invited her students to write about themes such as child labor, the global economy, and advertisement. Through writing, students were able to rethink some of their previously held assumptions and make more substantive local/global connections.

This social justice orientation involves aspects of deconstruction and reconstruction, as well as inquiry and action. In a study of a community-based sexuality program, Ashcraft (2012: 600) wrote that critical literacy educators should “involve students in asking questions about language

and power and help them to read and rewrite the texts, narratives, and discourses that shape their lives, opportunities and the larger social order.” However, Hayik (2012: 294) cautions:

Merely integrating materials with social-justice issues into the curriculum does not make it critical. An in-depth interrogation of real-life issues is required for a more critical classroom. Such interrogation is essential for moving learning from the personal to the social ... to raise students’ awareness to historical practices, power relationships, and cultural systems of meaning.

CRITICAL LITERACY AS DIALOGIC ENGAGEMENT

Marking a shift in emphasis, Aukerman (2012) contends that critical literacy generally focuses on interpretations (critical literacy as outcome), analytic procedures (critical literacy as procedure), or personal responses. Students are often adopting the teacher’s lens. The question, then, is how to create contexts where teachers’ knowledge and authority are also the subject of critique. Aukerman (2012: 46) argues that critical literacy depends on conditions where a student’s voice is “structured and emerges in conversation and constant tension with multiple other voices.” There are a number of papers published in 2012 that represent critical literacy as dialogic engagement.

Staples (2012) describes an inquiry context in which college-educated, African-American women came together to discuss popular culture narratives post 9/11 and reflect on the power of literacies in their everyday life. Their readings and discussion of the literate life of one woman in particular (Mukhtaran Bibi, a Pakistani Muslim woman who was sentenced by tribunal to be raped and kidnapped as punishment for a crime her brother committed, and then forced to deny the opportunity to form her own romantic attachments through an arranged marriage) led to the women’s unexpected disclosure of their own romantic desire and pain. When the women explored how Bibi used literacy practices – journaling and writing letters – to find strength and forgiveness, they learned to do the same. They pushed each other to disrupt unproductive thinking about romantic love through three critical literacy moves that Staples referred to as disordered coherence, literate witnessing, and reading darkly. The women created new positions for themselves, what Staples (2012: 456) termed “a direct, literate defiance of terror.”

In studies conducted by Turner (2012), Waterhouse (2012) and Labadie *et al.* (2012), learners were invited to share and respond to each other’s interpretations of texts. In so doing, competing perspectives surfaced and ideas about what constitutes a valid reading were investigated. Critical literacy as dialogic engagement evokes conversations in which students grapple with the fragmentation of interpretations. Studies that foreground this stance need to reckon with how dialogic engagements are intertwined with social and political orders.

Influential scholarship

To assess the variety of scholars being drawn on in the 2012 empirical studies ($n=28$), we took stock of all critical literacy scholars referenced and the number of times each was referenced. First, we listed each publication (books, articles, or chapters) in reference to critical literacy across all twenty-eight articles. Next, we counted the number of times an individual author was cited, including combined authorship. From there, we identified the specific publications that were cited most frequently. Table 4.1 displays the most cited scholars and specific pieces of scholarship.

A diverse group of scholars is cited across the 2012 empirical studies. Nine of the fifteen scholars listed work in the United States and six work from Australia, Brazil, or South Africa. There is a fairly even distribution of gender across the list of authors. The top three cited authors are all men of color (Freire, Luke, and Morrell). Barbara Comber, Mitzi Lewison, Ira Shor, Peter Freebody, Vivian Vasquez, and James Gee were each referenced more than five times, suggesting their influence on the field.

The publication referenced the most is Freire's (1993 [1970]) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (referenced ten times). This is followed by Gee's (1996) *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideologies in Discourses*; Lewison, Leland, and Harste's (2008) *Creating Critical Classrooms: K-8 Reading and Writing with an Edge*; and Shor's (1999) chapter "What is Critical Literacy?", which are each referenced four times. The publications span time, representing work from 1970 (Freire) to 2008 (Morrell; Lewison *et al.*). This suggests that authors are drawing on both traditional and contemporary work.

We analyzed the frequency and placement of key terms in the titles ($n=23$) to foreground the choices authors and their editors have made to position their scholarship within the field. The terms 'critical' and 'literacy' are the most common words across the titles. Interestingly, the top cited publication (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) does not mention literacy. Another of the top cited titles (Lewison *et al.* 2008) refers to "reading and writing with an edge," not critical literacy. Only six publications did not mention literacy, reading, or writing. The majority of times (thirteen of seventeen), literacy is referenced in the singular versus 'literacies,' which is referenced only four times. The word 'critical' is mentioned in twelve titles. In ten of these titles, it is mentioned before the colon, signaling its relative significance through the ordering of ideas. However, in only seven publications do we see the words 'critical' and 'literacy' side-by-side.

Nine of the publications use the terms 'education,' 'learning,' or 'pedagogy.' Of these, four reference 'pedagogy.' This perhaps suggests the emphasis on critical literacy as a practice, rather than on the accumulation of knowledge and understandings. We found it surprising, given the political commitments of critical literacy, that only eight of the publications reference justice, social change, liberation, or empowerment. Similarly, only eight titles mention place (e.g., urban schools) or specific populations (e.g., young children, teachers).

We noted the fairly even distribution of publications that feature classroom practice (e.g., Vasquez 2004) and conceptual pieces (Freire and Macedo 1987). Only three publications mention the word 'research' in their titles (Comber 2001; Morrell 2004, 2009). The word 'theory' is used only once across all of the titles (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008). We expand on these findings in our discussion below.

Recommendations and future directions

How has scholarship in critical literacy education expanded our understandings as a teaching and research community? The sheer growth of the field is remarkable, going from eighty-nine articles in the 1990s to 147 articles in just the first three years of the current decade. While there is no one 'procedure' or 'method' associated with critical literacy education, there are some well-formed traditions that appear routinely in the scholarship – those associated with Freire; Janks; Luke and Freebody; and Lewison, Leland, and Harste. Although there are similarities among the approaches, future work might tease apart the differences, which reflect the sociopolitical contexts of origin. There is also a need to move beyond the stabilizing force of these traditions so that the field learns from itself rather than solely relying on established frameworks. Similarly, the field should continually reconsider definitions of critical literacy, asking how such definitions might privilege certain worldviews across space, time, and modality.

To varying degrees these frameworks move beyond developing voice and critique to teaching students the technical resources necessary for learning how texts work, a necessary prerequisite to proficient reading or writing. We call for more research that attends to these twin pillars of critical literacy.

Looking at the scholarship over time generated some important understandings about the field. Noteworthy is the shift in emphasis of articles published about classroom practice to research. In the 1990s there was a close balance between classroom practice and empirical articles (34 percent and 26 percent respectively); however, this decade has seen a surge in the number of empirical articles (59 percent) and simultaneous decline in classroom-based articles (18 percent). It seems that scholars are devoting less attention to convincing educators of the importance of critical literacy and its classroom applications, instead incorporating critical literacy into research designs and continuing to refine it conceptually. Another possibility, given the increasing demands of standards and high stakes testing, is that educators are finding less time or space to enact and write about critical literacy practices.

We are impressed with the global reaches of critical literacy. Within the entire database (1990–2012) six continents and over twenty-five countries are represented. Yet, the scholarship itself does not tend to cross geographical areas but remains bound to specific geographic locales. The majority of studies in our dataset were carried out in the United States, Australia, and Canada. Further scholarship might examine how critical literacy has (or has not) been integrated into curriculum and policy in different parts of the world. It is important to remind readers of the geo-political limitations of the databases that we searched which may have excluded examples of critical literacy scholarship.

Reflecting on the sociopolitical areas of emphasis, we note some established areas of inquiry in the empirical work from 2010 to 2012. Across the entire dataset (1990–2012) there are four sociopolitical areas that are the primary foci of scholars including critical media literacy; issues of cultural and linguistic diversity; justification and possibilities of/for critical literacy; and literary studies, processes, and theories (e.g., genre studies, reader response). The percentage of articles focused on critical media literacy has risen over time going from 7 percent of studies between 1990 and 1999 to 19 percent of studies between 2010 and 2012. Changes in the communication landscape are represented in the increasing prevalence of digital literacy, critical media literacy, online learning, and computer mediated communication as the focus of study (Wohlwend and Lewis 2011). Although the expansion of digital discourses increases understanding of communication and provides new ways of looking at interactions, texts, and discourses, digital engagement does not necessarily constitute critical literacy. Further conceptual work might focus on developing understandings around the multimodality of critical literacy in digital environments.

These sociopolitical areas of focus are tied to particular political contexts and historical moments. Areas that appear ripe for critique and redesign include standards, assessment, and curriculum, as well as performative literacies, embodied literacies, and visual literacy. Conceptual interests have circulated around the rationalist limitations of critical literacy and the extent to which merging play, humor, and critical literacy is possible (e.g., Janks 2002; Lewis and Tierney 2011), but we do not yet see this focus reflected in empirical studies. We call for more studies about resistance and emotionality associated with critical literacy. Because emotions (feelings of anger, sadness, belonging) are the strongholds of ideologies, as a research community we might inquire into the kinds of feelings associated with critical literacy work. This is equally as important for those educators who are beginning to experiment with critical literacy as those who have more deeply integrated a critical stance into their teaching and researching lives and who perhaps are seeking the kinds of solidarity that comes from working with other like-

minded educators. Similarly, it is important to understand why people are drawn to critical literacy and for what reasons they reject it.

Honing in on empirical work published from 2010 to 2012, we see the popularity of using discourse analysis as a tool for understanding links between micro- and macro-practices associated with critical literacy education. This makes sense given that critical literacy education always involved inquiry into discourse and power. Likewise, teacher-researchers are finding discourse analysis useful in the study of their classroom life. However, similar to other researchers, they report using discourse analysis at the close of the study versus as a tool for generating data. We suspect that researchers are calling on discourse analysis in more nuanced ways and across the life of the project (e.g., Rogers and Mosley 2013). With this in mind, we recommend expanding the ways discourse analysis is used and reported on in published reports of research. More detailed descriptions of when and how discourse analysis is being used could help develop our understanding about how these tools are useful not only for describing, interpreting, and explaining critical literacy practices but also in provoking and informing the emergence and transformation of such practices. This might include, for example, inviting our participants to learn how to use discourse analytic techniques to inform the next stage of a project or taking the time to learn how educational practitioners (broadly construed – policy makers, website designers, instructional coaches) use forms of discourse analysis to persuade, inform, criticize, and create more effective practices. In this way, discourse analysis can become a tool for informing (versus solely reporting on) life in the public sphere.

A majority of the studies published from 2010 to 2012 were conducted in secondary and post-secondary classrooms. This reflects continued assumptions about the appropriateness of critical literacy with young people. We call for more research with children at the beginning stages of literacy development. In addition, the majority of studies reported on in this paper took place within formal classroom spaces, meaning that other areas such as informal learning sites, advocacy, and community organizing are ripe for future study.

Across the studies, we noted that critical literacy tends to get analyzed at particular moments in time rather than being treated as the accumulation of knowledge. Similarly, Freebody and Freiberg (2011: 411) observe, “the kinds of specifically textual practices that emerge as *portable knowledge* from the educational experiences remain unclear” (original emphasis). We call for studies that trace the emergence and development of critical literacy over time and across contexts. We agree with Bhabha who, in an interview, poignantly stated, “Revolution or radical social transformation cannot be seen altogether, at the same time, from one place. You’ve got to look at it in different moments and times, and things add to rather than necessarily add up” (Olson and Worsham 1998: 385). How do individuals and groups continue to become critically literate? What conditions make this possible? And, what are the different routes for studying these identifications? There are a number of topics and questions that we think will continue to ignite the imaginations of critical literacy scholars. Equally important is scholarship about the field.

Related topics

Critical pedagogy, Teacher education, Social action, New Literacy Studies, Literature review.

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5

BI/MULTILINGUAL LITERACIES IN LITERACY STUDIES

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Introduction

As we embarked on writing on the topic of bilingual/multilingual literacies, we were initially stuck with the difficult question of how we could introduce a field of studies that seems to be undergoing rapid re-conceptualization and witnessing mounting tensions between not just old and new terms but also radically different ways of conceptualizing language and literacy practices. Traditional ways of thinking about literacies as manifested in the use of terms such as bilingual literacies, multilingual literacies or even plurilingual literacies have increasingly come under challenge by the rise of recent terms such as translanguaging (García 2009) and translanguaging practice (Canagarajah 2013a, 2013b). In what follows we shall first outline these new theoretical developments from early to recent work that has sought to break through the monolingual ideologies governing our understanding of literacy. Then we shall discuss how the recent re-conceptualization of literacy practices stands to highlight the heteroglossic social relations embedded in literacy practices. We shall illustrate these new conceptualizations of translanguaging literacies with examples from the case of Hong Kong where Cantonese, English and Chinese literacies have been mixing and matching for over a century. In the concluding section, the theoretical and empirical challenges facing the field now are discussed and future directions for research are suggested.

Historical perspectives

Street's (1984, 1995, 2003) critique of what he calls the autonomous model of literacy represents one of the most important early attempts to problematize the monolingual and ahistorical ideologies dominating the field of literacy studies in the past century. Under the autonomous model, literacy is conceived as a uniform set of techniques and skills that are naturalized as having universal cognitive and social benefits:

The standard view in many fields, from schooling to development programs, works from the assumption that literacy in itself – autonomously – will have effects on

other social and cognitive practices. Introducing literacy to poor, ‘illiterate’ people, villages, urban youth etc. will have the effect of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their ‘illiteracy’ in the first place. I refer to this as an ‘autonomous’ model of literacy. The model, I suggest, disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it so that it can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal and that literacy as such will have these benign effects.

(Street 2003: 77)

Street suggests instead an ideological model that conceives literacies as multiple and socially constructed (see also Gee on new literacies, Chapter 2 in this volume):

This model starts from different premises than the autonomous model – it posits instead that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. ... Literacy, in this sense, is always contested, both its meanings and its practices, hence particular versions of it are always ‘ideological’, they are always rooted in a particular world-view and in a desire for that view of literacy to dominate and to marginalize others.

(Street 2003: 77–78)

Hornberger and her colleagues have further developed and elaborated the continua of biliteracy framework (Hornberger 1992; Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester 2000), which encompasses four intersecting and nested continua: development, content, media and contexts. These four continua demonstrate the multiple and complex interrelationships between bilingualism and literacy and the importance of the contexts, media and content through which biliteracy develops. Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester (2000: 110) further point out that traditional power relations have often privileged monolingual, decontextualized literacies (see Figure 5.1), “such that being able to state truths that hold, regardless of context, has been a part of speaking the language of power”.

Hornberger and her colleagues’ work on the continua of biliteracy seeks to provide a comprehensive framework to analyse the complex aspects of biliteracy and how power relations have always figured predominantly in both the development and valuation of literacies (e.g. how certain literacies carry more currency than others in specific contexts). This work converges with Rampton’s (1995) research on language crossing among Anglo, Afro-Caribbean, and Punjabi adolescents in Britain. Rampton problematizes the notions of native speaker and mother tongue for the assumptions underlying these terms can no longer be taken for granted: for example, we can no longer assume that a particular language is inherited (genetically or socially); that people either are or are not native/mother tongue speakers; or that people are native speakers of one mother tongue. Rampton thus argues that it is better to think in terms of *expertise*, *affiliation* and *inheritance*. Expertise refers to a speaker’s skill, proficiency and ability to operate with a language while affiliation and inheritance are two different, socially negotiated routes to a sense of allegiance to a language, i.e. identification with the values, meanings, and identities that the language stands for (Rampton 1995: 336–344).

The early work outlined above is continued in recent more thorough-going reconceptualization of language and literacy, which we shall turn to in the next section.

Bi/multilingual literacies

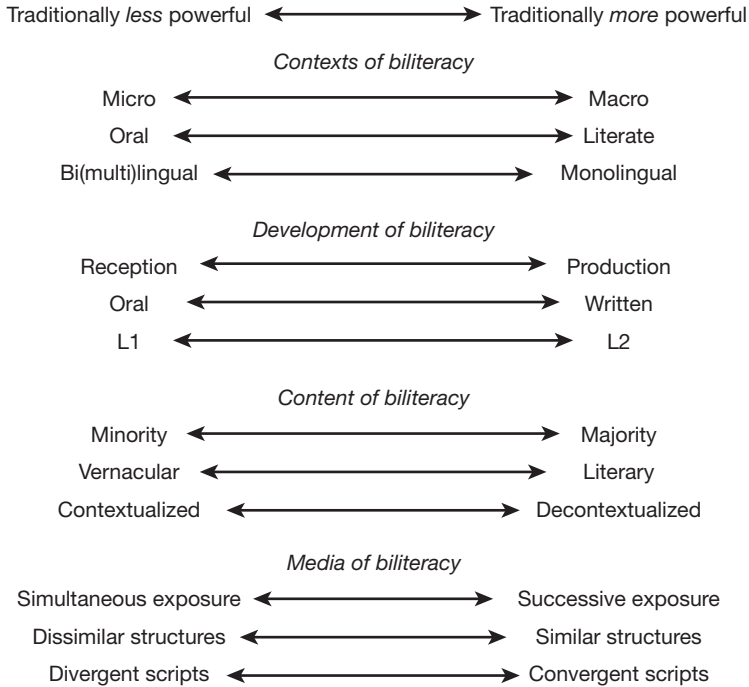


Figure 5.1 Power relations in the four continua of biliteracy (based on Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester 2000).

Critical issues and topics

In explaining what he means by translingual literacies, Canagarajah (2013a: 2–3) provides a historical analysis of how monolingual ideologies are part-and-parcel of Anglo-European modernity and colonialism of the past four centuries:

Translingual literacies are not about fashioning a new kind of literacy. It is about understanding the practices and processes that already characterize communicative activity in diverse communities. ... Having defined literacy according to monolingual ideologies since modernity, they [scholars] have to now revise their understanding to conceive of literacy as translingual. With hindsight, scholars have now started analyzing how ideologies that territorialized, essentialized, and circumscribed languages came into prominence around enlightenment and romanticism. ... With the colonial enterprise, these ideologies have also migrated to other parts of the world, often imposed as literacies more conducive to science, rationality, development, and civilization, threatening diverse local translingual practices.

Canagarajah (2013a, 2013b) proposes the term ‘translingual practice’ to highlight the point that traditional terms such as bilingual literacy or multilingual literacy still lend themselves too much to the assumption that there exist different linguistic entities with solid or stable boundaries. Instead he wants to highlight translingual *practice* as intrinsic to all human communicative activity, not just in contexts which are traditionally labelled as bilingual or

multilingual. Seen in this light, traditionally labelled monolingual literacy is in fact a kind of translingual practice as people draw on a range of styles, genres and registers to achieve their communicative purposes. Canagarajah is not alone in this line of thinking as quite a number of scholars have recently come up with different terms to capture a similar kind of understanding, e.g. ‘translanguaging’ (García 2009) and ‘metrolingualism’ (Pennycook 2010).

Like translingual practice, the notion of heteroglossia focuses on breaking away from the ideology of discrete, unitary languages and breaking through the centralizing forces driven by ideologies of monolingualism and linguistic purism that are dominant in the literature of language education and government language education policies (see critique by Lin 1996, 2006). As pointed out by Lemke (2002: 85):

It is not at all obvious that if they were not politically prevented from doing so, ‘languages’ would not mix and dissolve into one another, but we understand almost nothing of such processes Could it be that all our current pedagogical methods in fact make multilingual development more difficult than it need be, simply because we bow to dominant political and ideological pressures to keep ‘languages’ pure and separate?

Thus, for example, in Singapore, after four decades of linguistic engineering by the state, the once fluid, hybrid, dynamic translingual landscape has changed into one of standardized and compartmentalized ‘multilingualisms’. Any local translingual practice involving other than the four officially recognized and standardized languages – English, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil and Malay – has been formally driven out of all public spheres and educational institutions (Rubdy 2005). This statist engineering or making of artificially compartmentalized languages confirms Bakhtin’s words half a century ago, “A unitary language is not something given but is always in essence posited – and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia” (Bakhtin 1981 [1935]: 270).

Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia (‘hetero’ means ‘different’; ‘gloss’: tongue/voice) does not merely mean a combination of different signs and voices. It has a focus on the social tensions and conflicts between these different signs and voices; as Bailey puts it:

Heteroglossia encourages us to interpret the meanings of talk in terms of the social worlds, past and present, of which words are part-and-parcel, rather than in terms of formal systems, such as ‘languages,’ that can veil actual speakers, uses, and contexts.
(Bailey 2012: 506)

Bakhtin is convinced that within the boundaries of the same utterance, there can be the free juxtaposition and fruitful dialogic interaction and inter-illumination of diverse voices or points of views on the world (or social languages, styles, ideologies, different consciousnesses). He writes:

At the time when poetry was accomplishing the task of cultural, national and political centralization of the verbal-ideological world in the higher official socio-ideological levels, on the lower levels, on the stages of local fairs and at buffoon spectacles, the heteroglossia of the clown sounded forth, ridiculing all ‘languages’ and dialects; there developed the literature of the *fabliaux* and *Schwanke* of street songs, folk sayings, anecdotes, where there was no language-centre at all, where there was to be found a lively play with the ‘languages’ of poets, scholars, monks, knights and others, where

all ‘languages’ were masks and where no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face Heteroglossia, as organized in these low genres, ... was parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time.

(Bakhtin 1981 [1935]: 273)

It is this lively play and inter-illumination of diverse voices and points of views that we shall focus on illustrating in the next section with examples of translingual literacies in the newspaper communicative practice in Hong Kong.

Main research perspectives: an example from analysing the translingual literacy practices in Hong Kong newspapers

Since the first Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government under Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa in 1997, the official language-in-education policy goals have come to be known as ‘biliteracy and trilingualism’ (兩文三語) – the official way of compartmentalizing language and literacy into five different channels (two written ones and three spoken ones). Government resources continue to be put into the education sector, from primary to tertiary, to facilitate the development of abilities to read and write Standard Written Chinese (SWC) and English, and to speak and understand English, Putonghua (the spoken form of SWC) and Cantonese. All students are told and taught that Cantonese is a ‘dialect’, which is not supposed to be used for written communication. As it is natural for children to write the way they speak, Cantonese-specific words (Cantoneisms) are systematically banned and cleansed in students’ writing outputs in schools. Still, exclusion from school literacy does little to stop and stifle the spread and vitality of ‘written Cantonese’ or Cantonese literacy, which figures prominently in the ‘soft’ sections of newspapers and magazines and, to a lesser extent, hard news stories (Li 2000; Shi 2006; Snow 2004). The vitality of written Cantonese is inseparable from the ways the vernacular is used in the region. Until the 1990s, Cantonese emerged as a prestigious ‘dialect’ thanks to the popularity of Hong Kong-based popular culture such as Canto-pop songs, karaoke products and TV dramas. Even though the golden years of Cantonese popular culture may have subsided following the rise of China as the world’s second largest economy, there is no doubt that Cantonese remains the most prestigious of all Chinese ‘dialects’.

While water-tight boundaries between Putonghua-based SWC, Cantonese and English are promoted through the institutions of education and examination, literacy practices as gleaned through the SAR’s Chinese newspapers and magazines show that people are readily engaged in translingual literacies. Below we shall exemplify such practices with the help of one news clipping from *Headline Daily* (頭條日報), a popular tabloid newspaper distributed free of charge and allegedly having the highest circulation in Hong Kong.

In terms of language style, there is a general expectation that the language of formal, hard news stories will adhere to SWC norms only. The same may be said of editorials and features even though, as Shi (2006) has demonstrated, the syntax of Hong Kong Written Chinese (HKWC) exhibits considerable lexico-grammatical influences from English and Cantonese.

- 1 [headline] 七. 一「散步」荷包出血 Dream Bear 捐到「乾塘」*
- 2 Kelly 有朋友目擊昔日「頭號梁粉」劉夢熊 Dream Bear 高調現身銅鑼灣(...)
- 3 前全國政協委員劉夢熊嘢日好忙碌, 上午出席完慶回歸酒會, 下晝兩點半約咗個內地朋友喺柏寧酒店見面。DB 話因為司機放假, 要自己搭港鐵落銅鑼灣(...)
- 4 DB 高調現身, 但就澄清唔係去遊行, 但話遊行係好事, 可以敲響管治者警鐘, 佢話個女都有去遊行, 唔會反對大家嘅表達方式。CY 上任一年, 施政同市民期望有落差, DB 語重心長話: 「希望香港明天會更好, 唔係明天會更燥! (...)」(Executive 日記, Kelly Chu, H.D. 2013-7-2, p. 12)

* Note: Like SWC, Cantonese is written using logographic Chinese characters as shown above. However, whereas *gaan2 tai2 zi6* 簡體字 'simplified Chinese script' is used in mainland China, under one country, two systems the traditional script *faan4 tai2 zi6* 繁體字 continues to be used in Hong Kong. In addition, some Cantonese morphemes have written representation in Roman script (e.g. *hea*, he3 'laid-back'/'tardy'). JyutPing (粵拼), the transliteration system devised and promoted by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong (LSHK), is used to romanize Cantonese morphemes (www.lshk.org/node/31).

Approximate English translation

Background: Lew Mon-hung, a former supporter of Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying (popularly referred to in the media as 'CY'), was seen taking the MTR (Mass Transit Railway) to Causeway Bay, the starting point of the anti-government protest march on July 1, feeding speculation that he wanted to take part in the march. He was also seen donating money to support the anti-government movement.

- 1 [headline:] July 1 'leisurely stroll' costly Dream Bear donates all he has
- 2 Kelly has [a] friend[s] who saw former 'Top supporter of C Y Leung' Lew Mon-hung Dream Bear appear in Causeway Bay in high profile, (...)
- 3 Former representative of the Chinese people's Political Consultative Conference Lew Mon-hung was very busy yesterday; after attending the 'Return of Sovereignty' banquet in the morning, [he] went to meet a friend at Park Lane Hotel in Causeway Bay at 2.30 p.m. DB said because [his] chauffeur was on leave, [he] had to take the MTR (Mass Transit Railway) to Causeway Bay. (...)
- 4 DB appeared in high profile, but clarified that he was not joining the protest march [on July 1]. He said the protest march was a good thing, for it sounded an alarm bell to the government, adding that his daughter also joined the march, and that he would not be opposed to that. CY [Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying] has been in office for one year; there was a gap between his governance and popular expectation. DB said from his heart: "[I] hope tomorrow will be better, rather than [we will be] more agitated."

This standing column carries a hybrid title *Executive* 日記 ('Executive Diary') by *Kelly Chu* (no Chinese name is provided). Readers who are literate in HKWC will recognize that this diary cannot be neatly classified as being written in SWC only or in Cantonese only. In fact the writer draws upon both SWC and Cantonese resources in achieving a local colourful heteroglossic style. The SWC lexical elements are, for example (with English translations in brackets):

- 昔日 (formerly)
- 前全國政協委員 (former representative of the Chinese people's Political Consultative Conference)
- 語重心長 (speaking from one's heart)
- 明天會更好 (tomorrow will be better)

However, it should be noted that except for 昔日 (formerly), which seldom appears in spoken Cantonese, all of the other lexical items above may also be found in spoken Cantonese. It is thus hard to say that these are strictly SWC or Putonghua-specific lexical elements.

On the other hand, Cantonese-specific words are used, as evidenced in Cantonese grammatical markers and lexical items such as the following:

- perfective aspect marker: zo2 咗 (約咗 'made an appointment')
- preposition: hai2 喺 (喺柏寧酒店 'at Park Lane Hotel')
- verb-to-be: hai6 係 (係好事, 'is a good thing')
- negator: m4 唔 (唔係去遊行, 'not going to protest march'; 唔係明天會更燥 'tomorrow will not be more agitated'; 唔會反對 'will not be opposed to')
- genitive marker: ge3 嘅 (大家嘅表達方式 'our mode of expression')

In addition, there are many other Cantonese-specific expressions and idioms which would make this column partially obscure to non-Cantonese-speaking readers, for instance:

- cam4 jat6 嘢日 'yesterday' (SWC equivalent: zok3 yat6 昨日)
- haa6 zau3 下晝 'afternoon' (SWC equivalent: haa6 m5 下午)
- zung6 仲 'also' (zung6 waa6 仲話, SWC equivalent: waan4 syut3 還說)
- waa6 話 'say' (used four times; SWC equivalent: syut3 說)
- daap3 gong2 tit3 搭港鐵 'take the MTR' (SWC equivalent: zo6 gong2 tit3 坐港鐵)
- loeng4 fan2 梁粉 'Leung fan/supporter', 粉 being the first syllable of the bisyllabic lexical borrowing fan2 si1 粉絲 'fans' (SWC equivalent: zi1 ci4 ze3 支持者); there is also an unmistakable touch of humour as loeng4 fan2 is homophonous with 涼粉 'chilled jelly', a popular street delicacy in the Pearl River Delta region to counter the scorching summer heat

Other Cantonese-specific features include the use of Cantonese hyperbolic idioms in the headline:

- ho4 baau1 ceot1 hyut3 荷包出血, literally 'purse bleeding'
- gon1 tong4 乾塘, literally 'pond drying up'

both alluding to Lew being obliged to donate money to support the protest march.

Of all the linguistic features, however, perhaps none is more eye-catching than the use of English as an additional resource to capture some of the interesting meanings which would otherwise be lost in a 'pure' SWC or 'pure' Cantonese rendition. These include reference to the Chief Executive as 'CY' (pronounced as 'C Y'), the literal translation of the bisyllabic given name of the newsmaker Lew Mon-hung, 'Dream Bear' (used three times, including in a photo caption), which is then abbreviated as 'DB' (used three times in the extract). Such examples of translingual literacy practice reinforce the language-use pattern in this standing column (*Executive 日記*) as well as the trilingual identity of the columnist who identifies herself as *Kelly Chu*. They

also suggest that the language norms being adhered to are clearly more characteristic of those of heteroglossic orality, rather than those of ‘proper’ compartmentalized monolingual school literacy. The language-use pattern as exemplified in this column is also indicative of a trend in informal social interaction and written e-communication among educated Chinese Hongkongers (Li 2011). Similar examples of translanguaging literacy practice may be found in many adverts collected in 2013, especially the attention-grabber or slogan such as the following:

5

至	fit	安	全	駕	駛	大	行	動
zit3	fit	on1	cyun4	gaa3	sai2	daai6	hang4	dung6
most	fit	safe		drive		big		action

‘The most **fit** and safe big drive action’ (API, Transport Department)

6

原	來	老	花	都	可	以	戴	Con
jyun4	loi4	lou5	faa1	dou1	ho2	ji5	daai3	con
so		presbyopia		also		can	wear	contact lens

‘So [people with] presbyopia can also wear **contact lens**’ (CIBA Vision)

7

KILL	新	BILL
kill	san1	bill

‘kill new bill(s)’ (PPS payment system)

Apart from newspaper columns and adverts, the heteroglossic vernacular-driven writing style is also very common in other ‘soft’ sections such as infotainment news stories and comic strips.

Fluid and porous boundaries

The fluidity or ‘mixing’ of elements from apparently discrete languages and registers as exemplified in a standing column of a Hong Kong Chinese newspaper above is by no means a linguistic novelty. The language-use patterns of ‘soft’ sections of Hong Kong Chinese newspapers are similarly characterized by the mobilization of linguistic resources from various sources: Classical Chinese, Standard Written Chinese, Cantonese and English. Made popular by a few Chinese columnists since the 1950s, such a writing style has been called: saam1 kap6 dai2 三及第 ‘mixing of elements from three discrete styles: Classical Chinese, Standard Written Chinese and Cantonese’ and this style has won the hearts of many readers (or ‘Like’ in the Facebook era) who appreciate the subtle nuances and humour conveyed successfully by such a fluid performance through the mobilization of multiple linguistic resources (Wong 2002) to juxtapose multiple social views and voices. This trend has continued since the 1970s; to make meaning creatively, skilful writers who are trilingual in Cantonese, SWC and English would

draw on the semiotic potential of elements from their whole linguistic repertoire, which is treated as a composite pool of resources rather than as compartmentalized languages or registers. Such a style is also found in newspapers which are more characteristic of the 'quality' press. This is not surprising given that, as in speech, writers of 'soft' sections of newspapers and magazines tend to shape their vernacular-based language-use pattern to appeal to the stylistic preference of their readers (Bell 1991). From the point of view of marketability, it seems that the survival of Chinese newspapers in Hong Kong hinges on how ready they are to exploit this translingual, heteroglossic writing style.

In ideological terms, the above examples from Hong Kong illustrate an interesting contrast between, on the one hand, official school literacy norms and standardness which are perpetuated through education institutions, and on the other hand, non-school literacy practices in local newspapers and magazines where such norms and standardness are patently ignored. This is so largely because, for decades, in a highly audience-sensitive and market-driven press industry, Cantonisms and other linguistic features which are characteristic of the heteroglossic vernacular style have found social space to thrive, allowing trilingual writers to exercise their individual agency in defiance of top-down linguistic standards. Hong Kong thus offers an interesting case where multivoicedness expressed through rich colourful discursive acts, along with linguistic creativity which knows no boundaries, is able to grow and flourish in the 'soft' sections of Hong Kong newspapers and magazines.

Future directions

What translingual literacies look like and why bi/multilingual literacies need to be re-conceptualized so as to capture the fluid, heteroglossic, non-compartmentalized nature of literacies remain important research questions. For instance, the new translingual literacies emerging in new media communication remain a rich field to be described and explored. How do these translingual literacies resemble or differ from traditional print translingual literacies (as shown above, for example, in the translingual practices of Hong Kong newspapers)? What are the kinds of fluid and at times contradictory identities being negotiated in such practices? What are the different social voices and points of views being brought together to 'dialogize' each other in the same stretch of text? Do we need to adapt our traditional linguistic, pragmatic and literacy analysis tools in order to furnish a better analysis of such translingual literacy practices? All these require the collaborative research efforts of both linguists and heteroglossia/sociocultural theorists. In short, as we ponder directions for future research, what is needed seems to be more linguistic/literacy analysis that is heteroglossically sensitive and socioculturally aware.

Related topics

Translanguaging, Heteroglossia, Translingual practice, Lexical transference, Phonetic borrowing.

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PART II

Space-focused approaches

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6

SOCIO-SPATIAL APPROACHES TO LITERACY STUDIES

Rethinking the social constitution and politics of space

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I have become convinced that the implicit assumptions we make about space are important, and that, maybe, it could be productive to think about space differently.

(Massey 2005: 1)

Introduction

Attention to space and the spatiality of literacy practice is increasingly inspiring new ways of analysing literacy research, and in particular, research that describes and traces flows, networks, and connections between literacy practices within and across specific social spaces, such as school and home (Bulfin and North 2007; Nesor 1997, 2008; Pahl 2001), the library (Nixon 2003), the mall (Moje 2004), after-school contexts (Brass 2008), prisons (Wilson 2004), and virtual environments (Valk 2008). The reassertion of space in literacy studies has been referred to as the ‘spatial turn’, and can be seen as complementary and parallel to other shifts in literacy research, including the social (e.g. Gee 1992; Street 1995), the critical (e.g. Comber and Simpson 2001; Luke 1998), and the digital turn (Mills 2010b). The concept of ‘space’ in this chapter is not simply a response to the “now-fashionable attachment” of theorists “to geographical facts and spatial metaphors” (Soja 2004: ix). Rather, the first principle of socio-spatial literacy studies is that language practices are distributed socio-geographically, appearing in distinct forms in certain social sites, having both similarities and distinctions to literacy practices in other social spaces. At the same time spaces such as classrooms are not considered as mere containers in which literacy practices occur. Rather, spatiality in literacy studies includes the socio-material effects and relations of space-time in relation to literacy practices, including the temporal dimension of flows or connections between literacy practices, textual artefacts, technologies for textual production, locations of literacy practices and texts, networks, social actors, and communities of practice.

A second key proposition of spatial approaches to literacy is the understanding that space and literacy practices are socially produced, as are the organisation and meaning of spaces. This view

of space applies the contributions of social and cultural geography by authors such as Henry Lefebvre (1991), Edward Soja (1996), and Doreen Massey (2005). More recently, educational researchers have begun to examine the spatial dimension of literacy practices in a way that foregrounds space, and that considers space as constitutive of human relations and practices (Gulson and Symes 2007a). Applied to literacy studies, spatial approaches to literacy often consider the social and spatial stratification of literacy practices, power, economy and literacy, and modes of ideology. Such approaches have addressed equity and the distribution of literacy practices, and spatial patterns of marginalisation and domination in relation to literacy practices and societal structures. For example, some social spaces, such as schools, libraries, and workplaces, provide homogenising contexts for certain literacy practices, permitting some practices and excluding others (e.g. Gutiérrez and Larson 2007).

To gain a sense of the scope of spatial theories in the social sciences throughout this century, consider the volume *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* edited by Hubbard and Kitchin (2011). This work is devoted to explaining significant breakthroughs by over sixty prominent social scientists in the understanding of, and relations between, space and place, and the shaping of cultural, social, economic, and political life. Not surprisingly, it highlights the work of many interdisciplinary scholars – Bhabha, Bourdieu, Castells, Foucault, hooks, Said, Soja, Williams, and others – whose ideas about space have been productively applied to the analysis of many significant domains of social activity – including literacy studies. The authors of the collection acknowledge that in identifying what counts as ‘key thinkers’ they have regrettably privileged the contributions of white male academics that have gained the most repute in this field. At the same time, they excluded over 100 other contributors to theorisation of social space, due to limitations of ‘space’ in one volume. A good number of these theorists, both ‘key thinkers’ as well as those deemed as peripheral, have argued that the spaces in which we live, learn, and work – whether it be school or home, town or city, physical or virtual (e.g. online communities) – are socially constructed as spatial geographies that shape our lives in various ways. An example of this is Lefebvre’s (1968) highly acclaimed work on urbanism and contested rights to the city. As Fenwick *et al.* (2011: 130) interprets Lefebvre (1996): “Space is too important to be left to social geographers.”

These approaches that give priority to spatial themes in social and cultural geography have led to new theorisations of space as it pertains to literacy studies. For example, literacy theorists have borrowed Soja’s term “Thirdspace” to take on a new meaning for literacy studies (Gutiérrez 2008; Lynch 2008; Moje *et al.* 2004), “spatial theories” (Gulson and Symes 2007b), “spatialized literacy” (Leander and Sheehy 2004), and “geosemiotic” approaches to language and discourse that “study the social meaning of the material placement of signs ... discourses and ... actions in the material world” (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 2). There is an understanding that systems of signs are always located and exist relationally in the material or spatial world, and that literacy is more than a mental construct, which can never be detached from the space-time dimensions in which it is practised. Indeed, Burnett emphasises literacy practices are as much about “the stuff which is physically present as we make meanings, such as bodies, screen, artefacts and texts” (Chapter 34, p. 520, this volume).

Critical spatial perspectives: the politics of space

The recognition of the social production of space can be coupled with an acknowledgement of the politics of space. Theories of social power have influenced both spatial approaches to literacy research, and social theories of space more broadly. Power relations – economic, political, social, cultural, and gendered – influence the social stratification of space in society. Soja (2004)

argues that it was largely the work of Lefebvre (1974, 1991) that initially moved the field from what had been primarily a time-centred or historical interpretation of critical thought towards a critical sociology that concerned itself with questions about space. More specifically, Lefebvre foregrounded a critical orientation that acknowledged that spatiality, and indeed, society, history, and geography were mutually constituted. Lefebvre argued convincingly that our perceived space of everyday lived experience is influenced by the geopolitics of capitalist nation-states, such as the way in which geographical space is distributed in lots, property is owned, and one must have rights to spaces – determined as public or private (Lefebvre 1991). Laws govern the accessibility and use of space, and resistance to these rules (e.g. illegal squatters) is enforced. Hence, he showed that the struggles over ownership of geographical spaces are politically contested and influenced by power relations.

The critical interplay of power and the use of social space was a central theme in the work of other social theorists, of whom Foucault is one of the most widely cited. For example, the disciplinary power of institutional spaces on the body, and the production of human subjects, were important themes in Foucault's late 1970s volume, *Discipline and Punish* (e.g. Foucault 1977). This work traced the increase of prisons and reformatories of nineteenth-century Europe, theorising how the state subtly disciplined human subjects into docile minds and bodies, compliant with the functioning of capitalist accumulation and civic responsibility. Foucault argued that the end result is that human subjects find themselves reduced in capacity for truly independent action, and little opportunity to shift positions, whether within institutions or broader national territories. As Elden (2001) argues, Foucault's historical studies continued to be thoroughly spatial, leaving a legacy of work that deals with the intersections of space and power, and to historical mapping of power, both of the past and the present.

The implications of the spatial turn on educational research did not begin to thrive until the late twentieth century, when theorists examined the potentials of social constructionist spatial theories for analysing schooling. Researchers became concerned with the ways in which spatial theories allow new understandings of educational problems, such as issues of educational inequality and how power is enacted spatially (Gulson and Symes 2007a). Applications of the work of Lefebvre, Massey, and Soja have been influential in such analyses of educational inequality. Many of the chapters in the work of Gulson and Symes (2007b) address educational inequities through geospatial themes and populations, such as the "spatialization of urban inequality" and education (Lipman 2007), the "in/visible geographies of school exclusion" (Thomson 2007), and "space, equity and rural education" (Green and Letts 2007). Importantly for literacy studies this work emphasises that "students and parents are not just traversing 'empty space', they are actively engaged in constituting, and being constituted by, space and places" (Gulson 2007: 50). Indeed, spatial approaches to educational policy and practice demonstrate the non-neutrality of space in a similar way to which critical literacy theorists address the always political ideologies of language practices and their effects.

The implications of critical sociology to understanding the politics of space (see Soja 2010) are no less central to literacy research. This is because the distribution of space and the control of human subjects within the institution of schooling are not exempt from the fundamental workings of power. Literate training, from the very beginning of compulsory schooling, can be seen as a form of moral and political discipline. One of the earliest scholarly theorisations of spatial and social control in classrooms was proposed in the early 1990s. Luke (1992) analysed lesson observations of a Year One classroom to demonstrate how literacy and the control of the 'body literate' are material social practices in the institutional site of the classroom. For example, it is not incidental that part of learning to read involves the explicit rearrangement of the students' bodies to be seated attentively on the rug, and to display the correct reading habitus at

the onset of a book-reading session. The teacher monitors the correct posture, movement, and the direction of students' gaze, both implicitly and overtly, and power is used to maintain the social order. This work demonstrated and theorised how the material culture of classroom reading lessons involves bodily inscriptions, and the moral regulation of the literate subject within the social space. Literate practices in schools are realised spatially, materially, and are governed by diffuse forms of disciplinary power.

Space as dynamic and fluid: More than determinist accounts of space

The historical and dynamic nature of space has also taken centre stage in socio-spatial theory (Massey 2005). Spaces can be seen as contingent and negotiated, constituted by the multiplicity of trajectories that bring people together at a specific time and place. British social geographer Doreen Massey is considered a key contributor to a feminist framing of space, including a consciousness of the gendered ordering of space and the power-geometrics of the ordering of gender inequality (Fenwick *et al.* 2011: 131). In Massey's (1993: 155) view, space and time cannot be separated: "Space is not static (i.e. timeless), nor time spaceless". She argues that: "Conceptualising space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open, and thus a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics" (Massey 2005: 59), where space becomes an arena of possibility for creating something new. It is this productive potential of geographical metaphors for journeying and meeting that has recently attracted literacy researchers. These understandings of space as formed by a multiplicity of trajectories has led to re-examining adolescents' reading histories in the work of Cliff-Hodges (2010). A class of twelve- to thirteen-year-old students were invited to represent their reading histories in a collage entitled 'Rivers of Reading'. The analysis pointed to the ways in which young people's trajectories as readers are constructed in relation to other people and across time and places. Comber (2013) also considers the affordances of Massey's work for reimagining the classroom as a meeting-place – a site for collaborative meaning making – whereby students' placed histories and current engagements with the relational politics of everyday places become the objects of study.

Similarly, in a comprehensive review of research entitled "The changing social spaces of learning: Mapping new mobilities", Leander and colleagues (2010) argue that thinking about the classroom from a nexus-like perspective, where its permeability and connectedness is emphasised, rather than from the usual container-like perspective enable us to think differently about learning. Using Massey's (2005: 9) approach to a space as "the simultaneity of stories-so-far", they revisit Heath's (1983) seminal study, *Ways with Words*, to consider what might be missing from her 'localist' portrayal of the Roadville and Trackton communities. While they do acknowledge some permeability and mobility in Heath's account they argue that her work may have come to stand for the idea of "containing culture in the local" (p. 334) and to have paved the way for other locally bounded studies of situated literacy learning. Their preference is for a more mobile, relational analysis. However as we discuss below it may be less what Heath portrayed and more a case of what scholars of the time were ready for that meant that the contrastive renditions of the linguistic practices of the three communities were rendered in more static ways than were ever intended by Heath herself. In addition, the spatial theories of that time did not have the explanatory power to account for the escalation of population mobility that was to come and which was to have impact on the local in profound ways as Heath's later work demonstrates (Heath 2012).

Critical issues: the relationship between socio-spatial and socio-cultural viewpoints

One of the critical issues for spatial approaches to literacy research that has not been previously examined is the intersection between socio-cultural and socio-spatial approaches to literacy. Unlike socio-cultural research, research of literacy practices that foreground the spatial and material dimensions of literacy practice have emerged without a uniform theoretical paradigm. For instance, sometimes literacy theorists examine spatial themes by drawing on socio-cultural frames of references, and at other times, without. For example, Gutiérrez has proposed a paradigm shift for literacy learning for youth that blends “Collective Third Space” with a socio-critical approach (Gutiérrez 2008: 148). This is an approach that considers how practices travel across multiple and often contradictory spaces involving boundary-crossing, particularly for migrants, and how “people, ideas, and practices of different communities meet, collide, and merge” (Engeström 2005: 46). Paraphrasing Street (2005: 2), Gutiérrez asks:

What additional set of challenges do students from non-dominant groups address as they move across home, school, and other community settings and interact with family members, teachers, peers, and other adults who also bring ‘sedimented’ features of their life’s activities and experiences to bear on their ways of interacting and participating?

(2008: 151)

While such an approach is theoretically grounded in a socio-cultural, also called socio-critical, approach, there is particular attention to Vygotskian influences in the notion of the Collective Third Space. It expands the basic notion of a student’s zone of proximal development to negotiate different activity systems, not just the collaboration of individuals, to create what Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström (2003) describe as interdependent zones of proximal development. The approach extends socio-critical or social-cultural approaches with an explicit focus on these spatial dimensions of border crossing and pedagogical dimensions of the Collective Third Space.

The precise relationship between spatial approaches to literacy and socio-cultural approaches is similarly described as a productive synergy of theoretical viewpoints in the work of Leander and Sheehy, who argue: “Educators and researchers of culture are increasingly turning to space to understand and explain socio-cultural practices and processes” (2004: 1). Throughout their book, *Spatializing Literacy Research and Practice*, there is an overt grounding in socio-cultural literacy research, but with a particular emphasis upon how discursive practices are produced in spaces. The authors in that volume aim to “recover the interpretive loss experienced when a context of literacy practice is considered to be background to the situated practices happening ‘within it’” (p. 3). Leander and Sheehy are referring here to classrooms, prison cells, bedrooms, and suburban malls, which are material settings that can be realised as social spaces, intimately connected to literacy practices – institutional documents, graffiti, books, architectonic meanings of the physical space, conversations, and other material tools and dimensions of literacy. They argue convincingly that in separating literacy from its immediate material tools – pencils, computers, and so on – literacy spaces have been produced as metaphors without material substance.

In seeking to map the conceptual relationship between socio-cultural approaches to literacy and a spatialising approach to literacy, the two are understood as mutually constituted, though there is an explicit emphasis on the forgotten temporal, material, or spatial dimensions of literacy as a social practice in socio-spatial approaches. As Burnett notes, this allows us to understand

how “times and locations are significant to how we make meaning in the here-and-now” and to the meaning of past and future events, times and places (Chapter 34, p. 523 this volume). Such an approach can be seen in part as a response to the spatial turn in broader social and cultural theory that has emerged since earlier socio-cultural literacy research (e.g. Barton *et al.* 2000; Gee 1992; Street 1993, 2001).

While grafting spatial principles to the socio-cultural is apparent within literacy studies, it should be noted that there are also analyses of literacy events that consider socio-spatial dimensions without explicitly positioning them within a socio-cultural approach (e.g. Green *et al.* 2008; Mills 2010a; Scollon and Scollon 2003; Somerville 2007). For example, an alternative framework is “geosemiotics”, presented in the work of Scollon and Scollon (2003: x) who have paved the way for “the study of the meaning systems by which language is located in the material world”. This shifts attention from different communities as central units for understanding the social organisation of literacy practices, to understanding the indexing of signs, meanings, and discourses by their material and geospatial contexts.

In the following section on historical perspectives, we revisit two key literacy studies to examine the role that the spatial dimensions of literacy practice may have played out either explicitly or implicitly in their anthropological accounts. We discuss the studies of Shirley Brice Heath and Brian Street, given that these scholars have provided the terms of reference for future generations of literacy researchers, Heath for her development of ‘literacy events and practices’ and Street for his ‘ideological model of literacy’. Our aim is to look for traces of the ‘spatial’ in their explanations of literacy, which may continue to inform literacy educational researchers.

Historical perspectives: revisiting the spatial in seminal socio-cultural literacy studies

Re-reading Heath’s (1983) classic *Ways with Words*, with the benefit of spatial theory, one can see evidence of what Leander and colleagues term as a “localist” rendering of the communities. It emphasises their boundedness, and we find strong confirmation of her prescience in addressing issues raised by social geographers with respect to education. In the 1983 prologue for example she writes about Roadville and Trackton residents in the following way: “The ways of living, eating, sleeping, worshipping, using space, and filling time which surrounded these language learners would have to be accounted for as part of the milieu in which the processes of language learning took place” (Heath 1983: 3). Such details begin to capture the “depth of information about a particular site, community, issue” which Compton-Lilly argues, is crucial for longitudinal research (Chapter 14, p. 218 this volume).

Her introduction to the ten years of research in this community is replete with maps and accounts of neighbourhoods, environments, job settings, workplaces, seasonal activities in particular places, bus trips, walks to the creek, and the “natural flow of community and classroom life” (Heath 1983: 8). While Heath is focused on contexts for language learning, her accounts are geographically, materially, and historically situated, including an understanding of the people’s economic circumstances. While Leander and colleagues would like to see a more relational, fluid and dynamic account of the social nature of space, the question remains whether the limits are in Heath’s storytelling or indeed an artefact of the period and the place. In other words, is the boundedness a function of the researcher’s conceptualisation or a phenomenon of the era? In either case, Heath goes on to explicitly address the differences in the three communities’ space and time orderings, even indexing space-time functions, and the ways in which this is related to children’s language learning practices; namely, where and when and in which circumstances young children learn to name their worlds and tell their stories before

going to school. Indeed, Heath (1983: 344) argues that in comparison to the townspeople, the community for Roadville and Trackton children was “geographically based and spatially limited” until they went to school. Yet in the conclusion of her research monograph, *Ways with Words*, Heath updates movements in and out of the communities, and notes that the next generation all plan to move to the cities in search of work.

Heath’s (2012) more recent book, *Words at Work and Play*, which she describes as “a relay-race of then-and-now stories” (p. 1), portrays her revisits to the families of Trackton and Roadville. It includes maps depicting the relocations of the families during the 1980s and the 1990s – the families she first undertook her research with during the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed a key theme of this later work is movement – relocations related to the economy, work, and so on. Mobility needs to be considered not only in terms of space, but across timescales which pertain to the researchers’ ultimate goals and questions.

Social anthropologist Street (1975) studied the literacy practices in an Iranian village in the early 1970s. He described the different kinds of schools contrasting “maktabas, one teacher elementary schools run by the clergy” (Street 1975: 290), with the new education system being introduced at that time. The central government trained teachers and sent them to the villages with the explicit intention of modernisation of rural areas in order to produce new kinds of workers for the contemporary world. Street’s early analysis very much attended to the historical moment, the national political agenda at that time, and interestingly, to the ways in which broader discourses impacted on life, education, and literacy practices in the rural community where he conducted his research. He explains that the centrally trained teachers were “not integrated into the community” (p. 292); rather, “they were in the village but not of the village” (p. 299). Foreshadowing much later insights from place-conscious pedagogical theorists, he observes: “[E]ducation was an urban matter and ... those village youths who wanted to continue would have to leave. ... Progress was outwards not upwards” (p. 300).

Street explained that even though there was a long tradition of literacy associated with commercial success in the Middle East, the new central approach to education was overtly political and concerned with progress of the nation, rather than the village. Taking the perspective of the youth selected to get education beyond the village, Street (1975) points out that their new education credentials come with no guarantees of employment security in volatile economic climates. For our purposes here we simply note that the relational aspects of place, literacy, education, and politics were clearly embedded in Street’s early work. Street went on to distinguish between ideological and autonomous models of literacy, an idea which is foundational to work in critical literacy.

Our point in revisiting these seminal studies that came to shape literacy studies for the past four decades was simply to check for the presence of, and conceptualisation of, spatial ways of knowing. Since that time the material realities of the relationships between places and populations, global and local practices and movements, along with the very nature of literate practices, have changed extraordinarily, hence the need for theoretical development to explain these new phenomena.

Current contributions: spatial flows, networks, and deterritorialisation of literacy practice

Dynamic spatial concepts and metaphors of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), such as the concepts of “rhizomes”, and “lines of flight”, “smooth and striated spaces”, “deterritorialisation” and “reterritorialisation”, are increasingly being applied to language and literacy research in original and hybrid ways to show the fluidity of spaces, their borders, and the connections between

spaces. An example is Gibbs and Krause's (2006) application of rhizomes to hypertextual reading practices in the Web 2.0 world. Rhizomes explain multiplicities that extend in diverse trajectories of nodes or meeting points that can form vast networks, such as those found in the Internet or in neural pathways. Rhizomes cannot be contained within simple structures, such as a tree or root system, but can rupture at any point in diverse lines of unpredictable flight. Gibbs and Krause argue that in web-based textual practices, there is a contemporary focus on the spatial and visual, which always occurs in the context of the temporal and verbal in our reading and viewing. Readers of the Internet follow diverse hypertextual pathways or rhizomes, often generating unpredictable "lines of flight" in our reading, leading to "nodes or points of structuration", such as documents and web pages (Gibbs and Krause 2006: 154). These rhizomes can be traced using the 'Go' function of Netscape or other similar functions that map the sequences of sites traversed on the web.

Influenced by post-structural theory, Hagood (2004) produced a rhizomatic cartography of two adolescents' constructions of their identities through interactions with popular texts, youth group events, school, peers, religious artefacts, and beliefs. Hagood applied the rhizomatic theory of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in relation to principles of rhizomatic cartography. For example, rhizomes are maps with multiple entry points, are heterogeneous rather than dichotomous, and are composed of a multiplicity of lines that extend in all directions while connecting to something else, but have only surface features, rather than a deep structure. Rhizomatic cartography can be used to map pathways and connections between texts, artefacts, people, and places relevant to the study focus, rather than simply coding and describing data. Hagood's analytic mapping work demonstrated how two adolescent girls used spiritual and religious paraphernalia to create subjectivities that coalesced with their use of popular culture and identities across social sites, such as school, home, and youth group or church. The rhizomatic analysis enabled Hagood to trace how their adolescent identities were constructed across social and textual sites in morally conservative and value-oriented ways (Hagood 2004).

Related to these spatial metaphors are smooth and striated spaces. The sea is an example of smooth space with its boundless continuity able to be traversed, and cities are largely striated spaces, with their economic structures, rules, and architecture, which are regulated by state apparatus. However, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 474) acknowledge: "the two spaces in fact only exist in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, traversed into a striated place; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space". Gibbs and Krause (2006) apply these metaphors to challenge the notion that web spaces are totally free from rules, arguing that hypertextual documents are composed according to explicit and implicit rules, including linguistic, digital, spatial, visual, or audio conventions. They may be read in ways that give less attention to rule-governed or striated forms, yet these readings are still bounded by our histories, identities, previous readings, and social constraints.

Concepts of "deterritorialisation" and "reterritorialisation" can occur when lines of flight of the rhizomes interact with the structuring of institutions, including disciplines of knowledge (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The concept of deterritorialisation is a useful heuristic to explain the gradual blurring of boundaries around what counts as literacy practices in the digital age, to embrace more than linguistic forms of representation. Similarly, reterritorialisation could be used to describe the reclaiming of decentred literacy practices of marginalised communities as no less purposeful and valid than the literacy practices of the dominant, white, middle class.

The territorialisation of consumer spaces for enabling and constraining different literacy practices and its associated youth identities is illustrated vividly by Moje (2004). As a participant observer, she would regularly spend time walking around the streets with four Latino youth, sometimes in a pack, and at other times accompanying one teen. Moje describes how the

mainstream space of the mall provoked mainstream enactments of identity, such as through clothing, available consumer goods, music, restaurants, and the way that onlookers regarded the group. Conversely, when they walked through familiar Virnot Street, this local community space “shaped the texts that they consumed and produced” (Moje 2004: 30). This was evident through the accessibility of material texts for purchase or which were worn, such as t-shirts with Mexican slogans and the DVDs of popular Latino music, and the Spanish that was spoken in the street. These practices converged with the ways the Latino youth chose to “identify and were identified” (ibid.). While the territorialisation of literacy practices was clear – city as Mexican/Latino, mall as mainstream commercial culture – there was evidence of some deterritorialisation of the mall as it becomes inclusive spaces to situate hybrid versions of Latina youth identity.

Moving beyond Deleuzian perspectives of space, a recent research project that illustrates the importance of examining networks of literacy practices across time and space is provided by Nichols and colleagues (2012). This research examines networks and geographical connections between early literacy practices of participants observed in two nations and three local regions. An interesting feature of this work is that the reporting of a four-year study of literacy practices of young children and their caregivers is organised geospatially through four key sites of early learning. The places that emerged as significant in the lives of the participants included the mall, clinic, church, and library, and their networked discursive fields. The authors demonstrate how these everyday institutions use social power to influence children and their caregivers, and how participants respond to texts produced by the agencies that operate in these sites. Applying actor-network theory and material semiotics, the authors map in both discursive and geospatial ways, such as through Google mapping, the pathways of parents as they search for resources, whether hypertextually via the Internet, or in the actors’ daily time-space paths. Their analysis of early literacy practices traverses “places, texts, artifacts, and narratives” to map the “discursive” topography of literacy practices in the early years of life (Nichols *et al.* 2012: 159). The socio-spatial organisation of the findings from this research is a distinguishing feature, generating knowledge about early literacy learning that could not be possible if relevant practices were only observed in independent sites.

The socio-spatial dimensions of literacy practice are in the midst of reawakening, with unexamined implications for classroom pedagogies that are being continually reshaped by transnational, globalised, and technology-mediated networks, circulations, and rhizomatic flights of textual practices. Debates about space-time compression, which concern the lessening of social constraints due to receding geographical and cultural distances, are increasingly apparent in people’s experiences and thinking about the world, and about the way literacy is distributed and practised globally and locally (Cope and Kalantzis 2000). The space-time compression that is reshaping the way literacies are practised, would not have occurred without a history of global exploration, advances in technologies of communication and transport, fuelled by political and economic interests (Fenwick *et al.* 2011). The implications of these global shifts have presented new directions of inquiry for socio-spatial literacy research to understand precisely how literacy practices that we observe are simultaneously influenced by both global and local places, and the flows and connections between them.

Challenges and recommendations: spatialised digital practices

Given the rapid changes to the communications environment in recent decades that have given rise to new foci in literacy studies, the future of socio-spatial literacy studies will undoubtedly shape and be shaped by the emergence of global communities, both online and offline social

spaces and networks. Theorists of social semiotics have argued that in recent decades, digital media is increasingly replacing books or other written artefacts as sites of display, both in education and within social institutions and society more broadly. This has been accompanied by a related emphasis on linear or temporal arrangements of words, one-after-the-other, to the use of image, with its spatial rather than temporal organisation, as the “central mode of representation” (Kress and Bezemer 2008: 166). While images are certainly appearing in greater force in the public sector, such as on websites, magazines, billboards, shopping malls, food packaging, buses, and walls, the logo-centric orientation of texts is clearly still dominant in current discourses of the academy, such as books, journals, and literacy assessments in schools and higher education. Geospatial tools have emerged via the Geoweb, such as the widely accessible Google Maps and Google Earth platforms, and other competing developments. Thus, there are new challenges for socio-spatial literacy researchers to explore new forms of geospatial data collection, analysis, and reporting, incorporating moving visual images, network analysis, and other spatial presentations of data. Such multimodal representations of knowledge will increasingly play complementary or alternative roles to the conventional reporting of research findings via conventional books and journal articles with their linear and logo-centric formats.

Future directions: socio-spatial literacy studies

Socio-spatial approaches to literacy studies have enabled researchers to understand how literacy practices are recontextualised and reconfigured in different social spaces, emphasising the materiality of literacy by attending to matters beyond discourse – the body, the classroom, the tools, the technologies – in the context of broader dynamic relations between people and places. There is potential for literacy studies to investigate the multiplicity of “activity spaces” as a “spatial network of links and activities, spatial connections and locations, within which a particular agent operates” (Massey 2000: 54). Research will continue to be needed to investigate how literacy practices are transformed as they migrate to different virtual spaces (e.g. websites, online gaming, social media), and other digital sites of textual display and interaction (e.g. iPads, smartphones, touch screen computers, games with motion sensors), geographical sites, social contexts, transnational spaces, and sites of social control and resistance. Furthermore, there are changes to the material circulation of texts and practices, and the networks, rhizomes, and nodes that connect and differentiate literacy practices locally and globally.

Spatial research of literacy practices does much more than adopt spatial language and terminology; rather, such research acknowledges that literacy practices and their associated spaces are socially produced. There is also a consciousness of the politics of space and the distribution of literacy practices. If, as Soja and Hooper (1993: 197) state, there is general agreement that “space makes a difference in theory, culture and politics” then it can equally make a difference to our knowledge of literacy practices which are inherently social and spatial.

Related topics

Place-based approaches, Critical pedagogy of place, Ecological approaches, Rural and urban literacies, Indigenous literacies.

Further reading

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7

ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO LITERACY RESEARCH

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Introduction

It is now nearly twenty years since literacy scholar David Barton (1994, 2007) first called for researchers in the field to adopt what he called the “ecological metaphor” to conceptualise literacy as “embedded in other human activity ... in social life and thought and ... history” (Barton 2007: 32). The term ‘ecology’ is now so commonplace in everyday, as well as scholarly, discourse that users often see no need to define it. It can stand for everything that is going on around an object of focus, such as a literacy practice, and generally signals an inclusive, holistic orientation to investigation and social action.

Ecological theory however is not a single entity. Theories that attempt to account for ‘everything that is going on’ differ in some important ways. Barton categorised ecological theories as either psychological or sociolinguistic and aimed to integrate these perspectives. I will distinguish between conceptualisations that are person-centred from those that are system-centred. I will also consider the issue of epistemology – or theory of knowledge – and how this can colour the ecological lens. That is, ecological theories can be mobilised from both positivist and postmodern perspectives. Following a discussion of the theoretical perspectives, I will survey a range of methodological approaches to ecological research in literacy. Finally, I will argue that four points are important to take into account when considering undertaking literacy research from an ecological perspective:

- 1 Ecological studies are trans-contextual; contexts are multiple.
- 2 Ecological studies may be systematic or rhizomatic.
- 3 Sustained engagement can bring new layers of insight into a literacy ecology.
- 4 Research changes ecologies.

Ecological theories: historical perspectives and current contributions

The risk with labelling any perspective ‘historical’ is that bias toward the contemporary in research circles tends to relegate ‘historical perspectives’ to irrelevance. That is by no means the case in this field. Indeed as we shall see, it is always important to consider the temporal dimension of ecologies. From that perspective the ‘past’ is necessarily a part of our present focus. Readers

should also be aware that theorists have long careers and are often revising and further developing concepts decades after originally formulating them. In the following section I review several approaches to theorising ecologies which have influenced research in the fields of literacy and linguistics. While some of these views have emerged more recently than others, all are currently being actively mobilised by researchers seeking to understand contemporary literacy ecologies.

The developing child's ecological context: Bronfenbrenner's model

Uri Bronfenbrenner made a lasting impact on the field of child development studies when during the 1970s he published several works conceptualising human development in ecological terms (Bronfenbrenner 1974, 1976, 1979). However, even before this, by advising on the establishment of the Head Start Program in the United States, he had significantly changed early childhood education provision, including in literacy. Indeed, fostering close connections between social policy and child development research was one of the main priorities of this highly active researcher.

While Bronfenbrenner's model may be familiar to many readers, I will briefly describe it. This ecological model places the developing child at the centre of a nested set of systems from the most immediately present to the child (or proximal) progressively out to the broadest level of social organisation. The *microsystem* is the immediate setting in which the child develops and it is important to recognise that there is usually more than one microsystem in a child's life. The family household, child-care centre and preschool can all be considered microsystems. A view of the "developing person ... as an active agent, who inevitably plays some part in any developmental process taking place" was considered by Bronfenbrenner to be essential in studying the microsystem (2005: 160).

The *mesosystem* is produced through interactions between microsystems. The child's transition to school is a situation that brings the mesosystem into focus since it requires the child to begin a life of travel back and forth between two important microsystems. Attempting to understand the effect of this transition on children has motivated many studies which take up Bronfenbrenner's model (e.g. Dockett and Perry 2007; Fisher 2009; Lee 2010; McNaughton 2001).

The *exosystem* comes into being as a function of interaction between the microsystem and other settings that do not include the child directly (Bronfenbrenner 1993). Institutions that impact on children's lives through the formation of policy or the provision of services are involved in the exosystem. Also included are contexts that parents and other family members inhabit such as workplaces.

The *macrosystem* is the level at which broad societal and cultural patterns are formed which Bronfenbrenner described as constituted of "*developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange*" (2005: 149, original italics). Bronfenbrenner's work at the policy level was a practical application of this model since he argued that actions in exo- and macro-settings can materially impact child development through resourcing actions at other levels of the ecology (Weisner 2010).

Bronfenbrenner intended this model to challenge scientific accounts of child development, particularly those derived from laboratory experiments, which he famously described as "strange" (1979: 513). However, while he championed naturalistic research and was strongly supportive of contextual accounts of children's lives, research citing his theories has not always reflected this orientation. As the theorist himself pointed out when presenting a revision of the model, studies too often relied on "an operational definition based solely on a proxy variable (ie a social address)" (p. 151) to investigate complex phenomena.

The at times reductive application of ecological systems theory has possibly contributed to its lack of popularity among literacy researchers, particularly in the New Literacy Studies camp. The second edition of *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* includes two chapters about ecological perspectives (Kramsch and Steffenson 2008; Pahl 2008) neither of which make any mention of Bronfenbrenner. Barton has criticised the model for treating contexts as “too static” (2007: 30). However, Bronfenbrenner has been more interested in permeability of boundaries than might be appreciated; he writes: “such interesting linkages take a number of forms, among them the participation of the same persons in more than one setting, communications between settings, and the availability of information in one setting about the other” (2005: 159).

All these forms of connection have been noted by literacy researchers studying the relationship between literacy practices in different but connected contexts.

Time and ecosocial systems

The final dimension of what its author called the “ecological paradigm” (Bronfenbrenner 1993: 37) is the dimension of time, or the *chronosystem*. As a theory of development, ecological theory is inherently concerned with change over time in the life of a developing individual. However, it departed from traditional developmental psychology by being unconcerned with normative sequences of assumed universal developmental milestones. Indeed, Bronfenbrenner reflected on his own shift from a traditional to an ecological perspective: “Seen in different contexts, human nature, which I had once thought of as a singular noun, turns out to be plural and pluralistic ... The process and product of making human beings clearly varies in place and time” (Bronfenbrenner 1979: xiii).

The chronosystem encompasses continuities and changes over time in every level of a system: micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystemic. So, to fully incorporate a temporal dimension into an ecological investigation, it would be necessary to look at how time effects environments and not just how children change as they grow and mature.

Arguably consistent with this view is Lemke’s (2000) explanation of ecosocial systems in terms of intersecting timescales. Here the central focus is not the developing individual but the *process*. Lemke proposes two central analytic tasks: first to identify processes “characteristic of each relevant timescale” and, second, to establish how processes are “integrated across different timescales” (Lemke 2000: 275). Lemke’s theorisation assists us in understanding how an event in a single place or setting may simultaneously involve different timescales. He uses the mundane example of a high school chemistry lesson. A teacher’s question and the student’s response is in a short timescale – it occurs in minute-by-minute interaction. However, when students consult their notebooks in order to check a possible answer, they may be looking at text they produced days or weeks ago. The textbook from which the teacher derives some of the content of the lesson and which may supply the question asked, was first produced years ago (particularly if it has run to several editions) while the formulas contained within it may have been in use for decades or hundreds of years.

If literacy is understood as social practice, then its study always involves a temporal dimension (Tusting 2000). A practice usually can only become entrenched into a society or a community over time and some of the timescales of literacy are particularly long. This point is powerfully made by Jimenez and Smith (2008) in their study of literacy practices in a Mexican city, San Andres Cholula. The researchers trace connections between ancient Mesoamerican writing systems and current local literacies. These scripts and associated practices were suppressed by European colonisation but, while unacknowledged, have not ceased to shape the semiotic

practices of communities. The researchers argue for “the importance of historical antecedents to contemporary practices” (2008: 29).

This may be particularly vital when considering communities impacted by colonisation and repression whose languages and/or literacies may have been driven underground or into protected sub-cultural spaces (such as religious rituals). It is important to consider that time does not always preserve; it can also erase. An illustration of this is given by Connellan and Nichols (2011) in their discussion of a history project undertaken in a primary school. They describe how, each year, each teacher clears the walls of the graduating class’s work. On a different timescale, the school itself is built on land cleared from the bush, formerly home to the Kaurna, the local indigenous people:

Each year, the group of children see reflected only their own productions, with no reference to those who went before. This is an erasure of history that, on a smaller timescale, echoes the school itself in its act(uality) of building over and effacing traces of the lives of those who preceded its arrival.

(Connellan and Nichols 2011: 7)

I will return to the dimension of time when considering different approaches to designing research into literacy ecologies. First, however, we will consider perspectives that take up the challenge of building multilayered accounts of literate lives without embracing a systemic model.

Storied worlds

Literacy researchers tend to be particularly sensitive to the role of language, text and genre in social contexts. This orientation has influenced how the field generates explanations of happenings within and across the diverse situations in which individuals learn and grow. Language is inherently a shared and boundary-crossing resource which is changed by the circumstances in which it is used (Blommaert 2001). This may be why literacy researchers have been less inclined to categorise phenomena according to levels in a system and more inclined to pay close attention to the qualities of language and literacy interactions in every circumstance available for observation. Explanations tend to be more emergent and less governed by an a priori system framework (though, see examples of systems oriented literacy studies in the following section).

The concept of the ‘world’ is a flexible construct which recognises that certain contexts can have their own logics, landscapes and languages quite distinctive from other seemingly similar contexts. In their exploration of children’s learning across home and school environments, Huber and colleagues (2011: 108) refer to Lugones’ definition of a world as a “tiny portion of a particular society” (1987: 10). They take up the concept of “world travelling” (2011: 109) to interpret children’s experiences of moving between what they describe as the two “curriculum” of home and school. The researchers argue that ‘world’ is a more appropriate concept than ‘site’ in evoking the way in which children as participants are required, not just to be in but, to live in these environments.

Depending on their focus, researchers have created different accounts of children’s worlds and how these are interrelated. Based on close sustained engagement with a group of child writers over three years, Dyson (1993, 1997, 2001) has highlighted three worlds and produced many case studies of how these are negotiated by individual children: “the *imaginary worlds* formed from varied symbolic media – drawing, talking, writing; the *ongoing social world*; and

the *wider experienced world* of people, places, objects, and events” (Dyson 1988: 364, italics added).

Text-making is at the heart of this conceptualisation of multiple worlds. As Dyson puts it: “text worlds are suspended – embedded – within a web of multiple worlds” (1988: 387). In other words, it is through making connections – with other texts, with represented and experienced lives – that texts are able to mean.

Dyson (1988) offers as one of many examples of this interconnection in action, first grader “Mitzi” writing a piece which brings together a fairy-tale world with her family world. The story begins: “Once there was a witch. She is my mom” (Dyson 1988: 378). As Mitzi shares this with her friends, they express concern about the story’s tone, advising her not to read it to the class at sharing time. The following exchange takes place:

Mitzi: She’s a bad witch (pointing to her picture)

Jenni: Then you’re a bad girl

Mitzi: No, I’m not. I might not even like my mom, or I love my mom.

Striking from this example is the simultaneity of activity across the story, peer, family and classroom worlds as Mitzi keeps in play daughter, creative writer, student and friend identities. With its deep resonances in mythology and popular culture, the character of the witch evokes the widest cultural frames (and longest timescales) while at the same time operating at the intimate level of Mitzi’s closest relationship – with her mother.

Essential to Dyson’s view of children’s worlds is the permeability of their boundaries, enabling cultural and linguistic material, as well as the children themselves, to cross between them. Dyson has adopted the concepts of ‘sampling’ and the ‘re-mix’ from contemporary music to refer to the ways in which materials from across children’s different worlds are combined to produce texts and other communication practices (2003: 103–104). This highlights the importance of finding ways to name the practices of working between and across contexts.

Decentred networked ecologies

Over the last two decades, the task of conceptualising social ecologies has been complicated by the set of issues encapsulated in the term ‘globalisation’. Coming to grips with trans-local aspects of contexts has become pressing with a range of social phenomenon associated with globalisation impacting on children’s lives and literacy learning environments. This has challenged child-centred perspectives with some commentators advocating intensified protection of children from global culture particularly associated with consumerism (Beder 2009), effectively policing the boundaries of local ecologies.

The 1990s saw significant intellectual activity aimed at analysing and conceptualising the world in conditions of globalisation. One of the key theorists of globalisation, Appadurai (1990, 1999) characterised the contemporary situation as “a new force field of social relations”, a “world of flows” in which all kinds of entities were in motion including people, resources, goods, ideas and practices (Appadurai 1999: 230). In practical terms, one consequence was increasing diversity in communities particularly challenging those that had previously been much more homogenous. Bronfenbrenner had characterised the macrosystem as composed of members sharing “similar belief systems, social and economic resources, hazards, lifestyles, etc.” (2005: 150). Assumptions about how much is shared are put under pressure in conditions of increased diversification which has in some places reached the status of “superdiversity” (Blommaert and Rampton 2012).

At the same time, developments in digital technology were challenging previously clear boundaries between contexts such as the home and the workplace, formal and informal learning environments and the private and the public and between nation states (Lawn 2001). Such developments put the very idea of a macrosystem in question.

However, the need to understand “everything that is going on” has not diminished. Rather, different conceptualisations have emerged to analyse connections between contexts crossing local and trans-local, and material and virtual, settings. Actor-network theory and rhizome analysis can be described as new ways to investigate ecologies and equally as ways to understand new ecologies.

Decentring the subject

We have seen that ecological theories of child development put the child in the centre. While these models are theoretically relational and bidirectional they have in practice been primarily motivated by the drive to improve children, through implementing policies and practices at every level that will optimise development and learning. From this perspective the classical ecological approach can be considered modernist. Prout, a proponent of what has been called the New Sociology of Childhood, argues that studies of childhood need to “[move] beyond the grip of such modernist thinking” by “attending to the networks, flows and mediations” of contemporary children’s lives (Prout 2011: 4).

Network perspectives offer a flatter, decentred and multi-focused orientation to the world under study. Taguchi, writing about young children’s learning, describes it in this way “Learning can ... be understood as emerging from what happens in distributed networks and assemblages consisting of both human and non-human matter and organisms that are in interaction” (Taguchi 2011: 38). Actor-Network Theory (ANT) conceptualises networks as “comprised of diverse materials” (Murdoch 1998) including the human and the nonhuman. This approach is interested in tracing movements and connections between all elements that make up networks (Law 2004 [1999]). Literacy researchers in the ethnographic tradition are used to paying close attention to people – their behaviour, interactions and expressed views. ANT encourages researchers to look also at the nonhuman elements in each situation and to ask what is being achieved by and through them.

This approach soon loses its initial strangeness when we consider a very familiar and conventional focus of literacy practice – the book. In a literacy event, the book can be considered part of an assemblage which also comprises human actors who select, carry, handle, process, talk about and otherwise interact with the book and with each other. Material and discursive qualities of the book promote and even compel particular activities on the part of the humans. Conventional book pages have to be caught between finger and thumb to be turned; on a digital tablet, pages must be swiped. They thus call on the body to respond in specific ways. Books may also attract other objects to the assemblage such as the easel on which a ‘big book’ is displayed. The assemblage of book, easel, teacher’s chair and teacher operates as an attractor to bring an assemblage of children into place on the floor. This illustrates the point made by ANT theorist Law that “materials (human, textual and technological or artefactual) define one another and hold one another in place” (2003: 8).

Taking a wider lens, a networking approach asks how the book came to be in a position to be utilised in this way. School-based resource funding and selection processes become relevant as are the actions of commercial entities networking into schools. The state literacy curriculum may well be an actor influencing both school resourcing priorities and commercial publishers’ strategies. Timeframes could also become salient. Perhaps the school in question has a very

limited budget for new books and so the big book could be decades old, a vector for storylines and values of a previous time.

Rhizome theory offers an alternative approach to exploring assemblages – one that emphasises the emergent and non-hierarchical nature of connections (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The concept of a rhizome is taken from botany, referring to the way in which some plants, rather than having root systems connected to a single stem or trunk, send out runners in every direction which can emerge as sprouts in ways that seem unconnected but which can be found by looking beneath the soil. “Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be ... A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7).

Rhizome theory is arguably a non-systemic way of conceptualising an ecology. Considering the categories of things connected rhizomatically – “semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances” – one can see how it might be possible to generate a picture or account of a literacy ecology.

The mobile nature of literacy has emerged as a focus owing in part to the impact of mobile devices (although the book is perhaps the original mobile literacy device). Literacies have been called “nomadic” (Masny 2013: 342); even those forms of practice that may seem most bonded to a context (such as those often referred to as school literacies) are travellers, appearing in many guises such as “edutainment” assemblages (Buckingham and Scanlon 2003). This focus on mobility and transformability has made rhizome theory particularly relevant to literacy research (Leander and Rowe 2006; Sellers and Honan 2007).

Designing the ecological study: main research methods

In the previous section, readers encountered a range of approaches to conceptualising social ecologies. These differ on a number of axes including whether the ecology is viewed as person-centred or decentred and whether it is considered to be a system composed of structural components or as a dynamic confluence. The tradition of ecological thinking that a researcher enters can have a significant impact on the kinds of questions that are asked and the designs of studies. In this section, I will introduce several methodological approaches, illustrating some of the options taken by researchers with specific examples. We will look at systematic and immersive studies, exploratory and activist orientations. An ecological approach can be shaped to researchers’ experience and resources, whether novice or veteran, whether well funded or running on time and energy alone.

Systems design: working the levels

While not all ecological studies are systematic, one way to structure a study is through system categories. This means the researcher will ensure that the participants and data sources are reflective of at least some levels (micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems) in a literacy or learning ecology. While it is often assumed in literacy research circles that ecological research must be qualitative and characterised by immersion in a community, that is not necessarily the case. Indeed ecological theories influenced by biological models of natural ecologies often appeal to researchers working within a positivist paradigm. Statistical and experimental methods have been taken up in attempts to produce knowledge about ecological dimensions of literacy development. In the interests of informing researchers about the full range of options, examples of quantitative approaches will be given.

Those working within interpretive and postmodern paradigms may be inclined to skip over the next section. However, concepts often become clarified by seeing how they are

operationalized in research. Dialogue between literacy researchers with different backgrounds and perspectives may increase our capacity to promote a holistic view of literacy within complex interrelated contexts of acquisition and use.

Quantitative and experimental studies

The “linguistic landscapes” of bilingual youth were the focus of an investigation by Borrero and Yeh (2010). The researchers sought to gain a better understanding of the social contexts in which bilingual students learn and use English and which influence their identities as successful English users. The interrelation between these multiple contexts was conceptualised as the language learning ecology. The researchers’ selection of a quantitative design was motivated by a desire to establish patterns in relation to the linkages, both connections and disconnections, between these dimensions. Accordingly they identified a cohort of 269 bilingual high school students and administered a purpose-designed survey instrument.

The Ecological Language Learning and Academic Success (ELLAS) scale was developed through a process that was consistent with the researchers’ motivations. As well as reviewing literature to generate possible items, they talked with bilingual youth about their experiences with language use, and also sought the perspectives of teachers, school counsellors and other researchers. Based on this consultation, seven “ecological influences” were selected, including family, friends (both native and non-native English-speakers), classes, teachers and neighbourhood (Borrero and Yeh 2010: 573). Self was also included since personal reflection and independent strategizing also emerged from initial inquiry as an influence.

Statistical analysis was used to create clusters of items which helped to explain variance in influence over students’ language use decisions and sense of competence. These clusters mapped onto the four systems of school, peers, family and community. The researchers then employed a multidimensional scaling process to render in visual form the relationships between these “ecological spaces” in terms of “similarity, difference, and distance across and between each other” (2010: 576). In this manner they were able to see that the school cluster (a combination of class, teacher and self) was the most distant from the other three – family, friends and neighbourhood. This suggested the challenge that bilingual youth experience in bridging the school and non-school contexts in relation to their English learning, competency and identity as successful English speakers.

Experimental methods were combined with naturalistic field work by Pellegrini and Galda (2003 [1998]: 1) in their study of children’s literacy development in the early years of school. They conceptualised development as involving transactions between different settings in a child’s “social ecological niche” (p. 1) mediated by a child’s individual temperament. The researchers focused particularly on the use of “literate language” across settings arguing that this form of language is crucial to children’s success in school literacy (p. 11).

The researchers conducted telephone interviews, asked adults and children to keep literacy diaries and implemented the HOME inventory, a tool which documents a range of literacy resources and opportunities in homes, or to compile data about home literacy practices. In-class observations were conducted. The researchers also employed what they refer to as “contrived or analogue studies” in which children were asked to participate in tasks under conditions set by the researchers but where the design of these tasks was “informed by prior naturalistic observation” (p. 26).

These analogue tasks were designed to enable the researchers to investigate an aspect of the microsystem – children’s relationships with school peers – with a particular focus on the circumstances in which literate language would appear in interactions. Individual audio

recorders were used to capture oral language in both naturalistic and contrived situations. The researchers anticipated that certain kinds of play as well as certain kinds of peer relationships would be conducive to the use of literate language.

Comparing the peer microsystem with the official classroom microsystem, the researchers noted that young children performed at a higher level of linguistic competence in pretend play than in formal school tasks. Their observations of children's social interaction in analogue tasks which mimicked naturalistic play supported an interpretation that "play is characterised by negotiated rules and requires children to justify their decisions and actions" thus prompting more complex oral language use (p. 105). They also looked at children's social networks across both home and school settings, identifying that more extensive social networks outside of school appeared to be correlated with more extensive peer networks, and thus more opportunities for play and language use, in school.

Qualitative ecological systems designs

Within a qualitative approach, ecological systems theory can inform the conceptualisation of literacy learning contexts. Some researchers have drawn on this theory to make conscious selections of contexts representing various sub-systems of an ecology. In analysis, this approach can sensitise researchers to how different contexts come into relation and how these relationships impact on what can be practised as literacy. An ethnographic orientation is compatible with this approach as it involves the researcher(s) visiting and revisiting settings, gathering insights from participants and using multiple kinds of documentation strategies to track and map activities.

The place of the library in children's literacy learning was the subject of Sensenig's (2012) research. He conceptualised the library as a microsystem in interaction with the family microsystem, creating a mesosystem, which was also in interaction with its broader social context. Using ethnographic methods, the researcher drew on Bronfenbrenner's model to focus his observations and analysis. Sensenig acknowledges the critique of this model from within the literacy research community, engaging specifically with Barton's comment that the model is "too static ... making different contexts and environments seem very fixed" (2007: 30). He responds:

the simpler model pays off precisely because social contexts are complex and dynamic. The distinct systems of the model provided a means to grasp and sort specific details in the dense mix of people and ideas that characterized even the shortest library programs.

(Sensenig 2012: 241)

It is the principled attention to particular activities and their connections, both proximal and distal, that enables the researcher to create a multilayered account with explanatory force.

This can be seen in two aspects of the analysis. First, we see how the child is located in relation to two co-present microsystems, the family and the library, when participating in storybook sessions. Second, we see how the library is related to other institutions in the exosystem which, though not immediately apparent in social interactions in the library, are impacting on how librarians understand and carry out their literacy work.

Sensenig's overall conclusions show the importance of working across more than one level of a system. He observed that there was a high level of complementarity between the actions and beliefs of adults in both microsystems regarding the value of reading and the most effective ways to engage young children as literacy apprentices. However, access to this beneficial

mesosystem was not assured. This access was highly dependent on libraries' connections with other institutions in the exosystem. In particular, the permeation of standards-based accountability models in education systems was beginning to change the nature of library management: "Many of the librarians I interviewed talked about 'incorporating standards' into their story times ... Libraries that followed these guidelines were eligible for best practice awards, and as one administrator noted, 'The money follows the measurement.'" (Sensenig 2012: 198).

In contrast, he describes one library which developed connections with a very different element in its external environment, drawing on what librarians perceived about children's interests in that community (Sensenig n.d.). This library hosted a 'Wrestling Club' which was presented by a professional wrestler and where storylines, characters, history and technicalities of wrestling were the material of literacy and language interactions.

Sensenig's conclusion critiques a common assumption about the importance of consistency across different learning contexts in a child's life. Quoting Bronfenbrenner on the "formation and maintenance of transcultural dyads across a variety of settings" (1979: 214), he argues "[t]his element of variety is crucial" (Sensenig 2012: 233). Homogeneity of provision, with an emphasis on consistency between institutions and only one kind of family microsystem (Western middle class) denies children from diverse family contexts opportunities to realise their potential.

An example of a smaller scale ecological study is Lee's (2010) investigation of shared book reading practices in a single preschool over nearly a year. He describes his research focus in terms of "two different settings in the Microsystem ... the home (parents) and early education (teachers) contexts, not as separate contexts, but interacting ones" (Lee 2010: 213–214). In the literature there are divergences in the application of system categories; Bronfenbrenner (1979) referred to the home and the education setting as microsystems rather than as settings. In Lee's research, the interaction between these two settings (or systems) prompted the selection of the morning transition as the focus of observations. This was the period in which parents were present in the preschool and thus the two microsystems were in direct interaction. Video was used to capture instances of book sharing between parents and children, teachers and children and children and peers in over a hundred sessions.

Through careful analysis of video data, including looking at what preceded and followed each book-sharing instance, Lee was able to come to some conclusions about how relationships between these systems fostered or impeded young children's participation in reading. For instance, he found a pattern in which book sharing between a child and parent was often followed by the child approaching the teacher to read the same book, often immediately after the parent had left the premises. Looking closer, he noticed that teachers unobtrusively observed parents' reading strategies and at times incorporated these into their own interactions with the child. Also, following book sharing with parents at morning transitions, children were inclined to continue reading in the free play time which followed, often finding a peer to share a book with.

These examples demonstrate that literacy researchers in the ethnographic tradition can find ecological systems theory useful in designing their studies and analysing literacy ecologies. More commonly we find that literacy researchers build their picture of an ecology without adopting a system framework of the kind that Bronfenbrenner advocated.

Immersive non-systematic approach

In an immersive approach, the researcher aims to get to know the literacy or learning ecology of a place through exploring as many aspects as possible in a sustained manner over time. Rather than beginning with established system categories to direct attention at elements of the

environment, researchers aim to build a rich multilayered account of the diverse literacy and language practices of participants in the focus community. They employ a range of metaphors and interpretive devices to express their understanding of the meaning of aspects such as reading, text and communication to members.

The nature of such engagements is such that researchers generally become to some extent incorporated into these ecologies, for instance by providing resources which are deployed in local activities. Indeed, this may be a motivation for engaging with the community; studies of this kind often target disadvantaged or marginalised locations. Here I will discuss studies which involve a significant exploratory dimension. Later in the chapter I will look at studies which are primarily activist in nature.

The first example is not a literacy-focused project but one which exemplifies many of the elements of an immersive approach and which has inspired some literacy researchers (eg Nichols *et al.* 2012). A team of eight researchers led by Good (1997) set out to learn why residents living in an impoverished neighbourhood were not more involved in their children's school. The study began with what they describe as an "ecological assessment". This process was not guided by any formal checklist. Rather, it took the form of exploring and engaging with the neighbourhood and its residents. Methods employed included:

- immersion in school life
- attendance at school and school district events
- monitoring of media commentary on and representations of the school
- walking streets
- drawing detailed maps
- 'cold calls' on parents
- identification of key group of involved parents (Good *et al.* 1997)

It will be evident to literacy researchers that this is a multimodal approach to exploration. Visual documentation, textual analysis, talk and embodied experience of places were all utilised with the overall goal of understanding what it means to be a member of this community and of this school and why these two identities may be in conflict.

UK literacy researcher Kate Pahl embodies the immersive approach. Her projects have involved sustained engagement with communities and families and iterative processes of coming to understand multiple dimensions of their lives and the role of literacy in their lives. One project has involved a family that Pahl first encountered as a literacy tutor and who became participants in an initial study of the "diverse communicative landscape in which literacy practices are embedded" (2001: 146). The families were purposively selected on the basis that one of the children was experiencing a "disruption with school". The study was designed from the outset to explore this relationship but with a focus on developing a deep understanding of the home as a rich landscape, rather than just a unitary context to be compared with school.

The iterative process of deepening understandings can be seen in a series of writings Pahl has produced over time as she has continued her engagement and reflection. It was only after a year of fortnightly visits to the family, in which the researcher built up a picture of the many kinds and uses of texts, that in-depth interviews were carried out. Thus Pahl was able to draw on a foundation of shared experiences and understandings in a process of co-constructing meanings with the participants.

In an early paper, she focused on the flux of literacy practices in homes as participants moved in and out of family contexts, including play, education, religion, cultural participation and

household work (Pahl 2001). At this point the concept of the “ephemeral text” emerged as a way to name the sometimes fleeting nature of literacy and communication practices. An example is when a child’s play space (and its associated texts) has to be tidied away in order to make room for other domestic activities: “meaning-making exists in a constantly moving, oscillating space, between a making moment, a tidying-up moment and a remaking moment, as objects are shifted and re-contextualized” (Pahl 2001: 148).

In a later paper, Pahl re-explored her accumulated data and analyses to develop new insights. Reflecting her extended engagement with one family over time, she focused on the temporal dimension (Pahl 2007). Adapting Lemke’s categories (Lemke 2000), she analysed family literacy practices in terms of micro, meso and macro timescales. Macro timescales were seen in the way that some family cultural practices were seasonal, such as in reflecting the Islamic calendar. This scale also connected the histories of older family members with current ways of knowing. Meso timescales were associated with the divisions of a school year into terms, and the week into school time and home time whereas micro timescales reflected the moment by moment interactions.

It can be seen that this analysis works across contexts as well as between times. Pahl’s ecological orientation is family centred (also community centred – see below) but links the family to other domains of practice and knowledge. She writes about coming to understand the many meanings of “bird”, a figure that appeared in a child’s text and talk at home and at school: “It took me a while to realise that Fatih’s bird was an artefact that held multiple meanings and could be identified with different meanings in different sites and across domains” (Pahl 2007: 188).

This process involves tracking semiotic material through many contexts and learning about it from various participants whose views may change over time. As the researcher revisits aspects of the ecology, she layers her understanding.

Multiple case design

Regardless of whether a systematic or an immersive approach is taken, designing a project around several sites or cases can have advantages for ecological literacy research. The specificities of the cases, when contrasted, can shed light on the diverse ways in which broader social movements are mobilised in local contexts. When this approach is taken, site selection and case identification are important in the design and evolution of literacy research projects (Abu-Lughod 2007). While site selection needs to be considered early in the design process, case identification may be emergent, as the exploration of an ecology unfolds.

In an oft-cited example, Neuman and Celano (2001) specifically chose four contrasting neighbourhoods for their ‘ecological survey’ of affordances and resources for literacy learning and participation. Literacy, in this study, was defined inclusive of practices taking place in community contexts and included activities such as purchasing or borrowing reading materials, reading signs and posters, and finding safe and comfortable places to sit and read. To ascertain neighbourhood literacy affordances the researchers systematically documented specific aspects of these environments including shops where reading material was available, quality of signage, seating and lighting.

Site selection is based on perceived qualities of places and researchers’ access to these perceived qualities is through their interpretive resources. Therefore, one of the first decisions comparative case study researchers have to make is how to describe sites. Neuman and Celano chose two low-income and two middle-income neighbourhoods for their study. They describe the low-income neighbourhoods as follows:

Kensington is a dense, multiethnic community consisting of Puerto Rican, Black, Vietnamese, Eastern European, and Caucasian family sections, all of which are highly segregated. Although the community has areas of urban decay, it is lively and dynamic with beautiful urban gardens hidden throughout the area. Kingsessing is a more socially isolated community, contained by physical and natural boundaries. Largely African American, it has many local businesses, shops, and carryout food stores, some of which are well maintained, others in disrepair. Although the signs of poverty are throughout, there is a Rockwellian ethos in the community with children playing double dutch in the streets, walking their dogs, and bike riding around the playgrounds.

(Neuman and Celano 2001: 12)

It is evident that demographic characteristics have contributed to the selection of these communities, both categorised as low income but with contrasting cultural mixes – one multi-ethnic and the other African American. The descriptions also signal the researchers' intentions to recognise and name both flaws ("urban decay", "disrepair") and high points ("beautiful urban gardens", "well maintained" shops) of communities. The term 'Rockwellian' is interesting in pointing to a larger cultural lens through which the Kingsessing neighbourhood may be viewed. For this author, not a citizen of the United States, this necessitated some quick internet research on the reputation of this iconic American artist, a search which yielded descriptors like "optimistic", "family oriented", "idealistic", "small town" and "sentimental". It is a reminder that descriptions are always interpretive, challenging any assumption that literacy ecologies exist 'out there' waiting to be documented.

Multiple-site studies are necessarily trans-local. Localities may be in different neighbourhoods, different regions or even different countries. An example of a trans-national comparative case study is Eady and Reedy's (2011) collaboration. This team looked at learning ecologies in indigenous communities in Canada and Australia. This contrastive case design created opportunities for better understanding the impact of a range of contextual factors on the indigenous communities' resources for learning. Both communities were located in areas geographically remote from urbanised centres and were infrequently serviced with deliveries of goods owing not only to remoteness but to extreme climatic conditions. They sought out instances of technology use across community life including in homes, schools, sporting facilities, libraries and other settings.

When working across multiple sites, researchers need to have some common foci or categories to direct their attention. While Neuman and Celano focused on access to print, Eady and Reedy focused on access to technology. Nichols and colleagues (see below) looked at resources for early learning across four sites in two countries (Nichols *et al.* 2012). All these researchers defined their subject inclusively, recognising many different manifestations of the category and being guided by members' definitions and patterns of participation. In each case, the researchers viewed a site as a collection of settings (e.g. streets, shops, clinics) each of which required to be explored and analysed.

Building learning ecologies

Understanding the importance of ecologies in fostering and supporting literacy and language learning can prompt a more activist approach. Some researchers design projects with the express intention of strengthening existing ecologies or even building new ecologies. Others begin with the intention of simply studying a particular community before coming to the realisation that they have become agents of change.

An example of this realisation in process is Goodridge and McNaughton's (1994) study of family literacy in a disadvantaged urban neighbourhood in New Zealand. In this study, families of two different ethnic affiliations (Anglo European and Maori) were interviewed regarding home literacy practices. The researchers took an ecological perspective, following Bronfenbrenner, and set out to better understand differences in the family microsystem which may impinge on children's transitions to school.

While Pakeha (Anglo European) parents were keen to show examples of their preschool children's writing and drawing, Maori parents stated that their children did not do any writing at home. However, when the researchers specified joint writing activities (e.g. card making) and children's unconventional script ("scribbles"), the Maori parents found many more artefacts and examples. Reflecting on this study at a later time, McNaughton writes:

Our intention was to collect naturalistic descriptive data over the months before school, but the process of asking was highly 'reactive', at least in a methodological sense. That is, [as a result] the families viewed these forms of emergent writing in a very different light.

(McNaughton 2001: 49)

Some researchers deliberately set out to develop community resources and activities with the research element a means of interpreting literacy and language practices and how these are transformed (Pahl and Allan 2011). Kris Gutiérrez and colleagues, for example, have established what they describe as a learning ecology in the form of Las Redes, a "technology-mediated after-school club" in a Latino neighbourhood in Los Angeles (Gutiérrez *et al.* 2011: 236).

A main aim of this endeavour was to create a space where bilingual children's home languages and cultural ways of knowing were legitimated and "comingled with school-based discourses" (Gutiérrez *et al.* 2011: 240). Exploiting the affordances of the internet, the researchers designed this activity space as a network including materially and virtually present members. They also incorporated an element of the imaginary in the character of El Maga, a bilingual magician with whom children communicate via the computers. The role of El Maga was taken by university students, extending the ecology into the realm of teacher education. The researchers argue that the hybridity of this ecology – a feature which was designed into the intervention – worked to "extend children's repertoires of practice, while leveraging their expertise" (Gutiérrez *et al.* 2011: 259).

Another team to deploy the after-school computer club strategy, Zhao and colleagues have drawn explicitly on ecological theory to analyse the process of implementing educational innovation (Zhao *et al.* 2006). In the case of this team, they also established in-school projects with varying degrees of success. Although not specifically focused on literacy, their insights have resonance. First, they view network building as crucial: "Technology uses in schools are not independent and isolated events or artefacts, but are situated in complex relations within the school ecosystem" (p. 146). Second, they caution against impatience since change causes disruption, meaning that the system needs time to "achieve new equilibrium" (*ibid.*). They also recommend encouraging play and connecting to prior knowledge. Finally, the innovator should look for "the right niche", one in which the technology finds its "natural" place; when this is the case, new technologies "weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life" (*ibid.*). Given that new technologies are so often associated with new forms of literacy practice, these suggestions have considerable relevance.

Both time and space dimensions of children's ecologies were designed into Connellan and Nichols' (2011) participatory research project *Changing Lives*. One dimension of the project

involved the researchers examining school activities and routine in relation to theories of time including Lemke's timescales (see above) and narrative time. The participatory element involved children in researching their personal history through working with tangible and intangible 'treasures' in the form of objects, memories, stories, images etc. Children then worked with these materials in ways that extended and transferred their meanings through the use of different media. For instance, a ceramicist showed students how to make tiles by impressing objects into clay.

In one activity, a photo studio was set up in a classroom so that children could pose and take photographs of their significant objects and later add text to these images. The researchers comment:

In the process of transformation, the meaning of the object in the child's life became interwoven with the meaning of the object in institutional space. ... For instance, when the Year 1 children added captions to their digital photographs, these often commented on the new and unfamiliar spatial circumstances of the object. Objects were attributed with subjectivity and made to speak of this strangeness: 'Where am I?'; 'What am I doing here?'

(Connellan and Nichols 2011: 10)

This project operated at multiple levels of children's ecologies, both creating new connections between contexts of their lives and enabling researchers to build their knowledge about the relationship between these contexts (see also Nichols and Snowden forthcoming).

Networking and rhizomatic designs

Network and rhizome theories have had a significant impact on literacy research methodologies. One of the main shifts has been from a person-centred to a decentred focus – or perhaps more accurately to a decentred, defocused view. These impacts are seen in the kinds of questions asked, the view of the site, and the researcher's orientation to the subject.

A networked view of literacy encourages researchers to look for "network effects" in local spaces (Clarke 2002: 112). It can also mean that, rather than going into pre-selected sites, researchers attempt to map the connections through texts, practices or discourses in the virtual and textual domains. Song and Miskel (2005) are interested in the political context within which school literacies, and particular approaches to teaching reading, are debated. They focused one study on what they call "policy actors", a category which is inclusive of government, professional and corporate organisations seeking to influence and form reading policy. Data for the study took the form of interviews with individuals representing these actors drawn from eight of the United States, thus the study looks across a number of levels of a policy system: local and trans-local. As well as interviews, the researchers collected and analysed policy documentation.

To trace lines of influence in the formation of reading policy, the researchers looked to establish the central or most prominent actors. First, it was necessary to identify all actors mentioned across the data and then to ascertain which organisations or individuals were mentioned by the greatest number of actors. When a policy actor specified an individual in an interview, or when a document produced by a particular actor made reference to another actor, this was counted as a network connection. Based on the connections found in the data, the researchers produced network diagrams which depicted the web of ties and made visible those actors with the greatest number of connections (as nodes in the network).

It is important to note that the researchers did not reduce the data in advance by administering a survey, which is a common approach to social network analysis. They were as inclusive as possible regarding the range of actors that might be considered to have an interest in reading policy. Semi-structured interviews allowed informants to raise any actors that they consider salient, including those of whom the researchers may not have been aware. The specificities of the informants' expressed views helped to shed light on how some actors had achieved centrality and influence over reading policy while others had not.

In a trans-national study, Nichols and colleagues investigated the circulation of knowledge, practice and resources related to early learning (Nichols *et al.* 2012; Nichols 2011; Nichols and Rainbird 2013; Nixon 2011; Rainbird and Rowsell 2011). Their approach involved a combination of systematic documentation and analysis, inspired by the 'ecological survey' approach of Neuman and Celano (see above), with a more fluid, rhizomatic exploration of connections. The researchers drew on the concept of the "activity space" taken from Massey (2000) to look for "the spatial network of links and activities, of spatial connections and of locations, within which a particular agent operates" (Nichols *et al.* 2012: 18)

The researchers explain that network tracing can begin from different kinds of points, such as an individual, a locale, a practice or an artefact. An example of networking beginning with the individual is the case of "Kimberley", one of the parent participants who spoke of the importance of her Christian beliefs in decision making related to her children. The researchers visited her home and photographed the books she shared with her children, most of which had religious themes. Kimberley also provided a copy of her church's magazine for mothers which included an article she had written. The researchers describe how they moved from Kimberley's account and her artefacts to tracing the networks through which circulated texts, resources and discourses:

We visited the book shop in the capital city, took notes of titles in the parenting and children's sections, and looked at covers and contents. We went to its online catalogue, noted titles and descriptions of products and the names of main publishers; we went to these publishers' websites. ... We considered all this in relation to an advertisement for a church-run mothers' group seen on the library noticeboard in Midborough, not far from where Kimberley lived. This notice had led us to a website which detailed the curriculum organizing all such groups' activities and described the movement's spread from the US to many other countries. Through these rhizomatic moves, we could identify a globally circulating discourse of Christian motherhood, materialized in multiple local places through texts and practices. The children's books in Kimberley's home were instances of a large market of Christian materials with which parents were encouraged to orient their children to faith and, simultaneously to literacy, numeracy, and other school subjects.

(Nichols *et al.* 2012: 30–31)

The researchers describe cases as "dynamic relations between multiple actor-networks" and their approach as networking cases with other cases (Nichols *et al.* 2012: 45). Masny (2013), whose research is informed by rhizome theory, describes her work as forming assemblages. When considered as a form of ecological research, this approach draws attention to the researcher as a part of the ecology and co-producing it in association with other human and nonhuman actors. The account of an ecology which ensues is always provisional and dynamic since there is "no a priori or pre-given relationship among the elements in the assemblage" (p. 341).

Critical issues

Emerging from this review of theories and designs are some significant overarching issues. Consideration of these will assist literacy researchers to determine whether the research question or problem they are investigating can be fruitfully approached with an ecological perspective and to consider how to orient to the ecology under investigation.

Ecological studies are trans-contextual; contexts are multiple

This means that even when a study centralises a particular context, such as the home or the classroom, this is always understood as related to other contexts. In an ecological study relatedness is understood, not within a system of abstract binaries (eg “in-school” vs “out-of-school”), but as dynamically occurring through multiple processes involving human and nonhuman participants, some of which are mobile and others fixed in place. To design an ecological study, the researcher first needs to conceptualise the ecology. The plurality of levels and settings is important. Even if a single site, such as a classroom, is selected it will be conceptualised as complex and multiple. There must be some conscious attempt to think about and investigate the relationships between parts of the literacy ecology whether these are understood as ‘settings’, ‘niches’ or ‘worlds’.

Ecological studies may be systematic or rhizomatic

Literacy researchers who want to understand ‘everything that is going on’ may be drawn to more systematic or more fluid approaches to researching ecologies. The field of literacy research includes individuals from a range of different academic and professional backgrounds and with different ontologies – orientations to being in the world. In research collaborations on substantial projects, where the team includes researchers from a range of academic backgrounds, it may be possible to incorporate phases of more exploratory and more systematic investigation. Lemke has written that “‘It takes a village’ to study a village” (2000: 275). If we consider the range of skilled specialists in any village, we may be encouraged to diversify our skill and knowledge base. Pragmatically, literacy researchers also need support for their work from funding bodies and may find, particularly in early career stages, that more systematic approaches are better appreciated by those making funding decisions. However, the increasing mobility and hybridity of literacies is breaking down previous distinctions between production and consumption, individual and collective and formal and informal, making it important to continue to develop fluid and emergent approaches (Syverson 2008).

Sustained engagement can bring new layers of insight into a literacy ecology

Engagement with an ecology – whether it be a family, classroom, church or town – always has a degree of extension over time. Even the second day of field work, a researcher feels a little more acclimatised and less of a stranger. However, for some literacy researchers this experience of getting to know people in their context is a long-term project. It involves many returns, not just physically, but in terms of revising and reinterpreting insights gained at earlier times. Even for those who lack the resources for a lengthy engagement, it is valuable to develop an appreciation for the histories of practice in a particular community, whether this be a family, classroom or shopping mall. Deliberately seeking out historical artefacts, consulting senior members or those who have previously passed through the setting, and

reading any available histories or memoirs can be a means of layering one's knowledge of a literacy ecology.

Research changes ecologies

The concept of the observer effect is well known in social research but it is a reductive view of the relationship between a researcher and an ecology. If we take a systems approach, then research should be considered a system which is brought into engagement with the system which we are investigating. From a networking perspective, the researcher can be considered as contributing to the production of the network through making connections between parts of the ecology whether these be texts, places, people, objects or ideas. Even something as simple as describing a site implicates the researcher by drawing on her interpretive repertoire. Despite the challenges of researchers being always already implicated, ecological approaches offer many rewards in both understanding and strengthening literacy ecologies.

Related topics

Time, Ecological approaches, Networks, Storied worlds, Rhizomatic theory.

Further reading

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8

RURAL LITERACIES

Text and context beyond the metropolis¹

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Introduction

In recent years both literacy research and research on rurality have been challenged by spatial analysis. Increasingly pluralistic ways of talking about both rurality and literacy (literacies and ruralities) have become common. This research has established that the discursive categories of rurality and literacy are both deeply problematic and essentially indefinable in any unequivocal sense. Scholars have become increasingly sensitive to the ways in which categorical terms like literacy and rurality have been used to ‘other’ particular groups of people whose literacy practices do not conform to those which are valorized and measured by standardized assessment instruments and/or who simply live in the wrong places and come to be defined as deficient by virtue of their geographic location (Ching and Creed 1997; Cloke and Little 1997; Pinar 1991; Popkewitz 1998; Ryan 1976).

Rurality is also a discursive construction that defines people and places as marginal to metropolitan spaces, a move that both conservative modernization theories and radical dependency theories shared. The result is that a wide variety of different kinds of community (e.g. farming, fishing, logging, mining, aboriginal, tourism-based, regional service centres, etc.) are lumped together under the rubric of the rural, a space which is coded as peripheral to the metropolitan centres of capital. This exercise in biopower (Foucault 2008) is typically accomplished through more or less crude demographic definitions of population density and distance from metropolitan areas. While rural geographers have long understood that these demarcations are inescapably problematic and unsupportable (Cloke 1994; Woods 2010), they remain central nonetheless to how the rural is understood and constructed by demographers and by the state. Ironically, though, what marks these communities as distinctively ‘rural’ is not so much in what they share in common as it is their uniqueness and physical and cultural geographies. This suggests that each rural place is its own place, and it is precisely this sense of place that marks out a lived sense of rurality. At the same time, as any country music or television sitcom fan understands, ruralities are symbolic constructions (Phillips *et al.* 2001) which are written and read in a variety of ways in mass media and indeed by rural people themselves (McKay 1994).

Rurality has been understood in developmental terms as the space that modernity and capitalism leaves behind. As I have argued (Corbett 2006), along with Paul Theobald (1997)

and Chet Bowers (2006), from the point of view of cultural analysis of curriculum and pedagogy this dismissal of rurality is equally true of Left and Right wings of the political spectrum, which both define development in terms of a monocultural techno-industrial teleology. The critique of neoliberal spatial practices as a metrocentric movement is fairly well established (Corbett 2007; Gruenewald 2003; Smith and Gruenewald 2009; Theobald 1997). But the same critique can be levelled at the Left and the way that place, and rural place in particular, can be understood as a retreat from the inevitably globalized and interconnected reality of modernity (Appadurai 1996; Bowers 2008; Nesor 2008). Drawing on her own work and that of others in the field of subaltern studies, Gayatri Spivak (2013: 191–217) has gone so far as to argue that Marx’s theory of value and general analysis of capitalist development actually requires an effacement of the rural. Spivak uses the idea of an urban teleology and the “spectralization” of the rural as concepts for a spatialized critique of Marx that is both caustic and sympathetic at the same time. In Spivak’s reading, Marx offered a theory of urbanization in which capital propels humanity away from what he famously called “rural idiocy” and from the land itself into the factories, which are themselves necessary for the development of both capitalism and a transformational revolutionary consciousness to supersede it. But what is then missing from Marx’s analysis is a geography (a theme developed of course by Marxist geographers from Lefebvre [1992] to Massey [2005], Harvey [1997] and Soja [1996, 2010] for example), a theory of the nation-state, and an understanding of land more generally.²

The spectralization of the rural nonetheless is never complete (Corbett 2006). Some things that are solid are more difficult to melt into air, particularly when the breathability of the air itself is what is at stake. What Spivak points toward, at least as I read her, is a re-emergence of the material in a land-based, rural form. While Marx needed the “narrative of the urban” (Spivak 2013: 215) to develop his theory of value, capitalism today is the rural:

Today’s global front is in that [which] can be called the country, not the city at all. To learn that is to move from postcoloniality to globalism, from below. The space that is not the global – global being roughly synonymous with the old social minus the centralized pivot of socialism – is now thought from the centrality of the global; as the rural, the local, the ecological, the aboriginal.

(Spivak 2013: 212)

Ruralities emerge as important here in two ways. First of all, they emerge in the commodification of nature movements like the commercial patenting of human and plant-based genetic material, the collection and codification of indigenous knowledge, the ‘management’ and ‘development’ of natural resources as commodities (e.g. oil and gas, minerals and gemstones, forestry, marine species and water resources). Second, ruralities simultaneously emerge in resistance to commodification or in terms of new green or “responsible” commodifications (Zizek 2009) that take the form of ecologically progressive consumption, resistance to new and controversial technologies for food production and energy extraction (i.e. ‘fracking’), and local and aboriginal resistance movements that proactively invoke rurality as others to capitalist development (Scott 1985, 1999; Woods 2003). What is most important for present purposes is the re-emergence of the rural at the centre of capitalist development, as opposed to its consignment to the margins by Left and Right alike. Ruralities are both multiple and networked into contemporary capitalism in increasingly complex ways.

Historical perspectives on rural literacies

Beginning in the 1980s, it became possible to identify a number of literacy studies that drew upon sociocultural theory to address the way that literate practices were at the same time social practices. The emergence of the New Literacy Studies movement (Street 1984, 1993), critical pedagogy, derived from the deeply rural literacy work of Paulo Freire (1986 [1970]), and the sociocultural turn in literacy studies (Gee 1999), along with the debates that the emergence of this reconceptualization of the nature of literacy/literacies has been well discussed in the literature. For our purposes I simply wish to point to several North American studies that developed out of this tradition and were situated in rural locations. In most of these works rurality is clearly present, but it is not specifically problematized.

Included in these rurally focused Canadian literacy studies are Jenny Horsman's (1990) sensitive study of the life challenges faced by rural women in Atlantic Canada and the way that their own literacies are marginalized in favour of schooled literacies, which are themselves presented as individualized solutions to rural underdevelopment. William Fagan's (1998) *Literacy for Living*, like Horsman's work, is explicitly set in rural Newfoundland and it interrogates the literacy practices of several families in coastal communities. Each of these works is a sensitive portrayal of the nuances and multiple layers that literacy assumes in the lives of rural people, drawing in some respects on both situated and local literacies analysis and the functional and social justice oriented rural literacy initiatives of Frontier College which is a long-standing Canadian literacy-promotion organization that began its work among rural labourers (2013). Each of these studies makes powerful arguments for a valorization of the literacy practices of ordinary people, practices which are not recognized either in what was emerging at the time under the rubric of hegemonic forms of elite 'cultural literacy' or in the increasingly schooled and measured standardized literacies that have gone on to inform the testing movement today.

Each of these studies, like Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) classic *Ways with Words*, a text which again appears to have unspecified and unproblematized rural dimensions, looks at adult literacies, and this is characteristic of a good deal of the work that fell under the umbrella of the New Literacy Studies in Great Britain through the 1980s and 1990s. In the United States several literacy studies have explicitly problematized rurality. John Lofty's (1992) analysis of the misfit between schooled writing expectations and conceptions of time and seasonal rhythms in an Atlantic fishery draw literacy practices into the lifeworld of working fishing families. This work resonates with the established separation of local literacy practices in coastal communities identified by Fagan (1998), Corbett (2008) and Kelly (1993). Katherine Kelleher Sohn's (2006) *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia* takes up the marginalization of rural women in Appalachia and the way that the notion of 'illiteracy' is constructed as both a rural disposition and as a deliberate attitude toward modernity and the world outside the local. In *Storm in the Mountains*, James Moffett (1989) somewhat famously described this 'illiteracy' as a form of "wilful ignorance", a view which reinscribes rurality itself as a rustic anti-cultural space (Ching and Creed 1997) marked by deficient literacies. What is interesting in Moffett's analysis, though, is the way that he prefigures what has come to be the field of rural literacies by problematizing the social, economic and cultural conditions around rurality itself, and then connects this analysis to literacy (Donehower 2013).

Indeed a considerable part of what has come to be known as rural literacies in the United States draws explicitly on sociocultural analysis expanding the debates around Moffett's form of deficit rural literacy analysis, seeking to incorporate the nuanced, locally sensitive literacies employed in rural contexts while at the same time addressing broader, complex political, social, economic and cultural questions about the nature of literacies and ruralities and the connections

between these heavily laden concepts (Donehower *et al.* 2007, 2012). Internationally this work is taken up by Bill Green (Green 2010; Green and Letts 2007), Jo-Anne Reid (Reid *et al.* 2010), Barbara Comber, Phil Cormack (Comber *et al.* 2007; Cormack and Comber 2013), Margaret Somerville (2013) in Australia and Ursula Kelly (1993, 2009) and Mike Corbett in Canada (see Green and Corbett 2013 for a current international survey of the field). It is the conjunction of literacy studies with the socio-spatial in non-urban contexts that marks the emerging field of rural literacies.

Critical issues and topics

The emerging rural literacies work I cite above reflects an emphasis on re-theorizing the rural as well as contemporary research in literacy, and is now defined well beyond the traditional and established print-based categories of reading, writing and speech (Lankshear and Knobel 2006; Coiro *et al.* 2008; New London Group 1996). Theorists now speak of a proliferation of multiliteracies and new ways of making and interpreting text, broadly understood. Multiple ways of reading and writing the world are also drawn into contemporary literacies discourse as areas such as ecological literacy, numeracy, critical literacy, media literacy, scientific literacy and political literacy, for example, enhance the way symbolic production and interpretation are now understood in more complex ways. Contemporary information technologies also add to the complexity. The rapid spread of mobile communication, easily accessible image-making technology such as video cameras, digital cameras and mobile phones, wireless computing and a more widely accessible broadband internet are just some of the change forces that have driven reconceptualization of the way people are literate.

Correspondingly, a new emphasis on place and space in the social sciences generally and in educational thought in particular has led to new spatialized ways of thinking about ruralities, literacies and education. As educational thought has come to focus on a multiplicity of aspects of what might be called the uneven development of education, it is clear that rural spaces are one largely unexamined space of social disadvantage. Rural spaces too are now increasingly considered as multiple and distinct rather than uniform and vestigial. However, as the Canadian state (my specific national context) has begun to develop rural policy that recognizes the diversity of ruralities, rural education scholarship has not been as responsive. It is equally clear that traditional ways of understanding rural space are no longer adequate as ruralities are transformed, sometimes radically, by globalization, the spread of mobile communication technologies and the same contemporary change forces that have transformed literacy. Indeed, it is clear that what might be called ‘new’ literacies have tremendous capacity for supporting rural transformations, even as all too often rural populations are derided for their lack of monolithic and traditionally print-based literacy as it is typically understood. Narrow understandings of both literacy and rurality have not been particularly helpful in addressing the transformation of rural communities and regions both in Canada and around the world. As a result, rural areas are typically defined as problem spaces to be fixed (often by simplistic literacy programming) or alternatively to be abandoned (particularly by youth – Carr and Kefalas 2010; Corbett 2006, 2007; Hogg 2006).

Increasingly, rural regions in Canada and around the world are emerging as spaces of economic, social and cultural disadvantage (Blake and Nurse 2003; Carr and Kefalas 2010; Corbett 2006, 2007; Epp and Whitson 2001; Winson and Leach 2002). While there is at this point little focused Canadian research on rural literacies (Corbett and Green 2010), the Canadian Council on Learning (2008) has identified what they call the “rural/urban literacy gap” as a key policy issue which reflects socioeconomic inequities but also the problematic sustainability of

rural-regional economies. Problems relating to both ruralities and literacies and their intersections are problems that are increasingly global in scope and intricately connected with issues of mobility and social justice. Questions of rural-regional sustainability (Green 2010; Reid *et al.* 2010) are also questions of how rural populations and rural educators understand and manage emerging literacies and textualities, within a globalized world (Brandt 2001; Donehower *et al.* 2007; Edmondson 2003).

Seminal here is the work of Donehower *et al.* (2007), whose book *Rural Literacies* raised questions concerning sustainability in rural communities. They look at literacies as a window for conceptualizing positive social change in rural communities that gets beyond preservationist nostalgia and promotes forward-looking transformational thinking. The approach is to confront established stereotypes about rural people and to support these people in recognizing and strengthening their literacies, and also to support a general broadening of the frame of what counts as literacy. This expanded idea of literacies (in the plural) is to be linked to rural social development, the reconstitution of rural places in the face of global change forces, and productive thinking around sustainable futures (Woods 2007; Zeigler and Davis 2008). It has implications well beyond the rural sector, moreover, as Donehower *et al.* (2007: xi) write: “[R]ural literacies are not something for only rural people to pay attention”, since “rural should not be seen in opposition to urban but as part of a *complex global economic and social network*” (my emphasis).

Current contributions and research

Rural literacies is a term that was coined (so far as I know) by Jaqueline Edmondson (2003) in *Prairie Town*, a text that takes up the complex relationship between educational and literacy practice and the development of one rural community. Edmondson, like Donehower and her colleagues (2007, 2012), employs the idea of multiple literacies to problematize and connect the classic “rural problem” of declining populations, rustification and other stereotypes of rural people, and the chronic educational/economic disadvantage that these codings reflect, with a broad vision of literacy as a way to rethink old binaries and to re-imagine how the rural might be re-read and re-written. This vision of rural literacy as an important feature of sustainable development that is rooted both in multiple, ever-changing, ordinary “situated literacies” (Barton 1998; Barton *et al.* 2000; Heath 1983), but also in a new vision of literacy that escapes the traps of nostalgia and preservationism and looks at sustainability and growth.

In their most recent book *Reclaiming the Rural*, Donehower *et al.* (2012) extend and expand the argument they set out in *Rural Literacies* (2007), providing more particular analysis of the connections between literacy practices and economic and sociocultural sustainability. This work builds on the foundational work of Edmondson (2003) and Brandt (2001) whose arguments about the interconnections between identity, place and literacies move the analysis of rural literacies into broader social questions of rural viability and sustainability in the face of neoliberal globalization which tends to erase the importance of place and space. Here, the analysis of the politics of the rural and particularly debates over ownership, and meaning of land, water and resources in neoliberal times gives rurality an emerging significance. In addition to well-known struggles of small farming, fishing and forestry operators, new fly in-fly out communities, migrant labour issues, incessant depopulation of some rural areas, emerging rural eco-tourism and niche agriculture, and debates over the placement of a quarry, a strip mine or a gas fracking operation are all instances of emerging tensions in the rural. The analysis in *Reclaiming the Rural* does not shy away from this complexity but rather draws together the analysis of broader economic structures, established and emerging rural imaginaries, and

symbolic practices in and out of school. The ultimate argument, it seems to me, is a call for place-sensitive pedagogies and for careful negotiations between rural educators and the communities they serve.

A recent collection edited by Green and Corbett (2013) takes up similar issues in an international or transnational context through a series of thematic studies that range from conceptual discussions of the very idea of rural or spatial literacies to the pedagogical implications of rural literacies, to investigations of place and sustainability, and finally to an analysis of mobilities. This collection begins by problematizing the ambivalent nature of literacy and rurality and the particular way that these two heavily freighted concepts have been conjoined in education. A central theme for this collection, entitled *Rethinking Rural Literacies: Transnational Perspectives*, is the idea that literacies are implicated in environmental and sustainability practices as well as with conceptions of the rural that are both real and imagined, drawing on Bill Green's (2013) use of Lefebvre's trialectical conception of space. Pieces in this collection draw on historic understandings of rurality and the way that rural people have contested their interpellation as deficient literates, the way that they have enacted literacy practices in the context of their lives and communities, but also the way that the rural itself is an insufficiently problematized space, with a chequered history and emotional geography of struggle and contestation dating back to the arrival of settler populations. Out of this history has arisen a matrix of literacy practices which are more or less valued by capital and by the state, and which are more or less connected to the resilience and struggle of people living and learning in what are defined as rural places.

In a changing, postmodern, globalized world, new challenges and opportunities arise for literacy studies, as a distinctive field of scholarship and inquiry. The same can be said to be true for rural studies and for rural education research generally. Much has been made in this regard of the so-called new technologies – that is, the digital technologies of text, representation, information and communication, and relatedly of screen and image. An important and somewhat controversial initiative here has been Manuel Castells' (1996) argument concerning the rise of the so-called Network Society, with its thesis of a shift from a 'space of places' to a 'space of flows'. This is consistent with other accounts of time-space compression, the supersession of distance and isolation, and the renewed articulation of the metaphor of the global village. The importance of this revolution in communication technology is matched by widespread cultural and linguistic diversity and increasing heteroglossia, massive population shifts, increased urbanization and the growth of cities, and new intensities of difference and diaspora. Somewhat ironically, as Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1990) argued almost two decades ago, the same forces that draw us together into the collective "juggernaut" of late modernity at the same time cause us to individuate and celebrate difference (Corbett 2010a). So we can be drawn into a form of global capitalism that both limits choice and increases it at the same time. We may fall under increasing pressure to consume mass-produced, simulacra goods and services, but at the same time we are also under increasing pressure to do so in a personally styled way that expresses our uniqueness and cultural distinctiveness.

Moreover, there is a case for arguing that the escalating environmental crisis, linked to which are new national and global insecurities regarding food and water, highlights the significance of the crucial albeit changing relationship between the 'rural' and the 'urban', the city and the country, as never before. To date, it would appear that literacy studies, perhaps by default, is oriented more to the metropolis – to metro-urban contexts – and to what is still sometimes called the 'developed world'. And yet much of the world's population continues to live in rural areas in China and the 'global south' which, as Raewyn Connell (2007) indicates, has been ignored in the 'north' which is the location for the production of legitimate social theory.

In this context, it is significant to note an emerging body of work is being addressed to the interactions between literacy and rurality (e.g. Corbett 2010a, 2010b; Donehower *et al.* 2007, 2012; Eppley 2011; Green and Corbett 2013; Kelly 2009). This work is increasingly framed explicitly by sensitivity to local–global dynamics, interest in notions of place, space and scale, a new glocalised sense of fragility linked to issues of sustainability, and acceptance of multiplicity and plurality. This requires taking a multidimensional view of both literacy and rurality *per se*, and an engagement on the part of literacy research with notions of rural social space and rural–regional sustainability (Green 2010), as well as globalization. A particular focus is the phenomenon of *mobility*, described by Urry (2000, 2002, 2008) as the new organizing principle for a reconstituted sociology in and for a global age. The task here, then, is how to understand new forms and conditions of both literacy and rurality, *and* their intersection, in and for an increasingly complex and mobile world – a new global space of flows *and* places.

Rurality, education and modernity

What Plato never suspected, apparently, was that the Athens of Solon and Themistocles was itself a greater school than any imaginary commonwealth he was capable of creating in his mind. It was the city itself that had formed and transformed these men, not alone in a special school or academy, but in every activity, every public duty, in every meeting place and encounter.

(Mumford 1961: 169)

Raymond Williams' classic, the *Country and the City* published in 1974 drew on what were already clear cracks in the monolithic idea of the rural. Williams challenged the polarities and idyllic imagery that situates rurality in British cultural consciousness as an idyllic paradise and as a key reference-point for all that is modern (for better or worse). The rural–urban binary then serves political purposes which are fundamentally conservative and that set up a kind of preservationist nostalgia, on the one hand glorifying the old rural culture and on the other hand dismissing rurality as a vestigial remnant. Even in the early 1970s this was not a particularly new idea.

Nearly ten years earlier, R.E. Pahl (1966) drawing mainly from work done in the early 1960s challenged the value of the idea of the rural–urban continuum, which developed out of the simplicity of the binary. Pahl situated rural–urban binary thinking in Louis Wirth's classic article (1938) entitled 'Urbanism as a way of life', but also linked the development of the binary back to the foundations of the discipline of sociology. Pahl's analysis of the polarization of the rural and the urban in the work of Durkheim (mechanical solidarity–organic solidarity), Tönnies (*gemeinschaft–gesellschaft*), Weber (traditional–rational), Redfield (folk–urban), etc. illustrates nicely how this way of dividing time and space is essentially code for modernization and development. Of course the list could be expanded both within sociology and in other disciplines; for instance, Pahl left out a couple of sociological superstars – Marx (primitive accumulation–capitalism) and Parsons (ascription–achievement). Pahl's question was simply to wonder whether any of this conceptual slicing and dicing of time and space, and its attendant glorification or vilification of the rural, its face-validity and popular appeal notwithstanding, actually contains any analytical value.

Pahl's question remains prominent in the field of rural sociology, which since the 1960s seems to have been in some measure preoccupied with answering foundational questions about its very existence (e.g. Copp 1972; Hoggart 1990; Theodori 2009). The result of this 'identity

work' has, in the view of some critics, not been particularly fruitful. In his *Dictionary of Sociology*, Marshall (1998) went so far as to claim that rural sociology is a moribund subfield. Indeed at the 2010 meetings of the Rural Sociological Society there was at least one invited panel that discussed the advisability of folding the work of rural sociology into the broader cross-disciplinary space of rural studies. While these may seem like arcane debates in a paper that is fundamentally about rural education, literacies and mobilities, I think it illustrates some of the core difficulties that arise in contemporary analysis of this conceptual space called 'rural'. The development of sociology has been, in some respects, a progressive evolution of a field in which the rural is substantially "effaced" (Halfacree 2009).

Williams (2001 [1961], 1974) also saw that in the emerging space of networked market capitalism that required a highly mobile labour force, organized, coherent communities that represented loyalties to people and to place were a political problem to be solved. So both working-class neighbourhoods with their communal attachments (Hall and Jefferson 2006) and rural communities that continued to foreground stewardship, kinship and neighbourliness stood in the way of a mobile and flexible workforce. In the countryside, this population could also stand in the way of concentration and 'efficient' techno-mechanized exploitation of resources (Berry 1977; Theobald 1997). The confluence of the forces of marketization and rural 'development' were not simply natural processes that would evolve unaided; they required a coordinated educational response linking education to the urban and to rural outmigration, a phenomenon I have called elsewhere "learning to leave" (Corbett 2007).

More can be said about the way that rurality is positioned and understood in social science discourse, but it can be argued that the erasure of rurality from the social science agenda has been mirrored in educational thought and policy discourse as well (Corbett 2006). The 2011 conference of the European Educational Research Association for instance chose as its focus *urban education* (European Educational Research Association 2011). The conference theme effectively conflates urbanism and education and inserts contemporary social change forces like migration, cultural hybridity and diversity, markets and trade, and civil society as quintessentially urban phenomena. This analysis echoes much contemporary spatial theory,³ unabashedly asserting the city as the space of education. In a recent review of research on rural schools in Europe, Kvalsund and Hargreaves (2009) argue that most existing rural education research begins from a centralized perspective and essentially asks the question: how are rural schools meeting national and international standards? The perspective of those living and working in the communities themselves are insignificant, and the rural school is deemed a priori to be deficient and judged "in terms of how well it overcomes its deficiencies and weaknesses as defined by the norms of larger urban schools" (Kvalsund and Hargreaves 2009: 141). Kvalsund and Hargreaves recommend a rural schools and communities research agenda that moves away from what they call, citing Habermas, a "system world" perspective to one that attends to the lifeworlds of rural communities. The point is that research which proceeds from the urban-centric system world perspective simply reinforces stereotypes and misreadings of those schools which fall outside the standardized model of schooling (Kvalsund 2009).

Contemporary educational theorizing is responding to a core tension that is introduced by the globalization of education. Joel Spring (2008) characterized this tension by contrasting the way that globalization simultaneously supports what he calls a convergent vision of a globalizing "world culture" as well as a divergent view which he calls the "world system and postcolonial/critical" view. There is then, in the first instance, a view of education that imagines the convergence of national societies, different cultures and economic and social practices. This is essentially the human capital model that argues for standardization of educational systems around the world, on the grounds that we are all simultaneously pulled into Giddens' (2002)

runaway “juggernaut” of modernity, whether we like it or not. This is a vision of a form of global capitalism that is characterized by freer trade practices, smooth and rapid currency transactions, established and robust ‘scapes and flows’ (Castells 1996; Urry 2000) to convey people, information and commodities across increasingly irrelevant national boundaries, and global corporate and governance structures that regulate, mediate and provision everyday life for an ever-growing majority of the world’s peoples.

In this vision of global market capitalism and a singular homogenized world culture, education becomes a key institutional mechanism for connecting people and places into the bloodstream of global modernity. Standardization of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are all-important tools for integrating individuals from different cultural spaces and from different geographic locations into the mainstream of a single, competitive world system. Here education is rescaled and lifted out of the specific locations in which it is carried out because these particular places are on their way to becoming transformed and drawn in to a world of global proportions. Even if it once did so, it is no longer sufficient or appropriate to educate with an eye to place, because all places are being drawn into the sausage-grinder of world culture where workers compete with one another on a global scale and where indeed the weak suffer consequences. A specifically ‘rural’ education that attends to place is not only irrelevant, it is dangerously counterproductive. In the discursive space that emerges out of these engagements, the key curriculum and pedagogical questions become concerned with how to achieve standardized educational ‘outcomes’ in nonstandard social circumstances. This is a system that is presented as both inevitable in its teleology and positive in its overall outcomes.

This is where Spring’s second and oddly complementary vision of the globalization of education enters. The second and alternative view of the impact of globalization suggests something quite different from Giddens’ vision. This vision has its roots in a number of what might be called, generally, resistance movements that operate in the face of the homogenizing vision of world culture theory. These formulations include world systems theory (Wallerstein 2004), dependency theory (Frank 1991 [1966]) and postcolonialism (Fanon 2004 [1961]). These perspectives follow from Marxian economic, social and institutional analysis and essentially posit the close relationship between knowledge and layers of oppression, which operate from the micro interactions in everyday life to uneven global market arrangements that systematically generate massive inequality, and subsequently the fragmentation of cultural spaces. To speak of any singular world culture in this view is simply to generate ideologically motivated lies that serve to manipulate and dupe those who can never hope to access power and resources.

Rural futures

Rural places figure in this vision of education in an important way, in the sense that they are one part of what is called a periphery or hinterland, a term contrasted in dependency theory by its other, the metropolis. This is not to say that all hinterlands and peripheries are rural, but in terms of internal, national systems of exploitation, rural peripheries are often relatively impoverished (Howley and Howley 2010). For instance, in Canada, Nova Scotia which is considered by Statistics Canada to be approximately 43 per cent rural (Government of Canada 2011), has a 2006 median family income that was approximately 30 per cent below that of more urbanized, oil-rich Alberta (17 per cent rural) and 25 per cent below the average of the established industrial Central Canadian heartland of Ontario (14 per cent rural).

The influence of postcolonial and critical theory have become well established in educational thought over the last thirty years again, partly as a result of the same social and economic forces that have generated the ideas behind world culture theory. As various colonial enterprises have

attempted to control both resources, territory and knowledge forms, there has arisen a multitude of powerful resistance movements, both at the level of revolutionary challenges to established regimes and also at the level of intellectual and cultural work. So Western schooling is often understood to be part of colonization.

Ironically perhaps it is the very power of the colonial educational mission that has generated a backlash against it that has taken the form of a valorization of specific cultural knowledge systems that fall outside the centralizing project. As Castells (1996) and others point out, globalization does as much to allow us to celebrate our differences and distinctions and to establish and maintain what he calls “resistance identities” as it does to create global solidarities. Aboriginal and other non-Western cultural and religious groups have seized this space to challenge the hegemony of what Benjamin Barber (1995) calls “McWorld”. This is the irony of globalization. It seems to promote two apparently contradictory movements at the same time, as convergence around capitalist, multinational world culture sits alongside the divergence of multiple cultures and emerging hybrids that are generated by cultural contact which itself is made possible in a networked society.

In terms of rurality and rural education, the ultimate result is that two seemingly contradictory discourses can operate at the same time. The first is something I call the teleology of the rural, and that is the general idea that rural areas are in unavoidable permanent decline in the face of unrelenting urbanization. World culture in this view is and should be drawing people and particularly the young out of failing and redundant rural places, rendering them flexible and mobile, and of use-value to capital. Therefore, the appropriate educational response is one of supporting youth outmigration, and education is the most effective way to accomplish this mission. At the same time, though, the influence of what Spring (2008) calls “culturalism” along with the resilience and “belligerent vitality” (Halfacree 2009: 453) of rural people and places themselves create simultaneously the view that there is no singular rurality, and that each particular rurality is a politically charged space which itself deserves to be protected. Michael Woods (2003, 2007), watching this resistant belligerent vitality in rural Great Britain, has labelled it “the politics of the rural”, where rural dwellers come to see their places and their attachment to those places as something worth fighting for.

The politics of the rural illustrates nicely the way that rurality has emerged from its roots as a concept rooted in physical geography (the very kind of construction that Pahl and others have found so problematic as an analytical category) to become a space that combines the demographics of smallness and remoteness and a lived sense of resilience and connection between people and place. And as Halfacree (2009) and Reid *et al.* (2010) point out, there is more to rural social space than even this. Rurality is often understood culturally as desirable, natural space and one which is highly desirable to city dwellers looking for a different lifestyle typically involving what Urry (1995) calls the ‘consumption of place’. From here, rurality is evoked in popular media, real-estate development, tourism and in other spatial practices as the city’s idyllic other. Kelly’s (2013) recent analysis of the majestic visual rural imagery of Newfoundland tourist promotions stands as a good example of this strategic manufacturing of the rural not only to promote tourism but also to buttress pride and resilience and possibly even stem the tide of youth outmigration (Carr and Kefalas 2009; Corbett 2007). Each of these levels of what counts as rurality complexify and multiply the meanings, sentiments and social practices in which rurality continues to have meaning in social and educational analysis. Ironically, post-rurality does not mark the effacement of the rural but, rather, the expanding complexity of its multiple layers and meanings. This complexity poses not fewer, but more interesting problems for educational research and analysis beyond the urban-centric vision of the city as the nexus of all things educational.

Recommendations for practice and policy

Above, I cite Spivak (2013: 204) to illustrate how she argues that capitalism requires what she calls an “urbanist teleology”. I take this to mean that the material and spatial practices of contemporary capitalism are founded upon symbolic positioning of rural spaces on the periphery or as other to modernity. This is both true of neoliberal thinking as well as for Marxist conceptions of development, which have, as Spivak (p. 208) puts it, “not been able to give up on the narrative of movement from the rural to the urban”. Spivak goes on to suggest that to understand globalization today is to, “re-think the separation of land and subject” (p. 213).

The policy implications here for literacies research have to do with a reconceptualization of literate practices, moving historically from a pre-1980s embedding in psycholinguistics, where literacy is seen as a discrete set of decoding and encoding skills, through the social turn, which situates literacies as multiple and situated in social locations (e.g. gender, social class, race, age, etc.), toward a view of literacies as spatial practices. I do not want to suggest a teleology of conceptions of literacy/literacies, but rather that what counts as literacy must be understood in terms of the particular real-and-imagined locations where teaching and learning occur. As Spivak suggests, literacies encompass ways of thinking about space and place: (1) as they have been imagined and constituted through time (historically); (2) as they are symbolically and materially produced in multiple places; (3) as these imaginaries and symbolic constructions are linked into networks; and (4) as they are imagined forward as what has been called “rural futures” (Woods 2012).

The social turn illustrated how literacies are multiple, mutable and situated human practices. The spatial turn is now challenging literacy theorists to consider the way that space is transformed through material and symbolic practices that bridge the human and nonhuman world, and which have significant implications in the Anthropocene. As Spivak (2013) puts it, the rural, the local, the ecological and the Aboriginal have been dismissed as unimportant, residual, atavistic, and other. Literacies research, new and old, has not been particularly helpful here. Rural literacies research might suggest a spatially sensitive rethinking of this historical narrative. This suggests the need to develop an informed understanding of new expansive rural literacies that challenge these core assumptions and begin to help us rethink the complex web of relations between people, animals, land, sea, air, water and, indeed, the objects we create and invest with meaning.

Future directions

A number of theorists have pointed out in recent years that we have passed out of the age of industrial progress and into an age where the consideration of the complex interrelationships and ecologies of an increasingly connected world must be considered. Part of this consideration is the importance of what has been called the spatial turn or the rise of geography. If the ideologies of industrial progress imagined a kind of paving-over of social space with education systems to support the accomplishment of uniform landscapes and dreamscapes, ideologies of ecological consciousness call us to come to understand the relationships between agents, places and spaces. A major part of this transformation must be the development of new reading practices in and for places. In very pragmatic terms, what this points to is:

- 1 Literacies that are responsive to the ecological challenges faced by and in rural places (Donehower *et al.* 2007; Edmondson 2003; Green and Corbett 2013; Smith and Gruenewald 2007; Gruenewald 2003).

- 2 Literacies that respect and understand the intimate connections between established, located networks and emerging technologically mediated globalized networks.
- 3 Literacies and schooling that resist and challenge residual industrial models of education that are more or less explicitly placeless and aimed principally at producing deployable, mobile labour, or what is today called “human capital”.

Notes

- 1 The work in this chapter has been generously supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada.
- 2 In advanced capitalism Spivak finds a fiction that Marx could already discern in terms of abstract finance capitalism in which labour and material production themselves are subordinated to monetary/ data transactions in speculation markets. Spivak (2013: 211) unearths a delightful quote from Volume 2 of *Capital* that positions the physical production process as “an unavoidable middle term” and a “necessary evil” for the real business of capitalism which is making money. Drawing on the work of Karl Polanyi (1947), Deborah Brandt (2001) makes a similar point about the way the dominance of market economies create a lifeworld in which exchange becomes more important than production. This all has implications for valued literacies that are inevitably located in place and space.
- 3 Notable exceptions here include the foundational work of Henri Lefebvre (1991, 2002) and Canadian spatial theorist Rob Shields (1992, 2013).

Related topics

Literacies, New Literacy Studies, Spatial theory, Place-based or place-sensitive education, Ecology.

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9

URBAN LITERACIES

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Introduction

On any given day, I would walk into Harlem High School (HHS)¹ and see passages from well-known African American and Latin@ activists plastered on bulletin boards and posted on classroom walls. Popular quotes from Amiri Baraka, César Estrada Chávez, Pat Mora, and Assata Shakur, for instance, provided me with a sense of hope and power, knowing and belonging, learning and liberation. As quickly as I would acknowledge the quotes and their deeply profound messages, I would also see, feel, and hear movement all around me. From students running down school hallways and up stairwells, students standing in corners laughing or arguing with friends, teachers instructing students to “move faster” and “get to class,” to teachers scheduling group planning sessions during the weekends, the movements were not only real, but powerful. These movements allowed me to be present within the space of HHS as well as to observe, see, hear, and participate in learning with people who are oftentimes and unfairly marked disengaging and disruptive urban students or unprepared and uncaring urban teachers. There was something about the movement within this school that contrasted with the aforementioned descriptions of urban students and teachers. Unlike images of urban schools, communities, students, and teachers we receive from popular films such as *Dangerous Minds* and *Freedom Writers*, HHS was real. The students and teachers in this school were real. Their movements in the classrooms, hallways, and in the spaces surrounding the school were real.

Also real were the ways students and teachers came to know and see each other in their own situatedness and situated activities within HHS. As Lave (2011: 152) chronicles in her extensive ethnography of Vai and Gola tailors in Liberia, “the notion of situated activity assumes that subjects, objects, lives, and worlds are made in their relation. That is, the contexts of people’s lives aren’t merely containers or backdrops, nor are they simply whatever seems salient to immediate experience.” On this point, Lave continues:

People are always embodied, located uniquely in space, and in their relations with other persons, things, practices, and institutional arrangements. They come to be located differently, where they are, doing what they are doing, as part of ongoing historical process.

(ibid.)

Students and teachers at HHS, then, were “always embodied” and positioned “uniquely in space” (ibid.), which became evident in how they moved through the hallways, used language to narrate their sense of being and (un)-belonging in and to school, and in how teachers and students interacted one with another based on “doing what they [were] doing” (ibid.). What they were doing in this one specific local context was real, for they were always already “actively making the places and practices of their world – in the reciprocal relations by which those places and practices make them” (ibid.). In this making, HHS students and teachers moved – physically, linguistically, emotionally, socially, and educationally – within and across school spaces. Somewhat similar to Lave’s observations of how the movement of master tailors and apprentices in Liberia represented unmediated and “multifaceted learning” (p. 60), my observations of movements within HHS pointed to multilayered forms of learning that resulted from the social relations and engagements of students and teachers.

While the movements of students and teachers within HHS were real, so were the movements in the local community. Youth orchestrated poetry, spoken word, and arts-based performances at community centers and other non-school sites were just as provocative as public demonstrations by longtime residents protesting gentrification and increased rental prices in the area. In the presence of such community-based movements, I learned about the significance of heavily traveled streets named after Langston Hughes, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Malcolm X, and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and housing developments that carry the names Rosa Parks and Frederick Douglass. HHS students, community members, and I debated the meanings of insignias on the sides of buildings that point to a local history of civil rights activism. The movements in the community and school tell an important story about urban education that must become part of the larger educational discourse on literacies, schooling, and youth. This story, as so many others, is important to document because, according to Conteh *et al.* (2005), it “mak[es] visible the lives of people whose stories are not often told [and] it gives a voice to all of us who are ‘nothing special’” (p. ix). In the introductory chapter to their book on writing, ethnography, and collusion, it is Conteh’s co-author, Gregory, who criticizes negative readings placed upon London’s East End community (e.g., statistics related to unemployment, overcrowding, eligibility for free meals, disenfranchisement, lack of public funding). They both opt, instead, for “a different story” (p. xvi) concerning “the literacy and learning taking place in the lives of children in London’s East End” (p. xvii) – a story not of hopelessness and discrimination, but of hope and justice. It is a story that must reject seeing people as “nothing special” and, instead, see people – particularly those who have been and continue to be marginalized – as more than special.

In order to tell “a different story” about literacy, schooling, and community – a story that positions HHS students as valuable resources of knowledge and as intellectual beings – I documented their movements at school and in the community. What I offer here is a story about how youth attending an urban high school learn. The story is also about centering students in school curricula through humanizing educational practices. Additionally, the story is about how students confront realities (e.g., demonstrations, racism, conflicting readings of the world) within an urban community as they make sense of, take up, and utilize literacy inside and outside school.

In this chapter, I examine the documented movements of two African American male students at HHS and in the local community to tell a story about urban literacies. To tell this story, I rely on framings of literacy as ideological and as a social practice as I move toward an understanding of urban literacies as grounded in a history of Black cultural ways of being in its attention to identities, power, and lived conditions in urban contexts. This understanding leads me to inquire: How do sociocultural factors influence the literacies of urban adolescents (*by*

sociocultural factors, I am referring to literacies inside and outside school, and to the politics of place and race)? What does urban literacies imply for needed directions in literacy studies (by implications, I am referring to the scholarly and pedagogical nature of this work)? These questions set the stage for a discussion of young people *doing* literacy to question lived realities in an urban school and community. Connected to this examination are questions about relationships between urban youth literacies and power relations across school and community contexts. From such examinations, I argue that increased attention should be placed on centering young people's educative, social, and cultural engagements in schools and communities.

Historical perspectives

Conceptualizing literacy as a social practice that is attentive to power (Barton and Hamilton 2000; Hamilton 2012), scholars working within the tradition of New Literacy Studies (NLS) focus on “the interplay between the meanings of local events and a structural analysis of broader cultural and political institutions and practices” (Hull and Schultz 2001: 585). Writing, reading, speaking, questioning, being, and performing, in an ideological sense, serve various purposes across “socially and historically situated, fluid, multiple” contexts (McCarty 2005: vii–xviii). Since literacy changes based on contexts and conditions, scholars in NLS argue for the use of multiple literacies to differentiate ideological from autonomous models of literacy and to distinguish literacy events from literacy practices. In this distinction, literacy practices and literacy events contribute to the uptake of literacy as ideological and as a social phenomenon in contrast to constructions of literacy as neutral and technical (Street 2005). This perspective draws on Barton's (1994) sociolinguistic approach to characterize literacy events as grounded in speech events, as well as on Heath's (1982) contention that such events serve as occasions in which writing is “integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretive processes” (p. 93; see also Blommaert 2008). In terms of literacy practices, Barton and Hamilton (2000) assert that such practices represent “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives ... literacy practices are what people do with literacy” (p. 8). Hence, literacies are “embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” (Street 2003: 77), particularly since literacies are intricately connected to ways of knowing. For Street (2003), “the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being” (pp. 77–78).

Significant to note is the argument that because literacies occur in multiple contexts, literacy practices cannot exist separate from social situations. For example, in this chapter on urban literacies, I collaborated with participants to create literacy experiences on community sustainability and culture in relation to gentrification. The literacy practices we employed (e.g., reading/writing the world, documenting community conditions, critiquing community changes, using African American Language, engaging in cultural practices) stemmed from actions we experienced in the community. As we discussed our experiences, we forged common understandings about community through print and digital writings, analyses of community traditions, and questionings of what we noticed happening in the community. We relied on spoken and written communicative forms to understand the inseparability of literacies from social situations and conditions. Our collaborations were grounded in “the social and cultural contexts in which literacy is learned, used, shared, and revised” (Vasudevan and Campano 2009: 312).

Building on a framing of literacy as ideological and a social practice helped us to see that our literacy acts, practices, and interactions did not exist separate from community contexts. Just as

Phillip and Khaleeq² read the community as a politicized site of engagement undergoing gentrification, they also read themselves as political beings within a politicized context. As such, I was able to closely examine their literacy engagements in light of current efforts at urban gentrification in ways that highlighted the politics surrounding place and race. This work adds to research on literacy as a social practice (Collins and Blot 2003; Pahl and Rowsell 2005; Prinsloo and Breier 1996) in its recognition of the movements of young people in an urban school and community, and in its examination of how the racially and ideologically charged nature of place is connected to power in ways that inform urban literacies.

Critical issues and topics

In moving toward an understanding of urban literacies, I rely on the history of Black people as readers and writers, revolutionaries and visionaries, in the context of the United States. In so doing, I resist singular readings of *urban* as representative of Black bodies occupying, or taking up, city space. In fact, I am in no way implying that only Black people occupy urban communities and utilize urban literacies. I am suggesting, however, that the history of struggle that Black people have endured lends itself to investigating the movement of Black people into urban centers and the subsequent literacy practices they employ to forge pathways into economic, educational, political, and social justice. This suggestion allows me to favor readings of urban and urban literacies that emphasize the cultural, communal, and intellectual repertoires of Black (and Brown) people as heavily connected to the social, political, and aesthetic nature of place, on the one hand, and to fights for civil liberties and educational opportunities, on the other.

Perry (2003) is important in this discussion, given how she posits an educational philosophy for Black people that emphasize “freedom for literacy and literacy for freedom, racial uplift, citizenship, and leadership” (p. 6). Understanding literacy as a communal act that fosters a sense of responsibility born out of Black people’s historical struggles, Perry writes:

While learning to read was an individual achievement, it was fundamentally a communal act. For the slaves, literacy affirmed not only their individual freedom but also the freedom of their people. Becoming literate obliged one to teach others. Learning and teaching were two sides of the same coin, part of the same moment. Literacy was not something you kept for yourself; it was to be passed on to others, to the community. Literacy was something to share.

(2003: 14)

A foundation for Perry’s assertion that literacy is a communal act is Anderson’s (1988) observation that Black people have persistently sought ways “to fashion a system of formal education that pre-figured their liberation from peasantry ... to develop an educational system singularly appropriate to defend and extend their emancipation” (pp. 2–3). The development of an educational system that would further emancipate Black people speaks volumes to a commitment to educational opportunities in light of their systematic exclusion from mainstream educational institutions. Of equal importance is the reality that Black people have always “held a deep and abiding faith in education as a means of improving their individual and collective social conditions,” a fact that Alridge (2009) traces back to the arrival of Africans, nearly four centuries ago, to the Americas (p. 23).

In his essay chronicling the many important contributions of African American educators to the Black cultural and intellectual tradition, Alridge (2009) further notes the following:

African American educators [Alexander Crummell, Anna Julia Cooper, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Charles S. Johnson] have been in the forefront of developing educational agendas for African Americans throughout their quest for education. Through their work as teachers, scholars, intellectuals, and activists, African American educators have left a rich history of ideas about the education of Black peoples.

(2009: 23)

This “rich history of ideas” reflects realities of Black life and liberation in America as these things pertain to freedom and education. The scholarship of Alridge (2009) as well as those of Anderson (1988) and Perry (2003) point to the important role education has played in the lives of Black people who turned to literacy “to write themselves into being” (Davies and Gates 1985: xxiii) in the presence of systems of degradation and oppression. It is this never-ending way of writing self into being that continues to represent Black people’s social, political, economic, intellectual, and linguistic experiences at the forefront of living within a highly contentious, racist society.

As Black people sought to acquire literacy (see African American hush harbors, churches, literary clubs and societies, Freedmen’s Bureau, independent schools) they also sought places in which their identities and cultural practices could be affirmed. The early-to-mid 1900s found many Black people migrating from southern states (e.g., Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, etc.) to northern states (e.g., Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, etc.) in search of employment opportunities, educational advancement, and/or suitable living conditions. (It is important to note here that this movement has never been exclusive to Black people in the United States. There is an ongoing history of international migration of Black people within/across/from some African countries, including Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, etc.) The plethora of public demonstrations and boycotts, rights movements and school desegregation cases, among other events, contributed to the production of Black counter-narratives to public images of Black people as uneducable second-class citizens. Literacy played an important role as Black people used linguistic, print, visual, and spatial communicative forms to question authority, critique dominant social narratives, and narrate their lived experiences and ways of knowing.

It is a history of Black people’s struggle and strife, solidarity and collective action that moves me toward an understanding of urban literacies as practices that are socially and ideologically constructed, attentive to the racially, ethnically, and linguistically situated nature of identities, and responsive to power structures and lived conditions in urban communities. In other words, urban literacies are situated within the historically cultural, intellectual, and social traditions of Black people who were born into, migrated to, or migrated away from urban community contexts. These traditions hardly ever get taken up and centered in mainstream educational institutions unless they are re-appropriated by others. These literacies, steeped in both Black rural and urban life, are not only represented by what people do and say (e.g., read, write, know, question, use language), but also by how and through what means they do these things:

- collaborating with others to address pervasive readings of urban communities;
- engaging in revolutionary work to resist dominant, racist, and classist narratives about urban contexts and urban identities;
- publishing texts (e.g., local newspapers, leaflets, books) and supporting Black owned and operated presses and bookstores to produce literacy counter-narratives;

- understanding how protest songs, spoken-word poetry, hip-hop, and African and African American Languages are forms of resistance against oppressive discourses; and
- critiquing dominant perspectives about literacy/learning in urban contexts by centering community voices, lives, histories, and artifacts that are less likely to be mainstreamed.

This uptake of urban literacies as grounded in a history of Black cultural and intellectual traditions allows me to document, name, and define characteristics associated with young people's literacy movements in urban schools and communities.

Current contributions and history

McInerney *et al.* (2011) write about place-based pedagogies, identity, and teacher education in Australia to highlight how the ecological nature of place helps young people “form relationships and social networks, develop a sense of community and learn to live with others” (p. 5). Their assertion connects to arguments by literacy researchers who emphasize how place is tied to young people's identities and cultures. In fact, countless literacy scholars have begun to investigate the role of place in the lives of children and young adults and its relationship to how meaning is produced outside school (Leander and Sheehy 2004; Mills and Comber 2013). This body of scholarship highlights the rich literacies (e.g., reading, writing, multimodal productions, arts-based performances) taken up by children and youth in community organizations, recreational centers, churches, and other non-school sites. A focus on the relationship between place and literacies serves “to test the boundaries between out-of-school and in-school literacy” (Hull and Schultz 2002: 4) as well as to problematize the situationality of learning, reveal the multiplicities of literacy across contexts, and enrich the experiences of children and youth during out-of-school time.

Contemporary accounts of the literacies of children and young adults have gradually shifted from a singular focus on school-sponsored learning to a more complex focus on literacies within community contexts (Blommaert 2008; Hamilton 2012; Mahiri 2004; Skerrett and Bomer 2011). Mahiri's (2004) edited collection on the literacies of urban youth is a good example of this shift. Contributors describe various urban sites and scenes in which young people participate in meaning-making activities. These sites include spoken word poetry in an African American community, gender borders in and beyond structured learning environments, the service industry that employs countless youth, and a lowrider culture in which Latin@ visual literacy flourishes. In addition to Mahiri's collection, there are other studies (Ginwright 2010; Kinloch 2011; Knobel and Lankshear 2003; Morrell 2008) that investigate how urban concerns such as civic engagement, economic stability, and gentrification have an impact on youth literacies, identities, and sense of belonging.

Daily, young people engage in and readily identify with countless community literacy practices that are not recognized in schools, practices that are embedded in community traditions and that affirm their identities. For example, in studies on the community practices of African American youth living amidst gentrification in New York City (Kinloch 2007), I documented their use of digital tools to produce narratives about community and identity. Their digital texts and print writings talked against what they considered to be unfair practices (e.g., increased rent, displacement) associated with gentrification. At the same time, youth imagined a community of Black cultural and political practices they wanted for themselves. Such work is complemented by research in literacy (Heath and McLaughlin 1993; Kinloch 2012; Vasudevan 2006) and urban studies (Freeman 2006; Maurrasse 2006) that analyze lived experiences, identity constructions, and power relations across contexts.

It is also important to consider how place influences the learning experiences and identities of youth, their peers, and their families. Significant research has examined how community members access local institutions, resources, and relationships to evaluate their experiences with institutional agencies (Cushman 1998; Moss 1994). Walker (2006), for example, investigates the academic urban communities of high-achieving African American and Latin@ high school students in mathematics to link “academic behaviors to a historical tradition of intellectual networks within their communities” (p. 43). She writes that students work within institutional structures and receive support from members in their non-school communities to increase their school-based mathematical performances and interpretative experiences. Her study is important for many reasons, particularly because of its emphasis on “understanding the depth of students’ academic communities and the ways in which students and their peers foster intellectual communities among themselves” in order for schools to not “undervalue the cultural contributions that students bring with them to school” (p. 68). From Walker’s attention to “intellectual networks” and students’ mathematical achievement, to Mahiri’s (2004) focus on urban contexts and students’ literacy engagements, the need to place attention on young people’s movements in urban schools and communities might shed light on how they “make sense of themselves and their surroundings” (McInerney *et al.* 2011: 5) through their uptake of urban literacies.

Main research methods

The following research questions guided this study:

- How do sociocultural factors influence the literacies of urban adolescents?
- What does urban literacies imply for needed directions in literacy studies?

Utilizing a qualitative case study design (Barone 2004; Stake 2000; Yin 1984), I present findings from a critical analysis of the literacy practices and community interactions of Khaleeq and Phillip, two African American male participants in a multiyear literacy research study. I rely on Yin’s (1984) methodological understanding that case-study research is empirical in its examination of recent phenomena, conditions, and events, and Barone’s (2004) argument that case studies record “patterns of behavior rather than a one-time event” (p. 24). Collaborating with Khaleeq and Phillip for nearly four years provided me significant time to document their “patterns of behavior” in relation to literacy practices and community interactions. I paid close attention to language and literacy patterns, engagements with peers, teachers, and community members, participation at community meetings, and reactions to gentrification in the local area.

As I describe in greater detail elsewhere (Kinloch 2010), my time in the field allowed me to build relationships with students and teachers at Harlem High School (HHS) and in the surrounding community. I observed students in their English classes, in the hallways, and during lunch breaks and I assisted the English teacher with reading and writing workshops. With project participants, I co-facilitated student and teacher interviews, attended demonstrations and tenants’ association meetings, and participated in community video walk-through sessions.³ Across these activities, I noted that Phillip and Khaleeq had a burning desire to do well in school and the community. Although they were not fond of traditional school requirements (e.g., routine writing tasks, worksheets, standardized testing), they experimented with ways to complete such requirements through their growing engagements in the community. This experimentation led me to purposefully focus on Phillip and Khaleeq to better understand how sociocultural factors influenced their literacy engagements.

Data collection and analysis

The data reported in this chapter, collected between September 2005 and June 2007, consist of field notes, shared journals, mapping activities, and interviews about literacy interactions. I systematically documented events and behaviors in an ethnographic journal and participated in audio- and video-recorded sessions with participants. The sites for data collection ranged from the English classroom and the teachers' lounge to bookstores, local parks, and other locations in participants' neighborhoods.

Drawing on Kahn and Cannell's (1966) belief that interviewing is "conversation with a purpose" (p. 149), I formally (e.g., use of protocols) and informally (e.g., talk sessions) interviewed Phillip and Khaleeq weekly over the course of this study. Our interviews centered on literacy engagements in school (e.g., production of texts; involvement with literacy tasks) and in the community (e.g., interpretations of visible signs of gentrification; critiques of community protests; analyses of public demonstrations). From interviews to videotaped community walk-through sessions, I observed that Khaleeq and Phillip's "readings of the word and the world" (Freire and Macedo 1987) had a lot to do with their interactions in community events such as tenants' meetings, uptake of print texts such as community newspapers, and participation in cultural traditions including African American Language.

Data analysis involved reading and re-reading field notes, interview transcripts, and video data, paying particular attention to how sociocultural factors influenced the literacy engagements of Phillip and Khaleeq. From formal and informal interviews as well as school and community observations, I was able to note recurring themes of resistance and struggle, place and belonging, power and identity as revealed by their literacy movements. Triangulation of data from multiple sources and data member checking sessions (Lincoln and Guba 2000) helped to deepen my understanding of urban literacies. These activities, and my role as participant observer and observing participant, supported my decision to study "side by side" (Erickson 2006) with Phillip and Khaleeq as I learned about their varied literacy practices in urban contexts.

A note on participant selection

Phillip and Khaleeq were not so much *selected for* participation in this study as much as they *selected to* voluntarily participate in it. In other words, they selected to work with me. They knew that they would neither receive academic credit nor earn an academic grade for their participation. Dating back to my initial interactions with Phillip and Khaleeq at the school, I noted that they individually talked with me about wanting to enhance their academic voices and increase their involvements in the local urban community. According to Khaleeq, being involved in a literacy project that focuses on community could "get our voices heard on what gentrification's doing to the community and strengthen how we write." Khaleeq's sentiments, paired with Phillip's insistence that "we need to look at the community and write about what's happening, like why's gentrification happening here," speak to the humanizing nature of this work (see Kinloch and San Pedro 2014) as well as guide this chapter's focus on urban students and urban literacies.

Findings

In this section, I present two major findings of the study. First, I will discuss Khaleeq and Phillip's literacy involvements on topics of urban gentrification and cultural ways of knowing, as these topics surfaced in their interactions at Harlem High School. In so doing, I will

demonstrate their uptake of literacy practices as influenced by their writings, conversations, and growing awareness of the politics of place and race. Next, I will turn attention to their literacy movements in relation to Black cultural and intellectual traditions and forms of participation in the context of the local community. Doing so highlights the ways Khaleeq and Phillip sought to “honor our history and community” (Khaleeq) as they questioned gentrification. A focus on their school and community movements places attention on meanings of urban literacies in larger conversations on literacy research and praxis.

Movements: In school, by youth, and with urban literacies

On this particular day in his senior-level English class, Khaleeq sat quietly at his desk – row three, seat two, if one counts from the wall closest to the teacher’s area. A few weeks before, he and I talked about attending a tenants’ association meeting in Harlem, and along with Phillip, Khaleeq’s mother decided to join us. With a few minutes left before class ended, Khaleeq told his English teacher, Ms. L, that he and Phillip would be presenting their community map at an upcoming meeting: “We’ve worked on it for a while and gonna see what they [residents] say. We brainstormed ideas on why gentrification’s not good for Harlem, mapping ideas on poster paper, talking with people at [HHS] to get opinions for ideas we got.” Ms. L referenced Khaleeq’s level of involvement with the project, noting, “You’ve been excited about this work. I’m glad you’re involved.” Khaleeq took her comment as an invitation to confess that his involvement in the project, generally, and at the upcoming tenants’ meeting, specifically, gave him a sense of purpose: “I’m reading community history and writing what I see. We do all this reading ’cause we examining gentrification. I’m involved, like responsible.”

Khaleeq’s feelings of responsibility became visible through the types of conversations on community change he had with peers and teachers at HHS – “take action,” “speak up,” “if it’s right say it, if it’s wrong, say that” – and by how he actively discussed readings on urban gentrification (see Maurrasse 2006; Taylor 2002) with Phillip and me. During an independent writing session, where students in Ms. L’s class were invited to write on a topic of their choosing, Khaleeq wrote about gentrification in Harlem. An excerpt from his writing sample indicated how he had been thinking about Black culture and history, as these things, in his opinion, are under attack in current discussions on gentrification. He wrote:

I hear it all about how Harlem needs to be improved, change this, fix that, get a new this. I wonder if the people talking about improving Harlem even been in Harlem. I’m not suggesting they have to live in Harlem to know Harlem, but they need to visit, shop in stores, talk to people, get a clue about why Harlem is this important community and why Black people and even Latino people live here. Maybe that’s why people talking about improving Harlem don’t come to Harlem, cause then they’ll see it’s already a strong community and they’re scared the attempts they’re making to gentrify will prove one point: they want Black people out, they want Latino people out. If you look at how much rent is in them new condos, if you pay attention to them new super pricey marts coming, you’d agree with me.

When Ms. L returned Khaleeq’s writing sample to him the next week, she had written in the margins comments such as: “Define gentrification early,” and “What are solutions?” I asked Khaleeq if we could discuss his ideas in detail during an interview session at the school, and when we did, I inquired: “What made you write on gentrification? How were you feeling when you wrote this?” As Phillip, Ms. L, and I listened, Khaleeq explained: “We sit back and

just take what they throw at us. You get to a point where one day, enough is enough, you have to stand for a purpose.” When Phillip interjected, “That purpose is what for you right now?”, Khaleeq responded, “Some people think urban, like Harlem, that means bad, dangerous, poor, people who don’t care about nobody besides themselves. They think crime and drugs with broken homes, trashy communities, people on street corners causing problems.” Phillip agreed with Khaleeq’s assessment of popular perceptions of urban, and Khaleeq continued: “I dunno why they think that. They fool themselves to believing lies so they could say gentrification’s the answer that’ll save you. It ain’t gonna do nothing but push us out.” Phillip added, “Erase our history. This why we gotta disrupt what people think about our community, and also like urban people and schools. We know we from a strong culture. When we know that, nobody can come push us out.”

Khaleeq’s comments, as well as those offered by Phillip, point toward an understanding of urban literacies as practices situated in a history of Black cultural ways of knowing (“we know we from a strong culture”), being (“stand for a purpose”), and doing (not letting them “push us out”). These practices, represented by young people’s involvement in the community (e.g., presenting at tenants’ meetings), uptake of literacies (e.g., community mapping, journal writing), and disruption of people’s negative readings of urban (e.g., dangerous), also point to a level of resistance with having one’s history erased. Khaleeq’s writing sample and the discussion that ensued from his interview encouraged Phillip to share an excerpt from a journal entry he voluntarily wrote after one of our group sessions. In his journal, Phillip argued that gentrification is “not all that it seems to be for the people already living here [in Harlem].” Near the end of Khaleeq’s interview, Phillip read the following journal excerpt:

From doing this project, I understand gentrification is remodeling or rebuilding an area, usually a poor neighborhood, and converting it to an area generally affordable by individuals with higher incomes than the previous inhabitants. Gentrification in my neighborhood is very serious ... I understand that people need a place to live and people work to get the homes they want, but what about the people who lived in the neighborhood for a long time, who struggled to get rid of the crimes and the crack houses? What about them, and what will happen to us?

Phillip and Khaleeq’s writings were vital to their “interactions and their interpretive processes” (Heath 1982: 93), as they were able to rely on observations, peer exchanges, and group readings to write about gentrification. Through their writings and follow-up conversations, they were also able to question “broader cultural and political institutions and practices” (Hull and Schultz 2001: 585): “Who’s running these businesses and corporations?” (Phillip); “That’s why people who talking about improving Harlem don’t come to Harlem” (Khaleeq).

The interview session ended with Ms. L asking: “What do we do about gentrification? How can we work in school to affect what’s going on outside school? Is that even possible?” Over the next few months, we all – Phillip, Khaleeq, Ms. L, me, other students and teachers at HHS, and participating community residents – pondered responses to Ms. L’s questions. Collectively, our responses generated important themes such as freedom, learning, struggle, civic engagement, consciousness, and collective action. These themes point to assertions made by Perry (2003) that literacy “was a communal act” and to the idea of “emancipation” envisioned by Anderson (1988). A recurring question throughout our work was: How, then, might we work across school and community contexts to examine gentrification and, in the words of Ms. L, “to affect what’s going on?”

Movements: in the community, by youth, and with urban literacies

During one of his videotaped walk-through sessions in Harlem, Phillip talked about community literacy artifacts that “people walk by without even thinking about.” Khaleeq inquired into such artifacts, given that he only saw “old buildings, the same old streets, corner stores, and people on every street corner.” Gesturing toward the signs Khaleeq referenced, Phillip described how the old buildings represent history, how the old streets are where prominent African American leaders protested for civil rights, how the corner stores serve as grocery stores and meeting places for Black people, and how the street corners mark locations where Black activists preached liberation. Phillip continued: “All these signs ... are about us and the struggle. It’s part of our history. Don’t be dismissing it. The history ... it’s all eye-opening.”

Phillip acknowledged the plethora of artifacts that surrounded him and that signified a rich history in the area. His desire to draw attention to these artifacts represented his recognition of the importance of Black cultural and intellectual traditions. For Phillip, “This our history here. The signs are about us coming to Harlem hoping for more than what we had. When people want more, they gonna fight for more. That’s our history. That’s being Black.” Phillip’s sentiments pushed both Khaleeq and me to see, feel, and hear movement – to *see* the physical movement of people in a community that has served as a site of political action; to *feel* how Black historical traditions impact current day efforts at community preservation; and to *hear* Phillip discuss how community literacy artifacts are “eye-opening” and represent “our history” and “being Black.”

Specifically, Phillip’s declarations told a story about urban literacies through the perspective of a young person grappling with community gentrification, on the one hand, and with the historical import of Black cultural and intellectual traditions, on the other hand. At the conclusion of our video walk-through session, we all agreed to journal about our reactions to Phillip’s emphasis on community literacy artifacts in relation to his claim, “This our history here. The signs are about us coming to Harlem hoping for more than what we had.” A few days later, both Khaleeq and Phillip indicated that in response to the journal topic, they wrote about street signs, cultural institutions, and the people in Harlem who, according to Phillip, “are all walking signs of creativity ... with stories to tell, struggles to share.” Phillip shared the following passage from his journal:

We all got a story. Some people get to tell their story and some don’t because they don’t feel they have the right. Look at Harlem. Look at the Apollo, the Powell State Building, Theresa Hotel. This [Harlem] all one big story, and for Black people, the story is us working to survive, save our home, remember history. We could take what they trying to give us or use our knowledge to do what our leaders did.

The following conversation ensued:

- Khaleeq:** What they do?
Phillip: Fight, protest, talk up, write, read, be smart. That’s what we gotta do.
Khaleeq: So we don’t get walked over by this [gentrification].
Valerie: Y’all talkin’ ’bout action.
Khaleeq: We sayin’ fight for what’s right.
Phillip: But the way we do it is what I’m thinkin’.
Valerie: You said fight and write, be smart. Like, take action physically and mentally.

Phillip: Now, fighting ain't just physical, like, I'mah knock you out, you know? Fighting can be taking a stand and speaking truth to wrong. OK, yeah, that's physical and mental.

Khaleeq: That's how we honor our history and community.

Points raised during our conversation connect to ideas that undergird an understanding of urban literacies. Phillip's response to Khaleeq's question, "What they do?", is a summons to action: "Fight, protest, talk up, write, read, be smart." It is such action, I believe, that grounds urban literacies in a history of Black cultural and intellectual traditions marked by strife, struggle, solidarity, action, and "freedom for literacy and literacy for freedom" (Perry 2003: 14). Khaleeq's plea, "honor our history and community," is poignant in that it references Phillip's suggestion for us to stand for something and speak against wrongdoing. It also references a message of rights as articulated by Black social and political leaders, from Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth to David Walker, Frederick Douglass, William Edward Burghardt DuBois, Fannie Lou Hamer, Mary McLeod Bethune, Essau Jenkins, and many others.

From this exchange, Khaleeq volunteered to read his journal entry. He began:

There is no other place in the world like Harlem. This ... home of the Harlem Renaissance and Black people who fought for rights. I can't do nothing else but remember because we standing on their struggles so we need to accept their legacy because their legacy our legacy.

Khaleeq admitted that being aware of the position he occupied – "standing on their struggles" – was a choice he made every day he moved, or walked, through Harlem:

I carry this responsibility with me. I go to them places our ancestors couldn't, at least not through the front door. When I think about what Phil said, this being our history and these artifacts part of that history, I say yeah, that's true. That's why people can't just come in and take it away.

The sharing of Khaleeq's journal entry led to an intense conversation:

Khaleeq: Did I actually think these old buildings were about history? In a way, but now I see how. Not just buildings ... the point is everywhere we go in Harlem you see us. I ain't talking about our bodies, but [pause] our ways, you know?

Phillip: You see our history, our culture.

Valerie: Would you say these signs are about Black cultural and intellectual traditions?
[They laugh]

Phillip: How we know you been gonna say it that way?
[More laughter]

Khaleeq: But fo' real. That's truth. I get mad 'bout gentrification 'cause that ain't gonna benefit Black people in Harlem. Just push us out.

Phillip: If we let 'em.

Valerie: What 'bout Black cultural and intellectual traditions?

Khaleeq: Like I wrote, we had the Harlem Renaissance here. We had people fighting for freedom here. The legacy...

Phillip: Shared responsibility. Collective action. All for one, one for all.

Valerie: That's deep.

Phillip: How you think Black people learned to read and write? Collective action, even if they got beat. That's part of your, what you call it ...

Khaleeq: Black cultural and intellectual traditions.

Phillip: Exactly. Exactly.

[We laugh]

Phillip: When we be talkin' 'bout change the system, we talkin' 'bout gettin' people to see the depth of a place like Harlem.

Valerie: Can I add, "an urban community like Harlem?"

Phillip: I thought that already been understood, Val.

[Laughter]

Phillip's comment, "to see the depth of ... Harlem," reiterates Khaleeq's assertion that we must work to refigure public perceptions of Harlem from "bad, dangerous, poor, with people who don't care about nobody besides themselves," to Harlem as "this important community" that is "strong." Their reading of Harlem is guided by how they identify with, belong to, and connect with the place, which are made visible by how they write and talk about Harlem. Hence, their ways of being, paired with their concerns for Harlem, are "rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being" (Street 2003: 77–78). Such rootedness, in relation to a focus on place, race, and urban literacies, necessarily requires us to rely on Black intellectual and cultural traditions.

Future directions

In this chapter, I have offered two examples of Phillip and Khaleeq's literacy involvements on topics of urban gentrification and cultural ways of knowing in the context of HHS and the local community. In so doing, I have examined their literacies as socially constructed and grounded in a tradition of Black cultural and intellectual traditions. The relations of literacy as socially constructed and situated in Black historical practices lead me to a working understanding of urban literacies. While I contend that urban literacies are steeped in a history of Black rural and urban life, I focus exclusively here on how urban literacies materialized in the engagements of youth in urban contexts. Phillip and Khaleeq's writings, conversations, and awareness of the politics of place and race reveal how specific sociocultural factors influence their literacy practices inside and outside school. Khaleeq's focus on people's negative readings of Harlem, for instance, and his suggestion to "honor our history and community," point to his growing awareness of Harlem's historical legacy at the backdrop of Harlem's current state of urban renewal. Phillip's insistence that we "fight, protest, talk up, write, read, be smart" suggests a political stance against, and an active response to, what he sees as unnecessary changes in the community. Their readings of Harlem are political and purposeful, and their suggestions to gentrification reiterate historical responses to struggle, strife, and fights for civil rights.

A focus on urban literacies enables teachers and researchers to consider the value and meanings of urban communities – culturally, educationally, historically, and politically – in the daily lives of young people. Inattention to urban literacies and to how urban youth take up those literacies necessarily reveals the contextual dynamics of power relations across school and community contexts. It makes known already existing tensions with whose stories and which stories get privileged and not privileged, represented and not represented, taken up and dismissed in discussions on schooling and the academic engagements of young people. So as to not reiterate these tensions, which signify inequitable educational practices, an understanding of

urban literacies is necessary not only for students, but for how teachers and researchers interact with, work with, and learn from and alongside students in urban schools and communities.

On this latter point, I end this chapter by turning quickly to research by Madison (2010) and Blommaert (2008). Madison's research on activism in South Saharan Africa, specifically in Ghana, presents a global perspective on the meanings and intended purposes of critical ethnography in the fight for basic, yet fundamental human rights in light of "the macro forces of a neoliberal political economy" (p. 23). Madison explains, "Ghanaian activists serve as examples of what it means to make radical performances and what it means for the performance ethnographer to be entwined in the habitation of a local-global space of inquiry" (p. 23). As I consider Madison's perspectives here, I connect her focus on human rights and the coexistence of spaces for local and global inquiries to my discussion of the import of focusing on movements: the movements of students and teachers within a school space; their movements within and across a local community; their movements to question and critique efforts at urban gentrification; and their movements as intricately connected to situated activities, the utility of language, and to identities as they do what Madison describes as "doing things and by things done," which makes space for "the opportunity of response-ability" (p. 225). It is, thus, the "doing" and the ensuing "response-ability" that allow me to be connected to Phillip and Khaleeq and that allow them to be connected to me as we come to realize how we are "entwined" with known and unknown others. For, as Phillip explains elsewhere, "this fight [against gentrification] ain't new. I bet people like worldwide having the same questions about how their community changing ... just like we be doing here in Harlem."

It could be argued that Blommaert (2008) already does what Madison (2010) suggests – that is, to consider the ways of doing things and the ways that things are done – in his analysis of the relationship between literacy and globalization. Hence, Blommaert focuses on the "situated (contextualised) nature of human actions" (p. 13) as he considers how literacy is based on "social, cultural, historical and political factors" (p. 5). As he analyzes documents from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, specifically from the southern province of Katanga, Blommaert insists that educational researchers pay closer attention to what transpires when people communicate. In other words, this means, "we need to come to terms with why others fail to get their meanings across to us *as well as* with why we fail to understand them" (p. 24). In my work with Phillip and Khaleeq, they often expressed frustration with others not understanding their actions, particularly as their actions signified aspects of their linguistic, racial, and gendered identities. This frustration grew more intense the more they learned about gentrification and the more they connected efforts to gentrify Harlem with what Phillip referred to as an erasure of "our history." Phillip's concern connects to Blommaert's belief that the "threatening problem such people are facing is one of inequality: their voices are *systematically* in danger of being misunderstood, dismissed or silenced," and for Blommaert, this is

not because of choice but because of far more complex and difficult issues that have to do with the ways in which we work and live within relatively stable sets of expectations and norms with respect to meaning, truth, and voice.

(Blommaert 2008: 199–200)

Khaleeq and Phillip are always working against such inequality, for they are aware of how their voices (and the voices of their ancestors) have been misunderstood and dismissed in larger conversations related to Black people's human rights. According to Khaleeq, people must "speak up" and "take action" in the face of wrongdoing.

Collectively, Phillip and Khaleeq, Madison (2010) and Blommaert (2008), Perry (2003) and Alridge (2009), as well as the other scholars cited in this chapter, encourage me to ask more questions as I pursue additional research: What might urban literacies mean in non-U.S. contexts? How might a more global focus on urban literacies, as grounded in Black cultural, linguistic, and intellectual traditions, contribute to expansive understandings of situated literacies, race, and place? In what ways might a focus on the local–global interplay of urban literacies contribute to theoretical, methodological, and praxis-oriented directions for literacy studies? Finally, how might a global focus on urban literacies get us to question the deeper meanings of Khaleeq’s claim that as he learns more about his community, he feels “like, responsible,” alongside Phillip’s attention to, “shared responsibility. Collective action. All for one, one for all?” The work that lies ahead in relation to urban literacies, I contend, is work that must be theorized within Black cultural and intellectual traditions and that must be attentive to human lives within and across local and global contexts.

Notes

- 1 Harlem High School (HHS) is a small open admissions school in New York City. At the time of this study, there were thirty-seven teachers and 500 students across grades 9–12. The student population was: 54 percent African American, 45 percent Latin@, 26 percent White, and 1 percent Asian.
- 2 I will always be indebted to Phillip, Khaleeq, their teachers, and the community partners in Harlem who invited me into their lives to conduct this research and to cultivate important lifelong relationships. Without their invitation for me to work with them, this work would not have been possible.
- 3 Community video walk-through sessions consist of a participant-researcher inviting other project team members into his/her community for a walking tour. The lead participant-researcher narrates his/her story about the area while he/she or another project team member videotapes. I take a “back seat” as the lead team member facilitates the entire learning experience.

Related topics

Urban education, African American language and literacy, Literacy teacher education, Publicly engaged scholarship, Adolescence and adolescent literacy.

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10

INDIGENOUS LITERACIES IN LITERACY STUDIES

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Introduction

One of the most fundamental issues concerning indigenous literacies is the situatedness of the terms ‘indigenous’ and ‘literacies’. Both terms have been coined and used outside indigenous communities and their communicative practices, but have been largely applied historically and uncritically to certain communities resulting in a series of injustices revolving around terms such as ‘primitive’, ‘illiterate’ and ‘ignorant’ used to depict these communities, their knowledges and their communicative practices.

As such, this chapter takes the position that indigenous literacies cannot be understood without a consideration of historical intercultural epistemological inequalities and conflicts that relegated certain world communities to the marginalized status of being ‘indigenous’ and not possessing so-called ‘literate’ practices.

This chapter will take as its focus issues of indigenous literacy mainly in the Americas, as it is on these continents that indigeneity and the literacy practices attached to it have had significant critical attention, especially in resisting processes of assimilation to dominant communities and their language and literacy practices. The submission and resistance to assimilation to the dominant surrounding communities is what may be said to characterize the issues concerning indigenous literacies in general.

Historical perspectives

Various recent Latin-American thinkers and critics (Castro-Gómez 2007; Dussel 1977,1995; Grosfoguel 2007, 2013; Mignolo 2000, 2007; Quijano 2000, 2007) have presented concerted critiques of what they call a ‘theo-politics of knowledge’ or ‘epistemicide’. This refers to the fact that, as a result of various economic, cultural and epistemological developments in Europe in the last 500 years, certain knowledges produced in Europe (and therefore situated in nature), acquired the privilege of deeming themselves ‘universal’.

Furthermore, when these knowledges encountered, through economic or political transactions, knowledges of other peoples situated outside Europe, these other knowledges were taken as being of little value, primitive, or just simply non-existent.

As these Latin-American critics have shown, in developing its myth of ‘modernity’, Europe constituted itself and its knowledges as self-generated, un-marked, with no epistemic locus, and un-inserted in any structures of power relations. Castro-Gómez (2003), for example, refers to this self-appointed unmarked-ness of Eurocentric knowledges as the “hubris of the zero-point epistemology”. One of the results of this hubris today is the concept of ‘indigeneity’ as un-modern and the associated concept of indigenous literacies as limited or non-existent.

Quijano (2000) introduces the term *coloniality* as the darker, hidden, constitutive side of modernity to explain historically the early European discourses of modernity which sought to overcome phenomena considered to be ‘traditional’, ‘barbaric’ and ‘primitive religious beliefs’. In their colonial contacts with the peoples of the Americas, the declared effort of taking modernity to these other peoples in fact disguised the unequal colonial organization of the resulting societies established in the Americas, based on inequalities of race, language and knowledges. Here, early notions of indigeneity referred to races and cultural knowledges of lesser value to those of the colonizing Europeans (Mignolo 2000).

Coloniality is thus not the historical process of colonization but the unequal relations of power, knowledges, languages, races and resources controlled and reproduced by the colonizers and their present-day descendants in the name of progress and development. As such, coloniality marginalizes and treats as peripheral everything that does not fit into its epistemological structure. It therefore creates an apparent totality in which ‘all’ are included, but not all have the right to include. The perception of the ‘all’ is therefore situated and ideologically loaded and presupposes elements recognizable on the basis of the values and epistemologies of the dominant group. Those whose epistemologies are not contemplated in this organization do not have the right to add them to it, due to the fact that, as their knowledges are not perceived, they are deemed to be deficient and lacking in knowledge and hence lacking also in the capacity to distinguish knowledge from non-knowledge. Coloniality, then, is a process of epistemological construction located in highly codified and exclusionary power relations.

As we shall see below, the conception of indigeneity and its knowledges as ‘other’, ‘local’ and ‘less’, produced by structures of coloniality hindered the access to and an understanding of the literacy practices of certain peoples defined as ‘indigenous’.

Critical issues

Identity

‘Indigeneity’ and ‘indigenous’ have no inherent, essential meaning other than presupposing a connection by birth to a specific tract of land or territory, better captured by the lesser used term ‘autochthonous’. However, in spite of this spatial connotation, ‘indigenous’ is not synonymous with ‘native’ in spite of the fact that ‘native’ also acquires its meaning in spatial terms, in opposition to ‘foreign’ meaning from ‘elsewhere’. In general, ‘indigenous’ as it tends to be used, paradoxically acquires its pragmatic meaning from a *temporal* dimension as in ‘the original people’ or ‘the primordial people’.

In most of Latin America for example, the term ‘indigenous’ refers to the Amerindian *pre-colonial* populations not of European descent (López 2011). In India, on the other hand, ‘indigenous’, or the more usual term ‘tribals’ refers to minority communities officially called ‘scheduled’ seen to have a more primordial connection to the land than the general surrounding populations (Khubchandani 1992). Another common temporal term for indigenous communities is ‘first peoples’, as for example in the preferred term in Canada ‘First Nations’.

What both concepts of indigeneity have in common though, besides the vague temporal notion of primordiality, is a spatial, territorial and rural relationship to specific tracts of land. However, whereas in Latin America indigeneity is largely associated with rural and agricultural communities, Khubchandani (1992: 5) points to an important cultural and occupational distinction within Indian society between more numerous rural *agricultural* communities – not deemed to be ‘tribal’ and less numerous rural *non-agricultural, hunting-gathering* communities defined as ‘tribal’. In relation to Africa, the African Commission (2005) defines indigeneity in Africa as also referring to minoritarian groups of hunters-gatherers.

Furthering the definition of his preferred term *primal groups*, Khubchandani (1992: 4–7) defines certain cultural parameters of these groups which seem to hold true for indigenous communities elsewhere. These include a close relationship with nature and the ecosystem, an emphasis on collectivity as opposed to individuality, and a preference for socio-centric roles rather than ego-centred rights.

‘Indigeneity’ as a purported identity therefore is relational and differential rather than essentialist, and connotes a relationship between certain small, minoritarian and geographically restricted communities and a larger, more dominant surrounding community. The relationship with the surrounding dominant community is almost always seen as threatening and prejudicial, and assimilation is a constant risk.

In the face of this risk of assimilation, and given the diversity and complexity of the concept of indigeneity, for some indigenous communities, *authenticity* of identity becomes an issue and affects literacy practices, especially in those communities that have written literary practices and traditions (Allen 2012).

Language, orality and the fantasy of the phoneme

Indigenous literacies are almost invariably preceded by issues of language standardization, linguistic analysis, grammars and dictionaries, essential instruments in the process of transforming the previously oral character of indigenous languages into written systems.

The process of reducing the orality of indigenous languages to writing often seeks justification as efforts to preserve these languages and the rights, identities and knowledges of these communities from the threat of assimilation to the more dominant communities that surround them. In fact, as a *reduction* and *transformation* the move towards standardization and a written medium ends up posing what could in fact be a greater threat to the existence of indigenous languages and communities. This results from the fact that such efforts aiming at literacy, rather than seeking to promote *access to* and *interconnection with* the surrounding dominant community, more often seem to originate in concepts of indigenous epistemologies and cultures as deficient: *lacking* in writing, *lacking* in knowledge, *lacking* in communicative abilities, *lacking* in a capacity for survival.

In order to understand the reduction and transformation of indigenous languages through the introduction of writing, it is necessary to understand the problematic conceptualization of *orality* in opposition to literacy. Rather than orality characterizing a state of deficiency, Kress (1997) reminds one that there are multiple modes of *synesthetic* meaning-making, involving not only voice as in orality or sight as in literacy, but also gestures, touch, taste, smell and sensation and intricate interconnections between these. Tedlock (1983) emphasizes the shortcomings of the alphabetic medium of writing in portraying the multiple intricacies of indigenous ‘oral’ poetry such as gesture, intonation, rhythm, silence and voice modulation, all indicators of the poetic sophistication of ‘oral’ narrators (Blommaert 2007; Finnegan 1970; Hymes 2003). From this perspective, rather than writing being seen uncritically as supplementing and compensating

for the deficiencies of orality, it may itself be *deficient* in its capacity to represent the synesthetic fullness of orality, reducing it to mere letters on a page.

Barros (1994), refers to what one may call the “fantasy of the phoneme”; this was the process whereby linguists in Brazil in the mid-twentieth century, convinced they were more ‘modern’ and ‘scientific’ than the “deficient” indigenous communities whose languages they were describing, produced sophisticated and technical linguistic descriptions of the phonemes of these languages as a basis for their alphabetic writing systems which would bring them into modernity.

The concept of the phoneme and the fantasy of its being the key element in developing efficient writing systems, however, is implicated not only in an ignorance of the complexity of so-called ‘oral traditions’ but also in other cultural presuppositions of which these linguists were unaware, such as *phonocentrism* and *monolingualism*.

The concept of *phonocentrism* (Derrida 1976) refers to the largely Western literate cultural presupposition, inherited from the ancient Greeks, that speech was the representation of thought and writing, as a representation of speech, was a derivative representation of thought. Though this logic apparently privileges speech (as a primary representation of thought) in practice it ends up giving supreme importance to writing as a visible, palpable and true representation of speech (and therefore, thought). In this logic the conventionality and (culture-bound) arbitrariness of alphabetic writing as a medium for representing speech is forgotten and produces the idea that thought is inconceivable without writing. Phonocentrism then privileges alphabetic writing as the true and concrete register of abstract thought and the very indication of the existence of thought. Indigenous a-graphic cultures and languages were thus seen through this logic as in dire need of alphabetic writing in order to produce knowledge. The fantasy of the phoneme consists of this belief that sophisticated linguistic descriptions of indigenous languages were necessary in order for indigenous communities to produce and acquire knowledge. The existence of complex non-written oral traditions as a means of producing and communicating knowledge was not perceived by such linguists whose phonocentric presuppositions focused their attention on the *lack* of alphabetic writing in these indigenous communities and led them to conclude that knowledge that was relevant enough to be written did not exist in these communities.

Through this phonocentric attitude, indigenous knowledges and languages are *reduced* to deficiency and with the introduction of alphabetic literacy the pre-existing indigenous modes of synesthetic meaning making are jeopardized and *transformed* into alphabetic written texts.

The phonocentric attitude of linguists unaware of the intricacies and complexities of indigenous epistemologies and communicative practices is evidence of the *zero-point hubris of coloniality* mentioned above in the sense that such linguists are not critically aware of their cultural presuppositions and how these may hinder or impede an understanding of the complex linguistic, epistemological and literacy predicaments of indigenous communities.

In perceiving indigenous languages and communicative practices as *lacking* due to the fact that such languages are not alphabetically written is further evidence of the zero-point hubris.

Apart from phonocentrism, the risk of Eurocentric attitudes towards indigenous languages and literacies tends to be also marked by a *monocultural and monolingualistic ethos*. Khubchandani (1991) warns about the pitfalls of assuming the universality of Eurocentric presuppositions such as linguistic territorial homogeneity and monolingualism.

Through the presupposition of territorial homogeneity, one arrives at linguistic homogeneity and consequently territorial monolingualism. Given their largely minoritarian nature, in the case of most indigenous communities territorial and linguistic homogenization tend not to be the reality. On the contrary, these communities, languages and knowledges are seen to be at risk

precisely because they are in intense (and often unequal) contact with numerically and symbolically more powerful communities, languages and knowledges.

These non-indigenous and indigenous languages and knowledges therefore often co-exist in a complex continuum (Hornberger 2004) where multiple affiliations, communicative capacities and knowledges may overlap and interconnect in complex ways challenging monolingual and monocultural concepts of language, literacy and knowledge as homogeneous entities or clearly defined substances separable from each other.

Khubchandani reminds one that in such contexts, a key word is *transition* in the sense of an *ongoing redefinition of relationships* between the interconnecting dominant and indigenous communities, languages, literacies and knowledges.

In his reflections on multilingualism in India, and his critique of the accompanying issue of territorial linguistic homogeneity that he sees as non-native and imported from the monolingualistic and monocultural West, Khubchandani (1991, 1992) introduces the heuristically useful image of the *rainbow* as a metaphor for the plurilingual *ethos* of such linguistic situations and, we might add, their accompanying literacy practices: as in the case of the colours of the rainbow, in such a plurilinguistic situation, what is most perceivable is a dynamic 'whole' (a language-literacy community, itself without clearly defined fixed external boundaries) constituted internally by multiple parts (multiple languages and multiple forms of literacy) with no clearly definable boundaries to separate each part – representing a language or literacy practice – from the others with which it co-exists to form the shape-shifting 'whole'. Where boundaries may, on occasion, be perceivable at certain moments, the *on-going redefinition of relationships* between the multiple constitutive parts of the 'rainbow' may constantly shift and redefine them. The level of complexity of such a 'rainbow' situation may increase when it is itself embedded as one of the colours of a larger plurilinguistic 'rainbow' with accompanying multiple literacy practices.

The widely held linguistic concepts that such a situation problematizes and challenges are those of *mother tongue* and *native speaker*, often highly and potentially prejudicial in situations of indigenous literacies. It is here that the problematic indigenous languages and literacies overlaps with that of so-called *vernacular* linguistic and literacy practices. What *vernacular* languages have in common with *indigenous* languages is not only their undefinable identity in essentialist terms, but the fact that they are both defined *differentially* in terms of their relationships to surrounding languages situated within a highly charged system of power relations itself marked by a structure of *coloniality* (as defined above).

A landmark icon of this problematic *rainbow* situation marked by *coloniality* is the 1953 UNESCO report which defined the 'mother tongue' as the required and recommended medium of instruction in all linguistic communities alike be they mono- or plurilinguistic. Botelho (2011) depicts the linguistic, political and cultural havoc that such an apparently innocuous and commonsensical (if not scientifically objective) notion is capable of wreaking on a community.

In indigenous communities where often the domestic language used for oral communication and its accompanying manifestations *within* the family domain is *radically different to but co-exists* with *other* languages used in the community *outside* the family domain for *external* functions involving *both written and oral functions*, such a (UNESCO) definition of *mother tongue* and the demand for its role in education becomes highly problematic, given that this requires that such a 'vernacular' or indigenous language first be reduced to the writing conventions of the dominant community and then taught in the school.

This *mother tongue as medium of instruction* logic problematically presupposes that literacy practices automatically result from a reduction to writing of previously un-written languages and forgets that (1) such languages in fact co-exist in unequal relations of power with other

dominant languages whose writing practices *complement* and not necessarily *substitute* for the absence of written forms and functions of the ‘mother tongue’ and also forgets that (2) literacy practices are socio-cultural constructs inserted in socio-historic contexts of power relationships and cannot easily be decreed into existence.

Thus, for example, in the case of indigenous education and literacy in Brazil, where official policy decrees that indigenous languages and alphabetic indigenous literacies be taught in indigenous schools (the policy in Brazil, however, leaves the final decision in the hands of the indigenous community; Ministério da Educação e do Desporto 1998), many indigenous communities prefer to teach and learn the non-indigenous national language and its alphabetic literacy practices in order to *supplement* and *enrich* their capacity to interact with the surrounding dominant community. In other words, rather than seeing their own indigenous language and knowledge as *deficient* and seeing themselves as being in need of compensating for this deficiency by acquiring alphabetic literacy and bringing it into their indigenous language practices, they perceive themselves as co-existing in a territory occupied *also* by a dominant non-indigenous national community with its own language, knowledge and alphabetic literacy practices; the indigenous community in such a situation may perceive the need to interact with the dominant non-indigenous community and by doing so acquires the need to learn that dominant language, knowledge and literacy not in *substitution* of their own ‘mother tongue’, but on the contrary, *in addition* to their indigenous language and knowledges (Cavalcanti 1999). Here the indigenous language and knowledges are perceived as part of what we have called above a dynamic shape-shifting *rainbow* continuum.

These considerations bring to light the intricate connection between considerations of indigenous literacy and educational policy (Botelho 2011; López 2011; López Gopar 2007; Ramanathan 2005; Tollefson and Tsui 2004). Apart from the issues of *mother tongue* and *medium of instruction*, the issue of *transitional bilingualism* is also significant here.

Transitional bilingualism refers to the process of educating indigenous and other minority language users in their mother tongue for a period of two to three years before they move on to education in the dominant non-minority or non-indigenous language. Though often disguised as a valorization of indigenous and minority languages, given the effort needed in describing, systematizing, standardizing and reducing these languages to a written medium (often based on the claim that such efforts ‘save’ these languages from extinction), the salient and ultimate purpose of transitional bilingualism is pedagogically instrumental – to facilitate the acquisition of curricular content and prepare the move to education in the dominant non-minoritarian language; hence it is clearly *assimilative*.

Processes of cultural and linguistic assimilation are effective instruments of organizations of *coloniality* and the unequal relations between languages, knowledges and races in which, in spite of the actual heterogeneity characteristic of such organizations, the dominant group ceaselessly seeks to impose a homogeneity based on its own self-image (enacting the epistemicide resulting from what was defined above as the *hubris of the zero-point*).

Though used in recent years (arguably as an off-shoot of the 1953 UNESCO recommendation of the importance of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction for minority communities), transitional bilingualism in contacts with indigenous communities has a long history in the Americas complicit with processes of conversion to Christianity and assimilation to dominant non-indigenous cultural values. Examples of this are the translation of the bible by Jesuit missionaries in South America into indigenous languages (the latter reduced to alphabetic writing for this purpose) since the sixteenth century (Pompa 2002).

Alternatives to transitional bilingualism, which involve valorizing indigenous languages in their unwritten forms and respecting their often highly conventionalized cultural and non-

alphabetic (and hence often invisible to the literate eye) practices tend however to be equally given the location of such issues in organizations of *coloniality*.

Multimodality and visibility

In spite of the decades since Goody and Watt (1963) and Street's (1984) considerations of the socio-cultural nature of literacy, it is easy to forget that even this socio-cultural, non-autonomous concept of *literacy* is located within a structure of *coloniality* which naturalizes values and presuppositions of the dominant group and universalizes them as *natural* and applicable to the whole complex community of which the dominant group is a part.

If multimodality as the interaction between different modes of writing – alphabetic, visual, sound (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996) – has now become an acceptable aspect of alphabetic literacy and the cornerstone of contemporary concepts of *multiliteracies*, it is still part of a textual tradition and its literacy practices that see the alphabetic text as central. Printed books are still largely alphabetic with visual images functioning as complements to the priority of the alphabetic text.

In minoritarian literacy practices such as indigenous literacies, the concept of visibility does not simply refer to the presence or not of illustrations. It requires more critical reflection. Seen as transparent from a common-sense perspective, visibility is highly culture-bound and conventionalized. What is visible or not and how it is interpreted or represented are issues that change over time even within the same culture. Thus the European medieval concept of *representation as resemblance* changed to *representation as interpretation* with Descartes' early modern humanism and rationalism. Representation was no longer seen as 'natural' resemblance, but the product of *interpretation*. Interpretation itself was seen as the working of the rational mind *reflecting* on the material information received by the brain from the retina (Mirzoeff 1999). However, the hubris of this rational conception of visual interpretation lies in its assumption of the self-sufficiency of the rationality and of the knowledge of the interpreting ego-subject. Mitchell (2005) defines this rationalistic view as the 'naturalistic fallacy'; such a fallacy results from the process of vision in which the individual seeing subject, engaging in the *interpretation* of the material information received from the retina, uses as a basis for interpretation, *supra-individual socio-cultural knowledge* originating not in the individual brain or mind but in the culture to which the interpreting individual belongs. Hence, what seems 'natural' or 'transparent' to an individual interpreter from one culture may not necessarily seem 'natural' or even be 'visible' to a rational interpreter from another culture.

The complexity of this process of visual interpretation increases greatly when the visual interpreter belongs not to a culture of humanistic and individualistic rationalism but, as in the case of many indigenous cultures, to a culture of non-humanistic, synesthetic and organic heterogeneous collectivities, where interpreting subjects do not see themselves as individuals but as constituent parts of larger wholes. In such ontologies, no member of a collectivity is separate and no knowledge is self-sufficient; both need to be complemented by other members and other knowledges. Visual interpretation here consists of a dynamic *perspectival* relationship between the seer and the seen (de Souza 2006, 2008), neither of which are believed to have 'the whole picture'.

More specifically, in the case of indigenous literacies, there is often a marked presence of unwritten, non-alphabetic visual *texts* that take the form of 'patterns', 'icons' or 'designs' on textiles, ceramics, bodies or everyday objects.

Given the discussion above, it makes little sense to speak of degrees of 'representation' or 'resemblance' between such markings and the 'objects' represented as this throws one into the

‘naturalistic fallacy’ that eliminates the mediating role of cultural knowledge and conventionality. Yet, the argument for introducing ‘literacy’ into indigenous communities is based on a perceived lack of literacy in these communities. What is rarely perceived is the highly conventional and culture-bound nature of the concept of literacy as being necessarily alphabetic and written, as opposed to being drawn, woven, inscribed etc., and presupposing a degree of completion only when ‘read’ or ‘seen’ by a member of the community who interacts with and complements the information of the visual text with his/her knowledge. In this sense, if ‘text’ refers to a complex unit of meaning within a conventionalized semiotic system, then visual texts also become *texts* and elements of conventional and systematic *literacy* practices.

It is worth repeating that in such indigenous visual literacy practices, texts, like members of the social collective, are not seen as independent and self-sufficient. They are part of an interconnected and dynamic shared network of elements and knowledges, which because of their shared nature, may not be visible or make sense to non-members of the collective. In the case of the Aztec codices, for example, the detailed conventionalized drawings on the ‘paper’ surface are not metaphoric but *metonymic* in nature and *need to be complemented* by the knowledge and the voice of an *informed* reader (Mignolo 1995; López Gopar 2007).

This ‘completion’ of the visual indigenous text by an informed reader may have varying degrees of sophistication. For example, the drawings may be organized on the page in a concatenated narrative or sequential manner; the sequences may indicate *causal* or *temporal* relations: one event or protagonist *caused* the following event or one event occurred or one protagonist acted simply *before* or *after* another ‘depicted’ event. Depending on the convention concerned, the informed reader always already *knows* and *voices* the relationship connecting the elements and bringing the text to life, not unlike the dynamism involved in the performance of oral narratives (Finnegan 1970, 2002). In other visual indigenous texts, as for example in those of the Western Amazon, the events and protagonists may be represented by metonymic *icons*, such as parts of the pattern of the anaconda skin, or parts of the pattern of the skin of the jaguar.

In such cases, the informed reader may use the visual icon to recuperate an oral narrative *not present* in the visual text (except in the partiality of the metonymic icon), such as a narrative of the anaconda, but it may not be the narrative itself that the text calls for but the *role* or culturally *symbolic function* of the metonymically depicted protagonist of the narrative. In this particular case for example, in narratives in which the anaconda is the protagonist, the anaconda may symbolize a bringer of knowledge. The informed reader of the visual text then knows that the text and any narrative it may depict contains important or canonical knowledge, similar in value to a scientific or academic text in an alphabetically literate culture.

The expertise or literate nature of the informed reader is indicated by his or her capacity to *perform* the connections between the narrative elements and the metonymic elements of the text.

In the case of the patterns woven into the ponchos of indigenous communities of Central America or the Plains Ledger Drawings of North America (Mallery 1972 [1893]), without the voice and knowledge of an informed reader they appear to be little more than unsophisticated patterns or drawings, or at the most ‘registers of events’ or ‘headcounts’ (Peabody Museum 2010).

The mnemonic nature of non-alphabetic visual indigenous texts is more easily recognized by non-indigenous readers, but their appreciation tends to stop there; the complexity of their *metonymic* function, requiring the knowledge of the reader to ‘complete’ them and bring their complex textuality to the fore is rarely perceived. The difficulty of engaging with such non-alphabetic visual indigenous texts calls attention to the highly conventional nature of literacy, and the fact that conventionality requires a degree of redundancy: one can only ‘read’ (make

sense of) what one already knows; be it as a code or as a conventionalized social practice. As rule-governed behaviour, one has to know the rules before sense can be made. From this perspective, alphabetic literacy, like indigenous visual literacies, is also partly mnemonic and metonymic.

Implications for research

Given the intercultural epistemological inequalities and conflicts defined above as ‘coloniality’ that relegated the communities on which we are focusing here to the marginalized status of being ‘indigenous’, of apparently not possessing adequate knowledges, and thus in urgent need of being made literate, it is precisely these intercultural epistemological inequalities that need to come to the fore in any research undertaken.

Wagner (1981: 9) reminds those engaged in studying cultures distant to their own that “culture can only be seen through culture”. A researcher into the culture of others can only perceive the other culture through the values and idioms – the epistemology – of his or her own culture. For Wagner, “culture is made visible by culture shock” (p. 17) or by epistemological difference and conflict; this means that the ‘otherness’, or what is deemed to be characteristic of the culture under study, is made visible to the researcher in those moments in which the researcher’s own cultural presuppositions are not enough to explain certain phenomena that appear to be ‘natural’ to the culture under study.

Thus, for example, in an indigenous culture which appears to a researcher as ‘devoid’ of literacy, where ‘literacy’ is seen by the researcher to be a ‘natural’ element of a culture, it is this apparent ‘absence’ that the researcher should focus on, not simply as a characteristic of the indigenous culture, but more importantly as *an aspect of the difference between the researcher’s culture and the indigenous culture* – a difference which needs to be the object of profound reflection.

As mentioned above in terms of the ‘fantasy of the phoneme’ the researcher needs to question first how literacy is characterized and how it functions in his or her own culture and then proceed to investigate if such characteristics or functions are present in the indigenous culture *under other guises* other than in alphabetic writing. For example, if literacy is commonly held in literate cultures to be a means of recording information and as an aid to the shortcomings of human memory and thus an important tool in accumulating information which may be lost in and through time, the researcher into indigenous literacies would first need to focus on *how information is remembered and stored* in the culture under study, even if it is not literate. So-called ‘oral’ cultures have various means of doing this, some of which are mentioned above. Second, the researcher would need to investigate and understand the *notion of time* in the indigenous culture.

If, unlike the researcher’s own literate culture which may see time as linear, and the past as no longer existent, the indigenous culture may quite possibly see time as non-linear and complex, where past, present and future may run on parallel planes, and where consequently access to the past from the present is constantly possible and where therefore the importance of forgetting or remembering acquire different values to those in a literate culture. In such a culture, the need for recording the past in writing lest it be forever lost may be seen very differently. The view such a culture may attribute to the function of literacy and writing may thus be very different and the researcher needs to be aware of these differences.

Given the concept of ‘coloniality’ as the unequal relations in which knowledges, languages cultures and races may be involved, it is of prime importance for the researcher into indigenous literacies to be critically aware of the existence of such potentially unequal relationships between the researcher’s culture and the indigenous culture, to avoid patronizing or stigmatizing this culture.

Finally, another important aspect of the research process of ‘reading’ another culture, and one that complements Wagner’s idea mentioned above of ‘seeing culture through culture’ is the necessary recourse, on the part of the researcher, to a concept of *critical literacy* (de Souza 2011) in which the purpose of critical reading, and acquiring an understanding of the ‘text’ under study – in this case the literacy practices or absence of them in an indigenous community – is not simply to *uncover hidden meanings* but perhaps more importantly to *read oneself reading*: this highlights *how* and *why* one has understood certain things and how these understandings are the consequences of one’s location within one’s own culture, one’s own language and the knowledges – epistemologies – one takes as ‘natural’ or ‘normal’. This may productively lead the researcher to the appreciation that the other – in this case, indigenous – culture, located differently, is also engaged in a similar process.

Thus, rather than attempting to render *transparent* the process of understanding, it may be more fruitful to understand that, by virtue of the fact that the culture of the researcher and the indigenous culture are differently located socio-historically and epistemologically, it may be more significant to understand the reasons for the *opacity* that hinders the process of apprehending the indigenous culture and its non-literate practices of recording information. This *opacity* in understanding when researching difference and otherness is not simply a non-productive *impossibility* of understanding, but refers to the highly productive perception that Viveiros de Castro (2004: 11) calls the understanding that “understandings are necessarily not the same”.

Future directions

There is an urgent need for academics and scholars to understand the complexities of indigenous literacies beyond the discourses of literacy as a harbinger of progress, transitional bilingualism as a linguistic *right* of ‘mother tongue’ speakers and the imminent perils of the language loss of indigenous communities. Located as they are on the lesser end of the unequal structure of relations of coloniality, indigenous communities tend to be involved in complex strategic relationships of survival in the wider national or regional communities that surround them.

To speak of progress, modernity, language death or loss of identity in these communities and their literacy practices requires a self-critical awareness of one’s own location as scholar/academic/outsider situated within the structure of coloniality that marginalizes the indigenous and privileges the academic. To what extent are scholars equipped for and tempted to adopt prescriptivist stances in order to promote and guarantee the survival of indigenous knowledges, languages and literacies? To what extent are our academic categories of language literacy, culture and indigeneity conducive or a hindrance to effective work with indigenous literacies? What exactly does ‘effective’ work mean: that which attends to the desires of these communities or that which attends to external academic perceptions of what is desirable or effective?

There is clearly a need to challenge dominant perceptions and categories (‘literacy’, ‘visuality’, ‘mother tongue’); *challenging* however, Ahmed (2012) reminds us, does not mean changing these perceptions and categories for more effective ones; it implies critically comprehending *how* such perceptions and categories, originally conventional and ungrounded, acquired groundedness and truth-value through their location in the relations of power/*coloniality*. How does this acquired apparent groundedness become *naturalized* and un-marked (an epistemological zero-point) and a potential instrument of the epistemicide of less powerful knowledges? In Ahmed’s words (2012: 182), “how can we not reproduce what we inherit?” The ultimate irony lies in the fact that we demand of the indigenous that *they* reproduce what they inherit, that *they* remain ‘authentic’ instead of us learning to perceive how they don’t.

Related topics

Post-colonial theory, Visual Literacy, Coloniality, Transculturality.

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11

FAITH LITERACIES

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History knows no nation whose sacred writings or oral tradition were not to some degree in a language foreign and incomprehensible to the profane.

(Voloshinov 1973: 74)

Introduction

It is likely that the first texts to be written and used on a regular basis were sacred texts. Although the earliest existing writing artefacts are of a commercial nature (the tallies of merchants in Linear B clay tablets, for example – see Sawyer and Simpson 2001) learning to read and (less often) write a sacred text was probably the first widespread, though not universal, usage of literacy. It is certainly the form of literacy with the longest recorded history. It is also reported that the first interest in languages and their scripts came from a need to know, teach and learn the languages of religion. The first philologists were more than likely to have been priests and other religious functionaries (Voloshinov 1973). As such, attention was called into existence by a need to know the ‘Other’ in terms of text and script and the first analysis of literacies was one intimately associated with matters of faith and religion (Haeri 2003).

“Faith literacies” is a term used here and elsewhere (see Gregory *et al.* 2013) to denote literacy practices taking place in settings that can be broadly understood as faith-based or faith-oriented. These settings are not restricted to particular institutional contexts, though these are common spaces for such practices, and faith literacies can be enacted anywhere and at any time (though appropriacy may be called into question in certain contexts). Faith literacies are characterised by the centrality of a text (often ancient): sacred texts (such as the Bible, the Qur’an or the Guru Granth Sahib) and devotional texts (as in poetry, song and ritual); intergenerational induction into sacred texts and the acquisition of reading practices; texts as sacred artefacts and as integral to ritual and ceremony; and texts and textual practices as integral to identity, collective and individual.

Many children spend a considerable portion of their time experiencing faith literacies. This may be by attending classes after or before mainstream school, or at weekends, in order to acquire the skills needed to decode texts often written in unfamiliar scripts (Rosowsky 2013a). It can also include the partaking in devotional acts which require literacy-oriented skills such as

decoding, recitation, repetition, memorisation and listening. Alternatively, it might be about being inducted into the teachings of their respective faiths through devotional texts. These faith literacies overlap with the literacies of schooling where similar pedagogical approaches may exist but also link homes and places of worship with the wider social environment where they permeate and punctuate the daily lives of individuals more generally. A young person reciting sotto voce from a devotional chapbook on a tram on their way somewhere is bringing their faith literacy into public spaces. Children singing in church choirs or participating in other ways in church services (as an altar server, for example) will be drawing on their faith literacies when doing so.

Faith literacy practices in this chapter are also understood as those dynamic clusters of technologies, skills and knowledge which underpin purposeful and recurrent social activities defined both narrowly, as in particular instances of activity or events such as a recitation, or broadly, as in terms of complete fields of activity such as liturgical or ritual practices (Scribner and Cole 1981; Street 1995).

More specifically, in this chapter, faith literacies are described and are understood as those literacy practices and events taking place in a religious context or setting, usually but not exclusively ritual, which involve languages or language variants which differ to a greater or lesser degree from the practitioners' spoken or secular language.

In many cases, this is a completely different language. This is the case for Muslims from various parts of the non-Arabic-speaking Islamic world using Classical or Qur'anic Arabic in their daily prayers and recitations. Sometimes, it is an archaic variant such as Biblical Hebrew for Modern Hebrew speakers or Ecclesiastical Greek for Modern Greek speakers. It is also sometimes both. For Arabic speakers, the Classical Arabic of the Qur'an is a variant of their spoken language. For British-born Jews, for example, Biblical Hebrew is a different language to their mother tongue, English. Fishman (1989) lists also Lutheran German (used by the Amish communities in the US) and Ge'ez (used by members of Ethiopian churches) as other examples of what he terms 'religious classical' to denote the form of language used in faith literacy practices. There are many more. There are, for example, a number of different national versions of Old Church Slavonic. And, of course, one of the most widespread faith literacies in Western Europe until relatively recently was Latin in the Roman Catholic Church. 'Liturgical literacies' (Rosowsky 2008) can also be found as a synonym for faith literacies. 'Sacred' (Ferguson 1982) and 'sacerdotal' (Safran 2008) are also found in the literature. Within the communities of faith where these literacies are practised there is inevitably an accompanying institutional structure which has developed for their acquisition.

Wagner describes the particular characteristics of Qur'anic schooling in Morocco.

The study of traditional Qur'anic schooling would be of considerable social significance if only for the fact that tens of millions of children in many nations of the world attend them. This statistic indicates that Qur'anic schooling is one of the largest relatively homogenous forms of pre-schooling in the world today.

(1982: 161)

If one adds other faith literacies and their associated schooling to this statistic then the scope and range of such literacy practices in the world today are substantial. Typical faith literacy practices in the sense adopted for this chapter include reciting aloud, reciting sotto voce in prayer, listening and responding to utterances, chants and incantations of performed ritual, together with the pedagogical and socialising processes that accompany their acquisition. By way of illustrating the kind of practices associated with faith literacies I reproduce below a

recent description of typical Qur'anic literacy practices. Readers with knowledge of other faith literacies will, I am sure, recognise common elements for much of what is understood as faith literacy practices is universal and partakes in a very recognisable set of textual activities.

[T]he Qur'an ... is used most extensively in the liturgy in the mosques and in private devotions. Chapters and verses of the book are used regularly in congregational and individual prayers. Indeed, it is impossible for a Muslim to pray without reading the first chapter of the Qur'an ... The Qur'an is read individually as part of one's individual devotions. It can also be read in a group as part of group devotions. It is often read aloud for people to listen to. It is often read in its entirety during the month of Ramadan, either individually or by the congregation as a whole ... It is read aloud to accompany birth and to accompany death. It is read in times of distress and in times of joy. It is referred to in nearly every sermon and religious talk with verses cited and explained ... Copies of the Qur'an will also be very much in evidence on window shelves or in bookcases. The Qur'an will also feature in the home with decorative calligraphy on walls and copies of the Qur'an on shelves often decorated. The car will also usually contain a Qur'an. Wallets may have small credit-card size verses. Jewellery will often feature verses ... [This] community ... does not speak or understand Arabic ... [F]or them, the language of the Qur'an has a sound they can replicate, a form they can recognise, but a meaning which eludes them. For an understanding of their religion, they have to be taught in their mother tongue by ... someone with access to the meaning ... When they pray, they use their liturgical language which is Arabic. They will also be able, at varying stages of proficiency, to read the Qur'an. This will be decoding and may be aloud or silent. They will probably also know a few common interjections ... in Arabic which they will use regularly in conversation such as 'al hamdu lillah' (thanks be to God), 'subhan Allah' (glory to God) and 'astaghfirullah' (May God forgive us).

(Rosowsky 2008: 8–9)

Probably the most widely held motivation for acquiring faith literacy, even to a minimal extent, is to allow worshippers to partake in ritual. Where formal prayer is exclusively performed in a liturgical language, as in Islam or in Orthodox Judaism, knowledge and use of the faith literacy is essential for participating in the regular ritual events that punctuate a worshipper's life, again, whether this is daily, weekly or less or more than that. This sometimes minimal learning consists primarily of learning how to decode the relevant script, with an emphasis on reading aloud with correct pronunciation and fluency together with varying degrees of memorisation.

Many forms of ritual, such as formal prayer, involve precise bodily action and/or prescribed inaction and a physical text in tow would be inappropriate. For example, a Muslim will often learn how to read initially in Classical Arabic but thereafter rely mainly on memory to perform ritual. This memorisation of text, or of parts of the text, is a literacy practice akin to the memorisation of play script or poetry in a more secular parallel. Others may forgo the learning of the script entirely and learn texts orally from the start. Such parallels are common when comparing ritual practice and more performance-oriented secular practices.

Other forms of ritual involve extensive use of the physical text and on these occasions decoding is more usual. Ritual recitation as part of religious services, as in the Sikh gurdwara, involves the physical sacred text often accompanied by precise and ritualised bodily and other artefactual practices in respect of the text itself. The complex procedures surrounding the reading of the Torah scroll in the synagogue is another example of how faith literacy often

involves a prescribed set of historically sanctioned bodily movements and positions, as well as dispositional behaviours that serve to remind and heighten the sense of sacredness that accompanies faith literacy practices. Not all recitation, however, is accompanied by a textual artefact – I make a distinction here between ‘text’ and ‘textual artefact’ – as a major faith literacy practice can involve the extended and artistic recitation of the sacred text. In the Islamic world, for example, the public recitation of the Qur’an, outside of ritual, is a widespread form of spiritual and cultural entertainment with renowned reciters (*qari*) performing live in front of large audiences and with their recitations being recorded and distributed commercially and informally (Nelson 2001).

Now, the greater part of faith literacies as practised by regular worshippers and members of faith communities do not pretend to such lofty accomplishments – though imitation of well-known reciters is not uncommon – and everyday faith literacy events remain more modest. Nevertheless, a significant amount of time and effort is invested by faith communities in ensuring the acquisition of faith literacy is passed from one generation to the next.

Critical issues and topics in faith literacies

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, with a secularisation legacy inherited from the previous 200 years of modernity (Wallerstein 2001) and an accompanying retreat of religion from public spaces to private domains in much of the world (Taylor 2007), it may seem odd to some that faith remains one of the most widely distributed contexts for literacy practices and events. Nevertheless, the fact remains that millions of people across the planet encounter literacy as much in faith settings as they do in mainstream education or in more secular contexts. For many, it is their principal setting (for example, *madrassah* education in Pakistan) and for others it can be a daily, weekly or merely an annual event. Prevailing social and cultural processes involving complex and often contradictory literacy resources in both global and local multilingual contexts perhaps seem to sideline faith literacy practices with their often carefully preserved and restricted function and domain. Characterised by rigidly closed forms – most of the texts involved have already been revealed or written many years ago – it would appear that there is no space for change or development, no possibility for ex normative influence, and limited as they are to relatively few texts, no scope for variant readings. But as outlined in this chapter, there is evidence to suggest that faith literacies are not suspended in a historical vacuum, immune to the contemporary world’s more fluid and dynamic social processes, but indeed do respond, and take their place, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the individual, in the ebb and flow of literacy and language practices shaping the lives of their practitioners.

Given the enduring place of faith literacies within human communities, it is not surprising, therefore, that much more recent research into literacy has also featured sacred texts and their literacies even when the primary aim of such studies has been to contextualise and situate literacy (or literacies) within their broader social, cultural and historical settings. Three of the most seminal studies on literacy, all of which appeared towards the end of the last century, and which were directly or indirectly instrumental in the formation of a new paradigm in the study of literacy (the New Literacy Studies) all featured faith literacy either as the central focus of, or as a contributory element to, their descriptions and analyses.

Street’s (1984) *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, which set out the autonomous/ideological model distinction for the understanding of literacy practices (see Gee, Chapter 2 this volume), relies on data gathered from what is called *maktab* literacy in Iran, or the literacy needed to learn how to read and, on occasion, write the Qur’an. Wagner’s (1994) study of the role of *kutab* literacy, also based on the decoding of the Qur’an, was the first major nationwide survey

outside of Europe and the US of literacy practices in general, and placed faith literacy at the centre of his investigation into broader literacy practice in Morocco. Scribner and Cole (1981), though acknowledging their relatively limited investigation of Qur'anic literacy itself, nonetheless recognise its central position within the literacy practices of their seminal study of the Vai people in Liberia. All these multiple perspectives, in their own ways, acknowledge the formational or complementary role faith literacy and faith literacy practices play in the panoply of cultural and discursive practices more generally.

Other major studies which have referenced in a significant way the role of faith literacy have tended to compare the latter unfavourably with vernacular literacies suggesting that, within religious practice, literacy can often represent a restricted model of reading and writing. Graff (1979), for example, in his study of literacy practices in Sweden, describes the claims made for universal literacy in that country at the end of the eighteenth century, as a literacy of rote, one which sidelines comprehension and was instrumental in an ideology of oppression. Below, I describe how this characteristic, and characterisation, of faith literacies is still very much embedded in practices and also how such a model of reading can have implications for reading in general. However, understood more broadly, faith literacies represent forms of literacy practice which are qualitatively different to mainstream and more secular reading and writing practices. Scribner and Cole, whilst recognising the lack of comprehension in much of the Qur'anic practices they observed among the Vai, also acknowledged the significant cultural role such faith literacy played in the community and also found positive links to more secular learning engendered by learning practices centred around memorisation.

This more 'ideological' view of literacy practice (Street 1984) sees faith literacy as very much embedded in other literacy, cultural and social practices. This timeless and universal characteristic of faith literacy practice, as evidenced by common approaches to its acquisition and to ritual practices involving text (Rosowsky 2013b) is accompanied by non-contradictory situated and contingent practices within different settings.

In an ethnographic account of the faith literacy practices of the Tidorese of Indonesia, Baker (1993) addresses the issue of decoding the sacred text as a cultural practice. As devout Muslims, the Tidorese read the Arabic Qur'an in a manner very similar to millions of Muslims around the world. Baker addresses the issue of reading without referential or propositional meaning by claiming for this literacy practice a social value which transcends the literal meaning of the text.

[I]f we ... think of reading as the socially significant practice of taking up a text and going through the processes of actualising the inscribed words in a temporal sequence, expending real time and personal effort in doing so, then we have something essential to the activity of reading without yet concerning ourselves with comprehension and the interpretations that can follow from it.

(Baker 1993: 98)

Baker further recognises that this literacy practice has a mnemonic function that links it diachronically with the practice of reading the Qur'an since the early days of Islam and links to what is said elsewhere in this chapter both to collective memory and to entextualising performance.

The invariant manuscript of the Koran serves to assure the verbatim accuracy of what is being recalled aloud in liturgical performance. Indeed, much of what is recited in Arabic is done so from memory. And, even though many of the verses that are regularly uttered aloud are learned from hearing others recite, their invariance across

local communities and language boundaries is assured by the one written source against which they could always be checked. In this respect a performance from memory is still a form of reading aloud.

(Baker 1993: 103)

He also draws a distinction between ‘comprehending’ and ‘apprehending’, viewing the latter as a means of engaging with text through aesthetic processes such as familiar sound and repetition. Grove and Park (1996) have identified a similar distinction when working on storytelling with children with learning disabilities where they suggest the “‘meaning’ of a poem or story” can be experienced “through a kind of atmosphere created through sound and vision” (p. 2) and where stories are learned by frequent repetition passed on from generation to generation with “snatches” of text becoming “recognisable by being repeatedly experienced in a structured context” (ibid.).

Whilst anthropological studies such as Baker’s embrace fully the cultural embeddedness of faith literacy, it is in the mainly urban post-industrial settings of the Western world where faith literacies appear to present challenges to normative perspectives on reading and literacy. Comments such as: “Inevitably, their experiences of rote learning without any understanding left them bored and alienated not only from the madrassah but from religion itself” (Lewis 2001: 137) have often been utilised, particularly more recently, as part of a discourse designed to vilify and pillory faith communities, particularly Muslim ones. More mundane concerns about the effectiveness of teaching faith literacies in other settings are also in evidence in comments such as the following:

The most controversial area of teaching is, without doubt, Hebrew: should this be taught in an instrumental way, to enable the child to chant their Bar/Bat Mitzvah portion or to be able to read prayer? Should Hebrew be taught with understanding so that the child has a working use of the language through translation of vocabulary and use of grammar?

(Miller 2010: 102)

Faith literacies, multilingualism and identity

Another characteristic of faith literacies appears to be their resilience in respect of language shift and language maintenance. Sociolinguistic theory concerning these matters identifies a number of stages through which a language might pass within a speech community on its way to disappearing as a used language (Fishman 1991). Many of the languages spoken by transnational communities created by twentieth and twenty-first century globalisation such as those in many Western urban settings, and which are characterised by very fluid multilingual practices (Blommaert 2010), quite rapidly shift to the majority language within three or four generations. However, even when this happens, a similar shift in respect of the community’s sacred language and the literacy practices that accompany it is rare. Ferguson (1982: 101) reminds us that “in voluntary migration ... religious affiliation will tend to be language conservative to the greatest extent for the language of sacred texts.” Fishman, likewise, asserts that religious classics remain “robust features of ethnocultural membership throughout the world” (1989: 229) and are more “resistant to change” (2006: 15). Despite a degree of minimalisation in terms of the acquisition of faith literacy practice, with many practitioners only acquiring the bare essentials needed to conduct regular prayer, Safran identifies its acquisition as a key variable in notions of religious identity, stating that “some familiarity with Hebrew has been considered a sine qua non for

believers and is studied, albeit often to a minimal extent, by almost all to whom Jewish identity remains important” (Safran 2008: 186).

Both Fishman and Safran make reference to the significant role faith literacies play in the formation and negotiation of identity. Recitation and memorisation, prayer and ritual, the literacy events of faith literacies, are performances through, by and with which religious identity is often enacted and embodied. Edwards (2009) argues that we need to recognise the important symbolic role played by minority languages within minority cultures, even when use of these languages is limited or features only in limited domains. Fishman (1989) suggests that we should see religious classics as minority ‘additional languages’ that have a highly symbolic function in terms of religious and religio-linguistic identity. There is a need to recognise this symbolic function and acknowledge the intimate link between language and ethnic identity even when language is no longer used (Suleiman 2006). An important aspect of symbolic identity and its resilience is how a collective can retain an attachment to its origins, linguistic and otherwise, well after the spoken language associated with that collective has been replaced (Edwards 2009). Best summed up by the regularly heard but paradoxical expression “I can’t speak my language”, a vestigial memory (and often it is little more than just a memory) can still be called upon to reflect a degree of ethnic or national attachment that might manifest itself occasionally. Faith literacy practices associated with the collective’s religious heritage can also serve an important symbolic purpose. Indeed, its ‘conservatism’ (Ferguson 1982) means it is likely to stay around for a good deal longer than any spoken community language. Furthermore, Jaspal and Coyle (2010) from the perspective of social psychology, write of how young British-born South Asians, whilst considering their religious classical an integral part of their religious identities, perceive a lack of competence in that language to impact negatively on their self-aspect, and even harm their ‘psychological wellbeing’.

Current contributions and research

It is a little odd that despite this characteristic of the seminal studies just mentioned, the study of faith literacy practices, with a few recent exceptions, still remains a peripheral and marginalised topic within the academic literature. For instance, in two recent and major investigations in the UK [one research council funded (Creese 2007) and the other government funded (DCSF 2010)] into supplementary school networks, relatively little mention is made of what are the most numerous and common forms of supplementary schooling to be found in the UK, namely faith-based complementary schools, together with the teaching and learning of faith literacies such as Qur’anic, Prayer and Biblical Hebrew, and Guru Grant Sahib that takes place within them. More recently, within the burgeoning sociolinguistic field of poly-languaging and superdiversity, the place of faith literacies, though often present on the edges of academic description and analysis, still remains non-mainstream.

In the UK and in the US for example, there are many different faith communities, mainly from minority groups, each with established institutional ways and means for the maintenance of their particular faith literacies. For example, in Judaism the community has a network of *cheders*, representing all branches of the Jewish faith, which usually take place on a Sunday, where children not attending Jewish day schools are inducted into the faith and to the literacy practices of their faith, Biblical Hebrew. Many mosques in the UK have an educational unit that usually takes place in the late afternoon and early evening after mainstream schooling has ended. This is devoted to the acquisition of Qur’anic literacy. In terms of learning methodologies, nearly all such learning follows a heavily phonics-based approach with children learning isolated letter and sound correspondences before moving onto whole words – real or unreal – and then

more extended passages of sacred verses. I have reported elsewhere (Rosowsky 2001, 2008, 2013a) on how UK Muslim children, who have learned to read the Qur'an in a *mosque school*, experience a method of instruction that could be labelled 'synthetic' or 'systematic' phonics (Rose 2006; Wyse and Goswami 2008). I have also suggested that such instruction, given that it takes place in a very sustained way over a significant period of time, can result in very competent, and even precocious, decoders in the liturgical language and also, by way of transfer, in reading English (Rosowsky 2001: 57). This intensive instruction may have an influence on the way these children come to understand the reading act and also how they learn to read in English (Rosowsky 2013a).

In each multilingual setting, the language interrelationship is different. In the *cheder*, the children are on the whole monolingual English speakers learning their religious classical, Biblical or Prayer Book Hebrew, as mainly a written code to be used for liturgical purposes and to encourage feelings of Jewish identity (Schachter 2010). In the *mosque school* mentioned above, the language situation is more complex. The children are usually multilingual, having some knowledge, sometimes oral fluency, of a spoken variety of Panjabi. Some of them may also be familiar with the prestigious variety, Urdu. They will all be either first- or second-language learners of English. They are learning to decode the Classical Arabic of the Qur'an, their religious classical. In the Sikh *gurdwara*, the children are again usually multilingual, having some knowledge, sometimes oral fluency, of spoken Panjabi. They are predominantly first- or second-language learners of English and are also learning to read their religious classical, Classical Panjabi, via the *gurmukhi* script. They do this in order to access their sacred text, the Guru Granth Sahib, and also develop their Sikh identities. In all three settings, a blend of religious, linguistic and scriptal markers contributes to notions of both individual and collective identity.

Future directions

Faith literacies and performance

In terms of recent theoretical perspectives in respect of faith literacies there are a number of recent studies that are particularly groundbreaking in seeking to account for the place of faith literacy practices within broader discussions of language and literacy. The first is recent work exploring the usefulness or otherwise of examining faith literacy through the lens of performance-oriented language or textual practices (Rosowsky 2012, 2013b). Drawing on the work of Richard Bauman, this developing body of work draws attention to the performative nature of faith literacy practices. It has two broad characteristics. First, all ritual utterance appears to offer language up to public scrutiny, and is often accompanied by active bodily enactments – either in posture and articulation, in recital or prayer postures, or in adoption of ritual posture when listening. This exposure of language to scrutiny, whether it be the scrutiny of the individual worshipper/reciter him/herself, who is often self-monitoring for error or infelicity, or the scrutiny of the congregation, or of a transcendent audience, seems to share in that heightened awareness of the act of expression which Bauman characteristically claims “puts the act of speaking on display, objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting, and opens it to scrutiny by an audience” (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 73).

Second, Bauman's accompanying notion of entextualisation (“the process of rendering discourse extractable”, *ibid.*) is used to account for the role of the sacred text within such practices. The sociocultural process of entextualisation involves the summoning up and performing of a ‘text’, often from memory, which varies in the degree of its faithful verbatim reproduction (the exact words in the correct order) depending on purpose and context. This gives rise to an

entextualising continuum (Bauman 1974: 303) that has at one pole, performances with “word-for-word fidelity” to a fixed text, and at the other more fluid, novel, or “generated anew”, performances that allow for more negotiated, or intertextual, elements. The more faithful the performance is to the former, the more authoritative it appears, and, conversely, where intertextual gaps appear, the more scope there is for more negotiated and novel performances.

Strict replication of the source utterance [the text archetype] by the mediator minimizes the intertextual gap... between the source utterance and the target utterance [the entextualised performance,] thus enacting the authorization of the former in the strongest possible terms. When the source utterance is infiltrated by the mediator’s own voice, by contrast, the intertextual gap is widened in the process of recontextualization.

(Bauman 2004: 153)

Faith literacy performances, as already mentioned, tend in the main to minimise these “intertextual gaps” and demonstrate much more regular verbatim fidelity to the “source utterance”. Where intertextual gaps appear, invariably other linguistic resources are involved such as other languages. Faith literacy practices which involve translation or more aesthetic modes tend to admit intertextuality more readily (see Rosowsky 2010 and 2011 for examples of poetry and song). Practices involving the sacred texts of faith literacies, in this way, can be understood as regularly occurring entextualisations of the sacred texts, which are often verbatim, but always in Bakhtinian terms the ‘words of others’. Here ritual meaning dominates referential or propositional meaning.

Faith literacies and syncretic learning

Another recent study, this time more anchored in children’s learning, interprets faith literacy practices through the lens of syncretic literacy practices (Duranti and Ochs 1997; Gregory *et al.* 2004) and seeks to address issues such as the meanings children might gain from texts they cannot actually understand and how children learn to ‘perform’ sacred texts which are very different (including in a different language) from their other daily literacy activities. By means of a collaborative ethnography, the project explores the instances of syncretic learning that take place within the communities of practice arising out of minority faith communities in a majority and broadly secular and richly multicultural, multilingual and multifaith urban environment (London). They make clear that the learning evidenced in their ethnographies is not the result of formal, mainstream teaching, but rather is an instance of learning where “apprentice members of social and cultural groups are initiated by those who are more experienced into the relevant literacies and language forms necessary for membership” (Gregory *et al.* 2013: 29).

The authors too foreground ‘performance’ in their analysis of practice, drawing attention to “the importance of practise and performance leading to the perfection required by the faith” (Gregory *et al.* 2013: 27) and to how ‘performance’ in their work and in faith literacies more generally refers:

to the art of performing or ‘acting out’ a ritual or text through action, song, dance or chant, rather than ‘achievement’ as in school performance and ‘practise’ as in echoing, repeating to oneself or reciting a meaningful and beautiful text rather than practising to achieve success in a limited task as in school.

(Gregory et al. 2013: 30)

This distinction is an important one and positions performance, understood in such a way, into more artistic and aesthetic modes of analysis and appreciation.

There is also the recognition by Gregory *et al.* that faith literacy practices – recitation, prayer, chanting, singing, intoning, citation – are all entextualising processes (see above) where, in this study, children are involved in active and ‘creative meaning-making’ making the texts their own as they practise and perform in order to make practice perfect. There are notions here of striving for authenticity and accuracy, of the performer ‘getting it right’ which is very much at the heart of Bauman’s conceptualisation of performance (Bauman 1974). In richly ethnographic descriptions children in this study partake of their faith literacy practices holistically with a multimodality that involves all aspects of their being including “the scripted reproduction of historical and cultural memory, a disciplining of the body, a demonstration of alacrity and an automaticity of a linguistic code” (Gregory *et al.* 2013: 31).

Faith literacies and orality

A third area of interest to the future development of faith literacies research, this time indirectly linked, takes us, as researchers and those with an interest in the study of literacy, almost full circle back to the dynamic and, at times, controversially interpreted, relationship between literacy and orality (Goody 1968; Ong 1982; Street 1984). Other chapters in this handbook deal more precisely with the literacy–orality symbiosis. It is generally accepted that many, if not all, of the original sacred texts were oral in nature (Sawyer and Simpson 2001) and, like the children described by Gregory *et al.* (2013) who are not only taught the text orally but also ‘imbibe’ (p. 28) a collective cultural memory in so doing, were passed on orally through entextualising practices from one generation to another. In the recorded history of Islam, for example, the moment when the Qur’an started to be used as a written text, as well as an oral one, is clearly identified in verifiable accounts. The number of oral reciters, and in particular *huffaz*, those who had memorised the oral text, were either dying or being killed in battle and it was deemed sensible for a canonical and written version of the oral text be made, duplicated and distributed. Indeed, although *qur’an* can and is translated by the English ‘reading’, it has primarily been more understood as an ‘oral recitation’. The physical artefact of the text even has another name, the *mushaf* (or ‘collection of sheets’). It has been mentioned above how important the tradition of aesthetic recitation is in the Muslim world.

In New Testament Studies, a discipline intimately associated with texts and scripts, a heightened recognition of the original oral nature of the Gospels has given rise to the related discipline of Performance Criticism (Rhoads 2006) which explores the original orality of the scriptures of the New Testament. Basing their rationale for this approach to sacred texts on the evidence of a combination of a range of data about performance practices and techniques in ancient rhetorical treatises, the discipline recognises that the New Testament, and indeed the whole of the Bible, was originally a series of compositions that were always performed for audiences (Boomershine 2010). What is intriguing is their claim that new systems of biblical interpretation can correlate with the appearance of new communication systems and that digital affordances relating to the sounds of the Bible are now returning scholars to the oral origins of their texts whereas in a previous age the media culture was such that sacred texts were seen as documents to be studied or read in silence with the emphasis on referential meaning rather than on performance.

Rather than continuing to pursue the anachronistic study of the Bible as a text read in silence by ancient readers, historical scholarship needs to shape its methods for the

study of the Bible as sound. Ancient authors composed manuscripts with the assumption that they would be performed and resounded for audiences. What is being called sound mapping of biblical texts in their original languages is a foundational step for the study of the Bible in its original medium.

(Boomershine 2010: 285)

This takes faith literacy back to faith orality and perhaps, in Biblical scholarship, merely acknowledges the reality of a relationship that is much more in evidence in other faith communities and in other national contexts. The oral recitation of the Qur'an, for example, has never been relegated to the sidelines neither in practice nor in academic study (as-Said 1975; Nelson 2001).

Many of the emerging principles of Performance Criticism, such as the emphasis on the Bible as sound, as a source of communal memory and as a communal oral tradition are reminiscent of the practices found in most other faith literacy practices.

Implicit in the recognition of the vitality of ancient performance of the Scriptures is the recognition that the performance of the Scriptures in the church of the digital age is often dismal and boring. Among the performance traditions of the digital world, the Bible is on the one hand the most widely performed literary tradition in the world but it is also the most poorly performed. In most congregations, the performance of the Scriptures receives the least preparation and attention and is frequently a more or less meaningless, emotionless, and flat repetition of words and a dead time in the service. The invitation of the new paradigm is to perform the Scriptures by heart in every worship service of the church after extensive preparation.

(Boomershine 2010: 286–287)

These three projects certainly move the academic study of faith literacies into interesting and fruitful areas. Much of this research is interdisciplinary in nature, calling upon scholars working in a variety of related areas: sociolinguistics, religious studies, ethnomusicology and literacy.

Conclusion

There are, then, a number of potential paradoxes at the heart of the study of faith literacy practices. On the one hand, much of the practices, centred as they are on sacred texts of ancient origin which many do not comprehend in a referential or propositional manner, appear distanced from other, secular, literacy practices where meaning-making is foregrounded. This may explain the reluctance some regular mainstream teachers of literacy have in making connections. The secular–religious divide may also play a part in the marginalisation of faith literacy studies in the academic literature. However, the importance of such literacy practices to the theoretically foundational studies of Scribner and Cole, Street and Wagner suggest we sideline such practices at our peril, for the acquisition of faith literacies represents, as Wagner reminds above, one of the most widespread and universal forms of complementary schooling in the world. Moreover, faith practice itself does not seem to be going away in our 'secular age' (Taylor 2007) and the literacy practices that accompany it are dynamic and exhibit a vitality that belie their ancient and often culturally distant origins.

Another paradox is the one with which the chapter ends, the relationship between literacy and orality. Through a performance lens faith literacy practices appear to return us to the oral nature of texts, to that awareness that sacred texts arose in an oral form designed for performance,

for being spoken or recited aloud and for being listened to by an audience. Such instances of collective memory practices and communal oral traditions, extant in Gregory *et al.*'s study as well as in the findings of Performance Criticism, remind us of and pose questions about that relationship. Most faith literacy events involve performance and audience in one way or another and in so doing remind us of that symbiosis that is an ever-present social reality for practitioners and worshippers the world over.

Faith literacies then, as this chapter I hope demonstrates, rather than being peripheral social processes and activities, take their place alongside other, more mainstream literacies playing an important role in the social and cultural lives of those for whom faith, language and literacy are entwined and complementary. In a contemporary world, where, contrary to many expectations, religious life and practice have not withered away, but are still dynamic and playing a full role in the lives of citizens across the planet, faith literacies remain an integral part of people's identities, collectively and individually.

It is significant that Gee (Chapter 2, this volume), when making reference to some of the seminal works that have played an important role in forging the New Literacy Studies, mentions some of the same pioneering research that I made reference to earlier in this chapter. The move towards a sociocultural and practice-based understanding of literacy, and one which recognises the role of faith literacies, as exemplified in the works of Graff (1979), Scribner and Cole (1981) and Street (1984), has permitted the development of a much broader, comprehensive and inclusive definition of literacy which in turn has opened the door to the subsequent exploration of hitherto marginalised, and often misrepresented, literacy practices. And faith literacies is one of these.

Related topics

"Ethnography and language in defining and studying literacy events and practices" (Chapter 1, Bloome and Green), "The New Literacy Studies" (Chapter 2, James Paul Gee), "Multilingual/bilingual literacies" (Chapter 5, Lin and Li).

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PART III

Time-focused approaches

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12

HISTORICAL INQUIRY IN LITERACY EDUCATION

Calling on Clio

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Introduction

A marked absence in literacy studies in education is history. This is all the more notable because, in recent decades, work in literacy education has become increasingly more comprehensive and inclusive, and more and more interdisciplinary in character and orientation. At best, however, historical work remains marginal and a minority concern in it, which is greatly to be regretted. This is because a strong case can and must be mounted that history and, relatedly, historical inquiry, constitutes a much-underestimated resource for literacy studies. Another way of putting this is to say that, all too often, literacy studies as a scholarly programme lacks historical perspective and imagination.

A prime example is the appropriately influential field of New Literacy Studies (NLS), with its programmatic emphasis on literacy as a situated socio-cultural practice. To date, the major orientation in this body of research and scholarship has been towards ethnography, emphasising the importance of contexts and contextualisation, and moving from an initial undeniably productive and pioneering focus on 'local literacies' to heightened engagement with what has been called the 'trans-local' (Brandt and Clinton 2002). Such an emphasis has been extremely important, and generative, in taking account of the increasing importance of local-global dynamics in a globalised world, and new awareness of the significance of mobility in social and cultural theory – literacy occurs in places and spaces, and at varying and multiple scales and trajectories (e.g. Baynham and Prinsloo 2009). However, this emphasis on the present and on emerging futures may well have come at the expense of an explicit, properly informed historical consciousness in the field, and important insights into the nature of literacy practices and pedagogies over time.

This chapter undertakes accordingly to explore the role and significance, and value, of historical inquiry in literacy studies and literacy education. Why bring a historical perspective to bear on literacy research and pedagogy? How might historical imagination inform and enrich such work? What does it mean to think historically about literacy pedagogy? These and other questions open up both praxis and inquiry to new considerations and possibilities, including

how best to move forward into increasingly uncertain and unsettled futures, and new challenges for literacy and education alike.

Situating historical inquiry in/and literacy education

At the outset, it is useful to ask what it is that a *situated* view of literacy entails. What does it mean to think in terms of literacy as necessarily situated, over and beyond its immediate contextual circumstances? Following on from the work of geographer and social theorist Edward Soja (1995), it has been generative to think of literacy as situated in a three-fold manner: *socially* (i.e. socio-culturally and socio-economically), *spatially* and *historically*. Most work to date has explored and articulated the social dimension, working sociologically to address matters of class and economy, gender, and what has been called ‘ethnorace’ (Collins and Blot 2003), all traditionally conceived as the main sites of social power. Elsewhere account has been made of the spatial perspective, drawing in geography, place and spatiality (Green 2013), and this is now increasingly on the agenda (Mills and Comber 2013). However, less attention has been given to the nature, role and significance of the historical imagination, as a complement to what C. Wright Mills (2000 [1959]) famously called the sociological imagination, and also what might be identified, by extension and analogy, as the spatial or geographical imagination. Yet, more generally there has been increasing awareness recently of what Soja (1995: 3) calls “this three-sided sensibility of spatiality–historicity–sociality” and its effect not only on how we think about space but also “how we study history and society”. It seems highly likely, then, that this applies as much to literacy as to anything else.

But what does it actually mean to understand literacy as situated *historically*, or through the lens of a historical imagination? What is the distinctive ‘historicity’ of literacy, and more particularly of literacy education? These are questions rarely asked, it would seem. “History is a marginalized research genre among literacy professionals. ... Unlike many disciplines, literacy education researchers have positioned history on the fringes” (Moore *et al.* 1997: 90). This theme is picked up a decade later in Freebody’s review of literacy education, one aim of which is “to re-historicise enquiries into literacy education” (Freebody 2007: 9). As he writes:

Educators have been acculturated, especially in pre- and in-service professional development programs, to see little value in bringing historical understandings of literacy to bear on the everyday problems of the ‘doing’ of literacy education and the making of policies about it. One of the aims of this review has been to address this omission by encouraging a historical perspective, motivated by a belief that from the past we can learn lessons that can lead us forward.

(Freebody 2007: 65–66)

What he refers to as a characteristic “historical amnesia” (Freebody 2007: 68) is, however, by no means limited to teachers. Readance and Barone (1997) extend this to literacy research and scholarship more generally, and especially doctoral studies. They do so in the context of introducing the reprint of a classic study (the ‘First-Grade Studies’) from some decades previously, which they present as an unusual and ‘bold’ undertaking:

How many of our literacy colleagues have actually had formal exposure to literacy history through discussions centered on such reports? How many of our doctoral students take a course in literacy history? It would seem that in many cases, historical exploration has to be done individually, as a personal pursuit.

(Readance and Barone 1997: 341)

This is referring specifically to graduate work in literacy education and related areas, although a similar observation might be made with regard to the larger field of education studies – excluding, of course, work in the history of education itself, as an area of study, and perhaps also curriculum history. As such commentaries suggest, historical inquiry is either effectively marginalised or else personalised, and regarded as more or less idiosyncratic; and far from being in any sense institutionalised, or seen as part of the main game. Why is history such a lacunae in the field, then – indeed, such a blind spot?

The answer lies partly in the question of *disciplinarity* – or rather, literacy-educational research's self-understanding as a distinctive field of study. More specifically, how literacy studies has come to understand itself as a disciplinary formation has a bearing on how history is conceived. While undoubtedly there have been important moves in recent decades towards an engagement with the arts and humanities, nonetheless overall much literacy research continues to be oriented to the social sciences, and beyond that, to identify with science as an epistemic field of reference. This is entirely congruent with the historical identification of reading as a (quasi-)scientific field of study, certainly over the twentieth century, and indeed a larger alignment of education to science, epistemologically and institutionally – its programmatic 'scientification'. History has no place in the scientific enterprise, at least in its mainstream modern(ist) form; and hence historical sensitivity and awareness has been, at best, marginalised. That is apparent too in practice and policy alike, which remain all too often resolutely, obdurately 'presentist', and ideologically or at least dispositionally pragmatic.

Literacy itself is a term of quite recent historical provenance. It is only in the last few decades that it has become the term of preference for educators and others, in their research and scholarship. Its semantic field was previously assigned to and distributed across other terms such as 'reading' and 'writing', and also 'English'. Illustrative here, and also symptomatic, is the re-nomination of journals such as the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* (previously the *Australian Journal of Reading*) and the UK-based *Literacy* (previously *Reading*). Moreover, as Freebody (2007: 12) notes, "[t]he term *literacy* has various histories of use". One set links up with histories of schooling and the institutionalised practice of education, while others are associated more with fields such as anthropology and archaeology, and history itself.

Hence:

what we denote by terms such as 'reading' and 'writing' or 'speaking' and 'listening' are not the same thing in distinct historical periods. What we denote by such terms are communicative practices, defining in changing relation to each other, according to historically specific institutional developments and cultural concerns.

(Collins and Blot 2003: 31)

Furthermore, as Freebody observes, while there are indeed "available histories of 'reading' ... 'writing' ... and 'literacy'", both within and outside of schooling contexts, whether or not they have been taken into account overall is debateable: "Their impact on the study of literacy education, as an area that bears on the practice of educators, teacher educators and education policy makers ... has been negligible" (Freebody 2007: 65).

Nonetheless there has certainly been important work done in the history of literacy, both in the context of what has been described as "historical literacy studies" (Graff 2013) and in "literacy history", within a more educational frame (Monaghan and Hartman 2000). The first refers to historical inquiry more generally, as a disciplinary field. Harvey Graff not only provides an excellent overview of such work¹ but is himself a major scholar in this regard. Moreover, his dialogue with education over several decades, within what has overall become an explicitly

interdisciplinary research programme, has been extremely important in opening up literacy education in its various forms to historical perspective. As he writes:

The emergence of literacy as an interdisciplinary field for contemporary scholars opens the way for a richer exchange between historians and other researchers for the mutual reshaping of inquiry past, present, and future that is part of the promise of literacy's history.

(Graff 2013: 10)

This includes educational researchers whose focus is specifically on literacy, whether that be in terms of 'critical literacy' (Graff 2001) or else so-called 'school literacy' more generally. He sees history as concerned above all else with what he succinctly calls "the shaping power of the past" (Graff 2013: 55). Among his contributions is ground-breaking work on what he formulated in the late 1970s as the 'literacy myth'. This is an essentialist, idealist view of literacy's role and significance in human life and civilisation, embracing modernity, the Enlightenment and antiquity which, as he outlined, has become hegemonic to the point of being subsumed into professional and popular common sense. In critiquing this myth, Graff emphasises that literacy must be recognised as a 'dependent variable' – one factor, rather than *the* factor, in shaping culture and learning, and even consciousness – as opposed to being taken as an 'independent variable' in and for research and scholarship, as it had tended to be hitherto. Moreover, "literacy is a historical variable and it is historically variable" (Graff 2013: 4).

For Graff, history provides a distinctive and even crucial resource. "History's contributions provide much needed perspectives", he writes. "They allow us to reach out for new, different, and even multiple understandings of ourselves and others, often in their interrelationships" (Graff 2013: 56). Notions of community and tradition, and (dis)continuity, emerge as significant here. The presence of the past in influencing the present needs to be acknowledged, and properly accounted for. "Failure to appreciate the provenance of the past, of history, in the present and the possibilities for the future makes us its prisoners, bound to repeat the past, rather than to learn from it and to break its bonds" (Graff 2001: 2). Yet it is not simply a matter of the 'lessons' of history, or what we might have to learn from history, from revisiting and recalling the past. That is something altogether more complicated, and even complex, than commonly appreciated – a point also stressed by David Moore (Moore *et al.* 1997). The metaphor of the 'lesson' itself needs to be worked with carefully, and warily.

Nonetheless it is indeed possible to learn from history, at least indirectly, taking into due account history's own contingency. Pointing to the conjoint value of "comparison" and "criticism", Graff provides a useful characterisation of what a historical perspective entails and what it offers ("[i]ts values and virtues"):

History mandates focusing and refocusing the lenses of time, place, and alternative spaces. It probes and prompts us to comprehend what has been, what might have been, and what might be: choice, agency, and possibility, in their fullness and their limits.

(2013: 56)

Apropos what historical research has provided to date, he describes "the historicity of literacy [as] a first theme, from which many other key imperatives and implications follow" (Graff 2013: 87) – that is, that literacy itself, as concept, practice and institution, is always-already profoundly historical. Further: "Awareness of this historicity, which gains support from contemporary

research in anthropology, psychology, and literary criticism, is perhaps the single most significant contribution of recent historical scholarship, even if the point requires further broadcast" (ibid.). His own work is an indispensable resource in this regard.

Working more from an anthropological perspective, Collins and Blot (2003) similarly attest to the value of history in literacy studies. Their work provides philosophical and comparative perspectives on literacy developments and debates from antiquity to the twentieth century, drawing on postcolonial and poststructuralist theory among other resources to challenge what they call the "literacy thesis" (p. 15), a concept much akin to Graff's 'literacy myth'. As they put it: "The entire literacy thesis rests on sets of dichotomies which flow from a momentous *but transhistorical* contrast: 'written' versus 'oral'" (Collins and Blot 2003: 29; our emphasis). Referencing Derrida, they raise important philosophical questions about the historical record on writing, speech and literacy. Engaging with both ethnographic and archival research, they point to what they call "the official story": "The official story has been optimistic about the transformative powers of literacy and education, perhaps the most durable aspects of an otherwise battered modern liberalism" (Collins and Blot 2003: 7). They point to the links between literacy and modernity, enlightenment and education, as concepts deeply implicated in questions of power, history and culture. "Historical studies of the 'uses of literacy' during different phases of modern Western culture portray a complex interplay of text-and-talk which was part of the emergence of new forms of identity, power, and communication", as they write: "Such historical research supports the emphasis on a 'bottom-up' view of literacy taken by ethnographers of literacy, but it also suggests specific connections between changing literacy practices and political and economic conditions in Europe and North America" (Collins and Blot 2003: 67). This is indeed a bigger picture than often taken into account in literacy education.

Among their most useful insights and arguments are those concerning what they identify as "schooled literacy" (Collins and Blot 2003: 7). This links up with accounts by Cook-Gumperz (1986) and also Graff: the fact that the literacy of schooling needs to be understood as a restricted and specialised set within a larger field of literacy possibilities, both comparatively (and contemporaneously) and historically, and that indeed what has come to be seen as 'school literacy' is itself an historical phenomenon. They provide what they call "a historical case study of literacy in America" (Collins and Blot 2003: 67) to illustrate this, pointing to a shift over the nineteenth century into the twentieth century from a first-phase "common school movement" to a second-phase public-school system marked by standardisation, ability-ranking and curriculum-tracking, and "from [literacy] being conceived as a civic-moral virtue to being conceived as an economic-technical skill" (Collins and Blot 2003: 83). Collins and Blot point to the way in which the literacy of schooling, as itself a cultural-historical technology, reduces and restricts textual and semantic possibilities. "The advent of schooled literacy did not simply replace prior nonliteracy with literacy. Instead, schooled literacy emerged out of and in response to a complex, multifaceted commonplace literacy – of workplace, church, family and politics" (Collins and Blot 2003: 95). This is what Willinsky (1993) has described as "the literacy before schooling". Their argument is consistent and congruent with Cook-Gumperz's account of the redefinition of literacy as singularity, out of its previous multiplicity, and Graff's (2013: 90) description of "'school' literacy [as] a very special use of literacy and language", which we tend to "neglect", and to misrecognise. Again the effect of such historically-sensitive and -informed work is to make literacy a much richer, more complex and contradictory matter than realised in mainstream literacy-education contexts.

Returning to the question of literacy's own, inherent 'historicity' (or 'historicality', in Soja's formulation), it is worth picking up on the issue of what distinguishes a historical perspective.

Moore points to the significance of *time* in this regard: “More than any other methodology or discipline, history emphasises the ‘over time’ aspect of human interactions. History places events in temporal sequences; it is based on the assumption that the past affects the present and will affect the future” (Moore *et al.* 1997: 91). Hartman reiterates this point, describing time as “the defining feature of historical inquiry” (Moore *et al.* 1997: 97). Observing that “[t]he lion’s share of literacy research in [the twentieth] century has either ignored time or emphasised it in limited ways” (p. 97), he goes on, nonetheless, to suggest the value of “a diachronic approach to literacy ... focusing on literate activity as it evolves through and from the perspective of time” (p. 98). Of course, emphasising the importance of time does not mean committing oneself to chronology, or to chrono-logic, or to notions of linearity and chrono-metric realism. In this regard, common-sense relations of past and present (and also future) need to be challenged.²

Finally, to this reckoning into account of time or temporality in this context can be added issues of memory, representation and the archive, in thinking about the nature of historical inquiry, and also importantly scale. History need not be seen as referring only to matters long in the distant past, and literacy educators would do well to become comfortable with, and adept in thinking historically in flexible and dynamic ways, across the scales of time and duration.

Critical issues and methodological challenges

In this section we take up the question of how history might be accounted for within literacy studies. As described in the previous section, this involves both a deliberate focus on the ‘past’ – what might traditionally be called ‘history’ – but also building into studies situated in the present an historical perspective and imagination, or a focus on positioning what is being studied within a temporal dimension – attending to the ‘when’ of literacy, as well as the what, where and how. It will involve using history as a resource for disturbing any conception of literacy as an enduring object – largely the same over time – and, instead, examining it as contingent on the historical context within which it operates or, indeed, which it serves to shape.

Researching historically on literacy always involves traversing a number of intersecting traditions of scholarship. Literacy in its modern form, for example, is intricately involved in *education*, itself a transdisciplinary field of study, and any study involving the past must in some way engage with *history* as both field and methodology. These key fields – literacy, education, history – are themselves multifaceted and incorporate intersecting theoretical and methodological traditions such that there are specialised sub-fields in each. No survey of research across these fields can hope to be exhaustive; however, in this section we have selected some key methodological issues and challenges that arise from bringing an historical perspective to literacy studies. This involves attending to some new, as well as older, approaches to studying history and the ways they can be deployed in the study of literacy.

For literacy researchers incorporating historical study in their work, the disciplinary guidance into research methods offered by both historians and educators is thin indeed. As McCulloch and Richardson state in their guide *Historical Research in Educational Settings*: “Both in the educational research methods literature and in works of historiography, the treatment of historical research in education has often been shallow and cursory or problematic” (2000: 25).

One notable exception is Monaghan and Hartman’s (2000) account of historical research in literacy, which provides a useful overview of what little work there is in this regard (e.g. Venezky 1987; see also Barry 2008) as well as an outline of historiography and methodology. They point to what they call “four approaches” to researching the past, identifying these as “qualitative” (or “what most lay persons think of as ‘history’”) and “quantitative” (i.e. statistical, etc.) methods, as well as “content analysis” and “oral history” (Monaghan and

Hartman 2000: 114–115). Nonetheless, their account now needs to be updated and supplemented. McCulloch and Richardson's book, based mainly on work in the UK, represents a rare attempt to provide methodological guidance to the educational historian.³ They track three distinct traditions in the field (see p. 43 for an overview): (1) "Classical historiography", which dominated from 1900 to the 1960s, and which focused on celebrating educational history as 'progress'; (2) "Revisionism", from 1960 to the early 1980s, which sought to tell the social history of education from alternative perspectives (e.g. women, working-class students) and was influenced by social science theories, especially those in the Marxist tradition; and (3) "Post-revisionism", from the 1980s–1990s on, "influenced by postmodernism and allied cultural critiques".

A key figure in this last movement has been Michel Foucault (1977), who argued in an influential essay ("Nietzsche, genealogy, history") for a *genealogical* approach to history, which he opposed to the traditional or "monumental" form that tended to provide narratives to explain how things had turned out through telling the 'truth' about events. For Foucault, such approaches glossed over alternative ways of understanding events and tended to disguise their "fragility". A genealogical approach is interested in historical ruptures (discontinuities) and in showing how things could be otherwise than present arrangements – that is, the present is not an inevitable outcome of the past but, rather, a particular assemblage of elements to which traditional history gives undue solidity. Through a genealogical approach, history can be used to surface alternative discourses and provide new resources for thinking about the present. For example, historical studies of the school subject English in the early twentieth century show how the teaching and learning of literacy could be deployed around teleologies of 'culture' and self-examination which stand in stark contrast to present-day discourses that emphasise literacy as skill and tool for work (Brass 2011; Cormack 2012).

McCulloch and Richardson's main point about current (i.e. post-1990s) approaches, notwithstanding their apparent reservations about them overall, is that they draw on "an eclectic array of social science concepts, theories and research methods" (2000: 43) which, as they suggest, is an indication that the history of education is a field (still) grappling with the implications of the so-called 'linguistic turn' in the social sciences, a development of key importance for those interested in the history of literacy. This is something we have explored elsewhere (Cormack and Green 2009), with specific reference to curriculum history.

More than this, as Foucault (1981) has shown, discourses shape language and reflect relations of power so that they determine what becomes thinkable, who has authority to speak, and what counts as truth. Based on such understandings, educational historians are required to consider theories of text, language, signification, as well as issues such as the nature of textual artefacts, and the social context(s) for their use. This is where, arguably, literacy studies scholars have an advantage, because their field is steeped in such concepts – their challenge lies in adding a temporal dimension to their work such that time itself becomes an important element in understanding what literacy involves. This requires engagement with historical artefacts and texts within literacy studies. McCulloch and Richardson discuss a range of 'sources' for historical research in education and these are suggestive for literacy studies scholars – they are summarised in Table 12.1.

Literacy scholars will probably be confident in the use of such materials in a contemporary study, but what additional dimensions are there when considering such sources historically? What is clear from such a list is that most resources are textual in nature and, indeed, based around print literacy; however, there are also important visual and oral sources, involving wider and more varied forms of signification, with their own challenges for analysis. In the next two sub-sections, we examine approaches to analysis of both kinds of materials.

Table 12.1 Sources of data for historical studies of education

<i>Published sources</i>	<i>Unpublished sources</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Primary sources</i> produced by those directly involved in an historical event/period (e.g. reports, accounts, catalogues, materials, newspapers and magazines, autobiographies, some of which may be difficult to find or access) • <i>Secondary sources</i> – accounts produced at some distance from the historical event/period (e.g. histories, biographies, articles, which may be easier to access because of their wider publication processes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repositories of educational policy and administration kept in public or organisational record offices (e.g. minutes, in-house reports, materials, files) which provide an ‘official’ view of the matter being investigated • Educational institutions such as schools and associations which may have kept their own records and artefacts (e.g. minutes, student records, photographs, learning equipment and materials) • Personal records provided by individuals such as teachers, parents, principals, sometimes included in museum collections or made directly available to individual researchers (e.g. personal papers, plans, records, correspondence, resources, photos, video, materials) • Oral sources based on interviews with former students, teachers, parents etc.

Based on McCulloch and Richardson (2000: 79–119).

Examining print-based historical sources

From a methodological perspective, a key challenge for historical work in literacy studies is how to engage with text and discourse both as the foundation of the field – its central object of inquiry – and constitutive of the data being analysed. This means it is not possible to examine historical materials as providing any direct window onto the ‘real’ or the truth of what happened. The historian of literacy cannot stand outside of discourse in order to make judgements about it, even (or especially) when time has elapsed since the event. Historical texts were produced in and through discourses, just as the historian’s ‘reading’ of the text is produced in and through discourses in the present. Thus forms of reflexive discourse analysis are required for examining historical texts. Here we raise some key issues for dealing with historical texts through a lens that combines both a genealogical perspective, as already mentioned, and one that understands them as constituted within discourses. We argue that a genealogical stance to historical materials works to support the discourse analyst to ‘make strange’ present arrangements and assumptions by using history to show how things might have been otherwise and, indeed, were otherwise in different times and places.⁴ Close linguistic analysis provides a way of ‘denaturalising’ a text and reading it as a discursive practice. This provides a reading that may be different from the preferred reading structured by the author(s) of the text. Patterson (1997) labels critical discourse analysis “a condition of doubt”, where the taken-for-granted is interrupted and questioned:

Part of the ‘trick’ of critical analysis then is *not* to allow the object to appear without hesitation. Rather, the target of analysis is expected to draw attention to itself as socially constructed, historically positioned and culturally anchored, as is the person of the researcher/analyst. The goal is to make the object or idea appear problematic,

tentative, plural, multiple and complex through its social, cultural and historical positioning

(Patterson 1997: 425)

A key focus for the examination of texts from a discursive and genealogical perspective is the various ‘objects’ (including human ‘subjects’) that they refer to. Objects such as the ‘text’ or ‘reader’ appear, reappear, reform, and even disappear, in different (discursive) spaces and times. Genealogical inquiry will not attempt to tell the singular ‘story’ of such objects, but rather seeks to highlight their contingency and describe the ideals, strategies and techniques that make them possible, and which deploy them as technologies shaping human subjects. Another way of saying this is that the analyst of historical texts does not take for granted the labels and attributions provided for humans, and indeed other phenomena. Terms such as ‘student’, ‘child’, ‘teacher’, ‘parent’, etc. are treated as being constituted by discourses which ‘speak’ them into existence, and the concept of subjectivities provides a way of talking about the multiple, varying and contingent ways of being a human that are available and deployed at different times. Thus to historicise the concept of a ‘reader’ (someone who reads) is not to assume that the term means the same thing at all times – nor does it assume that changes in the meaning of ‘reader’ are varying approximations of what the practice is *really* like.

Rose (1996) notes that analysis of subjectivity and identity involves more than considering the ways of thinking (forms of thought) about human subjects that were available historically. It also involves attention to what were called previously the ‘programmatically’ aspects of discourse, which Rose labels as “techniques of regulation” and “problems of organisation” (p. 129), and a historically alert study of literacy potentially has much to say about these issues. Cormack (2005) also urges that curriculum historians attend to the mundane, the humble ‘techniques’, such as the classroom exercise, reading aloud to the teacher, reading with parents, and so on, that are deployed in the everyday world of education and schooling to shape the ways that humans could/must/desire-to-be. In their review of the history of subject English in South Australian primary schools, Cormack and Comber (1996) showed that differing views of the child and the subject English actually changed the kind of teacher that was being required in four successive curricula over more than thirty years:

In 1995 we see the writing of an anxious teacher, pessimistic about her work, and responding in a highly disciplined way to widespread panic about literacy in public schooling. This teacher is very different to the teacher of 1984, 1978 and 1962. Gone is the sense of satisfaction and enjoyment, and the faith in her efforts that are emphasised in those earlier documents.

(Cormack and Comber 1996: 142)

Here the figure of the teacher was reconstituted out of anxieties about the reading required and changing ideals for the child reader. Such work shows that it is possible, through close textual analysis, to develop histories of different aspects of literacy, including of the human participants in the process – the child, the teacher, the reader, the parent, the policymaker, and so on. Such work seeks to consider literacy as a process that involves the full range of human experience.

It is also possible to consider the history of the *artefacts* of literacy – the materials and resources involved; and this is the more common form of historical treatment of literacy. Notable here are histories of the book in general (see, for example, Lyons and Arnold 2001) and of other texts such as children’s school reading material (Patterson *et al.* 2012), pedagogical guides, policies,

newspapers and so on. Often such histories are not conducted by literacy scholars, or even education scholars, so that those with an interest in literacy history must read such texts with their own questions in mind and, often, work across a range of these histories, to gather a fuller sense of the ways in which literacy has operated historically.

Beyond print

One methodological issue that remains to be addressed here is what it is possible to do beyond analysis of print which, while the most common form of historical data, is not the only form. This involves taking due account of what has been described as a “post-linguistic turn” (Green and Cormack 2009). Reviewing Table 12.1, there are non-print forms such as photographs, artefacts and even video data, more recently, that can be utilised in historical research. In addition, there may be actual participants in historical processes, still alive and able to provide their own perspective on literacy in the period they were a parent, teacher, administrator and so on.

In relation to artefacts and primarily visual sources of data, much of the discussion in the previous section on print resources will still apply in that such materials can be treated as ‘texts’. This means that, like print texts, they are constituted within discourses and forms of representation. In his excellent guide to the treatment of photographs in educational history, Grosvenor (1999: 88) calls for a “critical practice” which recognises that:

photos exist both in history and as history, that they are the products of cultural discourse, that they do not offer a transparent window into the past, that photography constitutes a site of production and representation, and that a photograph must be read not as an image, but as a text, and as with any text it is open to a diversity of readings.

Photographs as sources of historical data do not provide a transparent window on the past, but they can be used, in combination with other sources, therefore, to build a sense of how literacy was being deployed in people’s lives, or at least the forms of use that were regarded as important to record. Sometimes, too, photographs may be taken for one purpose – to record an event such as the visit of an important guest, to promote a particular resource, to record a special day – but may provide other information to the historian: the charts on a wall, the technology being used, the clothing, the bookshelves in the background. Vincent (1999) points to the way that collections of materials, either sourced from single sites or constructed by the historian, may provide unique insights into the history of literacy. Vincent references the *Jane Johnson Manuscript Nursery Library* (Johnson 1708–1759) as an example of an early eighteenth century set of materials assembled and constructed by a mother for teaching her son (the future High Sheriff of Lincolnshire), which includes early primers like texts, hand-made word and sound cards, drawings and charts. Historians (of literacy), note Grosvenor and Lawn (2004: 389) “visit archives to view the fragmentary traces of the past, traces that have been placed in folders, put in boxes, numbered and catalogued”. Vincent also points to the importance of exploring textual material beyond what may be in official collections to include popular texts such as ‘Penny Dreadfuls’, which found their way into the homes of many people of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A further important source of data for historical work in the near past are the people who can recall their own experience as actors in literacy events. Interviewing people about their experiences – as learners, teachers, parents, administrators and so on – has the potential advantage of going beyond the official record to consider the experience of those whose

perspectives may otherwise be lost. Researchers interested in exploring such approaches can consult methodological support on ‘oral histories’ and, relatedly, on ‘memory work’, discussions of which are beyond the scope of this chapter (Gardner 2003) – a key related resource in this area is the work of Ivor Goodson (1992, 2005) on teachers’ ‘life histories’. Importantly, oral histories are often used in combination with other sources of data – forming a significant portion of the corpus, but also able to be used to confirm or question information obtained from other sources. An excellent example of such a study is one that touches on aspects of literacy as part of its focus on the history of English teaching in selected London schools in post-war Britain of the 1950s and 1960s (Hardcastle 2008; Medway 2012; Medway and Kingwell 2010). While the project was built around interviews with ageing key figures in English teaching of the 1960s and 1970s, it also sought out teachers who worked with them and incorporated photographs and other sources of data. As Hardcastle (2008: 4) explains, the project sought:

to do more than gather teachers’ testimonies as a means to reconstructing their professional lives. Rather, we are seeking to locate what the participants tell us within broader studies of other products of the time: books, influential journals, cultural institutions, archives and social policy documents, especially those relating to post-war renewal.

Such work is indicative of the way that oral historical data can be combined with official sources to provide a sense of “what English looked and felt like in classrooms for teachers and pupils” (Medway and Kingwell 2010: 750). As with visual and print resources, discourse analysis is a necessary component of work with interviews. Interview subjects, and the interview itself, are bound up in discourses that constrain and enable what it is possible to ask and say.

One necessary adjunct to consideration of all such resources is attention to *embodied* aspects of literacy. Analysis of texts and discourses can easily lead to a disembodied perspective on literacy history and this is something that the historian must work hard to counter – a point made most strongly by feminist educational researchers. History, like literacy, is made in and through bodies. Threadgold (interviewed in Kamler 1997: 447) notes it is simply not possible to have “text and context without a body”. Texts, in the ways they refer to other parts of the same text (cohesion), to other texts (intertextuality), to places, events and institutions, need a body – or bodies – to make those connections: the grammar of the text makes these connections possible, but the body realises or performs them. The body is required for producing texts – the muscles involved with vocal cords for producing speech, for example – and also for consuming and using them. The challenge for the historian of literacy is finding evidence of embodiment in their data. Photographs, pictures, clothing, architecture, artefacts such as school desks – these all provide information about the embodied aspects of the curriculum. Importantly, so do conventional texts – the mainstay of curriculum-historical research. According to Threadgold (1997), analysis of linguistic elements such as intertextuality, cohesion and the theme-rheme structure of a text provides much evidence of the body. To take one aspect of cohesion as an example, ellipsis (the omission of information that it is assumed the reader will be able to fill in from context and experience) tells much about what it is assumed the body of the reader will know, the resources they have access to, the places they have been, the things they can do. Vick’s work (Vick 2009; Vick and Martinez 2009) provides good examples of the ways that the body (in this case, of the teacher) can be incorporated into historical studies through (discourse) analysis of photographs, as well as texts written for and about teaching.

Current work and future directions

Literacy is more than reading, and literacy studies exceeds reading pedagogy. That is, in itself, a matter of historical interest and significance. Our own research programme, extending well over two decades now, embraces, on the one hand, an ongoing study of English curriculum history focused particularly on the first half of the twentieth century in Australia, but explicitly linked to the larger picture of curriculum history and the English subjects (Green and Beavis 1996; Green and Cormack 2008); and on the other, an exploration of the history of reading pedagogy, focused once again in Australia although more broadly referencing such work in the UK and the USA, and extending from the early to mid-nineteenth century to the 1930s (Green and Cormack 2011; Green *et al.* 2013). The first strand is relevant here because, for much of the twentieth century, certainly in the anglophone world, subject English was identified with the literacy project of the public school. Moreover, it was often compulsory and otherwise deemed central to the school curriculum – its ‘cornerstone’, as one early commentator put it. While more recently it became more recognisable as a distinctively secondary school subject area, ‘English’ nonetheless is clearly associated in the historical record with the elementary/primary school, and it makes sense therefore to refer to primary English teaching, as we have done elsewhere. This is, in fact, a direct link with our historical work on reading pedagogy. Here we focus on reading pedagogy.

So what ways forward are there for thinking historically about reading pedagogy – something that goes against the grain of the mainstream field, as already observed here? It is important to historicise the teaching of reading, exploring through detailed and comprehensive archival work the ways in which it has been constituted at different times and in different places. A useful frame for our work has been provided by a dynamic ‘triplet’ (Figure 12.1), which alerts us to the ever-changing face of literacy instruction. Our proposal is that in any pedagogical event that is formally or informally built around the learning of reading, there is a relationship between the teacher (parent, instructor, software), the pupil (child or adult) and the text (traditional or otherwise). Each element needs to be read in relation to the others as something that co-constitutes a pedagogy event. Of course this is not all that is involved – there are issues such as space, including architecture and location, to be considered, for example – but these three elements and their relations stand out, historically, as points of anxiety and problems to be solved. Considering reading pedagogy in this way allows for sensitive historical analysis of the continuities and discontinuities between reading pedagogies at different times as well as an understanding of the interactive practices that made up the *how* of reading pedagogy as well as the *what*.

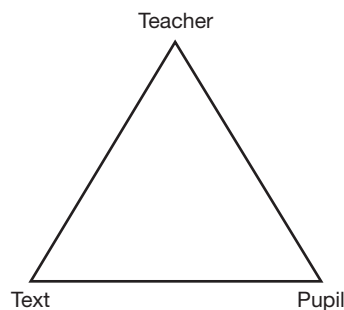


Figure 12.1 Dynamic elements of reading pedagogy.

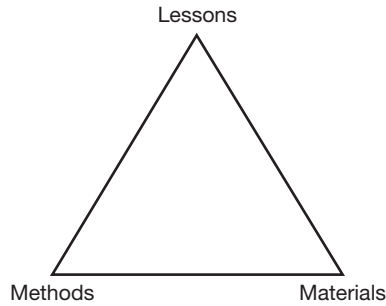


Figure 12.2 Aspects of historical data in reading pedagogy.

To further explore the materiality of reading pedagogy, the triplet mentioned above is mapped onto and complemented by a strategic focus on *lessons*, *methods* and *materials* (Figure 12.2). ‘Lesson’ is a term with its own fascinating etymology (Green *et al.* 2013: 331) which shows how learning to read and learning the (Christian) faith have been closely tied over time in the Western tradition. Questions about what constitutes a reading ‘lesson’ provide useful insights into what counts as reading as well as how learning to read is being managed. ‘Methods’ is a familiar and enduring concern in the field of literacy education, as many commentators have observed – ourselves included (e.g. Green and Reid 2004). So too is the issue of ‘materials’ (books, ‘readers’, charts, etc.), although we have begun to organise our work increasingly around what we now call the ‘materiality’ of reading pedagogy, to account for the larger socio-material network within which teaching and learning to read is realised. Conceived as a ‘history of the present’, our ongoing work has also involved investigations of reading policy from a critical-historical perspective (Cormack 2011), and more generally the politico-discursive relationship of pedagogy, policy and history.

To illustrate some of these approaches, we provide brief extracts below from two descriptions of reading lesson that we have discovered in our archival searches.⁵ Our purpose in selecting these descriptions of reading lessons, published nearly seventy years apart, is to demonstrate that it is possible to attend to a variety of features of literacy through close analysis of historical data and, especially, to use historical data to ‘make strange’ current ways of thinking about literacy.

The first extract is from a teaching manual written in 1816 by Joseph Lancaster, one of the founders of the so-called ‘monitorial’ system of schooling whereby a single schoolmaster, through a factory-like organisation of materials and pupils with most teaching conducted by monitors drawn from the ranks of the pupils themselves, could provide instruction for hundreds of children of different ages. To begin this lesson, at a signal from the ‘master’ the ‘monitor-general’ signals the draft-monitors to bring their draft from their forms (seats) to the walls of the room.

Reading lesson extract 1 (from Lancaster and British and Foreign School Society 1994 [1816]: 17)

The pupils stand in semicircles round the walls of the school-room.	1
These semicircles are composed of 9 or 10 children, superintended by a reading-monitor, who is called draft-monitor, on account of the children being drawn out in their classes.	2 3
These monitors suspend a badge, with the words "First Boy" written upon it, from the neck of the child who is at the head of the draft.	4 5
The monitor then directs his pointer to the lessons that the children are to read one after another.	6
These lessons are printed in large letters upon detached sheets; the union of which forms a book sufficient for a school of 500 or 1000 children.	7 8
The child who wears the badge with the word First Boy, stands close to the wall, and opposite to the monitor; and is first called upon. If he reads correctly, he keeps his place and his badge; if he mistakes, the reading-monitor says 'the next'.	9 10 11
Then the pupil who stands next corrects the one who had mistaken, and if he reads right, the monitor makes a sign with his hand that he should take the higher place, and the badge with the word First Boy; the possessor of this badge is then obliged to give it up and retire from his place.	12 13 14

This extract shows how it is possible to track some aspects of the materiality of the reading lesson. Line 1 begins with the walls of the classroom against which pupils' bodies must be arrayed and there are also badges (line 4) and 'lessons' on detached sheets (7). Perhaps even more a focus is attention to the bodies of the learners; arrayed in semicircles (1), wearing badges around their necks (4), standing in order (12), with the monitor using the voice (11) and hand signals (13) to move pupils to their place in the circle according to their accuracy (14).

By way of contrast, we now turn to the lesson taken from a book entitled *The 'Quincy Methods' Illustrated*. Written by Lelia Patridge, a teacher and teacher educator, and published in 1885, the book is a report on observations at the Quincy School District in Massachusetts run by Colonel Francis W. Parker, a leading pedagogue in the USA at that time, whose book *Talks on Teaching* (1883) would become a longstanding guide to pedagogy across the anglophone world.⁶ Based on his own study of pedagogy in Germany, Parker's ideas helped popularise new approaches to learning inspired by scholars such as Herbart, Pestalozzi and Froebel, emphasising children's interest in learning, connection of lessons with the world, and a focus on activity, among other things. The following extract is from a chapter on "A lesson in reading", from a section where the teacher has brought "the third division" to the front of the classroom where they stand in a line in front of her for a lesson from their "second reader", which each holds, while the remainder of the divisions (this is a multi-grade room) go on with other work. This is a revision of a previously read "lovely story" where the teacher is writing key phrases and words on a board as she rereads and discusses the story with the division.

Reading lesson extract 2 (from Patridge 1885: 376–377)

“Now she took the whites of the eggs, put a little sugar with them, and beat them with a-” writing rapidly; “fork” prompt the children; “until they were-” writes and pronounces slowly; “Foamy,” aver the interested little ones.	1 2 3
“Did you ever see anything that was foamy? Paul.”	4
“The milk when it was just brought in.”	5
“Jessie.”	6
“When the waves splash up, they look foamy.”	7
“Sadie.”	8
“The soap-suds in my mother’s wash-tub.”	9
“What was this that looked foamy?”	10
“Frosting!” specifies the eager group.	11
“Oh, I do love it!” exclaims Hattie.	12
“Yes,” giving that peculiar inflection to the word, common among the Quincy teachers, who use it with great effect. It seems to signify just enough gentle indifference, to hold the volatile and forward pupils in check, and yet denotes sufficient sympathy to prevent the impulsive from feeling any hurt to their pride or leaving the emotional with any sense of discouragement.	13 14 15 16
The teacher continues. “This is the way that it looks,” beginning to write; “I mean the word,” she adds, pausing with uplifted crayon, to glance archly over her shoulder at the lover of sweets, who laughs with the rest of the row, in full appreciation of the small joke.	17 18 19

This seems a thoroughly ‘modern’ reading lesson when compared with extract 1, employing methods and materials which seem not too distant from those used in today’s classrooms. Clearly what we have here is, in genealogical terms, a discontinuity in the practice of the reading lesson, but what can be made of these differences, and what else is worthy of attention?

The teacher–student–text triptych provides one useful way of highlighting the ways in which this lesson is different and the same across time. In Extract 1, we may ask who (or where) is (are) the teacher(s)? In the monitorial schoolroom, there is a remote master whose authority is relayed to the monitors, who are themselves pupils with a little more knowledge than those they instruct. In Extract 2, the teacher is there, with the children, who also maintains oversight of other pupils not immediately in front of her. The children in both lessons are arrayed within the immediate gaze of the supervising teacher, just as they are grouped according to criteria such as facility with reading and/or age. The texts are selected ‘lessons’ designed with this group of children in mind – in Extract 1, they are syllables or single words on a chart (for efficiency and cheapness) all can see a single text. In Extract 2, each pupil has their own (identical) text arranged which includes stories. The texts, then, are one clear point of difference and worthy of further exploration for what they might reveal about reading or assumptions about learning to read in 1885 compared to seventy-five years earlier.

Even more interesting is to consider the relations between these three elements – the teacher and pupil and text – as revealed in the two extracts. The pupil–text relation in one is enfolded into concepts of correctness and correct oral performance. Exchanges between pupil and text are short and sharp (military, even). The teacher–pupil relation is one of simple

authority, relayed across a distance if we count the connection back to the ‘master’, where feedback given is articulated into the very arrangement of the students’ bodies and the signs hung around their necks. In the second extract, the pupils must have a very different relation to the text – one of interest (line 3), even eagerness (11), betrayed by their enthusiasm. Still more, the teacher draws out from the students the connections between the text and their own lives (4, where Paul is asked if he has ever seen anything “foamy”). In turn, the teacher uses the text as a relay into the children’s interests, which she can then use for her own pedagogical and authoritative ends (encouraging and controlling the “lover of sweets” in line 18). Noticeable is that the relations between pupil and teacher are very different here – the pupils can speak before the teacher and make their own interventions (12). The teacher manages her students, not through signs and orders of performance, but through a carefully calibrated play between ‘indifference’ and ‘sympathy’ (distance and closeness), thus maintaining an appropriate tone and order (13–16).

We should remember that these are not ‘actual’ reading lessons but, rather, idealised accounts developed themselves for pedagogical purposes (that of teaching teachers). This does not diminish their usefulness to the historian, however, and remains an important aspect of their discursive role. They provide very useful insights into the teleologies that underpinned the pedagogies being promoted, and especially into the ideal being imagined by their authors. These are clearly two contrasting (discontinuous) takes on the reading lesson, and yet they remain *a* reading lesson, so there are continuities at work here too. The challenge for those taking up genealogical perspectives on literacy is working with these differences and similarities to estrange the present, and to use that to question contemporary assumptions that are made about reading pedagogy. Generative questions include:

- what relations between pupil and text (and teacher and text) are being valorised here, and how do those compare with present approaches? For example, what is the relation being established around correctness and authority in a basic skills test? How is delight or enthusiasm (if any) accounted for or desired? What account is taken of the lives of the children?
- who (and where) is the teacher historically and in the present? For example, what lines of authority lie between the teacher, the text and the pupil in the lesson? What relays of authority exist through, for example, software that is used to teach reading?
- how is the reading lesson used to shape pupils’ bodies and aspirations? For example, what sort of person must they be? How must they ‘stand’ in relation to their world?
- what forms of authority are being utilised in managing and controlling pupils as readers? For example, how overt is that authority? What mechanisms of control are being deployed?

Many more questions could be asked, of course, but space permits only a brief glance here into the history of reading pedagogy. This example is intended to illustrate the way that historical research in literacy can do more than tell a ‘story’ of how we came to be here – a process that usually makes the present seem immutable and inevitable. Rather, history can be used to show that things can change, and we can take lessons from the past through thinking about its differences and similarities to the present. For a genealogical approach to history: “will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting” (Foucault 1977: 154).

Conclusion: calling on Clio?

Clio was the Muse of History, from Greek antiquity. Perhaps suitably (post)modernised, she is appropriately evoked here, in closing, because thinking historically about literacy studies in education is important, and generative. This is especially so now, when so-called ‘old’ literacies, as many commentators have observed, are being increasingly displaced by the New. Calling on history as a distinctive epistemological and methodological resource⁷ is likely to bring new and critical light to the whole enterprise of teaching and learning, understanding and researching literacy. Hitherto all too often undervalued and marginalised, historical imagination needs to infuse the field, in all its aspects. It is more than time(ly).

Notes

- 1 See, in addition, Lindmark and Erixon (2008).
- 2 It needs to be acknowledged here that recent work does specifically address the significance of time (and also space) in literacy practice and pedagogy (e.g. Compton-Lilly and Halverson 2014; Sefton-Green and Rowsell 2014), though it arguably lacks an explicitly historical sensibility.
- 3 The authors claim the only previous such attempt had been made in the USA in 1949 by Brickman.
- 4 We have described elsewhere approaches to critical discourse analysis that are useful for this historical analysis of texts (Cormack 1998, 2003, 2012, 2013; Cormack and Green 2009; Green and Cormack 2008). Readers are also referred to the work of Fairclough (1989, 1992) and Janks (1997, 2010) for useful guidance on approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis. Ruth Wodak (2001) also makes specific reference to a “discourse-historical” approach, with especially useful advice on analysis of the context of a text’s production.
- 5 We have discussed these two lessons elsewhere. See Cormack (2011) for a discussion of the Lancaster lesson, and Green *et al.* (2013) for a discussion of the Patridge lesson.
- 6 For example, this text was a set reading for teachers in training in the Adelaide Teachers’ College, in South Australia, from 1906 to 1918 – it also reappeared in the 1930 syllabus!
- 7 It is important nonetheless to be wary of essentialising history, or of seeing it in more or less common-sense terms. See Ermath (2011) for a provocative challenge in this respect; also the journal *Rethinking History*.

Related topics

Literacy history, Reading pedagogy, Historical analysis, Discourse analysis, Genealogy.

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13

POSTMODERNISM AND LITERACY STUDIES

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Introduction

The charge we were given in writing this chapter was to explore the relationship between postmodern approaches to research and literacy studies. In doing so, we focused on two simple yet compelling questions that temporally located our inquiry in the present moment, while also allowing us to recall the historical implications of postmodernism on knowledge about literacy: What does it mean to conduct literacy research *today*? And, what are we doing when we say that we are *studying literacy*?

Postmodernism does not constitute a single school of thought or approach. As a movement framed by a social construction theory of knowledge, postmodernism is concerned with undoing the fixity of the perception of an objective reality and doing so by bringing forth multiple perspectives, orientations, and points of view (Berger and Luckmann 1966). (In this piece, we do not draw rigid distinctions between social constructionism and constructivism and see these lenses as complementary and as bringing in agentively social and more internal and individualistic foci, respectively. See Hruby (2001a) for a more extensive discussion of these distinctions and the broader landscape of social constructionist perspectives.)

This key argument of postmodernism provides a strong foundation for critically engaged and socioculturally grounded studies of literacy that recognize, for example, that the social arrangements for literacy learning are neither natural nor immutable and thus can be changed. In contrast to modernist or structural perspectives on the social world, postmodern approaches to research are characterized by methodological attempts to look differently at phenomena through the use of primarily qualitative methods that reflect a degree of vulnerability in both the researcher and the researched. Such methods also provide varied means of participation through which research participants may enter the research, consequently shaping the nature of data collected and the resultant knowledge constructed from analysis of the collected data. In other words, the world in which we live is largely a human construction and can thus be deconstructed as well as newly reconstructed. Human beings, therefore, have agency to effect change in the social and institutional structures in which they participate.

In our review and discussion of literacy research included in this chapter, we draw on postmodern theories in the humanities and social sciences which call for deconstruction – of texts, of messages, of whole institutional structures – as a way to study and more accurately understand

how power is at play in social life. Deconstruction as a mode of inquiry relies heavily on the practice of looking closely at an artifact (such as a piece of film, an advertisement, a photograph, a piece of legislation or policy, school curriculum, or a toy to question) as well as its underlying structure and ontology. This approach is resonant with the critical race theory (CRT) practice of identifying meta-narratives or 'stock stories' – what Guinier and Torres (2003: 35) describe as “those ways of explaining and interpreting the world that embody received understandings and meanings” – that are embedded in cultural artifacts such as those listed above and many more, in order to view them not as neutral objects but rather as semiotic markers of the contexts in which they were developed. For example, the marketing of “dolls” to girls and “action figures” to boys is not a neutral practice but instead is informed by assumptions about masculinity and femininity that are embedded and circulate within our social worlds (Walkerline 1984; Wohlwend 2009). Counternarratives – as practiced within the CRT tradition (Solórzano and Yosso 2002), and with discursive roots in cultural studies (Giroux *et al.* 1996), feminist epistemologies (Collins 2000) and related traditions – are one response to these dominant acts. The pursuit and production of counternarratives is an epistemological move that is resonant with other theoretical perspectives in the postmodern view which advocate, subtly or explicitly, action in response to unequal or unjust social realities. Giroux and colleagues (1996: 2) describe counternarratives as providing a “counter [to] not merely (or even necessarily) the *grand* narratives, but also (or instead) the ‘*official*’ and ‘*hegemonic*’ narratives of everyday life; those legitimating stories propagated for specific political purposes to manipulate public consciousness by heralding a national set of common cultural ideals” (original emphasis). Their description echoes CRT scholar Delgado (1995: 268), who calls for the practice of “naming one’s own reality ... [so that] the same phenomenon can be told in different and multiple ways depending on the storytellers.”

The postmodern practice of bringing to light social arrangements that were previously left unquestioned often reveals disruptions in seemingly linear or sequential processes, such as learning to read or write. As Street noted (2003: 77–78):

literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; ... it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being. It is also always embedded in social practices, such as those of a particular job market or a particular educational context and the effects of learning that particular literacy will be dependent on those particular contexts.

Literacy researchers who are responsive to the postmodern turn, and many who engage sociocultural lenses, are oriented toward their research participants in such a way so as to actively destabilize the power they traditionally hold as sole or primary producers of data. It is true, therefore, that things need not be the way they appear nor remain the way they seem.

The legacy of postmodern theories about knowledge and meaning have influenced the study of literacies for the past few decades, largely through an embrace of methodologies that reflect a social constructionist understanding of the world. Sometimes described in broad brushstrokes as the ‘postmodern era,’ this epistemological orientation is evident in the ways that research methods, relationships, interpretations, and representations are carried out in pursuit of knowledge about literacies.

For example, Erickson writes, data must be *found*, much like patterns or themes in data that do not merely emerge. To wit, he notes: “statable patterns and themes – assertions that make generalizations about actions and beliefs that were observed – must be searched for repeatedly within the total data corpus, in a process of progressive problem-solving” (2004: 486).

Similarly, Willinsky (1991), writing over a decade earlier, argues that form embodies meaning, for instance changes in text, font, and appearance of a literacy artifact are all intentional. As with text production, the postmodern methodology offers its author and audience, both, more than one mode of documenting and interpreting phenomena. Both Erickson and Willinsky are asking and exploring a version of the same question: What is knowable? Taken together with our earlier questions about the nature of literacies research, this broad question prompts another more focused line of inquiry that is significant for literacy researchers: What is knowable about literacy in people's lives?

In response, we implicitly engage these questions through an exploration of the methodological implications of postmodernism on literacies research, focusing primarily on literacy research with adolescents, and discuss some of the salient findings about literacy learning to emerge from the last few decades. Rather than attempt an exhaustive review of literacy studies in the postmodern era, we first identify key elements of the postmodern turn that have left indelible marks on literacy studies and, consequently, in our understandings of literacy practices and literacy learning. Next, we explore the influence of the postmodern turn on literacy studies through a discussion of studies that embrace criticality in literacies research. We then review studies that illustrate a range of participation opportunities made possible through new media and other technologies that also inform and shape how literacy learning and practice is enacted and understood. We conclude our chapter with recommendations for literacies research in ever-changing 'new times' to take more advantage of new and emerging material, social, and cultural resources to better understand the nature of literacies and how literacy learning is situated in people's lives.

Historical perspectives and critical issues: postmodernism and literacy studies

Questioning the validity of what is taken for granted as knowledge is a practice that resonates with an ideological understanding of literacies (Street 2003) wherein, as noted earlier, literacy practices are viewed not as neutral or universal, but rather as context-dependent and imbued with histories of power. In other words, whether jottings on a scrap of paper are ordinary fare (for example, a shopping list or a reminder) or more consequential (personal identification information such as one's bank account number) depends upon the surrounding context, circumstance, and people involved. (Of course, in some circumstances a shopping list may be more consequential than one's identity marker.) (For further discussion of New Literacy Studies, new literacies, multiliteracies, multiple literacies and the relationship across these connected ideas, see Rowsell and Walsh 2011; Vasudevan 2010.)

The influence of postmodernism in literacy studies is reflected in research that seeks to unsettle rather than reinforce a priori or ideological relationships between the meanings and practices of literacy and their value in everyday life. This inclination echoes the social turn (Gee 1999) in literacy studies that followed and effectively called into question the behaviorist principles that dominated once-popular understandings of literacy. Prior to this social turn, literacy was widely viewed as a set of discrete skills that would be learnable by everyone in the same way, thus prompting a sea of linear and sequential approaches to literacy pedagogy and curricula.

Seminal studies of literacies by Heath (1983) and Street (1984), which sought to understand literacy practices as situated in local contexts, ushered in a wave of sociocultural studies of literacy that foregrounded variation in people's ways of reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Hull and Schultz 2002; Mahiri 2004; Pahl and Rowsell 2006). In addition, these studies make available ample evidence for a perspective of literacies as multiple

(that is, *literacies* rather than literacy), or taking on more varied forms than only those sanctioned by schools and other formal institutions.

Across the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, where young people's literacies are flourishing beyond pen on paper, there also exists abundant and rapidly emerging spaces in which to communicate, and new technologies that catalyze new forms of literacy. However, despite the continued proliferation of socioculturally framed and postmodernist-oriented studies of literacies in situ – including action research, practitioner inquiry, ethnographic, and critical research – many of the contexts where much, though certainly not all, of the research associated with this vein of literacies research is ongoing are also places where heavy penalties are levied against non-linear or unpredictable paths to literacy learning. As a result, the landscape of literacy curricula in schools has become far more rigid and limiting in scope (Patel Stevens 2008; Skinner *et al.* 2014). Hruby (2001b) offers the following explanation for this incongruity:

cognitivist (mechanistic) and anthropological (contextualist) paradigms are not commensurable (Kuhn 1962; Pepper 1948), [and] research on learning processes and learning communities within education has often been at odds, at times quite vehemently (e.g., the phonics-whole language debate; the basics-critical thinking debate; the situativist-cognitivist debate, and so on).

(*para 1*)

This is the current curricular backdrop against which we crafted this chapter, one that highlights the persistent challenges between emergent understandings of literacies in practice and less rapidly changing classroom environments. Our chapter therefore focuses largely on out-of-school research all the while keeping schools in mind as an important, but certainly not the only, site of literate engagement. We thus draw from literacy research where a postmodern, and specifically a social constructionist orientation, is evident, regardless of whether this theoretical framing was central to the analyses of the studies we discuss.

Methodological note: literacies research in a postmodern key

Methodological orientations shape the conditions in which research is conceptualized, conducted, analyzed, and represented. The epistemological and theoretical implications of critical and participatory methodologies shape the knowledge produced about literacies. Lyotard (1984), writing in a time before widespread digitization and connectivity that much of the world is familiar with today, predicted that “the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age” (p. 3). His assertion that “The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation” (p. 4) is borne out in shifts in literacies research approaches and findings. *How* we learn and come to know about young people's literacies, for example, must not be confined to classrooms or even to a single location, as their literacies are regularly practiced across multiple spaces in the same time period (Jacobs 2007).

In an attempt to move beyond deconstructionist principles predominantly associated with a postmodern lens, literacy researchers have sought to reveal the ways that power is embedded in the (always shifting) contexts in which literacy learning is taking place. Deconstruction, therefore, need not be decontextualized and arbitrary, but might also be in service of interrupting and changing social realities. Postmodernism's inherent skepticism seeks to look beneath and beyond what is presented, to peer not only under the surface or behind the curtain, but to take the curtain itself apart. Thus, a postmodern influence in literacy studies can be seen not only in

the form of deconstructed meanings about literacy, but also in the conceptualization, composition, and analysis of literacy forms away from reliable and stable structures to multiple streams of meaning.

Children's literature provides still more examples of literacy artifacts in which seemingly basic truths are manipulated. Consider the oft-cited book *The Stinky Cheeseman and other Fairly Stupid Tales* (Scieszka and Smith 1992), whose table of contents does not appear until the middle of the book and in which the presumed reader factors into the broken narrative as a central character to whom the narrator periodically directs questions and dialogue. Citing this and other texts that similarly play with the conventions of a book, Coles and Hall point out that far from being a simplistic fracturing of the expected structures of "front" and "back" and the rest, children's books that reflect a postmodern approach embody:

the possibility of multiple pathways through a text [which] means that readers often have to work hard to construct the narrative, and need the confidence to assert their own meanings. If traditional texts produce clearly defined boundaries of meaning, in many contemporary texts boundaries are broken down.

(2001: 111)

They go on to note that "words and images convey multiple meanings, lending themselves to post-modern readings," such that the reader is invited hold "the possibility of multiple readings" rather than accept a single interpretation. These texts, like their digital counterparts – videogames, mobile applications, user generated video clips, and more – necessitate new methods of inquiry and different questions.

Current contributions

Active engagement with *criticality* and *participation* was evident across the research we reviewed in which researchers sought to be responsive to the changes in temporality and spatiality of everyday social life. Some of these changes include increased communicative mobility through smartphones, language and literacy adaptations across new communicative landscapes, and formation of social networks mediated by virtual technologies. In particular, the temporal and spatial dimensions of pursuing and conducting literacy research are changing. Thus, the research we surveyed demonstrates attention paid to the ways that changes in temporality and spatiality can alter, among other things, the nature of literacy learning, pedagogy, relationships, materiality, and practices.

Criticality in literacy studies

When the long history of sociocultural studies of literacy is viewed through a postmodern lens, criticality emerges as a salient characteristic. This is true of research that is identified as 'critical literacy,' as well as across a broader landscape of research in which the very concept of literacy is not taken for granted and is viewed as a site in which to cultivate a decentralized orientation toward the world. To this end, Wohlwend and Lewis (2011) invite a shift from "critical literacy" to "critical engagement" when discussing the trajectory of criticality in literacy studies situated within an increasingly digital and global landscape. That is, "combining the presumably unselfconscious act of engagement with the decidedly self-conscious act of watching" (p. 189) or the intentional interplay between "critical distance and immersion" (ibid.) in one's interaction with texts. In seeking to re-envision critical literacy for what they call the "new commonplace"

(ibid.), Wohlwend and Lewis explicate the ways in which criticality converges with and is embodied in digital technologies and resultant practices across local and global spheres.

This is not to suggest that sociocultural and critical perspectives are synonymous. In fact, they are not, and sociocultural theories of literacy have previously been critiqued for either their lacking or decreased focus on how power circulates across and is imbued in contexts, institutions, and practices. Rather, as Wohlwend and Lewis propose, “critical engagement” offers a lens that is “built upon the legacy of critical literacy and rational deconstruction of logical structures of text” (2011: 193). Our use of the term ‘criticality’ is meant to encompass Wohlwend and Lewis’s concept of “critical engagement,” to include a focus on both the findings about how literacies are critically practiced as well as the critical methods by which literacy research is pursued.

We see this to be true in research about adolescent literacy outside of school. For example, in his study of critical literacy located within a youth media program, Goodman (2003) provides the historical context for youth media that is fertile ground for youths’ criticality. Youth media, Goodman claims, seeks to privilege youth voice in an attempt to: (1) value students’ out-of-school literacies while supporting the development of literacies they need, not only to perform well in school, but also to critically analyze and respond to their surrounding media-saturated environments; (2) engage students with issues in their communities that are relevant to them; (3) raise up youth voices in order to build up the skills and confidence to question and challenge the structures tied to problems in their lives and communities. In Goodman’s case study of an after-school documentary program in which students make a documentary about gun violence, he describes an emergence of critical distancing through the course of the project, as well as a growing confidence among participants in their storytelling abilities. “Bringing video into the classroom,” Goodman (2003: 70) writes, “places in-school and out-of-school media viewing habits in tension with each other.” He goes on to offer this caution:

The failure of programs to address the media as the predominant language of youth today, or to recognize the social and cultural contexts in which students live, has resulted in a profound disconnect. It’s a disconnect that occurs between the experiences that most students have during their time in school and those they have during their time outside of school. Until corrected, this disconnect will lead to the increased alienation of low-income urban youth from the dominant social, political, and economic mainstream.

(Goodman 2003: 2)

Although Goodman is writing over a decade ago, prior to the mushrooming of social and participatory media platforms, tools, and technologies, his urging is still relevant today. In his admonition are traces of Lyotard’s (1984) own warning, wherein knowledge about young people’s literate lives will necessarily be incomplete and inadequate unless attention is paid to how youth *are* engaging literacies rather than an overreliance on discrete or decontextualized literacy learning measures to identify what is missing from their literacy repertoires. The postmodern impetus here is to dismantle “what counts” as literacy (Gallego and Hollingsworth 2000) and to usher in a move away from proficiency discourses and toward the multiplicative nature of literacy engagement.

Echoing Goodman’s inquiry, Morrell (2002) brings forward the importance of popular culture texts in supporting young people’s critical inquiries. He provides two examples of in-school classes that brought in popular texts in ways that both motivated students and resulted in evidence of critical thinking and cultural production (one in which students were asked to

match hip-hop songs to canonical poets, and another in which students were asked to compare popular films such as *The Godfather Trilogy* to canonical texts such as *The Odyssey*). He also includes one out-of-school example in which students were asked to analyze popular media representation of urban youth during the Democratic National Convention in a program that brought high school students to a California university. Morrell argues that teachers should actively embrace and fight for the use of critical popular media in classroom settings, even and perhaps especially in a high-stakes-testing climate. His examples illustrate how critical discussions of popular media can enhance more traditional literacy curricula as well as motivating students to take on and respond to social issues.

Criticality extends beyond the practice of textual deconstruction or comparative analysis. Lewis and Tierney (2013) identify the centrality of emotion and how it was mobilized within a high school English/History classroom as a site of critical literacy. They present an analysis of high classroom discourse that demonstrates how emotion was leveraged by teacher and students as “a medium, a space in which differences and ethics are negotiated, communicated, and shaped” (Boler 1999: 21, cited in Lewis and Tierney 2013). The authors detail the ways that artifacts, such as a short film at the center of one of the race-related discussions they analyze, can come to not only signify but also embody emotion. The film in question, *A Girl Like Me* (Davis 2005), was one such artifact. Another example is found in the ways that the students positioned their bodies in relation to one another. Lewis and Tierney focus on an interaction between two young women and note, “Their language located their bodies in time and space in contrast to their teacher’s language, which, in most of her turns, operated at a level focused on decontextualized and collective goals” (2013: 296). Whereas, as the authors observed, the teacher “wanted students to be objective and recognize categories of evidence and persuasion in filmmaking,” the two young women engaged in sustained response to the film “focused instead on their raced bodies in the classroom, which mediated their interpretation of [the] film” (pp. 296–297).

The ways in which youth embody and perform literacies is another site of criticality. Johnson (2012) spent a year observing the performative nature of high school students which, in resonance with the findings of Lewis and Tierney (2013), were marked by emotion, namely humor. Johnson analyzes several instances in which youths’ uses of laughter and jokes revealed an oftentimes sophisticated commentary on race and the young people’s surrounding cultural contexts. Johnson’s use of a performative lens allowed her to attend to and read gestures, clothing, and non-verbal exchanges as signifiers of the youths’ critical articulations in the form of their myriad expressions of popular culture. It is in these pop-culture mediated expressions where Johnson locates the high school youths’ criticality.

Both Lewis and Tierney (2013) and Johnson (2012) are engaged in a form of artifactual critical literacy (Pahl and Rowsell 2011) in their methodological approach, from data collection through analysis, wherein “an understanding of how literacy practices within homes and communities are materially situated, [is brought] together with an understanding of the multimodal nature of textual practices” (p. 137). Pahl and Rowsell go on to note that “an artifactual critical literacy approach best levers agency in favor of meaning makers and their lived experience, their habitus, and argues that the links across from the everyday to text-making are powerful for educators” (ibid.). The attention these and other researchers pay to the ways that artifacts (films, the body) and emotion (laughter, anger) work alongside spoken and written language to mediate meaning is reflective of a postmodern tenor in their research approach. What emerges as significant, then, are the new insights about how and where criticality is produced and held in our literate engagements, that is through artifacts, the body, and a variety of non-verbal articulations.

Participatory approaches to literacies

Like criticality, participation emerges as a significant characteristic of literacy studies in a postmodern turn. By this, we are referring to how participation is structured in some of the research we reviewed as well as new insights about the nature of participation in youths' literacy practices, in particular. Participation is not a singular act but is expressed through a variety of actions and practices that, as Jacobs (2007) illustrates, stimulates co-presence and near-simultaneity in young people's practices. (Of course, the practice of being present in multiple spaces at once – often reductively short-handed as 'multi-tasking' – is not limited to youth. But as we take a youth focus in this chapter, our examples will situate this social practice in the lives of youth.) When we surveyed the current literacy research landscape through the lens of participation, we observed the ways that emergent technologies craft myriad new spaces in which to communicate, represent, and disseminate information of various types. Youth are participating in spaces by engaging numerous forms of cultural production including self-representation across local and global contexts (Guzzetti and Bean 2013; Hull and Stornaiuolo 2010), becoming active content designers and producers (Peppler and Kafai 2010), navigating and (re)making social networks (Merchant 2012), and rewriting stories, 'stock' and otherwise, about who and what they are (Alvermann 2010; Vasudevan and DeJaynes 2013). These practices, both active and more passive, constitute new ways of participating that did not exist even ten years ago.

Using case studies, researchers involved with the Digital Youth Project, which evolved into an edited collection of collaborative ethnographic research (Ito *et al.* 2010), explored various forms of new, digital, and social media, and the ways that young people negotiate identity and other experiences like leisure and learning through these platforms. In their oft-cited three-year, multi-sited study of digital media and online communications in the lives of youth, Ito and colleagues located themselves in a wide range of social settings and geographies, both face-to-face and virtual, in order to better understand media and technology "as part of a broader set of social structures and cultural patterns" (2010: 5). Their study did not merely study the youths' practices from afar or through the use of sometimes distancing methodological tools (for instance, surveys). Instead, following an ethnographic ethos, they spent time observing, interacting with, and talking to adolescents while they were participating in online and digitally mediated spaces. The youth profiled in this study, like countless others elsewhere throughout the world (where connectivity is not a challenge), are not merely passive consumers of technologies and media. To the contrary, they engage a wide palette of literacy practices and resources for a range of purposes – gathering and disseminating information, communicating with other individuals and groups, designing environments, lurking, and more. In their case studies, the researchers observed "how these same youth are taking the lead in developing social norms and literacies that are likely to persist as structures of media participation and practice that transcend age boundaries" (p. 12).

These researchers understood that it was important to study the ways that youth are not only navigating existing platforms and participation structures, but also the ways in which their literacies contribute to shaping new social norms in the digitally mediated spaces in which they are engaging. As media technologies develop, our cultural landscape shifts and our relationship to media technologies evolves. The shift in how we view media and how, consequently, we come to see ourselves differently, occurs "first through our relations with popular culture, but that the skills we acquire through play may have implication for how we learn, work, participate in the political process, and connect with other people around the world" (Jenkins 2006: 23). Jenkins describes the "shift in the ways we think about media" (2006: 22–23) as convergence culture, a phenomenon that has implicitly influenced the ways we interact with the world

through our literacies and how we build knowledge about the world in the process. Berger and Luckmann define knowledge “as the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics” (1966: 13). Fused with the idea that our sense of self is increasingly mediated by the media and technologies available to us, this definition of knowledge pushes us to consider how the literacies of youth are interpreted. In other words, what value is given to the layered, oftentimes multi-spatial, and multimodal practices in which youth engage in their daily lives that does not fall neatly into prescribed or school-sanctioned categories of literacy? And consequently, without a postmodern embrace of the varied nature of adolescents’ participatory negotiations, what knowledge is lost about them as literate beings?

Participatory approaches to research also enable us to gain different and potentially new understandings about literacy practices. The use of participatory action research, for example, lays the groundwork for bringing youth into the research process in multiple ways such that they are helping to shape the direction of the research and therefore influencing the knowledge that is produced about their literacies. Garcia and Morrell (2013) emphasize the importance of inclusive and participatory practices in learning environments, stating that “[p]articipatory practices shift traditional learning structures in ways that encourage collaboration, interest-driven learning, and taking multimodal texts less as monolithic products for analysis than as tools for manipulation and remix” (p. 124).

We turn again to the domain of youth media where Soep and Chávez (2005) offer an explication of a “pedagogy of collegiality” and render vibrant images of a pedagogical model in which adults and youth work together collaboratively on media projects that will be published to a broader audience. At YouthRadio, youth participation is not merely an incidental byproduct of collaborative media making, it is the backbone of the process. Instead of relying on simplistic notions of youth being automatically ‘empowered’ by ‘having a chance to express their voices’ as soon as they are given any opportunity to express themselves in media, a pedagogy of collegiality recognizes the complicated relationships that are always involved in structured media making between adults and youth. Soep and Chávez explore how those relationships can be powerful when (while not obscuring differences in structural position) youth and adults work as partners on a creative project intended for a public audience. Deconstruction and social constructionism take on a pedagogical bent within a pedagogy of collegiality which:

characterizes situations in which young people and adults jointly frame and carry out projects in a relationship marked by interdependence, where both parties produce the work in a very hands-on sense. Students and teachers are mutually accountable to an outside audience, and through that audience to a larger community. . . . The anticipated audience acts as a witness or a third entity beyond the dialectical relationship between students and teachers.

(Soep and Chávez 2005: 419)

The embrace of alternative pedagogical arrangements that are generative of new forms of interaction and learning create fertile conditions for new literacies to emerge and flourish. Such contexts are ripe with literacy possibilities wherein multiple modes of engagement and multiple points of interactions with an audience engender more authentic literacy practices. As Gutiérrez (2008: 150) notes, “People live their lives and learn across multiple settings, and this holds true not only across the span of their lives but also across and within the institutions and communities they inhabit – even classrooms, for example.” A collegial pedagogy, while located within a youth media landscape, holds generative possibilities for how literacy research and pedagogy might be reimagined in a postmodern turn.

Recommendations for practice: literacies research in ever-changing ‘new times’

Over a decade ago, Alvermann and Hagood (2000) pointed out the ‘shifts’ in social, cultural, and economic systems that were emerging due to rapidly changing technology, and the impact they will have on what counts as reading and writing. As purposes for communication change, so, too, do the practices through which we communicate. What do the ‘new times’ that Luke and Elkins (1998) explicate portend for how we pursue understandings about literacy in situ? That is, literacy researchers must take into account that local contexts are not singular and are in fact saturated with multiple virtual spaces at any given moment.

Rowse and Kendrick suggest that we need to pay greater attention to how meaning is mediated in visual realms, noting that:

because both images and audiences may be sites of ‘resistance and recalcitrance’ (Rose 2007: 15), a critical approach to visual images is required, one that takes seriously the agency of the image, the social practices/activities and effects around viewing, and the specific nature of viewing by various audiences.

(2013: 590)

Following in the tradition of visual ethnographers, Voithofer (2005) advocates changes in the materiality of literacies research, by reimagining what we collect (artifacts of design, programming code) and our methods of analysis (media-specific approaches). He reminds us “When the language of description and representation changes, so does the object that is being described” (p. 11). We would argue that the practice of description itself must undergo transformation and reflect a greater inclination toward design. An interaction between two people sitting near one another or between two people mediated by their respective mobile devices can be observed from a variety of vantage points; likewise, how this instance is documented – for a choice between documenting visually, in the form of written field notes, reflectively, in the form of an interview, or using audio, for example – also shapes what meaning can be made of the interaction, or any other phenomenon.

Through a postmodern lens, our current reality can be viewed as a time of increased mediation, participation, mobility, and connectedness. Consequently, these social and cultural evolutions beget a new set of questions about literacy: What constitutes an utterance? What is context? How are relationships identified, for example the multiple meanings of signifiers like ‘friend’ and ‘message’? *When* are literacy practices being engaged, in addition to where and how?

To conclude, we turn again to the questions that framed our exploration of postmodernism and literacy studies and recast them in a forward looking light. Conducting literacy research today necessitates that researchers locate themselves in and between the spaces and times that youth are engaging in literacy practices: in their homes, libraries, or in transit; with friends, by themselves, with strangers in a coffee shop; during school, at various times during the day, with frequency or as isolated instances. We might ask what remains constant relative to all that is in flux and shifting? How are literacies being expressed multimodally and multi-spatially? The tools with which we engage in our inquiries – including audiovisual technologies, customizable media platforms, mobile devices – are in fact spaces in which meanings about literacies in our research is mediated. Thus, researchers must be prepared to assume roles as facilitators, interlocutors, and collaborators when we ourselves participate in these spaces. When we are studying literacy, then, we are also designing meaning in partnership with our participants. Furthermore, literacy researchers must consider that the landscapes of where and when literacy

practices exist and are visible have transformed and are constantly evolving (Voithofer 2005). This is perhaps the legacy of postmodern perspectives in literacy studies: to be methodologically nimble in the face of a changing literacies landscape and in doing so, to actively embed criticality and multiple forms of participation into methods of data collection and analysis.

Related topics

Adolescent literacies, Multimodal ethnography, Participatory cultures, Spatializing literacy research, Visual ethnography.

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14

LONGITUDINAL STUDIES AND LITERACY STUDIES

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Introduction

Longitudinal studies are generally considered hallmark accomplishments for researchers. They entail a significant amount of time, the management of shifting personnel, and notable funding sources as well as the courage to plan a study that extends into an uncharted and unpredictable future. While the idea of conducting longitudinal studies, qualitative or quantitative, is respected and valued, it is essential to look beyond the surface appeal of these studies to consider what they offer and afford the research community. In this chapter, I identify four general purposes for longitudinal research: (1) research that provides a depth of information about a particular site, community, or issue; (2) research that explores change over time; (3) research that documents and examines trajectories; and (4) research that focuses on the construction of ways of being over time (e.g., resilience, literate identities, social responsibility, affiliation, literate practices).

After defining what is meant by longitudinal research, I present a brief review of the history of longitudinal research, an exploration of critical issues, and an overview of longitudinal methodologies. I draw on examples of longitudinal research to explore the affordances and limits of the four types of longitudinal research listed above. While New Literacy Studies have clearly been influenced by both quantitative and qualitative approaches to longitudinal research, the review presented here attends most directly to qualitative examples due to their saliency in relation to New Literacy issues and perspectives. Finally, I offer recommendations for researchers interested in longitudinal research and highlight emerging directions for longitudinal research within literacy studies.

Defining longitudinal research

Longitudinal research is notoriously difficult to define. While some researchers ask how long is long enough to qualify as longitudinal, researchers and scholars have been reluctant to identify a requisite length of time. Saldaña simply explains that “longitudinal means a lonnnnnnnng time” (Saldaña 2003: 1). While he explained that there is no consensus on how long projects must last, he does suggest a possible minimum of nine months. Saldaña (2003) identified three distinguishing elements: (1) a research question that is longitudinal in nature, (2) data collection

over an identified and relevant period of time, and (3) analytic processes that explicitly attend to change over time. Saldaña (2003) and others (Cordon and Miller 2007; Vallance 2005) agree that longitudinal research has a deliberate focus on change, in terms of the questions asked and the methodologies used. As Sztompka (1993: 41) noted “It is impossible to conceive of time without reference to some change. And, vice versa, the idea of change apart from time is equally unconceivable.” In the current review, I maintain that simple definitions of change fail to capture the full range of longitudinal work. In particular, I have identified longitudinal studies that extend over long periods of time but attend very little to change; instead they aspire toward thick description of particular research sites or situations. Other studies do not simply identify changes, some focus on available trajectories or the construction of ways of being across time rather than identifying changes and their correlations.

Longitudinal projects can be quantitative or qualitative. As Molloy and colleagues report, longitudinal quantitative research seeks to “measure the extent of change and document the nature of transitions, whether that related to changes in circumstances (for example, in employment status) or changes in attitudes (for many in party political affiliation)” (Molloy *et al.* 2002: 6). Ruspini (1999) reported that quantitative longitudinal studies could assume a vast range of forms including repeated cross-sectional surveys, representational panels that are followed over the course of an event or a developmental period, cohort panels that share a common experience, or linked panels in which consistent types of data are collected from the same group of people. Molloy *et al.* (2002) contrast the quantitative focus on measuring change with the longitudinal qualitative emphasis on deeper understandings of how and why changes occur. Among the various forms of longitudinal qualitative research, Molloy *et al.* (2002) identify longitudinal case studies, longitudinal document analysis, and life/oral history approaches especially those that involve revisiting participants across time.

McLeod and Thomson (2009) note that it is unusual for researchers to follow the same individuals or groups of people over long periods of time. If conversations about longitudinal research extend only to a relatively small set of researchers, why is it worthy of a chapter in a handbook of literacy studies? Perhaps the answer lies in the possibilities inherent in this unique and compelling set of methodologies. Longitudinal accounts are intriguing not only because of their participants, situations, issues, and settings, but also because of the ways researchers and readers are able to glimpse essential and generally invisible dimensions of being human. Perhaps this is one explanation for the international success and interest in the British television series *7 Up* (Apted 1964–present). By returning to watch each episode, we not only learn about the lives of a group of people who are revisited every seven years, but we also hope to learn something about ourselves – who we are and who we might become. As others have argued (Mishler 1999; Wortham 2001), we understand our world and learn about our world through the stories we hear and those that we tell.

An historical perspective on longitudinal research

Longitudinal research has a long history within fields of study including anthropology, psychology (e.g., child and adolescent development), health studies (e.g., interactions between environment and health over time), and sociology (e.g., life course studies, child and youth transitional studies, criminology studies, and policy impact studies) (Holland *et al.* 2006). These longitudinal projects follow particular individuals, explore changes within particular communities, focus on historical cohorts of people, and explore change within particular institutions over time. For example, anthropologists have historically spent long periods of time within particular communities, sometimes returning to these communities throughout their

professional lives. This longitudinal presence in research sites serves their interest in thick description as well as the challenge of documenting changes within communities.

While numerous longitudinal quantitative data sets have been established and are available for analysis (e.g., National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, Wisconsin Longitudinal Study), mixed methods approaches (Elder and Conger 2000; Snow *et al.* 2007) have been generally more useful in exploring issues relevant to the types of questions being asked and the topics currently being explored (e.g., local literacy practices, multimodality, identity, artifact analysis, technological literacies) by New Literacy scholars.

Ethnography has been a particularly useful methodology for New Literacy researchers who spend significant periods of time in research settings. Ethnographers have been described as grappling with a continuously fleeting present (McLeod and Thomson 2009). While they present their findings as ongoing action, the processes of organizing and analyzing data results in ethnographers writing about what has passed. This challenge had led to a critique of ethnographic data for conveying a sense of culture and practices as frozen in time, immune to the passing of time and change (McLeod and Thomson 2009).

While many longitudinal projects are carefully designed to attend to change over time, as Thomson and Holland (2003) explain, many practices related to longitudinal research are arrived at by default. This is especially true when researchers, never intending to conduct longitudinal studies, find themselves revisiting participants from previous studies. This was the case for me when I became curious about my former first grade students who had participated in my doctoral research project. In my case, I relocated these students and relied on adaptation and innovation to craft a longitudinal project that eventually lasted a decade as I followed my former first grade students through high school (Compton-Lilly 2003, 2007, 2012).

Critical issues and topics

While the long-term nature of longitudinal research affords advantages related to depth and documenting change, complications are also inherent in longitudinal work. Complications relate to a vast range of issues including ethical issues related to the renegotiation of consent, maintaining participants, obtaining financial support, managing changes in research team membership, and accommodating technological changes that affect the organization and storage of data (Saldaña 2003; Thomson and Holland 2003). These issues, while certainly not prohibitive, complicate research ventures.

Ethical issues are particularly salient. Specifically, researchers must continuously attend to the interests and life situations of participants (Saldaña 2003). While some participants may be eager to participate at the initial phase of a research project, it is impossible for any participant to make a firm commitment to participation across time. Unpredictable situations involving family, employment, and resources occur; despite the best of intentions, participants can find themselves in situations where research commitments cannot be fulfilled. In addition, some participants become increasingly uncomfortable with the gradual disclosure of their experiences over time (Saldaña 2003). Being interviewed at a particular point in time is different from engaging in ongoing research. Discussing a child as a happy first grader is significantly different from discussing educational issues related to a disgruntled middle school student or a child who has encountered difficulties with the law. As people engage in multiple rounds of research more stories are shared and situations discussed. In longitudinal research, participant consent must be ongoing and continuously open to renegotiation (McLeod and Thomson 2009). Ethical issues

are not unique to longitudinal research, but they are magnified and deserve particular attention and care within longitudinal studies.

A second issue related to longitudinal research involves maintaining participants. Some participants are lost due to difficulties in keeping track of families. Families relocate to communities outside of the research community and beyond the geographical reach of researchers. Researchers have developed multiple strategies for staying in touch with families (Saldaña 2003). Research teams have been known to provide participants with the researcher's contact information and ask participants to contact the researcher if they relocate; researchers send Christmas cards, ask for contact numbers of friends and/or relatives, and work alongside community organizations (e.g., schools, community groups) to relocate participants. Relationships with participants must be nurtured. In our own work, we have sought small ways of supporting families including small gifts and stipends, helping participants negotiate school policies and paperwork, translating documents, or informing participants about local resources and programs for their children. Sharing data from the project can also help participants to have a sense of the work and promote their investment in the project and the questions being explored.

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of longitudinal research is assembling and maintaining a stable research team. While university researchers often rely on graduate students, few graduate students remain at the university for more than five or six years. In addition, as with participants, events occur in the lives of graduate students that affect their availability. In short, graduate students graduate, commence their own dissertation work, assume new positions on faraway campuses, get married, and have their own children. While care can be taken to minimize attrition, it is essential to have detailed data collection and analysis procedures so that new researchers can assume work with participants.

While all researchers face the eternal challenge of obtaining grants to fund their work, securing support for long-term projects raises particular difficulties. Few funders are interested in commitments that extend beyond two or three years. Thus, longitudinal researchers are often forced to obtain multiple grants to support various phases of data collection and analysis while long periods of time can remain unfunded.

Finally, technological changes affect the organization and storage of data across time. State-of-the-art platforms and data analysis programs become obsolete over the course of a five or ten year study. In some cases, converting previously collected data to new formats and specifications can be time-consuming and new systems are not always compatible with older systems, thus data can be lost or become less accessible and workable.

In addition to these organizational challenges, there is also a set of less obvious but perhaps more concerning issues that complicate longitudinal research. While a given research project may not seek to provide an intervention, researchers may encounter situations where they feel ethically obligated to act on behalf of participants. Even more complicated is that just being in a research project may affect participants. In a recent longitudinal study, after eight years, one of my former students asked me if I had selected him for the longitudinal study because he sometimes misbehaved in first grade. I was surprised as this was neither the focus of the research nor criteria I considered when I recruited families for the project. In short, longitudinal research may harbor unintended messages to participants. As Thomson and Holland (2003: 24) noted, "the structure of the research encouraged young people to present themselves as being involved in a progressive and developmental process of change." As they explain, this sometimes became a challenge for students whose long-term trajectories are less successful. Specifically, what might it mean to young people when we repeatedly return to talk with them about literacy, when literacy learning is a site of failure and distress. Are we playing a role in reifying feelings of failure and regret?

Longitudinal research draws our attention to the fragility and tentative nature of our research findings. Through longitudinal research, we learn that our interpretations are always provisional and that the next round of data collection has the potential to challenge past findings. The child who struggled in school can become successful. The religious and polite child can get in trouble with the law. The struggling single mother can be promoted into management. Changes such as these have real effects on identities, dreams, and possibilities.

Longitudinal research methods

Longitudinal research can involve a vast range of methodologies – from case studies, to massive surveys or control group and correlational studies. A unique affordance of longitudinal research is its ability to collect parallel or similar data at different points in time. For example, children can take the same battery of assessments at various points in time and scores can be compared. In a qualitative study, children might draw a self-portrait, tell a story about school, or answer similar interview questions at various points in time. These parallel data sources allow researchers to explore responses over time to understand longitudinal changes and patterns.

While longitudinal studies can entail a vast range of methodological and analytical practices, ultimately the specifics of the project (e.g., unit of analysis, sample size, study duration, data collected) are contingent on the questions asked and the specific contexts in which the research is conducted (Holland *et al.* 2006). Qualitative longitudinal researchers in particular are advised to be flexible throughout the research process. As Holland and her colleagues report, researchers “might adjust interviews or even the focus of the study as it proceeds” (2006: 33) to accommodate issues that become apparent over time as well as changes in the research setting and/or the ways participants experience and understand their situations. Finally, longitudinal research, both qualitative and quantitative, requires that researchers not only analyze data as it is collected, but they must also continuously “undertake extensive cross sectional analysis at each wave of data collection” (2006: 36) to explore how data collected during later phases of the project sustain, augment, or contradict patterns and findings from earlier phases. Saldaña (2003) explained that longitudinal projects can either be continuous or involve multiple waves of data collection. For example, revisiting studies involve the original researcher revisiting a “previously completed study with another wave of research, or subsequently returns to the research site or follows up participants” (McLeod and Thomson 2009: 125).

Longitudinal research highlights the ways that particular responses and interactions are situated within time. While interviews can be viewed as simply a means of eliciting information from participants, Yates (2003: 224) described “the interview as a construction, as situated, as the production of one embodied, aged human subject, talking to other embodied, aged human subjects in a particular location.” In this description, interviews are enacted at particular points of time within chains of data being collected by the researcher. Furthermore, the interpretation of interviews and other data draws on the researcher’s past experiences, assumptions, and body of prior work. Thus not only is the interpretation of data intertwined with the researcher’s own history but it is also situated within a chain of data collected over a period of time.

Analyzing longitudinal data can require new tools and analytical procedures. In longitudinal data sets it is not unusual to find participants using similar, and in some cases, identical language at different points in time. At times, participants retell stories that had been told during earlier phases of the study. Over time, temporal expectations related to literacy and schooling and the challenges some students face in fulfilling these expectations can become increasingly salient. In

my own work, I have identified five temporal manifestations of discourse that have been useful in making sense of longitudinal data (Compton-Lilly 2014).

Vallance (2005) focuses on the affordances of NVivo for working with longitudinal data. Specifically, he identifies the capabilities of NVivo to support the labeling, storage, and organization of longitudinal data as well as its ability to allow for the analysis of data at multiple points in time prior to the conclusion of the study. While traditional approaches such as data analysis programs, grounded coding, and critical discourse analysis can be used with longitudinal data, longitudinal questions will continue to require revised analytic procedures that attend to temporality and the extended accumulation of data.

Current contributions and research

In this section, I describe four purposes for longitudinal research. These purposes highlight (1) contextual depth; (2) change over time; (3) trajectories within institutional settings; and (4) construction of ways of being over time. These longitudinal research purposes are not exclusive. All longitudinal studies provide a sense of depth about people and contexts due to the extensive amount of time researchers spend in the field. Likewise, all longitudinal research allows the possibility of change over time. A study focused on the development of long-term processes such as identity construction cannot help but to address change over time. I offer these genres as a way of thinking about the primary goal(s) of various projects and as a heuristic to explore the potential of longitudinal research.

Research that provides depth for particular site, community, or issue

Drawing on anthropological studies in which researchers spend significant periods of time conducting research with a particular community, some longitudinal research is particularly suited to access rich and grounded understandings of particular contexts. These projects work toward “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of research sites and saturation in terms of patterns and themes. Perhaps the best-known longitudinal ethnography in literacy studies is *Ways with Words* (Heath 1983) in which Heath analyzed talk in two communities between 1969 and 1978. When conducting this study, Heath “lived, worked and played with the children and their families and friends in Roadville and Trackton” (1983: 5), providing her readers with detailed accounts of divergent language use. As she explained, “I focused primarily on the face-to-face network in which each child learns the ways of acting, believing and valuing of those about him” (1983: 6). Her careful documentation of language in use contributed to rich descriptions of what she described as “ethnographies of communication” (1983: 7). Foreshadowing her later work and her awareness of the dynamic nature of the community and her participants’ lives, Heath reminds readers that they:

should see *Ways with Words* as an unfinished story, in which the characters are real people whose lives go on beyond the decade covered in this book, and for whom we cannot, within these pages, either resolve the plot or the complete story.

(Heath 1983: 13)

The same year Heath published her classic study, Taylor (1983) conducted a longitudinal research project with six middle-class families. Her classic study of family literacy detailed the ways parents built on their own home literacy experiences as they interacted with their children around literacy. Although the children’s behaviors around literacy certainly changed over the

multi-year study, Taylor's focus was on describing the literacy practices and understanding how these literacy practices related to the values, beliefs, and past experiences of parents.

Rather than focusing on individual or familial literacy practices, some longitudinal researchers (Gregory and Williams 2000; Moje *et al.* 2004) have explored particular communities over long periods of time. Over a period of twenty years, Gregory and Williams (2000) explored literacy in one Bangladeshi East London community. Their work highlighted not only the changes they personally observed, but also the historical factors that contributed to current literacy practices. Drawing on community and classroom observations, participants' reading memories, and analyses of home and school literacy activities, Gregory and Williams crafted a detailed and nuanced description of literacy in this community, highlighting mismatches between language and literacy learning styles at home and school as well as a tendency for educators to make problematic assumptions about children's literacy abilities and potential. Moje and her colleagues (2004) drew on data collected over a five-year period in one school community to explore possibilities for creating third spaces in classrooms that merge experiences from students' home, school, community, and peer networks with the formal learning experiences of school. Focusing on content area literacy, they identified four categories of funds of knowledge (i.e., family, community, peer groups, popular culture). While their study pointed to possibilities for change by highlighting possibilities for teachers to draw on the funds of knowledge children bring, their focus was on description and analysis of the research community.

In a final example, Kozol (2012) explores the longitudinal experiences of poor children in America. He focuses on children living in urban communities recording their stories across a twenty-five-year period. Each account documents the challenges and triumphs faced by the children and their families. Depth is captured through his willingness to explore a range of contextual factors that affect the children, including housing, health care, schooling, and safety in communities. The children's stories highlight the incredible strength required from children and parents while revealing the failure of American society to care for all of its children.

Research that explores change over time

A second purpose for longitudinal research highlights change over time. In particular, Saldaña (2003) is deeply concerned with change over time. As he reported, longitudinal quantitative researchers tend to be concerned with what increases or decreases as well as the degree of these changes (e.g., Crosnoe and Elder 2004). Longitudinal qualitative research, while attending to change, may view change in relation to the situations that accompany escalation, reduction, suspension, continuation, accumulation, and/or reoccurrence of events.

Longitudinal quantitative and mixed methods studies have significantly influenced the questions asked and the changes explored by literacy scholars. For example, in a nine-year quantitative longitudinal study, Tabors *et al.* (2001) examined the relationships among kindergarten language and literacy assessments, home environment data, and later achievement. They found that home environment explained some of the variance in children's academic progress over time. Other quantitative researches have used longitudinal methods to explore the lack of change over time. Juell (1988) used quantitative methods to support the theory that children who struggle with learning to read remain poor readers years later. Analyses like these have intrigued qualitative scholars who have extended or challenged these findings through qualitative analyses that further explore these patterns.

Reese and colleagues (2000) used mixed methods to explore the variables that predicted the reading achievement of Spanish-speaking kindergarteners across an eight-year period. They found that achievement was positively correlated with a range of factors including the family's

socioeconomic status, home literacy practices, the presence of older siblings in the home, and the educational levels of the children's grandparents. Snow and her colleagues (2007) draw on both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore what happened to a group of preschool children from low-income families as they progressed through middle and high school. Quantitative analysis involved growth model analysis in order to "estimate within-person and between-person rates of growth" (Snow *et al.* 2007: 35) allowing for an analysis of change over time. Qualitative interview data were used to explore the experiences of students at various achievement levels. Based on their longitudinal analysis of change, they challenged the notion that early literacy success was the key to future literacy achievement. As they noted, "even some [children] with excellent literacy skills, became unmotivated and disaffected in the middle grades" (2007: 7). Factors identified as affecting children's literacy achievement over time were described as having "multiplicative rather than additive effects" (2007: 65). Conversations about change across qualitative and quantitative methods have revealed general patterns, changes in these patterns across time, and exceptions to these patterns.

Comber and Barnett (2003) conducted a qualitative study that followed 100 children from preschool through age ten. They explored a broad range of literacy practices and performances highlighting relationships between early literacy predictors and the students' later school achievement. Their findings revealed that all children did not follow predictable patterns of growth over time and that some children were able to catch up with more capable peers if parents, children and teachers made this a priority. Comber and Barnett identified factors that positively affected change for students highlighting the "extent to which what children can do counts" (2003: 6) alongside children's recognition that what they bring is valued. These case studies allowed researchers to view change in the literacy development of particular children.

Also within the qualitative realm, researchers have documented change over time in a variety of contexts. Strommen and Mates (1997) explored changes over time as children interacted with books during storybook reading. Bissex (1980) examined how one child's writing developed and changed over time. Sternglass (1993) conducted a five-year analysis of texts created by a college student during her first three and a half years of college. She argued that longitudinal research allowed her to explore the richness and complexity of writing development over time. Fine and Weis (1998) explored how life circumstances had changed or stayed the same for working-class adults twenty-five years after her initial research study.

Heath's most recent book, *Words at Work and Play* (2012) follows members of families from her earlier ethnography through 2007. In this text, she focused on changes that occurred for the families over almost thirty years – changes in employment, age, and health, as well as the effects of relocation over time. Within changing contexts, Heath explored the language practices of participants, comparing current practices to those she encountered in her earlier study. She noted that in the more recent data there were fewer opportunities for children to engage in extended talk and less use of language to plan ahead or consider the consequences of actions. In this text, Heath's focus was on documenting longitudinal change both in the lives of families and in relation to their language and literacy practices.

Research that documents and explores trajectories

Dauber *et al.* (1996: 302) defined trajectory as an "ongoing guide and restraint on the path to attainment" that is useful for thinking about school achievement, the factors that affect achievement, and possibilities for modifying the achievement of children who struggle in school. Some researchers maintain that it is best to "walk alongside" (McLeod and Thomson 2009: 61) individuals in order to craft a grand narrative, "a movie in which the intricacies of the

plot and the fluid twists and turns of the individual storylines” (Neale and Flowerdew 2003: 192) are revealed. Generally, shared expectations and institutional policies define and determine what are considered viable and valued trajectories while participants negotiate their courses.

The documentation and examination of longitudinal trajectories can entail either quantitative or qualitative methods. Parrila and colleagues (2005) used quantitative methods to examine individual differences in children’s reading trajectories from grade one through five relative to school expectations for reading success. Rather than reporting general patterns of growth across the sample, they used latent growth curve and simplex analyses to seek distinct developmental trajectories for various groups of students based on analysis of various components of the reading process (e.g., word identification, passage comprehension, word attack skills). They believe that their work revealed the potential of longitudinal statistical approaches to document the existence of multiple trajectories across time.

McLeod and Thomson (2009) drew on qualitative data to explore becoming within institutional contexts. They argue “by observing research subjects and inviting them to reflect on the past and project themselves into the future, these studies can capture something of the process through which the self is made and remade over time” (p. 61). Their work focused on the subjectivities of self within particular school spaces as students moved from age twelve through age eighteen – shifting from adolescence to young adulthood. The research involved twenty-six adolescents and ethnographies of four schools over a period of seven years. Focusing on the ways students’ selves were shaped within various school contexts, they investigated “patterns and experiences of difference and inequality” (McLeod and Thomson 2009: 9). In particular, they revealed how “two schools with roughly comparable student body demographics shaped different types of identities, aspirations, and values” (2009: 10) which determined available trajectories. McLeod and Yates (2006) examined interactions among institutions, social contexts, and the lives of students focusing on the possibilities particular contexts offer for individual development.

In her four-year study, Bartlett highlighted possibilities for one immigrant student, Maria, who was identified as a “student with interrupted formal education” (2007: 221) and thus was generally assumed to bring “too many learning problems to have a chance for success” (ibid.) at school. In contrast to the trajectories generally available to students in this category, Maria was able to draw on a local school-based notion of success – being a good student – to access relationships with faculty and peers that supported the development of identity as a good student furthering her success in school. Bartlett highlighted intersections among available trajectories, individual action, and personal agency.

Compton-Lilly (2013) used Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of chronotope to explore what school literacy experiences offer, allow, and reject in terms of identity construction for Jermaine, an African American student attending school in a high-poverty community. This analysis revealed how school policies and expectations carried meanings about learners as students and as readers. In this study, chronotopic motifs related to schooling (e.g., retention, special education placement) and literacy (e.g., failing standardized reading tests, not reading fluently at grade level) characterized Jermaine as a particular type of student and invoked a probable school trajectory. In short, Jermaine’s school experiences led to a trajectory characterized by repeated retentions, failure, and eventually leaving school without a diploma.

Research that focuses on the construction of ways of being over time

While closely related to research on trajectories, a fourth purpose of longitudinal research is to explore the construction of self and ways of being. Rather than change or trajectory, the

primary focus is on what is adopted, adapted, or rejected as people construct selves over time. While at times these processes seem conscious (e.g., choosing to attend a particular college, living in a particular neighborhood) at other times they are clearly unconscious. All researchers who tracked processes of becoming over time used qualitative methods.

For example, Neale and Flowerdew (2003) described children as more than blank states and challenged the idea that children progressed through a series of stages characterized by linear progressions of development. They argued that, for children, change over time could not be reduced to comparing children to established benchmarks and accepted norms. Neale and Flowerdew (2003) argued that contemplating time invited researchers and educators to appreciate how the personal and the social, agency and structure, and micro and macro contexts intersected as people constructed identities and selves and how understanding these dimensions of people's experiences provided clues about how contexts and positionalities grounded in those contexts might be transformed.

Working with young children, Carini conducted longitudinal research with children she referred to as "everychild" (2001: 21). In this exploration she presented the cases of three children – Iris, Paul, and Sean. Each child participated in the Prospect Center Project for at least eight years. Specifically, Carini followed the work of Iris from ages five through twelve highlighting the power and strength of Iris' female figures. She followed Paul from age three through adolescence and noted patterns across time in his use of line, angle, and edgy humor. Sean was accompanied from age four through twelve; Carini explored the recurring motif of eyes and lines of vision in his drawings. As Carini noted, "One of the useful things about having collections of children's works like those in the Prospect Archive is the lens they offer to highly particular selves – and to our humanness more generally" (2001: 21). The work of each student presented different motifs and patterns that Carini described as "a continuousness that is made visible in a coherent, yet complicated variation of image, motif, theme, growing and changing, but unquestionably that artist's signature from first to last" (ibid.). Carini's work points to the essences that make people human and the uniqueness of each child while also following children across time – placing writing and drawings into chronological sequences that allow researchers and readers to observe becoming over time. Carini argued for "a liberating education" that recognizes each child as "an ordinary person, a delft-in-the-making, a maker of works" (2001: 52).

Henderson and her colleagues (2007) explore issues related to the construction of adulthood for participants who grew up in an isolated rural area, a low-income housing estate, a "leafy suburb" and an inner city area in Northern Ireland. The scope of this study included gender influences, critical moments in individual lives, and participants' envisioned futures. During the original study and a revisiting phase conducted ten year later, researchers focused on "how young people invent adulthood over time" (2007: 29) in relation to their experiences of competence, recognition, and success within various contexts.

Studies like these highlight the development of identities and affiliations by people from various social and economic statuses. To reveal how "working-class people, people of different ethnic groups, etc., may be confidently embedded in ways that are invisible to the gaze of the middle-class academic" (Plumridge and Thomson 2003: 220). The focus is not on identifying particular changes, but in exploring the process of becoming both in terms of what is salient to an observer and what is salient to the participants themselves.

Recommendations for longitudinal researchers

Clearly various types of longitudinal research have much to offer literacy studies. Longitudinal studies have many advantages:

- 1 They provide an opportunity to observe experience and lives over time.
- 2 They invite researchers and participants to develop rich and trusting relationships.
- 3 Longitudinal research projects provide deeper insights into people's experiences by considering not only the here-and-now, but also longitudinal effects and outcomes.
- 4 Working with people over long periods of time can reveal important opportunities for advocacy and collaboration as researchers gain insights into the lived experiences of participants.
- 5 Finally, longitudinal research reveals the complexity of situations alongside the vulnerability of participants whose life situations bring limited resources.

Rich description, change, trajectory, and becoming are all fertile tools for making sense of literacy. While many recommendations could be made, I limit myself to three primary charges:

- 1 All research has the potential to become longitudinal. I would encourage literacy researchers, when possible, to revisit former research sites and participants. Discover what has happened to people who were involved in past research projects and be willing to challenge the findings and insights that seemed compelling at the time of the original study.
- 2 We must continue to craft analytic procedures that allow researchers to analyze data collected over long periods of time. Simply coding events at each phase of a project may or may not reveal longitudinal patterns. Sophisticated methods for exploring change, documenting trajectories, and understanding processes of becoming are needed (Compton-Lilly 2014; Vallance 2005).
- 3 Understanding the cumulative effects of factors that correlate with low literacy achievement may require longitudinal methods. The effects of poverty, race, cultural difference, and language diversity may become increasingly visible over long periods of time as participants describe and reflect on critical incidents, identify the accumulation of micro-aggressions (Pierce 1970), and brainstorm alternative possibilities for literacy learning and school success.

Future directions

As McLeod and Thomson argue, longitudinal research brings time to the forefront. It allows researchers to consider the “non-linear ways in which time collides and is experienced, apprehended, and imagined in research practices” (2009: 169). While the field of literacy has moved away from linear models of development; literacy as a singular, textual practice; and literacy as a formal school subject, we must situate literacy learning within the lives and long-term experiences of people. If we truly aspire to support lifelong learning and outcomes, we must move beyond short-term studies. Literate identities, practices, and affiliations are not constructed in six months, a year, or even three years. The ultimate goal of our work as literacy educators is to enhance people's lives by enabling them to use literacy for the things that matter to them. This requires a commitment to longitudinal research.

Related topics

Explorations of historical approaches, Literacy policy and curriculum, Revisiting studies, Representations of literacies, Situated methodologies.

Further reading

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15

LITERACY POLICY AND CURRICULUM

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Introduction and historical perspectives

Few issues in education have been characterized by as much sustained controversy over generations as the appropriate ways to teach reading to young children. Reading researchers, policymakers and the general public have all participated vigorously in what Chall (1983 [1967]) termed “The Great Debate”, which, in more recent times, has devolved into “The reading wars” (Pearson 2004). At issue is the extent to which reading instruction should focus explicitly and intensively on teaching the relationships between sounds and written symbols or whether instruction should focus students’ attention on the meaning of texts and encourage extensive reading of authentic children’s literature. A variety of duelling dichotomies have vied for ascendancy over the past 150 years, among them *phonics versus whole-language*, *code-emphasis versus meaning-emphasis*, *traditional or back-to-basics versus progressive pedagogy* and *teacher-centred versus child-centred pedagogy*. Clearly, debates about the teaching of reading intersect with wider divisions regarding the appropriate role of education within a democratic society.

Two sets of opposing ideologies can be distinguished in the debates about how to teach reading. The first division is within the academic world, pitting researchers who view reading as a cognitive process that takes place within the heads of individuals against researchers who view reading and other aspects of literacy as social practices intimately dependent on context. The former are predominantly rooted in the discipline of cognitive psychology and rely on quantitative research methods, ideally experimental and quasi-experimental studies, to test hypotheses and generate knowledge (e.g. Ehri *et al.* 2001; National Reading Panel 2000). Those who view literacy as a set of social practices argue that it cannot be reduced to a single linear quantifiable dimension. The term ‘multiliteracies’ (New London Group 1996) was introduced to highlight the multimodal and multilingual dimensions of literacy practices. The work of these researchers and theorists is often referred to as ‘The New Literacy Studies’ (e.g. Pahl and Rowsell 2005). This work draws on a more varied set of disciplinary orientations, including anthropology and sociology, and relies predominantly on qualitative research methods such as critical ethnographies to articulate claims and generate knowledge. In order to use terms that capture the major distinction between these two research orientations and that are minimally value-laden, I refer to the opposing perspectives as reflecting *individualistic orientations to literacy research* and *social orientations to literacy research*. During the past fifteen years, educational policies

in both the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US) have drawn heavily on the claims of researchers whose orientation is individualistic and have largely ignored the research and theory of those whose work is rooted in social orientations to literacy.

The second set of opposing ideologies that manifest themselves in debates about reading instruction involves a wide range of social actors, including academics, who disagree fundamentally about the purposes and conduct of education within society. These ideologies diverge on the extent to which education should reproduce the values, beliefs and power relations that currently exist in society as opposed to fostering an openness to alternative perspectives and critical literacy skills that might challenge, and even undermine, existing societal structures and beliefs. Strong endorsement of intensive phonics instruction is embedded in societal discourses that see education as transmitting core (mono)cultural values and invariant truths to the next generation. Dewey expressed the tenets of this orientation as follows:

The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without; ... [according to traditional education], the subject matter of education consists of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation. ... Since the subject-matter as well as standards of proper conduct are handed down from the past, the attitude of pupils must, on the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience. ... Teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced.

(1963 [1938]: 18–19)

In contrast to traditional education, Dewey's progressive education emphasized expression and cultivation of individuality rather than imposition of knowledge and rules from above, free activity as opposed to external discipline, learning from experience rather than from texts and teachers, and acquiring skills and knowledge from activities to which pupils are personally committed rather than learning isolated skills and facts through drill and practice activities.

These opposing philosophical perspectives continue to anchor debates about how reading should be taught in schools. In the US, vehement rejections both of progressive education and associated perspectives on literacy have invoked arguments based on national security, economic competitiveness and religious values. These arguments have typically invoked 'literacy crisis' rhetoric, despite the fact that there is minimal evidence to suggest that literacy attainments have been in decline (McQuillan 1998). Conspiracy theories have been invoked on both sides of the debate. Blumenfeld (1984), for example, argued that the 'look-say' approach to early reading instruction was a deliberate attempt by socialists to lower the literacy rates in America, thereby undermining the population's ability to resist a socialist takeover. From the opposite perspective, Weaver (1994) suggested that the strident advocacy for phonics by "ultraright" groups was designed, not so much to improve reading attainment, but to keep children passive and obedient and to maintain social stratification: "teaching intensive phonics is ... a way of keeping children's attention on doing what they're told and keeping them from reading or thinking for themselves" (1994: 296).

These debates continue on both sides of the Atlantic. In the UK, for example, prominent authors of children's books, such as Michael Rosen, Michael Morpurgo and Philip Pullman, have strongly criticized the literacy policies of both Labour and Conservative governments on the grounds that the UK policy of emphasizing synthetic phonics did not engage children with inspiring literature. In Rosen's words, "Is it any wonder that children are leaving school unable

to read, ... synthetic phonics is being presented as the cure-all but it will never be enough to teach kids to read. Let's stop pretending that phonics will solve everything, and develop a book-loving culture" (Henry 2012).

How can we explain the extreme volatility surrounding something as mundane as the most effective way to teach early literacy skills? One of the most insightful observations about why literacy arouses such passions was made by James Moffett in reflecting on the reasons why a conservative Appalachian community vehemently rejected an English-language arts textbook series he developed. The textbooks emphasized intercultural perspectives and the development of critical literacy skills.

Literacy is dangerous and has always been so regarded. It naturally breaks down barriers of time, space, and culture. It threatens one's original identity by broadening it through vicarious experiencing and the incorporation of somebody else's hearth and ethos. So we feel profoundly ambiguous about literacy. Looking at it as a means of transmitting our culture to our children, we give it priority in education, but recognizing the threat of its backfiring we make it so tiresome and personally unrewarding that youngsters won't want to do it on their own, which is of course when it becomes dangerous ... The net effect of this ambivalence is to give literacy with one hand and take it back with the other, in keeping with our contradictory wish for youngsters to learn to think but only about what we already have in mind for them.

(Moffett 1989: 85)

Moffett's observation goes a long way to explain why debates about literacy will always be rooted in societal ideologies and power structures. But that does not mean that individualistic orientations can simply be dismissed as naive or inadequate. Psycholinguistic questions about the most effective ways to teach initial reading and sustain reading development throughout schooling *are* legitimate and should be examined on their merits. These questions are considered in the remainder of the chapter.

Critical issues

The major critical issue to be addressed in this chapter concerns the legitimacy of the claims to knowledge generated by researchers who view literacy as an individual cognitive skill as opposed to those who conceptualize literacy as multiple and embedded in a network of social practices. It is not surprising that policymakers have paid more attention to the claims of the former group than to those of the latter because the message is much more easily packaged in 'sound-bite' language: *in order to reverse the literacy crisis, schools need to teach phonics in a rigorous and intensive way*. Thus far, proponents of a broader social orientation to literacy instruction have not been able to communicate to policymakers an equally convincing rationale for their position, and thus textbooks and curriculum frameworks continue to reflect individualistic orientations to early literacy instruction.

During the Bush administration in the US, policymakers and aligned researchers loudly proclaimed their reading policies, which emphasized the centrality of systematic phonics instruction, as 'scientifically proven'. Similar claims to scientific legitimacy have been invoked in the UK to justify the imposition of the 'literacy hour' and the more recent mandate to teach synthetic phonics. The following sections consider the extent to which these claims are justified and also the broader scientific basis of claims made by researchers representing individualistic and social orientations.

The credibility of individualistic-orientation research claims

In this section, I argue that many of the claims made by researchers who adopt an individualistic orientation to research, rooted in the disciplinary perspective of cognitive psychology, do not stand up to critical scrutiny. This critique is based on the fact that these researchers have interpreted their data in ways that do not meet the scientific standards they themselves espouse.

In reviewing the claims made on the basis of this research, I examine four 'episodes' that serve to highlight the issues in dispute. These episodes are (1) the exchange between James Gee and Catherine Snow regarding the interpretation of the Snow *et al.* (1998) National Research Council report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*; (2) the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) report on *Teaching Children to Read*; (3) the National Literacy Panel report on *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners* (August and Shanahan 2006); and (4) the *Reading First Impact Study* (Gamse *et al.* 2008).

The Gee/Snow debate

The debate between Gee and Snow in the *Journal of Literacy Research* was occasioned by a critical review written by Gee (1999) of the Snow *et al.* (1998) National Research Council report. Gee argued that the social dimensions of reading were largely ignored in the report and, in particular, the role of poverty as a contributor to reading difficulties was minimally addressed. He pointed out that broader indices of language development that reflected the impact of socioeconomic status were just as strongly related to reading achievement as phonological awareness which the report focused on as a critical variable. Underlying the problems with the report, he argued, was a conception of reading as an autonomous process divorced from the social realities of children's lives. Gee also highlighted the role of societal power relations and identity negotiation between teachers and students as contributors to students' underachievement:

The fact that children will not identify with, or even will disidentify with, teachers and schools that they perceive as hostile, alien, or oppressive to their home-based identities and cultures is as much a cognitive as a political point. ... To ignore these wider issues, while stressing such things as phonemic awareness built on controlled texts, is to ignore, not merely what we know about politics, but also what we know about learning and literacy as well.

(Gee 1999: 360)

In her response, Snow (2000) denied that social realities were ignored in the National Research Council report. Snow *et al.* (1998) did point to the correlation of 0.68 between reading achievement and the collective poverty level of students in a school and note that this correlation is considerably greater than the correlation of approximately 0.45 between reading achievement and early literacy indicators such as knowledge of the letters of the alphabet or phonological awareness. However, they then largely ignored these data, preferring to focus on individual cognitive variables. Snow defended the emphasis in the report on the cognitive subskills involved with literacy development on the grounds that instruction could address these effectively whereas schools were relatively impotent to change the social conditions of learners. She also challenged the claims of New Literacy Studies, arguing that:

If Gee really wishes to promote the impact of the New Literacies approach, he would do well to invest his time in conducting the sort of empirical research that proponents

of phonological awareness have produced, rather than simply arguing for his position as the politically and morally correct one.

(Snow 2000: 116)

Gee (2000) responded by pointing out that New Literacies theorists view skills not simply as internal cognitive states but as the means whereby individuals participate in culturally, historically and institutionally situated social practices. In this sense, skills are not fixed but rather change according to the social context and students' modes of participation in these contexts. He suggested that if this social perspective had been given greater weight, a very different report would have emerged with dramatically different policy implications.

Gee's critique is bolstered by the subsequent evolution of this debate in the United States. Despite the universally acknowledged relationship between academic failure and the collective poverty level of children in a school (e.g. Berliner 2009; OECD 2010a), there has been little political will to push for equality of access to funding as a means of raising achievement in the inner city and rural schools that serve low-income students. Policymakers and many researchers have instead focused on the presumed 'deficits' that low-income children bring to school (e.g. lack of phonological awareness) and teachers' alleged lack of competence to remediate these 'deficits', rather than highlighting inequities in the distribution of economic and educational resources as causal factors in students' underachievement (e.g. Rothstein 2013).

In considering the implications of the issues raised by both Snow and Gee, an important question is the extent to which schools *are* capable of responding, in an evidence-based way, to the socioeconomic realities that contribute to low-income students' underachievement. In a later section, I suggest that there is considerable evidence that schools can reverse at least some of the potentially negative impact of socioeconomic and sociopolitical variables. Unfortunately, researchers and policymakers have largely ignored the relevant empirical data and have focused on relatively weak interventions (such as intensive teaching of phonological awareness and phonics) while ignoring empirically supported strategies that are considerably more potent in sustaining long-term growth in reading comprehension. These strategies include maximizing literacy engagement and instituting pedagogies focused on enabling students from low-income and socially marginalized backgrounds to develop what Manyak (2004: 15) has called "identities of competence".

A final point concerns Snow's (2000) legitimate challenge to New Literacy Studies. What is the empirical basis of the claim that literacy achievement will improve when instruction responds to the social realities of children's lives and embeds literacy practices in these social realities? This issue is discussed in a later section.

The National Reading Panel Report

The NRP was established by the US Congress in 1997 with a mandate to review the scientific research on reading instruction and to articulate the implications of that research for improving students' reading achievement. The panel analysed the experimental and quasi-experimental research literature judged to be of central importance in teaching students to read. A major finding of the NRP was that there is "strong evidence substantiating the impact of systematic phonics instruction on learning to read" (2000: 2–132). The hallmark of systematic phonics programmes, according to the NRP, "is that they delineate a planned, sequential set of phonic elements, and they teach these elements, explicitly and systematically" (2–99). The methodology and findings of this report have been critiqued by numerous authors (e.g. Cummins 2007; Garan 2001; Pressley *et al.* 2004). Here I summarize the major points made in Cummins (2007)

in order to highlight the problematic interpretations of the research that characterize the report and subsequent publications (e.g. Ehri *et al.* 2001).

SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON READING ACHIEVEMENT WERE IGNORED

As pointed out by Gee (1999), individualistic orientations to reading research, almost by definition, focus on cognitive and instructional variables to the exclusion of social influences on achievement. Policies that arbitrarily exclude social influences on achievement are likely to be ineffective because they exclude a considerable amount of relevant data.

THE CONSTRUCT OF 'SYSTEMATIC PHONICS' IS INCOHERENT

The NRP report included the following dramatically different interventions as reflecting the construct of systematic phonics instruction: (1) scripted phonics programmes that continue systematic and explicit phonics instruction for a significant part of the school day (sometimes up to ninety minutes) well beyond the primary grades; (2) a fifteen-minute programme for kindergarten students, 'Jolly Phonics' (Lloyd 1993), involving "playful, creative, flexible teaching" (Ehri *et al.* 2001: 422); and (3) a five- to six-minute daily word study component introduced into a thirty-minute-per-day individual tutoring programme for grade 1 students entitled *Early Steps* (Santa and Hoiem 1999). The other components of this programme involved book reading with an emphasis on comprehension strategy instruction (eight to ten minutes), writing (five to eight minutes), and introduction of a new book, which the child was expected to read without much help the next day. The book reading, writing and new book components of this intervention are typical of whole-language approaches to reading. Cummins (2007: 565) argued that this looseness of operational definition undermines the entire construct of systematic phonics instruction:

Does the construct of systematic phonics instruction have any coherence or usefulness if it is equally reflected in a program that occupies 5 to 6 minutes of instructional time and one that occupies 90 minutes (or more) of instructional time? Why should policy makers regard 90 minutes of systematic phonics instruction as any more scientifically based than 5 to 6 minutes or 15 minutes? If the construct has little coherence, then policy recommendations based on that construct have minimal utility.

SYSTEMATIC PHONICS INSTRUCTION WAS UNRELATED TO READING COMPREHENSION AFTER GRADE 1

Although the NRP and subsequent publications (Ehri *et al.* 2001) reported that systematic phonics instruction was *unrelated* to reading comprehension after grade 1 for normally achieving and low-achieving students, this finding was 'backgrounded' in the reporting of the research and in all subsequent policy applications of the research. For example, the title of Ehri *et al.*'s paper in *Review of Educational Research*, "Systematic phonics instruction helps students learn to read" is misleading insofar as it omits to mention that phonics instruction does *not* help students develop reading comprehension after grade 1.

NORMAL SCIENTIFIC INTERPRETIVE PROCEDURES WERE VIOLATED IN ORDER TO MAKE THE
CASE FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SYSTEMATIC PHONICS INSTRUCTION

This claim is most obviously illustrated in the NRP's interpretation of the Santa and Hoiem (1999) study, mentioned previously. Ehri *et al.* (2001) repeatedly describe the experimental programme as a "phonics program" and attribute a causal role to the phonics component despite the fact that less than 20 per cent of the intervention focused specifically on phonics (word study) instruction. As pointed out by Santa and Hoiem, there is no way that the effects of the different components can be disaggregated: "every aspect of the Early Steps lesson undoubtedly promoted word recognition performance" (1999: 70). In contrast to Santa and Hoiem's cautious and appropriate discussion of the findings, Ehri *et al.* interpret the data as unequivocal support for the positive effect of phonics instruction, ignoring completely the potential impact of the other components that constituted 80 per cent of the intervention. Santa and Hoiem's findings suggest that a balanced intervention that includes an explicit focus on language (word study), combined with text comprehension strategy instruction and encouragement to read and write extensively, works better than an intervention consisting simply of guided reading.

MANY EXPERIMENTAL AND QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES SUPPORTING THE IMPACT
OF PRINT ACCESS AND LITERACY ENGAGEMENT WERE IGNORED OR DISMISSED
IN THE NRP ANALYSIS

Pearson (2004) pointed to the discrepancy between the NRP's conclusion in regard to the role of independent reading on achievement and what they actually found. The limited research that was reviewed led to the conclusion that "independent reading does not help – if you want to do it, assign it as homework" (2004: 239). Pearson, however, points out that the NRP:

did not study independent reading but rather the impact on fluency of instructional interventions designed to increase the amount of independent reading done in classrooms. From the paltry array of studies they were able to assemble, they concluded that the research on the efficacy of such interventions was inconclusive.

(ibid.)

Relevant well-designed experimental or quasi-experimental studies that received minimal or no attention in the NRP (and later the NLP) include the following: Elley and Mangubhai (1983); Elley (1991, 2001); Hafiz and Tudor (1989); Koskinen *et al.* (2000); Neuman (1999); Tizard *et al.* (1982). Together with the studies reviewed in a later section, this body of research highlights the central role that print access and literacy engagement play in the development of school-based literacy skills.

In summary, although the NRP (2000) expressed appropriate cautions about the role of phonics in a balanced literacy programme (see Cummins 2007), its conclusions regarding the central role of systematic phonics in reading instruction were skewed by its own narrow methodology and the bias that is evident in the way certain findings were interpreted and other findings ignored or dismissed. These problems were also apparent in the way the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (August and Shanahan 2006) interpreted the research on the literacy achievement of linguistically diverse students.

The National Literacy Panel (NLP) on Language-Minority Children and Youth

The contributors to the August and Shanahan (2006, 2008a) volumes predominantly represented cognitive psychology disciplinary perspectives, as was the case for the NRP report. The NLP report did consider qualitative research but, as illustrated in the following quote, consigned it to a secondary role with very limited scope to generate scientifically credible data: “Ultimately, [qualitative] studies can generate only hypotheses about the influence instruction may have on learning (because they make no systematic manipulation of the instruction, they have no control group)” (2008a: 133). As a result of this orientation to research, the NLP could draw virtually no conclusions regarding the impact of sociocultural variables on linguistically diverse students’ academic achievement. As expressed by August and Shanahan: “there is surprisingly little evidence for the impact of sociocultural variables on literacy learning” (2008b: 8). They note that a significant number of ethnographic and case studies provide examples of teachers’ giving legitimacy to students’ personal, communal or cultural backgrounds in the classroom but few of these studies demonstrated relationships between sociocultural validation in the school and students’ literacy outcomes. As I argue in a later section, this problematic conclusion reflects the narrow individualistic orientation to research and what constitutes scientific evidence rather than an actual lack of credible evidence regarding the influence of sociocultural variables.

The credibility of the NLP conclusions are further undermined by their superficial examination of the research relating to literacy engagement. Shanahan and Beck’s (2006) review of studies that encouraged reading and writing or involved adults reading to children could identify only nine such studies that they deemed worthy of inclusion. By contrast, Lindsay’s (2010) meta-analysis of 108 studies of “print access” identified forty-four “rigorous” studies that employed experimental or quasi-experimental designs. Shanahan and Beck reviewed only one of the nine research studies compiled by Elley (1991, 2001). They focused on the Fiji “book flood” experiment (Elley and Mangubhai 1983; Mangubhai 2001) which Elley (1991) summarized. They largely dismiss the findings because of what they claim are reporting flaws in the study. For example, they claim that it was not possible to tell whether the pretest was in the students’ native language or English and the author (Elley) did not document what was done to account for attrition over the two years of the study (grades 4 and 5).

These claims suggest that Shanahan and Beck (2006) may not have consulted the original study (Elley and Mangubhai 1983), which they did not reference, or Mangubhai’s (2001) later account of it, relying instead on Elley’s (1991) summary. It is clear from Elley and Mangubhai (1983) and Mangubhai (2001) that all testing was carried out in English including the pretest measures. Attrition was also not an issue because the study was not longitudinal. Grades 4 and 5 classes in 1980 and grades 5 and 6 classes in 1981 were tested as independent units, and results reported by grade level, with the result that any attrition of students between the 1980 and 1981 assessments would have been irrelevant to the results. In fact, the Elley and Mangubhai study is one of the most robustly designed of all of those considered in the NLP research synthesis. It involved random assignment of schools to treatments, relatively large sample sizes within each treatment, statistical controls for grade 4 pretest differences that were not resolved through random assignment, and replication of the original grades 4 and 5 results through a second year of grades 5 and 6 testing.

In summary, although the NLP report adopted a somewhat broader methodological lens than the NRP to examine the research on literacy development among linguistically diverse students, its conclusions are still warped as a result of the panel’s unwillingness to acknowledge that qualitative research is capable of generating knowledge. They also arbitrarily declined to

consider, or dismissed on superficial grounds, a significant number of experimental studies that documented the impact of literacy engagement on reading achievement.

The Reading First Programme

It did not take long for the ‘findings’ of the NRP to be distilled into the ideological space of the Reading Wars. The Executive Summary of the NRP report contains numerous statements reinforcing the centrality of phonological awareness and systematic phonics instruction that are inconsistent with the main body of the report (Garan 2001). Pearson points out that the discrepancies with the main report “only worsen when we examine the more ‘popular’ version of the report written for general consumption and the headlines distilled by reporters for headlines and newspaper articles” (2004: 231). The Reading First programme, established in the context of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (2001) incorporated a much more extreme version of phonics instruction than that envisaged in the actual NRP report, despite using the NRP findings to justify its claim that this approach to phonics instruction was ‘scientifically proven’.

Reading First received appropriations of close to \$1 billion per year between 2002 and 2007 with the goal of ensuring that low-income students learn to read well as a result of receiving scientifically based instruction. Applications for Reading First funding were reviewed by expert panels that determined whether the proposed interventions were scientifically based. The criteria used by the Reading First panels to judge the scientific acceptability of proposed reading programmes were examined by the Office of the Inspector General (2006). This report documented how panels that reviewed applications from states for Reading First funds were stacked with advocates of direct instruction (Carnine *et al.* 2003) and how funds were withheld from states and school districts that proposed to use instructional approaches or programmes deemed to be ‘balanced’ or tainted by whole-language assumptions. For example, in order to receive \$34 million in Reading First funding, New York City was forced to change its preferred early reading programme (*Month by Month Phonics*) because it supplemented phonics instruction with an active focus on writing and the use of classroom libraries, practices not deemed by Reading First to be scientifically based.

Not surprisingly in view of the fact that even the limited evidence produced by the NRP (2000) showed minimal impact of systematic phonics instruction on reading comprehension, the Reading First Impact Study (Gamse *et al.* 2008) reported no impact of Reading First on reading engagement or reading comprehension among students at grades 1, 2, or 3.

Claims to knowledge of alternative research methods

Snow’s (2000) challenge to New Literacy Studies to conduct credible empirical research (of the kind conducted by individualistic–orientation researchers) ignores the fact that an extensive amount of credible research, which is in the mainstream of scientific endeavour, has been produced by researchers operating from a New Literacies or social-orientation perspective. Pearson (2004) has pointed to the scientific legitimacy of research methods beyond experimentation and randomized field trials. These include:

- 1 careful descriptions of phenomena in their natural settings;
- 2 examination of natural correlations among variables in a particular environment;
- 3 natural experiments in which we take advantage of the differences between two or more settings that are otherwise similar;

- 4 data gathered with the goal of evaluating theoretical claims and building theoretical models;
- 5 design experiments in which we implement interventions to observe their effects; and
- 6 the use of qualitative tools such as ethnography and discourse analysis to describe what is really going on within different treatment conditions or comparison groups.

The data generated by these primarily qualitative methods contribute to theory (and knowledge generation) in two ways. First, this research establishes phenomena that require explanation. Across a range of scientific disciplines, knowledge is generated by establishing a set of observed phenomena, forming hypotheses to account for these phenomena, testing these hypotheses against additional data, and gradually refining the hypotheses into more comprehensive theories that have broader explanatory and predictive power (Cummins 1999). For example, this is how we discovered the nature of our planetary system and how we predict weather patterns.

The second way in which qualitative data contribute to knowledge generation derives from the fact that any phenomenon established credibly by observation (qualitative or quantitative) can refute theoretical propositions or policy-related claims. Any theoretical claim or proposition must be consistent with *all* the empirical data; if not, the proposition requires modification to account for the data.

These two processes can be illustrated in Reyes' (2001) multi-year classroom observation study of biliteracy acquisition by English-dominant and Spanish-dominant primary grades students in a dual-language programme. Students received initial literacy instruction only in their dominant language (L1) but were found to spontaneously transfer their reading and writing knowledge across languages despite the fact that they received no formal phonics or decoding instruction in their second language. This transfer was attributed by Reyes to the fact that the programme strongly promoted writing for authentic purposes in each language and also attempted to affirm the status and legitimacy of Spanish (as well as English) in the classroom. Reyes' study contributes to scientific knowledge by establishing the phenomenon (which is also supported by many other studies) that, under appropriate conditions, students can spontaneously develop reading and writing skills in their second language without overt literacy instruction in that language. This phenomenon is consistent with claims of cross-linguistic transfer of academic skills and it also refutes the theoretical claim that systematic phonics instruction is *necessary* to develop literacy skills in a language.

The same logic applies to the hundreds of other qualitative studies that have highlighted the social and instructional conditions that promote literacy engagement and achievement (see, for example, the documentation in Comber and Simpson 2001 and Pahl and Rowsell 2005). Thus, contrary to the perspective expressed in the NRP and NLP reports, ethnographic and case study research is in the *mainstream* of scientific inquiry, capable not just of generating hypotheses but also of testing and refuting hypotheses in ways that contribute directly to the building of theoretical models.

To what extent can we build a credible theoretical model of effective literacy instruction that takes account of the totality of research evidence deriving from both individualistic and social orientations?

Towards an evidence-based theoretical model of literacy instruction

The argument to this point has been that researchers operating from an individualistic orientation (1) have failed to take account of the research supporting the central role of literacy engagement in promoting literacy achievement and (2) have dismissed the role of social variables such as

socioeconomic status and societal power relations on literacy achievement. In this section, I summarize the empirical evidence supporting the impact of literacy engagement and broader social variables and synthesize the evidence into a theoretical model that can inform literacy policy and instruction.

Evidence supporting the role of literacy engagement

Syntheses and meta-analyses of the research relating reading achievement to both print access and literacy engagement highlight the consistently strong relationships that exist among these variables (e.g. Brozo *et al.* 2007/2008; Elley 1991, 2001; Guthrie 2004; Krashen 2004; Lindsay 2010). For example, Lindsay's meta-analysis of 108 studies concluded that print access plays a causal role in the development of reading skills:

Separate meta-analytic procedures performed on just those effects produced by 'rigorous' [i.e. experimental or quasi-experimental] studies suggest that children's access to print materials plays a causal role in facilitating behavioural, educational, and psychological outcomes in children – especially attitudes toward reading, reading behaviour, emergent literacy skills, and reading performance.

(2010: 85)

A sampling of other relevant studies is outlined below.

Neuman (1999)

Neuman investigated the effects on children's language and literacy development of 'flooding' more than 330 child-care centres in the US with high-quality children's books at a ratio of five books per child. The study sampled 400 three- and four-year-old children randomly selected from fifty centres across ten regions and 100 control children from comparable centres not involved in the project. Findings indicated that "children's concepts of print, writing, letter name knowledge, and concepts of narrative improved substantially over the year's intervention compared to those of the control group" (1999: 308). A follow-up of a subsample in kindergarten produced what Neuman termed 'striking' results: "Even after six months had elapsed, results indicated that the gains made by children in the Books Aloud program were still very much evident" (1999: 305).

OECD (2004, 2010b)

The 2000 PISA study (OECD 2004) reported that the level of a student's reading engagement was a better predictor of literacy performance than his or her socioeconomic status. The authors acknowledged that engagement in reading can be a consequence, as well as a cause, of higher reading skill but argued that "the evidence suggests that these two factors are mutually reinforcing" (2004: 8). In more recent PISA studies, the OECD (2010b) reported that approximately one-third of the association between reading performance and students' socioeconomic status was mediated by reading engagement. The implication is that schools can potentially 'push back' about one-third of the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage by ensuring that students have access to a print-rich environment and become actively engaged with literacy.

Sullivan and Brown (2013)

In an ongoing British longitudinal study involving a nationally representative sample of several thousand students, Sullivan and Brown (2013) reported that children who were read to regularly by their parents at age five demonstrated significantly stronger performance on vocabulary, spelling and math tests given at age sixteen than those who did not have this early exposure to books. Furthermore, the amount of pleasure reading students reported at age ten significantly predicted later scores at age sixteen. The authors were able to demonstrate a causal relationship between reading engagement and reading achievement that was not dependent either on the socioeconomic background of the parents or on cognitive or academic ability:

Once we controlled for the child's test scores at age five and ten, the influence of the child's own reading [at age sixteen] remained highly significant, suggesting that the positive link between leisure reading and cognitive outcomes is not purely due to more able children being more likely to read a lot, but that reading is actually linked to increased cognitive progress over time.

(2013: 37)

In short, these data provide highly credible evidence that literacy engagement plays a central role in literacy attainment.

Evidence supporting the role of social and interactional variables

The effects of socioeconomic status on literacy achievement have been well-documented in numerous large-scale studies (e.g. OECD 2010a). Some of the sources of potential educational disadvantage associated with socioeconomic status are beyond the capacity of individual schools to address (e.g. housing segregation) but the potential negative effects of other factors *can* be ameliorated by school policies and instructional practices. The two sources of potential disadvantage that are most amenable to reversal by school policies are the limited access to print that many low socioeconomic status students experience in their homes (and schools) (Duke 2000; Neuman and Celano 2001) and the more limited range of language interaction that has been documented in many low socioeconomic status families as compared to more affluent families (e.g. Hart and Risley 1995). In view of the documented relationships between literacy engagement and students' language and literacy development, it appears obvious that schools serving low socioeconomic status students should (1) immerse them in a print-rich environment in order to promote literacy engagement across the curriculum, and (2) focus in a sustained way on how academic language works and enable students to take ownership of academic language by using it for powerful (i.e. identity-affirming) purposes.

The role of identity affirmation is highlighted in numerous qualitative and quantitative studies that have documented the impact of societal power relations both on patterns of teacher-student interaction in schools and task performance more generally (e.g. Bishop and Berryman 2006; Ogbu 1978; Steele 1997). Groups that experience long-term educational underachievement have frequently been excluded from educational and social opportunities over generations. The interactions that students from marginalized social groups experienced in school often reinforced the broader societal patterns of exclusion and discrimination (Abrams and Rowsell 2012; Battiste 2013; Cummins 2001). Ladson-Billings has expressed the point succinctly with respect to African-American students: "The problem that African-American students face is the constant devaluation of their culture both in school and in the larger society"

(1995: 485). A direct implication is that in order to reverse the impact of this pattern of devaluation, educators, both individually and collectively, must create interactional spaces that affirm students' identities in association with literacy. This claim is supported by Sleeter's (2011) synthesis of the outcomes of culturally responsive education in the US which reported that literacy pedagogies that challenge the operation of coercive relations of power in the wider society produce positive outcomes for students from socially marginalized communities.

The Literacy Engagement framework (Figure 15.1) attempts to capture the major components of evidence-based literacy curricula (Cummins and Early 2011). Print access/literacy engagement is posited as a direct determinant of literacy achievement. Students will engage actively with literacy only to the extent that instruction scaffolds meaning, connects to their lives, affirms their identities and extends their knowledge of academic language. There is a large degree of consensus among literacy researchers from both individualistic and social orientations regarding the necessity of providing instructional support (scaffolding) to enable all students to comprehend meanings and use the target language effectively within the classroom. Similarly, most researchers concur on the importance of drawing students' attention explicitly to the ways in which textual language works. This focus on language awareness includes explicit teaching of sound-symbol correspondences as needed, explicit vocabulary instruction in the context of students' engagement with print (e.g. Collins 2005), and explicit instruction on discourse conventions of particular genres of language (e.g. Fillmore and Fillmore 2012). For bilingual students, it would also include drawing students' attention to cross-lingual connections (e.g. cognate relationships).

With respect to activating and building background knowledge and connecting to students' lives, there is considerable consensus among reading researchers about the importance of background knowledge for understanding both oral and written language. Pressley *et al.* (2004: 51) express the point as follows:

there are many demonstrations in the research literature that background knowledge improves comprehension and memory of text ... a clear implication of this literature is that building world and cultural knowledge that will be encountered in the child's future reading is essential if students are to comprehend those readings at a high level.

However, individualistic- and social-orientation researchers are likely to differ in the ways they interpret the role of background knowledge. Individualistic-orientation researchers are

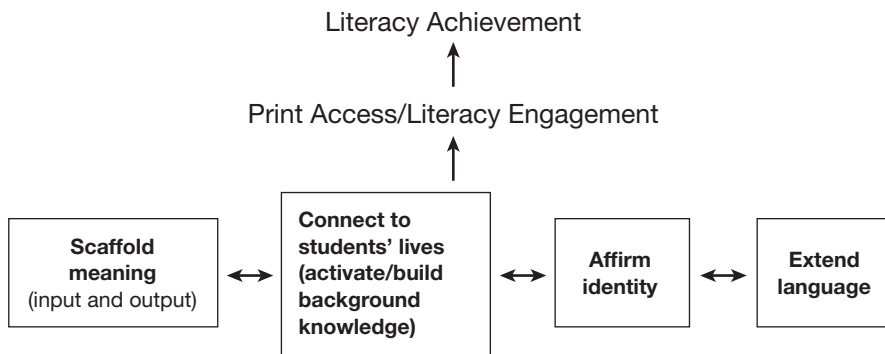


Figure 15.1 The literacy engagement framework.

likely to interpret the construct somewhat narrowly as referring to previous learning (e.g. content covered in previous lessons) whereas social-orientation researchers are likely to interpret the research in terms of the importance of connecting curriculum to the totality of students' lives, thereby affirming the legitimacy and importance of the funds of knowledge (González *et al.* 2005) within students' communities. The pedagogical power of this broader conception is dramatically illustrated in the FRESA project, reviewed by Cummins *et al.* (2007), in which low-income bilingual grades 3 and 5 students in a strawberry-growing region of California focused on strawberries in their science, social studies, math and language arts instruction, developing in the process a critical awareness of how power relations operated in society and how these power relations could be contested.

As discussed in previous sections, literacy policies in both the US and UK have omitted any consideration of the role of literacy engagement and identity affirmation in their educational prescriptions. In this regard, these policies are simply reflecting the interpretations of the evidence made by individualistic-oriented researchers. Very different pedagogical implications emerge when a broader lens is focused on the research evidence. Researchers whose conception of scientifically credible evidence includes qualitative as well as quantitative research acknowledge the role of broader societal variables as determinants of literacy attainment and include pedagogical interventions that address the operation of these power relations within schools. Similarly, researchers who have stepped back from the 'duelling dichotomy' of *phonics versus whole language* can highlight the research evidence showing that literacy engagement is a primary determinant of literacy attainment while, at the same time, acknowledging the importance of demystifying how academic language works. This would include appropriate teaching of phonics as part of an immersion of students into a highly engaging literacy environment.

Recommendations for practice

In this chapter, I have tried to interpret the research evidence regarding literacy and the school curriculum in ways that transcend the dichotomy between individualistic versus social orientations to research. I have argued that although experimental research *is* scientifically legitimate, it is not the only legitimate approach, nor in many situations the most appropriate approach, to the generation of scientific knowledge. Similarly, while it is legitimate to ask research questions that focus on individual mental processes, it is *not* legitimate to ignore or dismiss the relevance of the social realities within which these individual processes are typically embedded. Reading policies implemented in both the US and UK during the past fifteen years have been out of alignment with the research evidence because they privileged the very limited perspective of individualistic-oriented researchers and consequently ignored the importance of instruction that maximizes literacy engagement and promotes identities of competence associated with literacy practices.

The major recommendation for practice that derives from this analysis is that literacy curriculum and instruction should enable students to use their growing literacy abilities for powerful purposes. Such purposes are identity-affirming for individuals and communities and, as Moffett (1989) pointed out, they naturally break down barriers of time, space and culture. Hopefully, debate on the relationships between literacy and curriculum will increasingly move from asking 'How do we teach literacy most effectively?' to the question of 'What do we want students to do with the literacy skills they are developing?' If we want a citizenry that can think for itself and generate creative ideas for solving social and scientific problems, then schools must engage students in these same literacy practices as a core focus of their education.

Related topics

Multiliteracies, Identity, Literacy engagement, Socioeconomic status, Societal power relations.

Further reading

Ada, A. F. and Campoy, I. (2003) *Authors in the Classroom: A Transformative Education Process*, Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

This inspirational book highlights the power of creative writing to transform the identities of students, parents and teachers in multicultural and multilingual contexts.

Cummins, J. and Early, M. (eds) (2011) *Identity Texts: The Collaborative Creation of Power in Multilingual Schools*, Stoke-on-Trent, UK: Trentham Books.

This book describes the construct of “identity texts”, representing artefacts that students produce, which then hold a mirror up to them in which their identities are reflected in a positive light. This process is particularly significant in affirming the academic and personal identities of students from socially marginalized groups.

Lotherington, H. (2011) *Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Rewriting Goldilocks*, New York, NY: Routledge.

This book describes how elementary school teachers and university researchers working together transformed the theoretical construct of multiliteracies into imaginative and empowering pedagogy.

Montero, M. K., Bice-Zaugg, C., Marsh, A. C. J. and Cummins, J. (2013) Activist literacies: Validating Aboriginality through visual and literary identity texts, *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 9(1): 73–94, available at: <http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Validating-Aboriginality.pdf>.

This article highlights the relationships between identity and academic engagement in describing the process whereby Canadian First Nations high school students created art and poetry rooted in their cultural traditions.

Norton, B. (2013) *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation*, 2nd edition, Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

This book documents the close relationships between language learning and identity, understood as multiple, a site of struggle, and changing across time and place.

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PART IV

Multimodal approaches

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16

MULTIMODAL SOCIAL SEMIOTICS

Writing in online contexts

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Introduction

This chapter discusses writing as a resource for meaning making in contemporary communication, the changing place and uses of writing, as well as writing genres in the context of websites and food blogs. Comprehending the function of writing in online contexts, such as blogs, is central to understanding contemporary notions of literacy. A description and analysis of the features of such writing is offered in this chapter, from both a social and technological perspective. The reason for focusing on food blogs is twofold: first, food is a significant site for how individuals and societies form and express social identities, and second, blogs are a significant digital form that involves writing – in addition, food blogs are a common area of blogging.¹

Examples of food blogs are drawn upon to address the question of how notions of authorship and reading have changed, as well as that of the power relations between participants in online communication. These questions are intertwined with issues of technology, such as what kinds of texts and genres are produced on the site of different screens, and how the affordances of blogging platforms are taken up. For instance, contemporary principles of composition point to a melange of social and technological factors, in which the relations of authority and authorship, of power and knowledge, are being newly defined and ‘embedded’ in blog template design. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of current and future trends, in relation to writing online.

Current issues and topics

The contemporary landscape of communication is marked by a profound change in the uses, forms and functions of writing (Boulter 2001; Kress 2010; O’Halloran 2010). Speech has been and remains a major means of communication in face-to-face interaction although usually accompanied by gesture, gaze, body posture and so on. In short, speech is but one mode in a multimodal ensemble. When it comes to inscribed communication, writing has tended to dominate in the context of print. The place and role of language in inscribed communication is, however, changing in digital forms of communication.

In this chapter, multimodality is used to understand how blogging platforms and their resources convey meaning, such as how image, layout, frames and colour are selected and configured alongside writing. Multimodality expands social semiotic theory (Hodge and Kress 1998) to include non-linguistic systems of communication. The digitally enabled forms and contents of blogs can be seen as a process of selecting and shaping modal systems that express 'ideational' and 'interpersonal' (Halliday 1978) meanings. The social world, of which culture and technology are a part, shapes forms of interaction, along with the semiotic resources available for communication (Bachmair 2006; Kress 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006; Van Leeuwen 2004).

Writing and image are taking on new functions and relationships (Bezemer and Kress 2008; Jørgensen *et al.* 2011; Manovich 2001; Wilson and Peterson 2002). Technological developments, notably web-based audiovisual applications (e.g. Skype) and speech-based applications (e.g. transcription software) together with the more generic potential for image and movement in online digital environments have led to two particularly significant changes. First, image is more and more taking the place of writing at the centre of the communicational stage. Second, the many screens of the contemporary landscape are, increasingly, displacing the media of the printed page (Jewitt 2002, 2008). One consequence of this is that it is increasingly problematic to consider writing in isolation from the multimodal ensembles in which it is embedded. Understanding the function of writing – what it is being used to achieve – becomes increasingly complex, particularly when seen as part of multimodal composition. Beyond the design of any multimodal ensemble there is a need to distinguish between the existing 'pre'-designed constraints and potentials of a technological platform and its potential in terms of writing. The technologies underlying a blogging platform have a kind of grammar that sets constraints, and understanding this is essential for understanding writing in online contexts.

Current contributions and research

This section of the chapter explores the resources of writing and how these have been used and reshaped in the context of websites and blogs. Both the effects on writing as a mode and the social consequences of this reshaping are discussed, for example the ways in which authority is shaped by the design and use of navigational features, linearity, modularity and reading paths.

Writing as embedded in a multimodal ensemble

Writing is a mode: it is a set of resources, socially made, to enable us to achieve social purposes. In this sense, writing can be understood as a cultural technology, constantly remade, to fit with ever-changing social needs, occasions and purposes: it is shaped by the demands, structures and practices in which it is used. It follows therefore that changes in both the uses and the forms of writing provide a record of social change (Bezemer and Kress 2008; Kress 2003). Thus to understand the likely developments of writing, the social groups which use it can be examined to see what they do with writing in different settings, and hypothesize from present forms, practices and trends to future ones.

In making meaning as messages on blogs, writing is used together with images, still or moving; with colour; with sound in various forms; with actions and movements; with 3D objects. That makes one question inevitable, namely 'What work are the modes which are chosen and co-present here, doing in the message overall?' All are resources for making meaning evident, visible, material, and thus raise the question of what meanings each of the modes present is called on to bring to any overall ensemble of modes into the message as a whole (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001).

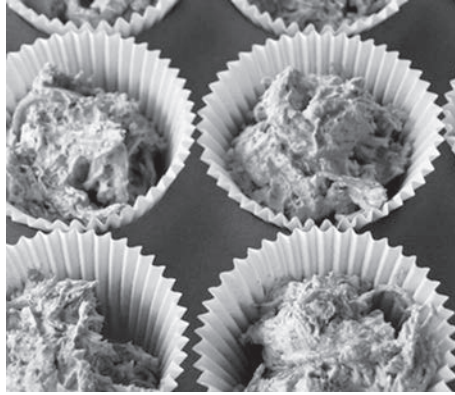


Figure 16.1 Carrot bun mixture.

A simple example may serve to make the point. Blogs, as one social medium, use a number of different modes together, writing included: images, for instance, are used frequently.

Focusing in on the work of each mode in Figure 16.1, the written part of this multimodal text, just preceding this image, the blogger has described what she has done up to a particular point. She uses writing to convey something about the consistency of the mixture, including what it looks like and how much mixture should be placed in each paper case. At this point the blogger uses an image to show what is difficult or maybe impossible to convey through writing. This raises the question of what is the semiotic relation between the writing and the image in such texts: is the image inserted into the chronological sequence of the writing? Are they running in parallel?

Writing and multimodal genre

The writing here is, itself, unremarkable: as ‘genre’ it is a recount, stating what has ‘gone on’ so far, a series of events, presented in chronological sequence. At this point a new, different, question arises concerning the labelling of a multimodal genre. While there is no problem describing the genre of the written part of this multimodal text, the image does not present sequential/chronological order; it *shows* a state of affairs. In other words, two (re)presentations, which are generically different, are co-present in this one text. That affects, changes, the genre of the text overall. The term *genre* captures central elements of a social relation and presents them in semiotic form (Bateman 2008). For example, a recount has three participants: (1) *someone* who recounts (2) *something*, to (3) *someone* who receives the recount; social roles are mirrored by semiotic roles. Writing as recount and image as depiction, each suggest specific and distinct *social* and *semiotic* relations. These kinds of texts thus throw into question many accepted terms such as ‘genre’ in ways that are relevant for writing theory and literacy theories and prompt the need for new terms that aptly describe such complex yet entirely common features.

Writing and multimodal affordance

Modes are cultural technologies for making meaning visible or tangible, that is, evident to the senses in some way. In focusing on modes, there is a need to begin to tease out what the

affordances of the different modes are (Jewitt 2013; Kress 2010) in order to see how and why each of these modes is taken up in online environments. This brings a new question about writing, exemplified in the blog screen shown in Figure 16.1: what kinds of things does each mode do well, which things does it do less well, or which not at all? The blogger made a choice: switching from writing to image – we hypothesize because writing is not as easily able to show consistency or colour. This was a design decision: *image will do better than writing for this meaning*.

Digitally enabled blogging platforms bring both a productive potential, and with that the need for a foregrounding of design in relation to the best means of communicating something. Blogging platforms differ from other social media practices (e.g. Twitter, Pinterest) given the range of modal resources made available through a customizable template design. This capacity changes how modes may be used and are used. Design becomes foregrounded; and with it the question of what resources are best used for is asked. That is not a diminution of writing in any way; rather it brings characteristics of writing to the fore which had previously not been in focus: it does do certain things well, others less well or not at all. The image is used to convey what the written parts of the text (as recount) might have done less well. That raises the question of what are the potentials of writing-as-mode in an online environment. That question arises here in sharp form, due to a conjunction of social and technological factors at this moment in the production of this text-genre with this still relatively new medium, the blog.

Writing and blogs as medium

There is a need to focus on the representational, productive and distributive capacities of how technologies allow for the distribution or dissemination of the meanings made with multimodal ensembles. The most significant medium has been that of the book. Other media using the technology of paper and print, with the site of the page, have developed over time, alongside the book: newspapers, magazines and leaflets. All used the technology of print and paper as their means of production, and the page as their ‘site of appearance’ (the page itself of course being a socially/historically produced object). As modes are means for making meaning material and media are means for disseminating meanings as messages, there is a clear need to focus also on material/semiotic means of producing meanings, and the sites where they appear in digital environments.

The online character of writing makes evident how ‘older semiotic orders’ of print-based page relations of modes, media, sites and production, are changing (Kress 2010; Lemke 2005). Online sites provide the conjunction of social and technological potentials and with that a lens to see how writing is challenged, in four ways:

- 1 changed social arrangements amplified by the potentials of screens are changing genres;
- 2 in places where writing was dominant, image and other modes are now increasingly used with or without writing in ways that reduce that dominance;
- 3 the media of the page, the *book*, magazines, e.g. are being displaced by the media of screens; and
- 4 print as the means of producing writing and multimodal texts more generally, is challenged by the ease of digital means of producing multimodal texts.

One factor central to these four changes is that notions of authorship and publishing are also changing. What is posted and circulated can be edited in ways that for what is published in print are not always readily available. With that, the centuries long naturalized relation of the site of

the page and the mode of writing are being loosened and undone. At the same time, paper and print are in many contexts being displaced by digital means of producing texts on screens (Boulter 2001; Castells 2000; Creeber and Royston 2009). In these processes, texts and principles of composition in general are being rapidly and radically remade.

The functions of writing, reading, authority and navigation

Reading paths and authority

This chapter maintains that the social is prior, prompting the need to examine carefully the nature of social change, and its effect on modes, media, production and sites of appearance. Socially speaking, the formal/semiotic feature of *linearity* correlates with and ‘materializes’ the social feature of *authority*: that is, it points to how the text was made and by whom; and its arrangement tells the reader how to read the text. ‘Accurate’ access to the meanings of the author depends on the readers following the implicit instructions on how to read this text: an instruction to follow a specific ‘reading path’. This is to say that the linear text and its materialized formal-semiotic features are signs of social power of a certain kind. This has led to a ‘naturalized’ order of engaging with a text, accessible only if the reading path is followed.

Social order and its semiotic form are both involved in a process of change. Instead of producing a pre-inscribed reading path, the contemporary page tends to be arranged according to a different order and different principles. The previously taken for granted authority of the author, instructing the reader to read in a particular way, has been replaced by an invitation to the ‘visitor’ to a page to design their own path, using the resources that are there, across the page or screen. With that has come a profound change to conceptions and practices of reading, which now no longer is decoding; it is now a matter of the visitor’s design, arising out of her or his interest to engage with the semiotic entity – here the screen – to construct coherence, developed in their construction of their ‘reading path’ (Kress 2003; Lunsford and Ede 2009; Moss 2003). This idea is useful for capturing the power tension and authority involved in the social media practice – blogging and thinking of writing in this context as a cultural technology.

An illustrative example is useful here to make these points: Figures 16.2 and 16.3 show two screen-shots of a website called *Poetry Archive*. The site imagines and addresses as its audience all those who have an interest in poetry: young and old, professionals or manual workers. The screen-shots (Figures 16.2 and 16.3) show two ‘pages’/‘screens’: one a general screen/page of information titled “About Us”; and the other the opening screen/page “Children’s Archive”.

Both of these screen pages have the usual features of website screens: menu, navigational buttons, etc.; however, there is a striking difference between them. The screen-shot in Figure 16.2 shows, as its largest element, a block of writing of a ‘traditional’ kind: an arrangement which is characteristic, in part at least, of a ‘traditional social order’ untouched by technological potentials. By contrast, Figure 16.3 shows an arrangement of entities of various kinds that has little or no resemblance to the page of a traditional book. The place of writing differs between these two sites. Figure 16.2 has, as its major compositional element, a written text arranged in a conventional linear way. Figure 16.3 shows anything but a traditional written element; writing is not dominant, nor does linearity dominate.

In Figure 16.3, linearity is replaced by modularity. Modularity (i.e. ‘modules’ as the *compositional elements*) is a formal-semiotic feature that derives from social arrangements of a certain kind, and expresses and reflects social meanings. They point to processes of text-making, not usually by a single author, but by a design team and its practices. Modularity also points to the assumed manner of ‘reading’ the text according to the interest of the person who engages

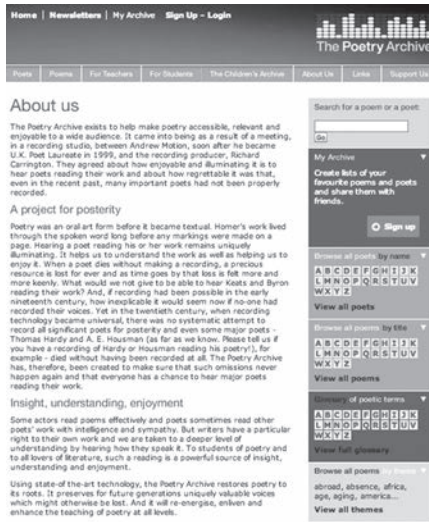


Figure 16.2 Poetry Archive: About Us (www.poetryarchive.org/content/about-us).

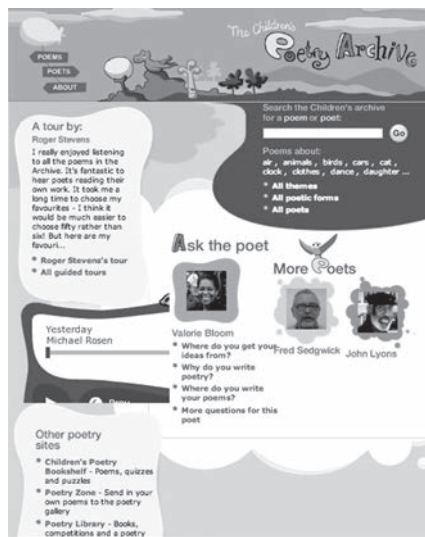


Figure 16.3 Poetry Archive: Children's Archive (<http://childrenspoetryarchive.org/>).

with it. Compared to the linearly constructed text shown in Figure 16.2, modularity inverts the social and power relations of maker and reader. It rests on a different distribution of responsibilities: namely that the task of the designer(s) is to assemble materials, contents, which will prove to be of interest to a reader, who will then make their choice about where to enter the page, and, by doing that, make a decision about how to move through the website.

In these online contexts, such choices have effects on writing, most obviously in the fact that if the assumed interests, including the aesthetic interests, of the visitors are pre-eminent in the process of construction, then writing will not be central, whether as organizational resource (linearity) nor in terms of meanings to be represented. Writing appears here mainly as caption, and its forms are shaped by that function. This arrangement points to and realizes a profoundly different social relation to that which underlies the compositional arrangement of Figure 16.2.

This is not an exhaustive account of indicators that connect the social and the semiotic: they are everywhere. It is not possible to produce a sign or a text, simple or complex, without displaying such indicators. As just one other instance, connected to the features of modularity and linearity, there is the socially and textually crucial issue of cohesion and coherence. Coherence names the effect gained from engaging with a semiotic entity, where the reader assesses that ‘everything that is here belongs and belongs together’ (Kress 2010; Liu and O’Halloran 2009; Van Leeuwen 2004). ‘Cohesion’ names the devices and their use employed to produce this effect. In the long written textual element of Figure 16.2, the devices are linguistic and textual. Here, to show some of them, is an excerpt from the page – the opening heading and paragraph:

The Poetry Archive exists to help make poetry accessible, relevant and enjoyable to a wide audience. **It** came into being as a result of a meeting, in a recording studio, between **Andrew Motion**, soon after **he** became U.K. Poet Laureate in 1999, and the recording producer, **Richard Carrington**. **They** agreed about how enjoyable and illuminating it is to hear poets reading their work and about how regrettable it was **that**, even in the recent past, many important poets had not been properly recorded.

Cohesive devices

In the second sentence, the initial *it* connects with the compound noun/name *Poetry Archive* in the preceding sentence. In the second sentence, the *he* restates the name Andrew Motion. The initial *they* in the third sentence connects with the two nouns/names *Andrew Motion* and *Richard Carrington* in the second sentence. The *that* in the third sentence provides a link forward and lets the reader know that she or he will be informed about what ‘was regrettable’. *Recorded* at the end of the last sentence, ‘gathers up’, so to speak, to ‘hear poets reading their work’. In other words, there are many direct links, as repetition, as restatement, etc., and subtle connections, which knit together all parts of this paragraph. The same phenomenon can be observed operating across the whole of any coherent text.

One means of producing coherence is by *ordering* and *sequencing*. Below, the three sentences of this paragraph have been re-ordered to show how the internal organization of the paragraph depends on appropriate sequence; but also to show how each sentence gets shaped by the need to fit into a specific place in a paragraph or even the whole text.

Re-ordered paragraph

2 It came into being as a result of a meeting, in a recording studio, between Andrew Motion, soon after he became U.K. Poet Laureate in 1999, and the recording producer, Richard Carrington. 1 The Poetry Archive exists to help make poetry accessible, relevant and enjoyable to a wide audience. 3 They agreed about how enjoyable and illuminating it is to hear poets reading their work and about how regrettable it was that, even in the recent past, many important poets had not been properly recorded.

Every text projects an account of that specific bit of the world which it produces and describes; in doing so, it projects, with and in that text, a sense of the ordering of that produced and projected world.

There are none of these features in Figure 16.3. There is no sequence; there are no lexical or syntactic or textual means of establishing coherence through internal connection, or through 'reference' by pronouns. Across these independent modular entities that is not a possibility. It indicates the different social semiotic organizations of the two texts, Figure 16.2 and 16.3. At a social level, it means that visitors to this site are not required or expected to be familiar with or knowledgeable about nor expected to be interested in the relation between these discrete modular entities, which exist here 'by themselves', so to speak. This is not to say that the example in Figure 16.3 does not exhibit or 'have' markers of coherence. It does. The social origins and the forms of coherence are, however, fundamentally different to those of Figure 16.2. The 'world' of Figure 16.3 and its forms of coherence are not about connection(s) between specific units or entities, at a detailed level. They are about coherence in the sense of all parts being part of a larger domain. The formal, semiotic devices which are used for that are, for instance, the *colour palette* of the whole; or the overall placing/ordering of elements of the composition within the space of the screen. Understanding the kinds of coherence provided by a text, knowing its principles of composition can provide insight into the kind of community which produced it (Jewitt 2005; Kress 2003). Conversely, knowing the community of readers for a text will provide an indication of the forms of coherence that are likely to be present. Both can provide insight into means for making a text *incoherent*, for this group. In the case of the device of colour, this may be a radical change in the 'palette' for instance, by introducing intensely saturated colours or colours that belong to a different part of the spectrum.

It is reasonable to assume that, with a few exceptions, no one sets out to produce an incoherent text: though the principles of coherence, and the cohesive devices available and used, are or can be profoundly different, and they and their use reflect social notions of coherence. We might feel that a 'bricolage', assembled casually on a beach from bits of flotsam and jetsam is incoherent. Yet its frame – some bits of branches and driftwood – around the collection of elements, can immediately suggest the potential to 'read' meaning into the ensemble. Thus the 'reader', can do the 'semiotic work' of conferring coherence on the ensemble. The materialized multimodal ensemble in blogs and new forms of writing more generally presents readers with similar choices for meaning making.

There is then a broad distinction to be made between a semiotic entity where someone has, clearly, done the semiotic work of producing coherence (for the reader); and an entity where the semiotic work done leaves the reader to do (some/much of) the work of creating coherence. These two orientations reflect changes in forms of the social as discussed in relation to authority. These orientations also have their effect on the semiotic work that is done and the semiotic entities that are produced. One question, for writing, is how writing-as-mode will fare in open digital environments, notably with multiple users bringing different cultural-semiotic resources to this process of reading.

Modular navigation

As already discussed 'traditional' written texts display a linear ordering: in their sequence of elements, arranged as lines; they are strongly sequential in larger textual elements, such as paragraphs and chapters for instance. In contrast, 'newer' forms of composition provide visitors with navigational resources to choose their own reading path (Lemke 2005). It is possible to see the examples in Figures 16.2 and 16.3 as relatively clear examples of the uses of writing in

‘traditional’ and in ‘newer’ forms of composition and how the reading path has shifted from a prescribed linear order to provide visitors with modular navigation choices. Figure 16.4 shows a partial screen-shot of the homepage of the same website.

Communicationally, the homepage needs to address all potential visitors to the site. And so, compositionally and semiotically, it has to be something of a halfway house, appealing to all groups, offering enough that is recognizable to all. The composition is modular, organized much more in a columnar rather than in a linear manner. Within the columns the overarching organizing feature is sequence and not linearity – that is, sequence may be vertical (top-down) or horizontal (left to right); within this there may be segments of writing which are linear. The social significance of modularity is evident here; that is, the visitor is free to enter the site where she or he wishes to do so. The modules themselves can have a structure of image plus writing; or of writing alone, with ‘blocks of writing’ (as in the module headed “Resources” with ‘blocks’ within this headed “Teachers”, “Students” and “Librarians”) rather than paragraphs. Within the ‘blocks’ there is writing of a conventional kind. Overall, in terms of the use of modes, writing here is still relatively dominant; in terms of compositional principles, the foregrounded principle is that of modularity, within an evident columnar, vertically sequential structure. In further thinking about structure and design, there is also a sensory experience that seems to be emerging in the ways that the blogger engages with potential visitors. For example, while less scrolling is often thought to be a sign of a more streamlined design, some bloggers seem to be using a vertical framing to engage viewers to keep physically scrolling and tangibly interact with their blog. Further, this shift in navigational design also changes the usual principle of composition that what comes first (or what is in the homepage online) is most important seems to not be the case.

In other words, compositionally, the website overall is aptly iconic both in terms of the different sets of principles corresponding to ideals of the ‘young’ and ‘old’ audience; and of a transition from the traditional to the new, in use of modes, organization and navigation. This starts to blur the boundaries in terms of applying once distinct sets of talents or skills and allowing them to coexist on the page.

In part it strongly preserves the mode of writing in its traditional manner, and some of its traditional elements: sentences and units ‘below’ the sentence, organized as blocks rather than paragraphs. There is an expectation of ‘linkage’ and development, from one paragraph to another. At the same time it uses elements which were not part of the mode of writing in its traditional form: ‘modules’, for instance, units which are not paragraph or sentence; and, we are suggesting (as a provisional label) ‘blocks’. The tasks demanded of writing, the tasks into which

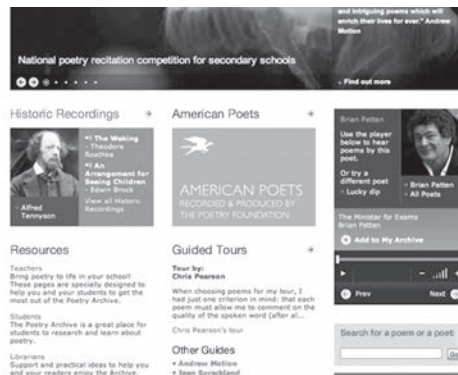


Figure 16.4 Poetry Archive: Explore Poetry (www.poetryarchive.org/explore).

it is drawn, are other than its central traditional tasks (though writing as ‘caption’ or ‘label’ does of course have a long history). In parts of the website writing is very much in the centre, in others it is on the margin. Where it is on the margin, the visitors addressed are imagined as young; where it is central, the visitors are imagined as much older. Modularity rather than linearity of writing provides visitors options for navigating the site as suited to their reading preferences. The website embodies the unstable characteristics of the communicational landscape in which this website functions, particularly the very different dispositions of its imagined audience; and of the place of writing within all that.

Designing (for) audiences

Blogs, as a medium, make use of a range of resources. There are, first, the generative resources of the platform itself. They offer the blogger the opportunity to design an overall shape for their particular blog. Different platforms offer different potentials for the blogger’s design of the medium. The platform constrains what can be done, much in the way that the grammar of a language constrains what can be expressed, while at the same time offering a wide potential for different kinds of expression within the overall constraint.

The widespread use of blogs has been attributed in part to free, user-friendly template design in blogging platforms. Notions of writing, authorship and reading became more dialogical in nature, with the combined social and technical affordances of blogging platforms. Weblogs, or blogs as they are more commonly known, have evolved considerably to become a significant aspect of online communication (Hookway 2008). Early blogs from the 1990s were identified primarily as having chronological organization, links to other sites, and commentary by the blogger; subsequent blogs became more ‘diary-like’, and offered more interaction, such as the use of RSS (Really Simple Syndication) subscription and ‘comments’ (Garden 2011). At present, modes on screens, in often new genres, and in multimodal ensembles of varying kinds, are beginning to occupy the page given the increased dynamic representation and modal resources made available on blogging platforms.

So, still with a focus on writing, there are, with any platform, specific potentials for producing texts-as-genres of a certain kind. There are the many modes which are or may be available for use in relation to a particular platform-as-medium: writing, image, moving image/video, layout and so on. The generative potentials are used to design a shape by the blogger. That shape does not determine what modes, where and how modes are to be used – such a constraint may be the result of certain design decisions deliberately made. With any online medium there are genres, which in their turn afford and constrain the uses to which modes are put (Lemke 2005). With any online medium, as indeed generally, new genres may develop, as a consequence of social changes – where the potentials of the platforms may have their effects on that possibility.

There are design decisions made by bloggers in relation to individualization of the blog; or in an attempt to appeal to a specific audience. That may include or lead to changes in genre: if one assumes for instance that the blog at one stage had come into being as a consequence of the transfer of the not-online genre of diary, then the development of this genre online can be followed. For one thing, the distinctions of a private–public domain may change given the characteristics of being online. For another, what a diary is like or is becoming when it becomes linked with large corporations and becomes a vehicle for advertising or product placement, etc. can be questioned.

These decisions and trends will have effects on which modes may become privileged: not necessarily in terms of quantity of use but rather in terms of the functions of modes. That is, is the blog ‘image-led’ or ‘writing-led’, does it deploy video, still image, or writing with equal

frequency and with different functions? Do aesthetic considerations change with changes in the social functions of the blog?

For example, taking the food blog Thinly Spread (Figure 16.5) in terms of the amount of space given over to a mode on the screen, writing is, here, equivalent to image.

A significant question here is one about the respective function of image and writing. If a left to right reading order is assumed, image is first; image is, as it were, the 'topic' of this 'blog element', its 'theme': it presents the main issue. In this structure writing has a subsidiary function, that of 'commentary'.

Understanding the place of writing online requires some further questions to be asked which are not actually about writing in its conventional sense, but about *composition*: does it matter which element, the written or the visual, is prior in a left-right sequence on the page? But asking that question is to move right away from characteristics of the mode of writing as such and to move to principles of multimodal text production. In other words, it is not productive – in thinking about writing online – to simply look at writing as such, but rather writing needs to be treated as an element in the design of a multimodal text. This holds true, even when writing is clearly the major and central mode, as for instance in the blog entry on page 262 (Figure 16.6).

Unlike Figure 16.5, this blog records the cooking and 'entertaining' of an individual. Writing is dominant, central in all respects. Where in Figure 16.5 the platform offered two columns, here the platform offers three. It shows that the affordances and the design of platforms are one variable, and the uses made by the blogger are another, separate variable. The affordances of the platform are used here less to embed the blog in a wider network of quite different media platforms.

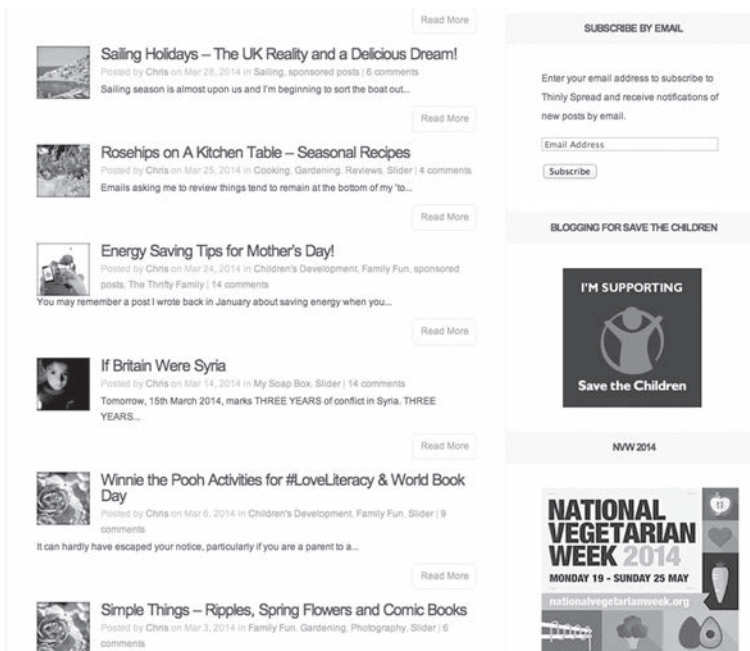


Figure 16.5 Thinly Spread: Homepage (<http://thinlyspread.co.uk>).

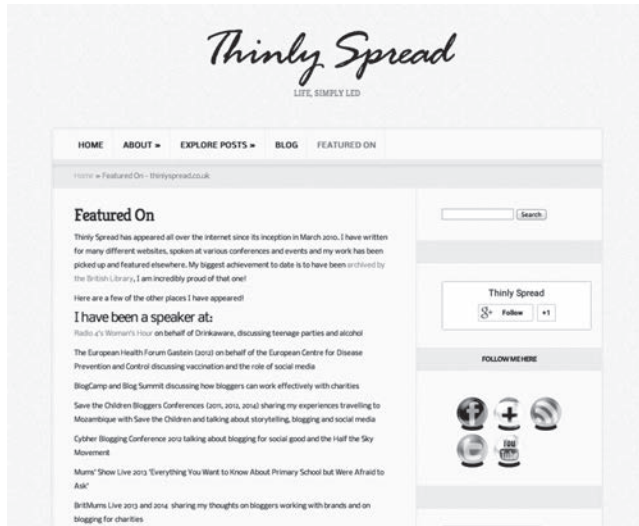


Figure 16.6 Thinly Spread: Featured On (<http://thinlyspread.co.uk/about/featured-on>).



Figure 16.7 Diary of a Frugal Family blog, placed in the blogger's wider network (www.frugalfamily.co.uk/blog).

10 kitchen gadgets you absolutely don't need and 5 that you actually do need....

by cass, on april 3rd, 2014

I'm going through a massive de-cluttering phase at the moment and the kitchen is definitely the biggest job. Honestly, you should see my cupboards now – let alone before I started the mammoth task of de-gadgiting my kitchen!

Here's my ten gadgets that I can absolutely live without....



A Quesadilla maker

I'm not even joking when I tell you that Mr Frugal bought me this for Christmas a few years ago because HE loves it when I make Quesadillas.

A cupcake maker

Yes, I know. Waste. Of. Money.

It was a bargain buy though as it was reduced to something like £3!

An electric steamer

Takes up lots of space and actually, the steamer I have that just slots over a pan is just as good with less washing up afterwards.



FOLLOW ME

SUBSCRIBE VIA EMAIL SO YOU NEVER MISS A POST.

Email Address

Subscribe



Follow this blog

NetworkedBlogs

Follow this blog



My Favourite Blogs



Figure 16.8 Diary of a Frugal Family: Homepage (www.frugalfamily.co.uk).

Writing, here, exists as the names of nodes, which connect elsewhere: to other, similar blogs in the right-most column, and to other activities on the web by this blogger. But again, here we are beginning to discuss not writing but *composition* of the specific medium.

To show the affordances of the same kind of platform as in Figure 16.5, designed very differently, consider Figure 16.8

The ordering of the Diary of a Frugal Family blog (Figure 16.8) is that of a vertical (downward) scrolling, within which there is no left-right ordering. The right-most column runs in parallel to the central column. Whereas in Figure 16.5, the dominant ordering was of elements displayed left to right, in a vertically organized sequence; here the dominant ordering is the vertical. The dominant genre is that of travelogue/diary, and in that genre writing is the dominant mode. In the blog overall, images take up about the same amount of space as writing: their function is to convey an aesthetic of 'high art': gastronomic, interior design, 'living'.

Future directions

This chapter has focused on blogs. Given their social function, their 'transitionality' between the older and the newer, socially and semiotically, blogs make it possible, perhaps more so than other media sites, to look at the present state of writing online, and to speculate about future developments in writing research. A number of issues have arisen clearly, marking social and semiotic changes that provide directions for future research for literacy studies, and new forms of digital writing more generally.

First and foremost, and most decisive, is the realization that it is not possible, now, any longer to look at 'writing online', as though it is 'writing' much in the way it has been known, and that it continues to exist as a discrete phenomenon. Semiotically speaking, writing now has to be considered first of all in its environment of multimodal textual ensembles and in the wider environments of the connections of various digitally instantiated sites. Although this chapter has not traced the now usual connection of blogs to other sites; nor therefore shown how the content of the blog is reshaped – transformed and transduced modally and generically on other sites, this also has profound effects on 'writing'. The need to investigate 'writing online' as an expanded multimodal practice is a key direction for future literacy research.

Second, the chapter has discussed the shift from the authority of the author to the interest of the reader (Kress 2003; Lunsford and Ede 2009; Moss 2003; Silverstone 2007). Semiotically, one consequence, or sign, of this is the shift from the linearity of the written text to the modularity of the contemporary written elements of multimodal texts. As has been discussed, if linearity was one means of signalling the authority of the author, then the modularity of the multimodal text signals the responsibility of the person who engages with the screen, let us say, as a (co)designer. Power relations have changed with semiotic consequences for writing – and beyond writing: this is an area requiring further research particularly as the Internet is suffused with discourses of democracy and equality which need critique and elaboration.

Third, the social is the origin of the semiotic; and as the social is dispersing and fraying, so notions of coherence as they had existed both socially and semiotically have changed profoundly (Kress 2010; Liu and O'Halloran 2009). There is coherence in contemporary texts, online – though its forms are often profoundly different from the traditional forms: from the tightly 'knitted' coherence of words, syntax and (written) text, to the more open, a looser, 'less committed' coherence of – as an example – a colour scheme. The former allowed no or little choice in ways of approaching and engaging with the text. If you transgressed the order given by the author, you would not 'understand' the text. The latter forms may offer suggestions about ways of engaging, but leave specific forms and orders of engagement with the text to the interest of the reader – again, the implications for literacy research of rethinking of coherence and forms of engagement in online contexts need further elaboration.

Fourth, in all that there is an absolute need to consider the potentials which online media provide for the production of kinds of texts and genres (Bateman 2008; Lemke 2005). The media of mobile screens are becoming dominant and ubiquitous. The urgent questions for those concerned with reading and writing include: what can actually be done – represented – on these screens? What is permitted or possible on these sites?

It seems clear that current social trends, matched with the affordances of the new media, will reshape the ways in which we make meanings. Writing will not disappear, though the "Children's Archive" homepage is taken as an example – and perhaps as a useful metaphor – writing in the ways that it has been known may be subject to enormous changes. There is not on that site, anything like a sentence: there are captions and headings, but no sentences, no paragraphs, no extended texts, no written narratives. Understanding what it means to become literate in this changed landscape is paramount for literacy studies.

For the near future, we suggest, a situation will be obtained in which traditional forms of writing will exist side by side with the newly emerging forms of representation. In as far as the elites will continue to use and maybe to prefer the traditional forms, it will remain crucial to ensure that young people will be able to have the best possible understanding of the affordances of writing in its traditional forms; and at the same time, that schools will be allowed by those who control them to foster their explorations of new ways of making meanings.

Online is a big space, and one that is constantly expanding but it is an expansion within certain principles – many of which are yet to be unravelled. This chapter is an attempt toward beginning elucidating some of these principles.

Note

- 1 The chapter draws on data from a research project on food blogs and multimodal principles of composition. This research is a part of a larger project on multimodal methods for researching digital environments (MODE) (mode.ioe.ac.uk) supported by ESRC (RES-576-25-0027).

Related topics

Social media practices, Online and virtual spaces, Digital and data environments, Visual and multimodal methodologies.

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THE SEMIOTIC MOBILITY OF LITERACY

Four analytical approaches

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“this voracious appetite for semiotic recycling ...”

(Kress 1997)

Introduction

This chapter addresses a prevalent phenomenon in literacy, that of semiotic mobility. Since literacy concerns meaning-making and the means for making meaning – in other words, representation – this chapter discusses transmodal representational practices, primarily but not exclusively those of students in classrooms. The term ‘transmodal representational practices’ refers here (1) to the range of semiotic modes that are used by students and other meaning-makers, language being one amongst others such as the visual, sonic, gestural and performative, and (2) to the way this range of semiotic modes is used in sequences of meaning-making, literacy practices and learning. The chapter provides an overview and sample of studies of literacy as semiotic mobility, clustering them under four different headings which indicate their focus and approach to analysis. Its intention is to provide an overview of different ways of understanding, analysing and engaging in transmodal semiotic practices that would be useful to teachers, students, scholars and researchers. The point of tracing the transmodal sequences of meaning-makers – of tracing the routes along which their representations migrate and mutate – is to show how their ideas are formed, developed and change, in other words, how their literacy practices are semiotically mobile.

The phenomenon of transmodal representation and communication is, of course, not restricted to education. It occurs with ubiquity in everyday media and communicational landscapes. Novels are commonly adapted as plays and films; print genres such as Batman comics or Harry Potter novels are remade repeatedly for the cinema, and spawn games, activity books, children’s clothing, mugs, toys and other commodities (Lemke 2007). News events are reported and remade on television, on radio, as Tweets on mobile devices, and, in the traditional news medium of newspapers (print and online) as headlines, reports, political cartoons, editorials and letters to the editor. Architects and scholars of the city may represent their ideas via

architectural drawings, computer-generated programmes, photographs, videos and writings (Bremner 2010). Artist William Kentridge transforms his charcoal drawings into animated films, and then inserts them into plays and even opera (Cameron *et al.* 1999; Clingman 2011). The *Life of Bone: Art Meets Science* project generated cross-disciplinary, transmodal meditations upon the two and a half million year old Taung Skull found in South Africa in 1940 (Brenner *et al.* 2011). Writer Lauren Beukes's novels become works of art by prominent artists which are auctioned to raise funds for refugee children and other beneficiaries (Beukes 2013). The transmodal phenomenon, which involves shifts of mode, medium, genre and context, is a feature of representation and communication today, across the arts and sciences, educational environments, literacy practices and processes, and the entertainment and communications industries.

The chapter is structured in the following way. It introduces and defines the phenomenon of transmodal semiosis, linking it to more general characteristics of mobility in the world at large. The core of the chapter consists of an overview of different theoretical and methodological approaches (see in this connection Yamada-Rice, Chapter 20, and Nichols, Chapter 7, both this volume) to the study of transmodal semiosis, with examples of each, many of which are set in South African educational sites.

Definitions, historical and theoretical perspectives: transmodal semiosis, mobility and translation

The notion of transmodal semiosis used in this chapter is located within the developing field of multimodality. It draws on semiotic perspectives from a range of domains, primarily multimodal social semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1988; Jewitt 2014; Jewitt and Kress 2003; Kress 1997, 2003, 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; Pahl 1999, 2003; Stein 2008), but also critical thinking and philosophy (Deleuze and Guattari 1988), cultural studies and anthropology (Barber 1997; Coplan 2007; Finnegan 2007), and translation studies (Jakobson 2000 [1959]; Lotman 1990). It is related to 'multiple intelligences' in the field of cognitive psychology (Gardner 1983); to "a pedagogy of multiliteracies" (New London Group 2000) – a framework for literacy education which pluralises the notion of literacy both semiotically and culturally; to "transmediation" – a media education approach (Semali 2002); and to the pedagogic and literacy practices of Albers and Sanders and their colleagues which cross modes and art forms (2010). It shares an orientation towards movement with the multiple literacies theory of Masny (2013) and Masny and Cole (2009) and the rhizomatic approach to literacy as process taken by Leander and Rowe (2006), as well as towards complex interconnectivity in meaning-making (Nichols, Chapter 7, and Burnett, Chapter 34, both this volume). All assume that representation and communication occur in a range of modes that are used in the articulation of meaning, language being one amongst others, that they are complex, interconnected, situated practices, and that they frequently co-occur or occur in series. Although some attention has been given to the topic of transmodal semiosis – the serial shifting across modes – opportunities remain for further theorisation and analysis and more comprehensive treatment of this complex topic, perhaps from other disciplines and perspectives. Transmodal semiosis implies mobility. It is predicated on semiotic movement, fluidity and 'recycling', to use a term from the epigraph to this chapter. Mobility and movement are features of life in the twenty-first century, though they regularly encounter forces of stasis and a desire to return to the past. Another meaning of 'mobility' – the upward mobility associated with moving up the social and economic ladder – is of relevance here since upward mobility today is facilitated by an individual's flexibility and range of representational and communicational repertoires.

This chapter assumes representational mobility to be a manifestation of the rapid movement and change that characterise globalised life in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – the rapid ‘flows’ of ideas, experiences, aspirations and economies that circulate through its different domains, circuits and ‘scapes’ (ideoscapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, ethnoscapes, financescapes), to use Appadurai’s formulation and categorisation (1996). Writing in 2000, Appadurai said:

It has now become something of a truism that we are functioning in a world fundamentally characterised by objects in motion. The objects include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques. This is a world of flows.

(Appadurai 2000: 5)

The concept of semiotic mobility resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s challenge to static, logocentric and narrow forms of thinking and meaning-making through their concept of the ‘rhizome’ (1988). Their delineation of the rhizome and of rhizomic growth is applicable to transmodal semiosis. As a subterranean stem that is different from a root or radical, a rhizome has no beginning and end and is a ‘multiplicity’ rather than a singularity. Deleuze and Guattari argue that it represents the more and more de-regulated flows of energy and matter, ideas and actions of the contemporary world, a world characterised by multiplicity, difference, unpredictability, indeterminacy, iterability, and lack of closure. For them, the rhizome is characterised by processes of becoming, change, flight or movement. Rather than conceive of the pieces of an assemblage as an organic whole, within which the specific elements are held in place by the organisation of a unity, the rhizomic process of becoming is able to account for relationships between the discrete elements of an assemblage, a point that will be exemplified in the examples of transmodal semiosis in this chapter.

The studies of semiotic shift across modes and media discussed in this chapter are located to a greater or lesser extent within the social semiotic framework of multimodality as developed by Kress and his associates (Jewitt 2009, 2014; Jewitt and Kress 2003; Kress 1997, 2003, 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; Pahl 2003, 2011; Stein 2003, 2008), sometimes in conjunction with other theories in order to more adequately deal with the range of questions that arise. Concepts of ‘synaesthesia’ and ‘transduction’ (Kress 1997, 2000, 2010; Kress *et al.* 2001) are central here. In his development of a theory of multimodality, Kress proposes that synaesthesia, “an entirely human characteristic”, is “the constant transition, translation and transduction between modes” (1997: 39) in the brain, and, on occasions, materialised in successive transitions from one mode of representation to another:

Transduction ... names the process of moving meaning-making from one mode to another – from *speech* to *image*, from *writing* to *film*. As each mode has its specific *materiality* – sound, movement, graphic ‘stuff’, stone – and has a different history of social uses, it also has different entities. *Speech*, for instance, has words, *image* does not. That process entails a ... re-articulation of meaning from the entities of one mode into the entities of the new mode.

(Kress 2010: 125, original emphasis)

Transduction is thus a kind of translation, as was pointed out in translation studies over fifty years ago. Jakobson identified three types of translation – intralingual (translation using signs in the same language); interlingual (using signs in another language); and intersemiotic or

transmutation (“an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems”) (2000 [1959]: 114). Goriée (2010) takes the view that intersemiotic translation applies to literature and art: it is the creation of a secondary, derivative reproduction of an original literary text, in another sign system or art form, for example, the transposition of *Wuthering Heights* into a film or *L’après-midi d’un faune* into music, ballet and graphic art. “The intersemiotic artist,” she says, “searches for the purity of the verbal and non-verbal signs and attempts to transpose them into modernity, translating them into different times and spaces” (p. 10).

These are the spaces of the ‘semiosphere’ in which semiosis takes place and in which different semiotic systems function, interact and produce meaning (Kull 1998; Lotman 1990, 2005; Monticelli 2012; Wu 2011). The semiosphere consists of open spaces in which the play of reflection, representation and re-representation constantly displaces and reconfigures the relationships between semiotic units and realia. The most fundamental mechanism of the semiosphere is translation, according to Lotman (1990). Each translation is the point of departure for new translations, since every translation is inadequate and partial. This is a useful way of conceptualising the plural, dynamic, indeterminate space in which transmodal semiosis operates. Lotman’s foundational assumption that thinking itself is an act of translation in an open, plural and heterogeneous semiosphere is significant in relation to acts of representation and literacy.

The concept of ‘the transmodal moment’ encapsulates the multiple translations and transformations that are involved in shifting across modes in a chain of semiosis (Newfield 2009, 2014). In my work, I ask two questions, ‘What is the transmodal moment, and what happens in it?’ I explore and operationalise the concept through different instances of transmodal redesigning, from two texts in sequence to a chain of multiple modalised texts. From these, claims are made concerning the nature and operations of the transmodal moment. One is that the transmodal moment is, semiotically speaking, a moment of radical change, during which the shift in mode impacts on other formal elements such as materiality, medium, genre, and site of display and hence reshapes meaning in dramatic ways. Another is that it is a Janus-like moment of cross-over and liminality, an in-between or intermezzo, “a moment of *un-becoming* and *re-becoming*” (Newfield 2009: 183, original emphasis), linking and separating past and present modes, texts, practices, contexts and meanings. And yet another that it is a moment of semiotic redesigning instantiated by agentive meaning-makers in a particular representational and historical context, who transform meaning and who themselves are transformed in the process. Finally, and most important in relation to literacy and education, the study concludes that the transmodal moment can be a powerful moment of learning. If the limits of imagination imposed by one mode are reached, shifting to another mode, which offers another potential, is a decidedly positive move, since it offers potential enrichment – cognitively, aesthetically and affectively.

Semiotic mobility: critical issues and topics

Literacy is now recognised to be both multiple and mobile. Semiotic multiplicity and mobility are everywhere apparent – in the multiple and shifting forms of representation of the public communications sphere, in the crossings between art forms in the arts and entertainment industries, in everyday representations of self, family and community which cross genres and media, and in literacy education where pedagogy takes cognisance of multiple intelligences and multimodality and moves across a range of forms of representation both in teaching and learning (Gardner 1983; Kress *et al.* 2005).

What are the implications of this for education? Should literacy classrooms become more open semiotic spaces, or do we want to preserve an emphasis on monomodal literacy? Does acknowledgement of semiotic mobility change the way teachers teach and learners learn? How,

and in what ways? Are notions of semiotic mobility in conflict with the development of traditional word-based literacy? What sort of literacy materials should be produced for classrooms? (See Janks *et al.* 2014 for a literacy workbook that assumes literacy to be semiotically diverse and mobile.)

Critical issues in research on literacy as semiotic mobility may be summarised through the simple questions of who, what, where, how and why? They concern the *producers* of semiotic mobility; the *context* in which semiotic mobility is to be found; how the *form of representation* changes and in what way this affects meaning and perspective; *why* semiotic mobility is a predominant feature of literacy today; and *how the research is designed*. In relation to research, one should note whether the scope and focus of the research is narrow or broad. Is the focus on a few individual texts in order to examine how meaning shifts as mode of literacy changes, or to examine the nature of modal translation? Or does the study comprehensively track a semiotic chain as it evolves over time – perhaps years, decades or even centuries? Researchers locate their research along a continuum that begins with a comparison of two differently modalised texts in sequence and ends with a potentially infinite chain of signifiers or texts. These extremes represent, in the first case, an in-depth focus on semiotic features, and, in the second, a more process-oriented, ethnographic approach. Both approaches may track representational shifts in relation to social life, power or learning, for example, but each approach has a different focus and goal and gives rise to different findings, as will be made clear in the methodological discussion that follows.

Research methods: four approaches to analysis

Studies of transmodal semiosis approach the issue of semiotic mobility in different ways, through semiotic movement itself (Iedema 2001; Pahl 2003, 2011) or through a focus on the signs or texts that are ‘fixed’ in a chain of semiosis, whose modal affordances and constraints are then analysed (Bezemer and Kress 2008; Kress 1997, 2005). Pahl and Rowsell (2006) have explored how these two approaches can speak to each other in order to achieve productive complementarities.

For the purposes of clarity, this chapter identifies and explains four approaches to the analysis of semiotic mobility and transmodal shift, although in practice they sometimes overlap rather than being tightly compartmentalised. Because the boundaries between them are to some extent porous rather than water-tight, the approaches sometimes co-occur in a single study. The approaches are:

- 1 Text- and/or mode-based analysis.
- 2 Analysis that tracks the semiotic chain as process.
- 3 Integrated analysis (analysis that integrates text-based analysis and analysis that tracks the semiotic chain).
- 4 Analysis of interaction.

This chapter uses a number of examples to illustrate these approaches from South African studies of transmodal shifts in pedagogic environments, amongst which are my own. It presents South Africa as a contemporary instance of a country which has undergone radical socio-political change in the direction of democracy, but which remains bifurcated in so many ways – a country of promise, natural resources and potentially productive diversity, but also one in which huge gaps continue to exist between privileged and disadvantaged in housing, health, economic well-being and education. The South African examples share an intention to

contribute to South Africa's ongoing emancipatory and democratic project by focusing on the relationship between forms of representation, learning and social justice (Newfield 2010), and by 'recognising' the semiotic resources of students in order to challenge singular, bureaucratic and prescriptive forms of knowledge and thinking (Archer and Newfield 2014).

Text- and/or mode-based analysis

This approach examines the *modes* in the transmodal sequence, as they occur in texts. It analyses them comparatively, relating them to one another primarily by difference rather than by similarity, using semiotic concepts such as mode, materiality, medium, genre, discourse, site of display and audience. In relation to meaning, it discusses the affordances and constraints for meaning-making of the modes used in the different texts, assuming that modes have different epistemological logics. The aim may be to illustrate how shifts in mode produce shifts in meaning, and, depending on the context, how learning and identity may be affected; or to illustrate how aspects of representation are differently constructed in different modes. The emphasis on mode (Kress 1997, 2003, 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001) over the past fifteen years has been influential in this approach.

Examples of children's experiences recounted as narrative and then displayed in images have illuminated the issue of modal affordances (Kress 2003: 153), as have studies of the representation of knowledge in textbooks across time (Bezemer and Kress 2008; Kress 2005). The comparison of an entry on an electrical circuit in a 1929 science textbook, an entry on a course in a 1992 prospectus of a teacher education institute and the homepage of the same institute in 2004 is used to argue that a 'revolution' in the landscape of communication has occurred, a shift in the dominant mode 'from the centrality of writing to the increasing significance of the image' and a shift in the medium of dissemination 'from the medium of the book to the medium of the screen' (Kress 2005: 6). A key point made by Bezemer and Kress is that the 'gains' and 'losses' for meaning-making and learning are associated with each shift in mode.

An exemplary early analysis of this kind concerns a child's mutating representation of cars (Kress 1997: 19–24). An eight-year-old boy draws a series of cars. The first – which is labelled 'power engin' [sic] – has a streamlined, dart-like shape, with red flames issuing from exhausts at the back and sparks and flames issuing from the wheels to indicate the great speed at which the car is travelling on the road. Later, another car is drawn, though in a simpler and more abstract way that depicts the car as an object of beauty. It is cut out of the paper on which it was drawn so that it becomes a concrete object. The third object in the car series is a three-dimensional, spacecraft-like vehicle made out of Lego pieces. What the study shows is that although the child's interest in speed and power remains throughout the sequence, the meaning of each representation shifts: the affordance of the Lego pieces differs from the pencil and paper of the previous two cars, particularly in relation to three-dimensionality and symmetry. However, what the cut-out car and the Lego craft share is a tactile quality; their weight and texture can be felt; they can be picked up and moved around and placed in new environments and imaginary worlds. The study reveals how materiality and mode shape the meaning of objects: when the representation comes off the page, it shifts the object from the world of contemplation to the world of action.

An emphasis on mode underlies 'How do I smile in writing?' (Stein 2008: 44–74), a case study of a child's storytelling in both oral and written modes. The study shows the flatness and lack of detail in Lungile's written version of the story by comparison with the fluency, liveliness and appeal of the oral narrative, which skilfully uses varieties of vernacular language and performance elements such as pitch, gaze, facial expression and body movement. It argues that Lungile's shift to the mode of written language 'involves a profound loss', attributed not only

to ‘what each mode has to offer’ but also to the way in which Lungile inhabits the different modes, which is an effect of her semiotic history. Oral narrative is a semiotic practice she has acquired in her home and community, one which she enjoys and engages in voluntarily, whereas writing is linked to her experience of school requirements.

A mode-based approach to academic literacies is evident in the work of Archer (2013), which explores comparatively how features of academic writing manifest themselves in other modes. The focus of her interest is the grammar of semiotic design. Archer’s study examines how aspects of ‘academic voice’ are modally realised or ‘transcoded’ in different ways in domains such as architecture. Degrees of certainty and uncertainty, realised in writing through terms such as ‘could’, ‘must’ and ‘may’, are realised in images through a range of visual features such as sketchiness, being in or out of focus, and colour. The convention of ‘citation’ in writing – realised through attributed quotations in inverted commas or indented paragraphs – becomes ‘mixing’ in music and ‘collage’ in the visual arts. In a similar vein, Huang’s study (2014) of manga comics – a popular Japanese genre that has been appropriated by Western readers – attempts to provide a metalanguage for the description of the bimodal techniques used in sequential visual narratives. Her analysis shows how mood, movement, point of view and narrative progression are differently realised in the visual and verbal components of the comic.

Transmodal assessment is a tricky issue in language, literacy and literature classrooms, where teacher education frequently does not include preparation for the assessment of transmodal responses to prior texts. For example, how does one assess a model of an island with a pig’s head on sticks, a broken conch shell, and a newspaper headline, ‘Rule of the mob’ as a portrayal of the theme of civilisation and barbarism in Golding’s (1954) *Lord of the Flies* in a language classroom? A number of studies explore the question of criteria in relation to such work, and conclude that different criteria may be necessary (Newfield *et al.* 2003; Reed 2008, 2014; Wyatt-Smith and Kimber 2009). At this stage, criteria such as semiotic resourcefulness, linkages across modes and risk-taking have been suggested, as well as tracking the participation of students in the stages of the transmodal process.

Tracking the semiotic chain

A second approach to analysing the semiotic chain involves tracking the *process and movement of transmodal semiosis*, how meaning-makers construct texts which lead into and out of one another for particular purposes (Iedema 2001, 2003; Leander and Rowe 2006; Masny 2013; Masny and Cole 2009; Pahl 1999, 2003). Here, researchers are more concerned with the development of the semiotic chain as part of an activity than with the analysis of individual texts. They foreground semiotic movement and mobility, process and practice. They are concerned with a stream of textual production unfolding through time and in a particular context. This approach is more ethnographic, less text-based than the aforementioned approach. It brings together meaning-makers and their goals, activities, contexts and texts, as well as the effects and consequences of the semiotic actions. This approach privileges sequences of texts and meaning-making trajectories rather than the semiotic properties of specific texts and modes. It examines the way texts are made in specific situations and then recontextualised, with particular consequences. It traces the flow of texts and events through lives, places and times, and the ways in which ensembles of texts, people and objects converge at particular junctures.

Iedema’s analyses of how meanings are made and then remade in organisations through processes of ‘resemiotisation’ (2001, 2003) demonstrate the power of certain semiotic forms over other semiotic forms in particular contexts. His tracking of the process undertaken by a health department in Australia to renovate a hospital shows how communities transpose and

reify their knowledges, practices and positioning. The process is tracked from its inception – when an architect-planner is hired – through his discussions with health officials, engineers, architects and future users of the building, to his official report, drawings and computer-generated designs and finally construction of the building. At the same time, actions of semiotic translation and mistranslation are made clear, with texts becoming ‘divorced from the social interaction that created them as they move through the system’ (Mehan, cited in Iedema 2001: 24) as they acquire the status of ‘fact’. Iedema shows how the method of tracking makes the logic of the planning process clear: “The planner’s resemiotisations from talk into print, and from print into design therefore marked near-irrevocable steps, semiotically and practically, embedding the project outcome in an increasingly durable and resistant materiality” (2001: 36). Resemiotisation is thus claimed to:

provide the analytical means for, (1) tracing how semiotics are translated from one into the other as social processes unfold, as well as for (2) asking why these semiotics (rather than others) are mobilised to do certain things at certain times.

(Iedema 2003: 29–30)

Using a semiotic ethnography which tracks a Xhosa woman’s quest to get her house repaired in a Cape shantytown, Kell’s study (2006) follows a power-related process of transmodal meaning-making as it is recontextualised across social groups, time and space. Her ethnographic tracing of Nomathamsanqa’s ‘sequential crossings’ – from speaking about her problem at community meetings where she repeatedly ended up in tears, to writing about it in a small exercise book which was read by many people in the community, often collectively, and finally to reading the story at a provincial meeting where it had a positive impact and led to her house being rebuilt – is a horizontal rather than a vertical analysis. Kell’s study shows clearly the changing responses to Nomathamsanqa’s complaint as it crosses modes and contexts: it shows “what happens in the space between them, the margins, as it were” (2006: 162). Linking form of discourse and social structure, Kell follows the transmodal trajectories of Nomathamsanqa’s quest, and their effects, as they move in and out of different concatenations of people, texts, contexts and objects.

Another South African study tracks the process of playing an oral storytelling game, Xoxisa, by young girls in a poorly performing school outside Johannesburg. It shows the way in which the girls recruit and use a range of different modal resources in a seemingly improvisatory way (Harrop-Allin 2014). It provides a thick description of how one young girl integrates graphic, spoken and performative modes in an improvisatory fashion to generate her story from a combination of personal experience and imagination. The study provokes serious consideration of how to utilise the energy and semiotic practices that children bring to classrooms:

The classroom desks are punctured with holes that break the soft wood. They have the ‘map’ of Xoxisa stories engraved on them – little blocks drawn next to each other, some containing pen puncture marks, and others without. The grid is carved into the desk. They are evidence of children’s stories imprinted into the school furniture: traces of the stories’ meanings, of children’s identities and lives, which inscribe their personal agency and power onto school materials. The grid patterns are visual traces of individual narratives expressed through performance, movement and rhythm, leaving the imprint of the people and places featured in the story. They are a child’s mark pronouncing, ‘I was here, this is what I said and this is how I said it’.

(Harrop-Allin 2014: 19)

The study also provokes consideration of the aesthetic and cultural resources children bring to the classroom and suggests that South African township children's artistic practices should be recognised not only for the insights they offer about child development and informal learning, but as creative practices that could be recruited in formal learning.

Yet another case study is set at the interface of mobile youth messaging culture on mobile phones and literacy education (Walton 2014). This study documents the participation of the teenage research subjects in a project designed to promote reading and writing, and analyses their literacy journey on the custom-designed mobile website with social network features in relation to a serialised m-novel (mobile novel). It tracks the participation of the research subjects in the project, showing their playful movement across modes, messaging discourse, orthography and images in the paradoxical ways of contemporary social media – simultaneously anonymous and intimate.

Integrating text- and/or mode-based analysis with tracking the semiotic chain

The third approach is the combination of mode- or text-based analysis with an analysis that tracks the semiotic chain. Both approaches are considered important and are built into an overarching analysis. The texts are seen as moments of 'fixing' or 'punctuations' in the transmodal semiotic chain (Kress 1997, 2003: 44–45; MODE 2012; Stein 2003: 123–135), and are analysed carefully in terms of some or all of the following: mode, materiality, medium, discourse, genre, site of display, and audience. One semiotic text is compared to another to uncover transformations of meaning. However, in addition, the transmodal chain or sequence of texts across a common core of meaning is tracked as a continuum, showing how semiotic resources and texts morph, develop and lead into others in an ongoing trajectory of meaning-making. The emphasis here is on semiosis as an ongoing rather than end-stopped process, on representation as potentially unlimited rather than finite, and on the process of meaning-making as a semiotically changing and unpredictable flow. This approach is especially useful in studies across a period of time when a number of texts are produced in a sequence. It takes the texts, meaning-makers and contexts into account in the tracking of the trajectory and is applied to studies of semiotic mobility in a range of domains – learning environments both formal and informal, organisations, the marketplace and domains of entertainment.

The integrated transmodal approach is concerned both with the epistemological logics of the multiple modes in which young children represent the world and the way the children shift effortlessly across differently modalised signs and texts:

This world is fully, entirely connected; a sign in one medium produces another sign in the same or in another medium, which produces a sign in the same or another medium, and so on. All are tightly integrated. ... The cognitive disposition which is produced is one that sees the connections of all parts of the semiotic world; realises that for different tasks different modes may be better; encourages ready, unproblematic translation/transition from one medium to another; and so on.

(Kress 1997: 142)

Integrations of the comparative mode- or text-based approach with that of tracking the sequence are exemplified in the studies of Newfield (2009, 2010, 2014), Newfield and Maungedzo (2006), Salaam (2014), Stein (2008) and Weiss (2014).

Salaam (2014) plots the transmodal learning process of students who are studying jewellery design, moving through the phases of the process – from the prompt of the teacher, to designs

and concepts in the environment which inspire the design, to a series of drawings of the design, to the making of the item of jewellery in metal and possibly stones – the final stage. She tracks the shifting roles of mode, materiality and meaning in the transformative process of designing and redesigning. Weiss (2014), a medical educator, researches the relationship of doctors and other healthcare professionals to patients. She seeks to enable her students to translate and transmodalise their medical knowledge – which is detailed and technical – into knowledge that is accessible to their patients, many of whom are illiterate, to improve compliance to recommended treatment. Her students are asked to prepare leaflets or other explanatory forms that take into account the needs, culture and educational background of the patients.

Stein's well-known analysis of the astonishing doll-like characters made by disadvantaged children in a foundation-level literacy classroom (Stein 2008: 98–120, 2003: 123–137) serves as a helpful example of the tracking of transmodal semiotic chains through 'an ethnographic-style method' which can provide analysts with an understanding of the communicative practices of children, both in and out of school (Stein 2008: 99). The aim of the Olifantsvlei project was to develop a body of imaginative 'fresh stories' based on the children's lives and experiences through building on and extending the children's semiotic resources. Stein tracks the multiple semiotic objects they produced as representations of characters in their environment: 2D drawings, writing, 3D figures, spoken dialogues and multimodal play performances, conceptualising each object as a 'point of fixing in the chain of semiosis' (2008: 98) and tracking the shifting meanings across the chain. She also provides a detailed examination of the materiality, design and construction of the doll-like figures the children produced. Her analysis is supplemented by interview data with the children through which she gains insight into their processes of making and comes to understand how the children took agency, drew on the semiotic and cultural practices of the home – in particular traditional fertility dolls of the Southern African region – and extended their creativity and literacy.

One of my own studies argues that the activity of mode-shifting, as well as the affordances and constraints of the selected mode itself, led to a new and important literary interpretation in a South African classroom. I claim that representing Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as an African masked performance enabled a group of preservice English teachers in Johannesburg to arrive at an innovative, postcolonial interpretation of the play while simultaneously enabling them to critically re-evaluate their roles as citizens in an illegitimately governed apartheid state (Newfield 2009, 2010). Using larger-than-life symbolic masks to represent the main characters, the indigenised dramatisation of *The Tempest* encapsulates a postcolonial interpretation of the play that profoundly challenges the conventional reading of the play in the mid-1980s – that of a battle between the forces of civilisation (Prospero and his kin) and barbarism (Caliban). Alonso wears a huge mask portraying P.W. Botha, president of apartheid South Africa at the time, Prospero a mask of a colonial explorer-usurper who subjects the native inhabitants of the island to his rule while he does 'some good', and Caliban is portrayed through two different masks: as a beautiful, antelope-like, magical creature before Prospero's arrival and as an oppressed black miner after his encounter with Prospero. The masked performance simultaneously re-presents the play's meaning as well as the students' identities and values in relation to South Africa's present and future. The *Thebuwa* study (Newfield and Maungedzo 2006; Newfield 2009, 2014), based on a three-year poetry project in a second-language English classroom in Soweto, tracks the transmodal chain of semiosis which culminated in the publication of the first poetry anthology by township youth to come out of South Africa (Newfield and Maungedzo 2006). This study tracks the text-making activity of a class of grade 10 students through its phases of reading poems and writing stories about them in English, researching and reciting of praise poems in their home languages, embroidering maps of 'the new South Africa' on to panels of

cloth, performing and writing of contemporary poems in English, and assembling these as a large multi-panelled cloth. The study combines a semiotic analysis of differently modalised texts with an attempt to trace the lines of semiotic movement and cognitive expansion. It argues that the texts represent different facets of the students' lives and identities: the maps represent their recently achieved national identity in newly liberated South Africa; the praise poems clan identity; and the contemporary poems represent their identity as young township dwellers of the early twenty-first century. Although the study tracks the lines of semiotic activity that led to the publication of the anthology to some extent, a thorough account may have been hampered by the study's emphasis on a mode-based analysis. A thick description of the nomadic movement and rhizomic development of the students' semiotic activity still needs to be given. This indicates a point of tension between mode-based and process-oriented approaches.

Analysis of interaction

A socio-cultural approach to multimodal interaction traces in micro-detail the interaction of people engaged in communication through multimodal semiotic processes of, for example, talk, writing, mobile phones, Facebook and other social media in order to show the complexities of human interaction. Studies trace which communicative modes or signifying systems are foregrounded, and how they interact with other systems when people interact and engage in a specific activity. Norris's approach (2004) is premised on an equality of value amongst communicative modes, both 'embodied modes' such as gesture, gaze and posture and 'disembodied modes' such as music, print or layout, and the fact that both types have to be taken into account in analyses of interaction, as well as the ideas, feelings and actions of people participating in interactions. She shows how units of interaction are made up of a multiplicity of 'chained' actions, for example, the chains of gazes and gestures ('lower-level actions') of three friends constitute the 'higher-level action' of their meeting: "Higher level actions develop from a sum of fluidly performed chains of lower-level actions, so that the higher-level actions are also fluid and develop in real-time" (2004: 13–15). Norris's focus is on the way in which chains of actions combine and are orchestrated in short units of interaction, which she studies through repeated video viewings, rather than in the shifts themselves over longer periods of time.

In "The policy-praxis nexus in English classrooms in Delhi, Johannesburg and London: teachers and the textual cycle" (Bhattacharya *et al.* 2007), the complex interaction between representational modes, policy, teacher's practices, texts and activities is examined through three case studies. The settings are grade 9 English classrooms in three cities in different countries with different but interrelated histories of colonialism. Investigating the interaction of these contributing elements, the scope of the analysis is much broader than that in Norris's analyses of micro-moments of communication; however, this analysis is similarly based upon fine-grained, in-depth observation of video recordings of multimodal interaction and communication in the three classrooms. The construction of the school subject 'English' is examined here through "the textual cycle" – that is, which texts enter the classroom and what is done with them, how teachers teach with them and how learners respond to them. The textual cycle is found to be constituted by and to result from a complex interaction of policy, history, teacher's aims and the modes used in teaching and learning. In Delhi, the text around which English lessons are structured is a textbook which students work through systematically with their teacher, answering the questions on comprehension, vocabulary and spelling either orally or in writing, whereas in Johannesburg the students study a local teenage novel through a series of multimodal activities which constantly relate the novel to life in South Africa. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is the prescribed text in the London classroom, where it is being prepared for an

examination. A transmodal pedagogic approach is taken, with students making posters, answering worksheets, enacting the first scene, watching a film of *Macbeth*, and writing an essay about how they would stage the first scene in such a way as to engage a modern audience and prepare them for the rest of the play. Through this comparative analysis, the study shows how 'school English' as a subject is produced differently in the three sites.

Implications for pedagogic and research practice

Understanding different ways of looking at transmodal chains is useful for teachers, students and researchers, since each way privileges different aspects of meaning-making and backgrounds others: comparing and contrasting the meanings and representational forms of differently modalised texts in sequence foregrounds the role of mode in the shaping and reshaping of meaning in individual texts; tracking the cross-semiotic chain foregrounds the ongoing mobility and generativity of semiosis and literacy, the transmodal processes of thinking and meaning-making in the semiosphere; examining both texts and semiotic mobility foregrounds both the role of mode in meaning-construction and its mobile nature; foregrounding interaction between modes in acts of communication or between various elements in a particular space shows the complex range of factors that enter into moments of meaning-making and representation. Being aware of the different foci of each approach has implications for teachers setting up transmodal task instructions and criteria for assessment, for students engaging in these activities, and for researchers examining them.

Conclusion and future directions

This chapter has provided a brief account of mobility as a social and semiotic phenomenon in the twenty-first century which manifests itself in the work of writers and artists in different disciplinary domains, as well as in the transmodal semiotic work of students in classrooms. My intention in the chapter has been twofold: to bring together disparate strands from a range of international studies and let them rub up against the practices of South African students and researchers in order to shed light on the phenomenon of semiotic mobility, which should be acknowledged and addressed in literacy education today. Future directions include the application and development of pedagogies, curricula and research studies based on literacy as semiotic mobility, as well as, importantly, critique and development of the approaches delineated here. Further theorisation of the ubiquitous, fascinating, complex and under-researched phenomenon of semiotic mobility is desirable.

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Related topics

The complexity, multiplicity and fluidity of meaning-making, Transduction and transmodal shift, Multimodality, Learning, Artifactual literacies.

Further reading

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REMAKING MEANING ACROSS MODES IN LITERACY STUDIES

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Introduction

This chapter is concerned with shifting information across means of representation. That which has been given in one or more communicational ‘channels’ – now commonly termed ‘modes’ (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001) – is reconfigured with the resources of another or others. An entirely ordinary and commonplace process, it is something that happens more frequently than might at first be envisaged. Image can be a basis for crafting objects or environments, such as constructing a space rocket out of junk from a comic illustration, making an item of dress from a fashion design or planting out a flowerbed from a sketch. Playing orchestral music is realizing a score instrumentally. Facial expression and action might be appropriated in acting out a song, and gesture in giving directions from a map. The priority in this chapter is instances where lettered representation is in some way involved. Producing a written account of an event (e.g. a report of a football match), spoken interaction (e.g. a transcript of a radio broadcast), a procedure (e.g. instructions on how to conduct a medical operation) or an image (e.g. a gallery guide) entails transitions from what has been seen, heard or done to the page of the page-like screen. By no means disregarded in the policy and practice of the literacy education, everyday instances that go on as a matter of course are individually named and sometimes extensively specified in curricula. In reading aloud, for example, writing is articulated orally, with much attention in the early years on the relationships between letters and phonemes, as well as the role of punctuation and layout in vocal cadence. Unsurprisingly, attention in the classroom is on the quality, accuracy and effectiveness of the outcome rather than the process of how one thing is remade as another. The very ordinariness, even transparency, of ‘transmodal remaking’ masks its complexities. Yet, the mundane turns out to be remarkable.

A brief historical overview drawing on the relatively limited pool of what has been published on this topic in literacy or literacy-related studies is organized for the most part chronologically: a Peircian semiotic approach precedes a social semiotic perspective, with the final paragraph adopting a strongly social slant. Focusing on individual authors in turn provides opportunities to sift out similarities and variations in naming the concept, distinctive theoretical themes, particular research areas and noteworthy implications. A section on critical issues picks out a selection of key social and semiotic factors. Dramatizing aspects of a shared picturebook story in the early years literacy classroom is an example of remaking across modes, because there is a

shift from read-aloud writing and image to action, with implications for how children's unsolicited movement is received and understood. Specification of some methodological considerations in investigating transmodal remaking is succeeded by implications for practice and suggestions for the research agenda.

Historical perspectives

Shifting materials across modes requires an inclusive theory that can accommodate all represented or communicated entities irrespective of what they are and what they become: print on a page, a painting on a canvas, an animated movie on the screen, speech, enactment, or whatever else. The concept has its basis in semiotics, which maintains the fundamental principle that all representation or communication shares the common ground of sign. In his study of the spoken sounds of Indo-European languages, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure proposed that a sign is a 'double entity' comprising a 'signifier' and a 'signified' (Saussure 1966: 65) – respectively a 'sound-image' and a 'concept' (p. 66). Contemporaneously, the American academic Charles Sanders Peirce, who did not restrict semiotics to linguistic communication only, defined sign as a triad where the third component, the 'interpretant', is the sense made in interpretation (Chandler 2007: 29–35). Social semiotics shifts the agency of interpreting and 'designing' texts to sign makers: signifiers are resources for making meaning (Kress 2003). Tools may be used in sign production (e.g. pen on paper, a guitar or a computer) or may not (e.g. utterance, facial expression or gesture) and the resulting text might be graphic (e.g. a written document or a drawing), digital (e.g. a film or a website), three-dimensional (e.g. architecture or a sculpture) or embodied (e.g. the physicality of whistling, looking or running). Remaking subject matter in a different mode is a purposeful, socially situated act that involves reconfiguring the form and meaning of the 'source' as a refashioned version in accordance with what is deemed apt.

Concern regarding "scant theoretical or research bases" for the use of 'nonverbal media' in English education aligned with the 'syntactics' area of semiotics led to the concept of 'transmediation' (Suhor 1984: 249), defined as "translation of content from one sign system into another" (p. 250), where 'medium' or 'sign system' includes possibilities such as language, gesture, pictures and music (p. 251–252). Some options for expressing materials 'transmedially' are more fit for purpose than others, although 'language', in this pioneering educational research into the phenomenon, is considered to be quintessentially fundamental and paramount, and frequently a component of communications that often occur in more than one 'medium' at a time (p. 252). In studying Steinbeck's novella *Of Mice and Men* in an American literature classroom, 'translation' into a charcoal sketch, collage, song and mime variously introduced or excluded certain details (e.g. an image can include representation of clothing, facial expression, proximity, and so on, which may be omitted from writing), thereby "stretch(ing) the receptive and productive capacities of the students in different ways" (p. 254). This work challenged contemporary theorization of and empirical research into the pedagogy of literary studies.

Peirce's notion of the 'interpretant' recognizes that "meaning always involves interpretation and all signs are connected to other signs" (Siegel 1995: 459). This is important for 'transmediation' – "the act of translating meanings from one sign system to another" (p. 463) – because inventing a link that does not already exist (ibid) "always involves an enlargement and expansion of meaning, not a simple substitution of one thing for another" (p. 456), and hence has "generative power" (p. 455). A conclusion arising from studies of how reading can support mathematical learning conducted in a high school and an elementary school in the United States of America is that 'transmediation' can contribute to an enquiry rather than a transmission pedagogic model where learners "see themselves as knowledge makers who find and frame problems worth pursuit,

negotiate interpretations, forge new connections, and represent meanings in new ways” (ibid.) which can enhance reflective, critical and creative thinking (p. 473).

The notion of ‘transmediation’, defined as “the process of translating meaning from one or several signs systems to another” (Semali 2002: 11), is predicated on the premise that people are “sign-manipulator(s)” (p. 7) who constantly handle and modify semiotic materials. ‘Intertextuality’, where ‘text’ is not limited to writing alone, entails “making connections with past texts in order to construct meaning of new texts” which might involve, for example, art, dance or a graph (p. 5). Through their ‘transmedial experience’, teachers and students are able “to engage in multiple ways of mediating knowing between sign systems” (ibid.). With a view to valuing different signs systems (p. 6) and promoting ‘active’ learning, the aim of this edited volume of research studies into ‘transmediation’ in the classroom is to investigate how students “negotiate interpretations” (p. 4), leading to “alternative perspective(s)” and “more complex thinking” (p. 7).

From a social semiotic perspective, ‘transduction’ refers to “transitions from one mode of representation to another” (Kress 1997: 29). The terminology shifts from ‘transmediation’ because medium is defined as a means of dissemination, whereas a mode is a socially and culturally shaped set of resources for making meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001). For example, writing and sketching are activities involving different modes, but they can share the media of pencil on paper. Whereas, physiologically, synaesthesia is a neurological phenomenon where stimulation of one sense is involuntarily perceived by another (e.g. numbers are experienced as colours), its social semiotic ‘analogue’, ‘transduction’, is an agentive, creative act of making meaning (Kress 2003: 36). Described as a kind of ‘translation’ (Kress 1997: 109), shifting ‘semiotic material’ across modes (Kress 2003: 36) demands reconfiguration according to their specific ‘affordances’ (p. 47), a term that refers to the potentials and limitations of modes that have been shaped historically, socially and culturally (e.g. writing is words in sequence whilst image is spatially configured). In a London secondary school, remaking scientific information about blood taught through image, writing, a three-dimensional model, speech and gesture as a diary, a thriller, a fairy tale and a concept map entailed “epistemological commitment” to what writing and genre enable (pp. 47–57). ‘Transduction’ is not without effect for the individual, never mind the ‘transducted’ text, because it involves imaginative, cognitive and affective action (Kress 1997: 29).

The metaphor ‘transmodal moment’ denotes a relatively fixed instantiation of a “transmodal translation” in a “chain of semiosis” (Newfield 2014: 103). Individual interest results in “multiple intersections, appropriations and improvisations, or new and different entanglements” “across and between different ideas, meanings and experiences” (p. 111), leading to “different perspectives on a topic” (p. 104). Masters students in Soweto, who were hesitant, even reluctant, to engage with the literary canon of the curriculum, became enthused by opportunities to express themselves in ways beyond writing (Newfield 2009). Making masks valued, and permitted them to draw on, their cultural and racial heritage. Wearing these masks to perform Shakespearean extracts, the students made the playscript relevant to their concerns by introducing contemporary African political figures and critique that would otherwise be precarious in the classroom context (ibid). Shifts of identity are a discernible consequence of the ‘transmodal moment’ (Newfield 2014: 109–110).

‘Remaking across modes’ or ‘transmodal remaking’ refers strictly to refashioning an entity that has already been given with the resources of a different means of expression (Mavers 2011: 105–123). Predicated on something that has already been communicated, sustaining constancy of meaning may be planned, but this is not as straightforward as it might appear. Some things can be done with ease, whilst others are more challenging and certain aspects may not be

possible at all. In creating a stop-frame animation, six-year-olds in an inner city school in England choreographed the ‘look for’ they had previously written in a storyboard as meandering towards the sought item (p. 121). What was done was not replication. The explicitness of the verb was lost (snaking might be a consequence of being sick), whilst adjustments of directionality suggested uncertainty (how they went about the search) and further information was added (side by side positioning of two characters suggests the collegiality of a shared enterprise) (ibid.). Being ‘cross’, on the other hand, was omitted from the animation because, although it can be readily drawn as down-turned mouths and angled eyebrows, the facial expressions of the small-world figures were fixed and absence of jointing at the knee precluded foot-stamping (p. 122). Remaking across modes is by no means effortless, nor is it trivial, but involves analysing the source, resolving on what is feasible, selecting signifiers from possible alternatives and reconfiguring that which is given with a combination of other-modal resources, always with a view to what is apposite to purpose and the social frame.

The term ‘resemiotization’ has been coined to refer to “more than translation of one kind of meaning into another” (Iedema 2003: 46) because it also concerns shifts between contexts and practices (p. 41). In seeking to redress a balance that favours “an objective-analytical intent” (p. 48), the focus is the dynamics of “how, why, and which meanings become recontextualized” (p. 40) as socially, culturally and historically located semiotic constructs (p. 50). A child’s misbehaviour in the classroom led to a chain of “resemiotizing moves” (p. 42) including reports, minutes of meetings and letters which reconfigured the incident through distancing and the imposition of institutional power, concluding in a crucial educational decision (pp. 41–42). ‘Resemiotization’ is concerned with socially situated processes, social rules, social practices, social functions, socially constructed artefacts and social repercussions (pp. 40–50).

A proliferation of terminology for naming the phenomenon of shifts across modes is a consequence of distinctions in how it is defined, which concepts are included in its theorization and particular academic interests. Differences of perspective and emphasis also lead to discrepancies in precisely what is investigated empirically: tighter and looser definitions frame what counts. At one end of the spectrum, a given communicated entity is deliberately remade with the resources of a different mode. At the other end of the scale, a concept is expressed in a diversity of ways, with, on occasion, slippage to multimodality as against transmodality. ‘Imaginative transmediation’, exemplified as writing a critical film review or free writing in response to a piece of music, would generally be more highly valued than ‘literal transmediation’ exemplified as constructing a raft like that described in Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* or miming the action of a narrative poem (Suhor 1984: 250). Granted that this distinction recognizes the difference between integration of the process into another (it might be argued ‘higher level’) activity and remaking across modes per se, the question arises as to whether creativity is the exclusive property of the former, whilst the latter is merely pedestrian and unimaginative.

Critical issues and topics

The semiotics of remaking across modes involves dealing with form and meaning. Nouns, verbs and adjectives are ingredients of what, in part, writing is, but they do not exist in pictures; substance and colour are essential components of graphic marks, but they are not constituents of gesture; the sounds of speech and articulation are entirely absent from gaze. Where resources are unavailable, decisions are reached regarding what is to be done. For example, movement is a key characteristic of embodied action that does not exist in still image, and so must be remade by other means such as ‘speed lines’ or splayed limbs. On the other hand, certain resources are

shared across modes. Sequentiality and pace, for instance, are ingredients of both speech and gesture. This mutuality offers the option of maintaining their presence in remaking meaning between them. Choice from alternative signifying possibilities has implications for meaning. As form is altered “a semiotic is hard-pressed to provide an unproblematic, transparent and ‘direct’ translation for meanings made in another semiotic” (Iedema 2003: 47). It is not that one mode is better than another, or that what can be done is necessarily modally unique, but that the semiotic potentials of signifiers enable particular aspects of subject matter to be communicated with varying degrees of ease or difficulty, and may even be prohibitive. Resignifying opportunities arise in picking out what is deemed criterial, omitting what is considered superfluous, modifying what can be made more apt, elaborating on features and adding fresh information. That which is given may be remade wholly, in part or not at all; what was specified might be left open, and what was left open might be specified. As a consequence, changes are introduced. Concomitant with a shift in how something is communicated comes the possibility, even likelihood, of variations in what is communicated.

Processes of transmodal remaking involve managing multiple semiotic features. Interpretation includes recognition and analysis of semiotic ingredients and how they are brought together as a coherent assemblage in the source. Refashioning as a ‘transmodalized’ version demands attention to the most minute detail in selecting and combining resources from the pool of those available in the ‘destination’ mode. Having written “The holy spirit looked like wind and a little fire” in her recount of the story of Pentecost, Megan (aged seven years) co-deployed this union of metaphors as overlaid peach, orange and yellow loops (Mavers 2011: 110). Her drawing is not ‘just scribble’. In substituting the signifiers of writing for the signifiers of drawing, she both maintained and aptly altered meaning. The comparator ‘looked like’ is implicit in the swirling lines that capture the invisible movement of air and the colours that suggest flames (ibid.). Naming the Holy Spirit and tense are lost in the image. The adjective ‘little’ is embedded in a smaller size comparative to her adjacent drawings of people, whilst it encompasses wind as well as fire. Choosing wax crayon as the substance for representing the Holy Spirit in preference to the coloured pencils used elsewhere for shading affords the visual impact of glossy iridescence as well as smooth, tacky tactility, additions beyond the given words that apportion salience and suggest otherness (pp. 109–111). A complex sign originally expressed in words was remade as a complex sign where line, colour and substance were combined in an astonishingly concise and effective redesign of this abstract theological idea (p. 111). As a written synthesis became a drawn synthesis, plurality of signification became a different plurality of signification.

Remaking across modes is not characterized by inevitability; there is not just one way of doing it. Despite provisions made available historically, culturally and socially, it is not the case that an existing solution to transmodal remaking is automatically slotted in. The process is always agentive and may be more or less innovative. Different solutions are possible according to purpose and what is considered best suited to the task in hand. What is done is always framed by the practices of the social environment in which the remaking takes place and is shaped towards the ‘audience’ for whom the redesign is intended. When the social milieu remains constant, as when children draw a picture to accompany a piece of writing in the classroom, understanding the practices of that environment is key to analysis. Remaking across social contexts introduces possibilities for adjustments because of shifts in practices, relations of power, priorities and expectations. Understanding contextualization is essential to interpreting how the remade text is configured.

Remaking across modes is not necessarily a single, one-way procedure of prompt to response. A sequential order is a preliminary prerequisite in that it is not possible to remake something

until the source has been interpreted. In the complexity of deciding how to proceed with the redesign, the process may be characterized by reciprocity. Contemplating options might transform ideas in such a way as to induce re-examination of the source text, and feasibility in the act of production might impel amendments to the transmodalized version. In sharpening engagement with the given entity and how it is to be made appropriate to purpose, such semiotic effort can provide fresh insights – Siegel’s (1995) ‘generativity’ – and thereby has the potential to deepen knowledge and understanding.

An example from research

Children in the earliest phase of schooling are frequently assembled for the purpose of listening to stories. These literacy ‘events’ are highly regularized (Heath 1983). Deeply rooted pedagogical principles and practices frame in not insignificant ways who can and cannot talk, when and about what. When scope for speaking is constrained, other means for expressing what is deemed urgent must be selected. Moving around, like talking out of turn, is variously tolerated. Sometimes, actions or gestures are allowed, invited or encouraged. Conversely, bodily compliance is regulated (e.g. exhortations to ‘sit up’ and ‘look this way’) because of potential to disrupt the flow of the story or the immediate line of enquiry, as well as distracting others. As movement slips beyond the limits of what is acceptable, it can be taken to indicate restlessness, lack of interest or diverted attention, and is renamed (e.g. ‘fidgeting’, ‘not paying attention’ or ‘being silly’). Silence, stillness, orientation towards and gaze at her teacher typified what Amira did over much of the ten minutes thirty-six seconds during which a picturebook story was shared with a Reception class (four- and five-year-olds), suggesting concentration on the pedagogic focus. But this was not invariably the case. For around one-third of the ‘reading’, she looked away, wriggled, waggled her hands, jiggled her legs and occasionally vocalized. Amira was not being disruptive or naughty – and she was not remonstrated for her behaviour. She was just seemingly distracted. If an assumption of inattentiveness is suspended, how do children express their understanding in ways beyond speech?

As part of a research project into use of digital technologies in the literacy classroom, over three successive mornings I video recorded the sharing of the picturebook story *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* (1989) retold by Michael Rosen and illustrated by Helen Oxenbury. In this inner-city school, the children spoke a variety of languages and brought different cultural backgrounds and experiences to the classroom. The data used in this chapter are extracted from the first day, when the teacher read the book to her class and showed the colour pictures on the class screen using a visualizer (a digital display technology). *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* narrates the story of negotiating environmental hazards encountered on the journey, meeting a bear, being chased home and forgetting to shut the door, prior to ultimate safety. Structurally, the sequence of the picturebook is patterned. Based on an American summer camp song, a refrain occurring six times is succeeded by thrice-occurring, mostly onomatopoeic assonance or alliteration describing the obstacle or how it is surmounted, with an associated whole-page, full-colour picture opposite. Following the encounter with the bear at the climax, each snag along with how it is negotiated recurs in reverse order, resulting in a breathless conclusion.

Having summarized the video footage (approximately 2,500 words for this initial whole-class session) and having undertaken analysis of the book, what the teacher did and the responses of various individuals, I was already deeply immersed in the event before I focused on Amira. I had not studied her engagement before, partly because she was close to the periphery of the shot and also because I had assumed stretches of disinterest from her averted gaze and bodily movement. The surprise of the analysis reminded me again never to discount

the significance of what children do. Following detailed multimodal transcription of how Amira responded to her teacher's reading, I used colour coding to differentiate between the modes of gaze, bodily movement, gesture, facial expression and speech, and introduced shading as a means of sub-categorization (e.g. the direction of gaze). Having extracted each mode, I matched the sounds and movements made by Amira to the book (e.g. what she did in response to each line of the refrain and 'verse') and studied them in relation to what the teacher said and did. Her movements over the course of the story were numerous and varied: she rubbed her nose, played with her hair, adjusted her headband, stretched, put her hands between her knees, folded her arms, crossed her legs, and so on. Certain repeated actions could be interpreted on the basis of regularized ways of signifying. Instances of putting her hand to her mouth were associated with anticipation (e.g. for a page to be displayed), suspense (e.g. the chase home), delight (after screaming at the terrifying climax) and uncertainty or unwillingness regarding how to answer (e.g. on request for a descriptive adjective). Elsewhere, what Amira did was similarly by no means random, but dramatized aspects of the picturebook story.

During the major part of the refrain, which was not once displayed, perhaps due to the amount of writing as well as black and white rather than coloured pictures, Amira rarely or never looked at the class screen or her teacher in front of it. Accompanied by what was seemingly fidgeting, an immediate conclusion might be that she was not paying attention. Closer examination of the footage reveals otherwise. At one point, quite independently, she raised her curled fingers in front of her eyes to create cylindrical shapes. Was this just 'messaging about'? Actually, her enactment coincided precisely with the moment when her teacher read aloud 'beautiful day' in the exclamation 'What a beautiful day!'. But how can the words and the action be at all related? The forms are quite different, but their meanings are linked. Since dramatizing a 'day' or what is 'beautiful' is tricky, this is a reasonable remaking presumably intended to simulate viewing (perhaps through binoculars). Later on, Amira flicked her fingers upwards on the 'over' of 'We can't go over it', dropped then raised her chin on the 'under' of 'We can't go under it' and projected forwards joined flat palms simultaneously with the 'through' of 'We've got to go through it!'. These movements were not restive nor were they arbitrary. As actional redesigns of the given prepositions, they demonstrate understanding of their directionality. Picking up on key words, Amira introduced ideas associated with but beyond those given in the book or by her teacher.

At the climax of the story, Amira remade suspense actionally. With the picture of the final locational hazard displayed on the screen, and having established that the characters are scared, Joshua predicted that a bear would be encountered, followed by a sharp gasp from the teacher. In a flurry of action, smiling, Amira clapped her hands twice in front of her face and once in her lap before covering her mouth. In response to the stealth of the thrice-repeated, whispered 'Tiptoe!' she put both hands to her mouth. As her teacher read aloud 'What's that?' Amira looked at her in silence (the screen was blank), quite still, apart from clasping her hands and flexing her clenched fingers (Table 18.1). She did not join in with the majority of the class as they followed the teacher when she indicated her nose, ears and eyes in identifying features of the frightening character yet to be met (Table 18.1). Rather, she flexed, flipped, unclasped and clasped her interwoven fingers in her lap, then wedged her hands between her knees before jerking back suddenly (Table 18.1). In the silence as the teacher turned the final page, smiling, Amira abruptly covered her face with her hands then gradually unfurled her fingers, prior to exhaling heavily on the 'not' of 'We're not going on a bear hunt again'. Her actions were not signs of restlessness. Where suspense was built in the story through a combination of writing

Table 18.1 Amira’s response at the climax of the story (*italics* = teacher; roman = Amira)

	<i>Reading aloud</i>	<i>Gaze</i>	<i>Action</i>
8:46	<i>what’s that?</i>	teacher	clasps her hands
8:49		"	flexes her clenched fingers <i>as the page is turned</i>
8:53	<i>one shiny wet nose</i>	"	<i>points to her nose</i> flips over her palms with her fingers interwoven
8:56	<i>two big furry ears</i>	"	<i>waggles her earlobes</i> unclasps then clasps her interwoven fingers
8:59	<i>two big goggly eyes</i>	"	<i>points to her eyes</i> puts her hands between her knees, then jolts her body back

and image, and in reading aloud with vocal expression and gesturing, Amira remade the tension of anxious uncertainty and nervous apprehension, as well as the relief of final resolution, through bodily action.

What is astonishing is that instances of what appear at first to be fidgeting or lack of attention turn out to be astute and perceptive redesigns of aspects of the story. Taken as “acting out” rather than “acting up” (Pearson 2010), what children do actionally in response to a shared picturebook story can be viewed with a different lens. In the absence of scope for talk, or perhaps because she considered alternative means better suited to purpose, unsolicited, Amira redesigned selected features of the shared story in a range of ways. Remaking across modes of communication entails complex semiotic processes. Selections are made about where enactment is feasible: some pictures and words or phrases are eminently well suited to acting out, whilst others may not be straightforward or even possible at all. In choosing which parts of the body to move, how to move them and how to combine them, responsibility is taken for deciding on which forms of expression are appropriate to the immediate need. In this process of interpretation, redesign and production, children construct meanings akin, but not identical, to those that are provided, with potential for expressing aspects of knowledge and understanding that are not otherwise given, and hence for developing ideas. Transmodal remaking involves analysis and judgements regarding what is apt, as well as imagination and resourcefulness.

Injunctions to stop what is seemingly wriggling, pulling faces or daydreaming are appeals to pay attention and not to be disruptive. Suppressing the view that unsolicited embodied responses are necessarily perverse or puerile, a modally open approach can support diversity of participation, initiative and inventiveness. I do not at all want to suggest that teachers are not sensitive to children being children and fully appreciate that containing over-exuberance is important in maintaining a productive learning environment. The extent to which averted gaze, gesturing, moving around, facial expressions and vocalization can be allowed in the dynamism of classroom activities is a careful pedagogic balance. Youngsters can get high-spirited and, as others follow, ‘interruptions’ present potential for upsetting carefully prepared educational opportunities. At the same time, over-restraint can squeeze out rich opportunities for learning. Unsolicited response in unexpected ways is not necessarily an indicator of waywardness. Nurturing by letting be in accepting, even if not responding to, such participation can give space for engagement, and perhaps the pleasingly unanticipated.

Main research methods

Remaking is relational. What is done is contingent on something that already exists as a represented entity. But how can a direct link between a source and what is presumed to be a modal reversioning be established with any confidence? Without suggesting that meaning can be definitively pinned down, a demonstrable relationship between signification and resignification can be persuasive, even compelling. It would be widely accepted that simultaneously tapping the toes in response to the read-aloud verb 'Tiptoe!' was not haphazard, but a dramatized remaking of the verb, because this is a commonly acknowledged signifying regularity. Furthermore, immediacy is a clue to relationality in that a source is referred to just in advance of remaking. Less clear-cut instances that are temporally or spatially disconnected might be plainly evident, as handling the misdemeanour cited by Iedema (2003) above, or may require more careful justification. Picking out examples of remaking across modes demands care and justification.

Examining processes of remaking across modes necessitates video because many things go on simultaneously and in quick succession, and what is important may not become clear until afterwards. Prior decisions include how many camcorders to use and if the filming is to be fixed or roving, as well as whether additional microphones are necessary. Close-ups of the act of production – be it inscribing a graphic mark, gesturing or fashioning a three-dimensional object – can be indispensable for examining the detail of processes of transmodal remaking, as can observation of the whole body, never mind interactions with and amongst co-present others. This poses a quandary in deciding on the length and angle of shot. Whilst the detail of alternative viewpoints can provide invaluable information, multiple recording devices can be intrusive and inhibiting, and large quantities of material can be daunting. With a view to precision, numerous replays of video footage in 'real' time, at speed, in slow motion, frame by frame and without sound (the latter being beneficial when focusing on a noiseless mode such as gaze, or to observe mouthing when the audio is indecipherable), as well as listening to the sound only can support immersion into the detail of pivotal moments. Transcription is not without challenge. Re-presenting video materials as writing or image, in a tabular format, a comic sequence or a vignette, has implications for which aspects of action and interaction are included and foregrounded (Bezemer and Mavers 2011).

Comparison between a source and its transmodal redesign involves examination of visual, audible and tactile data both discretely and in relation to each other. All represented and communicated entities consist of identifiable and describable physical or material signifiers. Isolating these signifiers and how they are interrelated is challenging enough in a single mode. Drawings, for example, include the configuration, length, substance, colour, weight and quantity of lines, as well as the size, directionality, spacing and position of image components; gesture incorporates the shape, reach, pace and direction of movements with the arms, wrists, hands and fingers. Peircian 'iconic' (Chandler 2007: 36–37) likeness might be sustained (e.g. joined, straightened index fingers in remaking the shape of a drawn apex roof), certain resources can be shared (e.g. spatiality in acting out and drawing, or sequence in speech and gesture) or entirely different forms may be selected. In view of the extent of these convolutions and with a view to keeping the focus tight, not everything that is analysed is likely to be incorporated in the argument as decisions are reached regarding what is criterial for the point being made.

Remaking across modes may be tacit. Amira's dramatization was not accompanied by any additional justification or explanation in what she said, so that the investigation relied on making connections between what was given and what she did in response. Credible analysis of

transmodal remaking rests on secure familiarity with its contextualization: being conversant with the habituated practices of the environment, as well as immersion in what went on previously, concurrently and later in the particular event. Certain clues to processes of remaking and meanings invested in the transmodalized version may be supplied in associated expressions or communications. Interactions with co-present others can shed light on what is meant, as can so-called 'egocentric speech' (apparently talking to oneself). Where the remaking is graphic, even apparently trivial happenings can be enlightening. For example, hesitation over selecting an inscriptional tool can indicate choice between alternatives, pausing at certain junctures can suggest uncertainty and facial expression can signal satisfaction or disapproval. Careful attention to detail is critical for fine-grained analysis.

Recommendations for practice

'Verbocentricism' (Fueyo 1991) is prevalent in educational policy, and deeply embedded in the everyday pedagogic interactions, learning tasks and assessment practices of the classroom. Without in any way contending the importance of being able to communicate through words, this prioritization implicitly marginalizes the capacities of other means of communication, which tend to be viewed as subsidiary to the 'real' work of the curriculum. Yet, remaking meaning across modes holds unexpected challenges and opens up certain opportunities for extending knowledge and enriching understanding. Drawing a picture to accompany a piece of writing is not mere illustration, dramatizing in response to a read-aloud story is not just babyish, and deciding not to look at the teacher is not necessarily lack of attention. "If writing communities agree that meaning is socially constructed, then the social context needs to honour the variety of constructions" (Fueyo 1991: 647). One challenge is putting remaking across modes on the educational agenda. Another is to keep it "from being dismissed as a frill or reduced to a technique" (Siegel 1995: 473).

For teachers, a moment-by-moment concern is what learning is going on. The associated question 'how do you know that?' frames where it is looked for. Language as writing and talk maintains a preferred, principal and dominant role in assessment. Yet "wherever semiotic work has been done, meaning has been made, whatever the modes in which that happened" and "it is the meaning made, not the meaning expected, which should be the focus of interest in assessment" (Kress 2010: 128). This raises the issue of how knowledge and understanding can be credited however they are demonstrated. It is not that gaze, gesture, action and facial expression pass by unnoticed by teachers, but they are not necessarily counted as legitimate evidence of learning and therefore afforded lesser weight in assessment. Given permission to recognize and value modes beyond speech, teachers would be empowered with extending opportunities for making judgements about what children do as well as what they say. However, this opens up a Pandora's box of associated issues. Much less is known about modes other than language as writing or speech, with implications for confidence in making sound appraisals and, at worst, hazards around 'reading off' meaning. Debate amongst professionals, policymakers and researchers could open up scope for pooling expertise. On the other hand, there are implications for heaping yet more methods of and criteria for assessment on already stretched teachers. Intricately detailed analysis is simply not feasible in everyday classroom practice. Accepting that teachers cannot possibly pick up on everything that students do in processes of learning, being pedagogically alert to responses beyond those that are linguistic and that might be diminutive and fleeting constitutes a basis for being open to the possibilities of knowledge and understanding being expressed in a variety of ways.

Future directions

Various named ‘transmediation’, ‘transduction’, ‘the transmodal moment’, ‘resemiotization’ and ‘remaking across modes’, desisting from terminological pinning down of the process has the benefit of leaving open scope for subtle and more radical variations of theorization. Conversely, the very fact that we have no commonly accepted, overarching and snappy term for naming this phenomenon bears the risk of it being disregarded as an issue insufficiently important to be consistently named. As, or if, the concept becomes increasingly popularized, how it is designated is likely to become more settled. Future contributions could critique, develop and extend semiotic approaches. Well-established intersections between literacy studies, media studies and multimodality (e.g. Burn 2009; Burnett *et al.* 2006; Lancaster 2007; Marsh 2005; Merchant *et al.* 2013; Pahl 2007; Rowsell 2013), as well as growing banks of research into multimodality in (critical) discourse analysis, socio-cultural theory, anthropology and other approaches (Jewitt 2014: 199–334), offer potential for developing understanding of the phenomenon in fresh and enlightening ways. Much is known about remaking across modes, and more is yet to be known.

Processes of ‘transduction’ happen “in the brain” and are therefore “beyond easy inspection” (Kress 1997: 39). How can that which is hidden and inaccessible become available for analysis? Observing processes of remaking and comparing the source with its redesigned version enable the analyst to identify signifying resources and to make reasoned hypotheses regarding meaning as it is contextualized socially. Asking people about what they remade, how and why is a different thing from examining what they did as a matter of course. This can be highly informative. Articulating deliberations, challenges and decisions can provide insights into remaking that are not otherwise accessible (e.g. options that were considered and discarded), as well as detail not obtainable in observation (e.g. related prior experiences). The difficulty is that internal processes are not only invisible to the researcher, but can happen over an infinitesimally short duration that barely register as conscious thought. What was entertained at the time might not be readily available for description and explanation afterwards, particularly for young children and those whose first language is not that of the interviewer. Another issue is that the remaker might feel obliged to give some sort of analytical answer irrespective of what happened in the moment. Further work into auspicious methods for getting at internal processes of redesign – including interviewing techniques, simultaneous accounts, commentaries on played-back footage, drawing or concept mapping – could be propitious.

There is enormous scope for empirical research into remaking across modes in literacy studies. It is not that it is something that has passed by unacknowledged. Indeed, much research has been invested in certain fields (e.g. drama, recording scientific experiments and inter-professional work). Making explicit instances of transmodal remaking offers potential for literacy specialists to build on understanding of everyday and less familiar practices in educational settings, including preschool, primary/elementary and secondary schools, vocational training and universities, never mind beyond in the workplace, community and home. Iedema’s (2003) investigation into ‘resemiotization’ holds potential for further study of shifts across social practices, as well as over more prolonged periods of time. Building on Newfield’s (2009) research in post-apartheid South African classrooms, there is scope for studying ‘transmodalizing’ in various cultures and across cultural variations. Extending and expanding research domains in investigations of remaking across modes promise fresh insights into and implications for literacy in such areas as learning, social practices, identity and culture in education, health, leisure, business, entertainment, the community and the home – and more besides.

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Related topics

Embodiment, Multimodality, Social semiotics.

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19

MULTIMODALITY AND SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHIES

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Introduction

The term ‘multimodal ethnography’ (Dicks *et al.* 2006, 2011) is subject to multiple interpretations, but broadly refers to work which employs both ethnographic perspectives or tools (Green and Bloome 1997) and a multimodal concept of communication. In this chapter I will outline the various ways in which different scholars have drawn on both an ethnographic approach to knowing and an understanding of the multimodal nature of meaning making in their work. Despite their different disciplinary origins, “attention to non-linguistic features” (Dicks *et al.* 2011: 230) is something which ethnography and multimodality share, and in the last ten years scholars have been drawing on both approaches to knowing in their work. Working across multimodality and ethnography brings epistemological challenges (Dicks *et al.* 2011; Flewitt 2011; Pink 2011), which I will consider. Reflecting on my own research with young children, which is ethnographic but also draws on multimodality, I will discuss how both sensory ethnographic perspectives and multimodal analysis are illuminating ways for me to think. Finally, I will reflect on the implications of epistemological issues raised for multimodal ethnography and make some recommendations for future directions.

Historical perspectives

Pahl and Rowsell (2006) were among the first to outline the intersections between multimodality and New Literacy Studies in their book *Travel Notes from the New Literacy Studies*. In the same year, Dicks *et al.* (2006) articulated the phrase ‘multimodal ethnography’ in their paper which examined ethnographic research on visitors to a science centre from a multimodal perspective.

The chapters in Pahl and Rowsell’s (2006) edited book present a range of ways in which literacy can be examined as both a social and a multimodal practice. However, not all of the chapters approach the examination of literacy as a social practice from an ethnographic perspective. One chapter which does this is Stein and Slonimsky’s (2006) ethnographic study of the multimodal literacy practices of three families in South Africa. The study draws on the concepts of ‘literacy events’ and ‘literacy practices’, from New Literacy Studies, and considers the multimodal make-up of the communicative practices which occur during these episodes.

Within the context of an ethnographic study of the science centre, Dicks *et al.* (2006, see also Dicks 2013) focused on how the multimodal nature of the visitor attraction produced specific kinds of semiotic messages, which in turn influenced the ways in which visitors behaved at the science centre. For example, the physical materiality of the objects in the exhibition conveyed, through their brightly coloured, glossy casing, that this was a fun and playful space (p. 85). Dicks *et al.* (2006) were also concerned with the constraints of the data records (such as photographs and fieldnotes) which, drawing on a much more limited range of modes, produce a limited representation of the field itself.

In contrast, Flewitt's (2005, 2006, 2011) work draws on both multimodality and ethnography to consider the multimodal meaning making of young children (in contrast to Dicks *et al.*'s interest in visitor interaction within a multimodal environment). In her ethnographic study of young children's communicative practices in a nursery, Flewitt (2005) drew on both ethnographic fieldnotes and fine-grained analysis of video footage, which focused on the communicative modes of the children, particularly body movement, gesture and gaze. This study identified a range of differing communicative styles within the preschool, depending on differing sorts of activities the adults and children were involved in, and on the communicative styles preferred by individual children.

Critical issues and topics

As Pahl and Rowsell (2006) point out, the commonality between social models of literacy and multimodality is that both fields are concerned with the social, cultural and individual reasons that certain communicative practices are employed by some within a community and interpreted in a certain way by others. Hence Pahl and Rowsell's suggestion that "it is time to merge a social practice account of literacy with a description of communicative systems" (2006: 1). In 2011, a special issue of *Qualitative Research* was published on multimodal ethnography (Dicks *et al.* 2011), bringing together many of the key scholars in this field, and opening up a debate about the epistemological fit between the two approaches. While there may be some dilemma about whether the emphasis should be on the social (ethnography) or the semiotic (multimodality), the authors of the special issue argue that for many research questions, it is necessary to study both meaning (multimodality) and social context (ethnography) (p. 229) and multimodal ethnography as an emerging field is well placed to do this.

Dicks *et al.*'s (2011) discussion highlights the epistemological tensions inherent in multimodal ethnographic studies. Chief among this critique is Pink's (2011) perspective that multimodality's use of the senses is grounded in a Westernised construct of five different sensory channels through which information is received from external sources (modes) into the brain. In contrast, anthropological understandings of the senses acknowledge the culturally constructed nature of sensory categories, and instead envisage sensory experience as something which originates within the body and is conceptualised and communicated to others through the language of 'the senses'. Related to the conceptualisation of sensory perception, Pink (2011) argues that developments within the practice of ethnography have implications for the use of ethnography with multimodality. Traditional forms of ethnography dealt with the observing and recording of 'naturalistic' behaviour, however in the last twenty years, a 'crisis' in anthropological practice, specifically the role of ethnography in an increasingly globalised world, has led to some major changes in the field (Agar 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Hammersley 2006; Spradley 1979). Ethnographic researchers have become much more reflective about their current and previous work, their positionality, and their production of knowledge about others (Agar 1996; Coffey 2000; Flinn *et al.* 1998; Lareau and Shultz 1996; Sanjek 1990; Wolf 1992). Pink (2011)

describes her own work, sensory ethnography, as learning with the aim to “*share or imaginatively empathize*” (p. 270, original emphasis) with the experiences of others. This kind of ethnography, Pink argues, deals with knowledge that cannot be understood through observation, and is therefore incompatible with multimodality.

While these epistemological issues are not easily dismissed, it is also true that fruitful research has been produced by academics who are working across these disciplines (as discussed below). Scholars have navigated the epistemological differences between multimodality and ethnography by either allowing one of these perspectives to take precedence, or by considering the relationship and positioning of the two perspectives to each other. This builds on Street *et al.*'s evocative description that “An ethnographic lens gives multimodal analysis a social map” (2009: 197). For example, in the 2011 special issue (Dicks *et al.* 2011), Kress (2011) describes himself as a social semiotician who sees ethnography as a “complementary enterprise”, and similarly Rowsell describes her time-compressed ethnography as “a lens for multimodal meaning making” (2011: 332). In contrast, Flewitt's study is primarily ethnographic, in which “micro moments of multimodal meaning making” (2011: 297) unfold within an ethnographic context.

Therefore, in this emerging field, there is still discussion to be had about the way(s) in which ethnography and multimodality fit together within research design and could be usefully employed in an epistemologically valid way. The purpose of such an enterprise is to understand literacy as a socially situated practice in a wider web of multimodal communicative and social practices.

Current contributions and research

Within the literature that falls within the definition of multimodal ethnography, there are a variety of ways that scholars have employed the approach. Table 19.1 summarises some of the key papers on multimodal ethnography, and provides a synthesis of the different ways in which the authors have brought multimodality and ethnography together in their studies.

As the analysis in Table 19.1 shows, researchers have made different interpretations of both multimodality and ethnography, and combined them in different ways. For example, in terms of understandings of multimodality, Dicks *et al.* (2006) relate the term to multi-media, Rowsell (2011) is interested in the sensory aspects of multimodal objects, and Kress (2011) and Flewitt (2011), following Kress' (2010) previous work, consider multimodal communication in terms of semiotic modes (writing, font, image layout and colour, and gaze, action, language/sounds respectively). In addition, there seems to be a range of influences informing the ethnographic aspects of research, including classic ethnography (Dicks *et al.* 2006), Geertz's thick description (Flewitt 2011), Sarah Pink's (2009) sensory ethnography (Rowsell 2011), and Green and Bloome's (1997) concept of time-compressed ethnography (Rowsell 2011).

All four studies outlined in Table 19.1 involved collecting visual data alongside descriptive data in order to try to explore social context and meaning making. In the methodological discussions within these papers, the process of combining multimodality and ethnography is considered both in terms of what knowledge is generated, that is, how multimodality and ethnography can be employed to better understand the meaning making of people in a social context, and in terms of method, that is, the implications of capturing experience and making data records across visual and written modes.

As the previous section highlighted, working across multimodality and ethnography raises questions about whether ethnographers' purpose is to observe and record, or whether ethnography is a process of sharing and coproducing experiences. Multimodality, as a way of thinking about communication, can be applied to a consideration of places, people, literacy practices or data collection. The review in Table 19.1 begins to trace the variety of responses to

Table 19.1 Analysis of key papers within the field of multimodal ethnography

<i>Author and study</i>	<i>Multimodality</i>	<i>Ethnography</i>	<i>The way in which multimodality and ethnography are used together</i>
Dicks <i>et al.</i> 2006 Study of the kinds of scientific knowledge that are produced in a science centre	Interest in the different media in a science centre, and how they work together to convey certain semiotic messages	Ethnographic study carried out at a site which encompasses a great deal of multiple media	Use of digital media to create data records from ethnographic fieldwork. A consideration of how digital records allow us to understand semiotic communication – the focus is on the semiotic messages of the site itself, rather than the visitors
Flewitt 2011 Study of the digital practices of children in a nursery	Video data which is then transcribed and analysed multimodally	One-year ethnographic study in a nursery setting	Bringing together of different data records (descriptive accounts, video). The multimodal video transcription reveals the detail and complexity of the interactions
Kress 2011 Analysis of road signs which indicate the way into supermarkets	The car park signs communicate through a number of modes	Our understanding of the meaning of the signs would be made more secure by an ethnographic study of the customers	Emphasis on the importance of drawing on different methodologies in different ways, depending on the research question
Roswell 2011 Study of students' personal artefacts and how they communicate about them	Videotaped interviews capture a focus on how personal objects are experienced sensorially	Time-compressed ethnographic. Also drawing on Pink's (2009) sensory ethnography	An ethnographic study which centres on the sensory experience of the objects. Focus is on the semiotic communication of the objects as experienced by the students and the researcher

these questions. In order to unpick and examine the processes that may be involved in bringing or fitting together ethnography and multimodality, I will now turn to an example from my own research, in order to consider these issues in practice.

During 2011 I carried out a one-year ethnographic study of two-year-old children visiting a museum with their parents. As well as a participant observer, I was also a participant mother in the research, making the visits with my own two-year-old daughter. The experience of visiting a museum with a group of two-year-old children involved much running down corridors, around galleries, jumping on exhibits and benches, chasing lights in the floor and dancing to the music that the children heard. As a parent and ethnographer in this experience, I too ran, climbed and lifted children around this museum space. The findings emerging from my own study were concerned with the children's movement through the museum, and led me directly to my explorations of both sensory ethnography and multimodality.

As I have argued elsewhere (Hackett 2014) the children's experience of the museum was constituted by their paths of movement through the museum (Ingold 2007, 2008). The knowledge they generated was sensory and emplaced rather than cognitive (Pink 2009). I found that Pink's (2009) approach to ethnography as "an embodied and multisensorial way of knowing" (p. 35) fitted best with my own experiences in the field, and as my ethnography developed, I drew on a more explicitly sensory ethnographic approach to both doing fieldwork and analysis. In addition, I was interested in children's perspectives of the museum. My participants said little in the museum, but were deeply engaged in exploring the space, and communicated about the space particularly with their peers. This non-verbal communication, mainly through gesture, gaze and movement, led me to an understanding of communication as multimodal. Kress (1997) and Flewitt (2005, 2006) illustrate the voice and competence of children which can be expressed through non-verbal communicative modes. I (and the other parents) used a Flip video camera to capture the children's meaning making in the museum, and multimodal transcription to explore and analyse it. Therefore "being with" and "imaginatively empathizing" (Pink 2011: 270) with the children, and fine-grained multimodal analysis of the action (e.g. Flewitt *et al.* 2009) added to my understanding of what was happening in the field, and my appreciation of the sophisticated complexity of the children's meaning making in the museum.

The vignette (see box) describes an episode which took place during an early visit to Park Museum, one of the two museums in my study. It involved two children, Bryan and Millie, who were both two years old, their mothers and me. It was captured in my fieldnotes, from which the vignette is drawn, and recorded on a Flip video camera by Bryan's mother, from which Figure 19.1 is taken.

Following the episode described in the vignette (see box), the children began to predictably return to the art gallery during each museum visit to dance to the same music. In total, the children did this on four subsequent museum visits, and all six children participating in the research took part in both pressing the button to start the music and dancing to the music during this time. My interest in dancing in the art gallery emerged from my ethnographic research. I noted the repetition of the practice, and the predictability with which the children began to go to the same place (the art gallery) to do the same thing (press the button and dance). By being in the field and part of the experience, I also became aware of the significance of these episodes to the visits overall. I was not just observing the lived experience of the children, but sharing and participating in the creation of these moments. Watching the video of the dancing is very evocative, bringing me back to the experience of watching the children dance around the art gallery, by evoking the sensations and emotions involved (Pink 2009).

As I moved between the literature and the field (Heath and Street 2008), looking for meaning in the experiences I was having with the children and their parents in the museum, I was driven by a desire to highlight the competence of the young children, and reveal their voices. Flewitt (2005) argues that an over-focus on verbal communication can detract from the multiple non-verbal ways in which children communicate, and she asks the question "Is every child's voice heard?" (p. 207). Therefore, my interest in multimodal transcription was driven by a desire to understand more about the children's non-verbal voices, which I felt would help my aim to "*imaginatively empathize*" (Pink 2011: 270) with the children.

Both Millie and Bryan had their own embodied response to the music which they heard filling the gallery space. Millie danced with floaty arms which appeared quite balletic, while walking in wavy-shaped lines and circles across the floor, whereas Bryan created postures on the floor with legs up in the air, evocative of breakdancing. He ran in a circle, jumped up and spun in the air, and bent over so his hands were on the floor and legs in the air. Fine-grained multimodal transcription (Flewitt *et al.* 2009) identified the nuances of the communication and

Vignette: Bryan and Millie dance in the art gallery

The art gallery at Park Museum is a large bright airy space, with walls lined with various paintings of different topics and styles. Comfortable padded benches run down the middle of the room. Beneath two of the paintings, there are buttons which play music when pressed. The music they play is inspired by the painting they are positioned under, and fills the gallery for several minutes.

Music starts: Tina (Millie's mum) has pressed the button under the picture of The Butler, and French accordion music begins to play. Millie immediately runs into the middle of the room and begins to dance, spinning around, waving her arms in the air, big smile, running in circles. Bryan enters the room with his mum, and joins in the dancing – jumping up and down and doing moves that look like breakdancing on the floor. When the music stops, Millie runs and presses the button so the music starts again. They both dance. As the music comes to an end for the second time, Millie stands near the button, waiting for it to stop so she can press it and start the music.



Figure 19.1 Bryan and Millie dance in the art gallery (photograph reproduced with permission).

collaboration which took place between Millie and Bryan during this episode. I transcribed the whole video on a second-by-second basis, using the following categories for multimodal communication: vocalisation; expression and gaze; gesture and body movement; moving through space (Table 19.2). This transcription highlighted the dancing as an intensely communicative act between Millie and Bryan; each child reflected the other's use of space and choice of movements, and, through gaze and gesture, encouraged the other to continue dancing.

When Bryan enters the art gallery, his gaze goes immediately to Millie, and he begins to dance because he perceives her already dancing, and the music playing. As illustrated in Table 19.2, the children did not dance with each other, or right next to each other, but they made contact with each other at key moments; for example, at 10:16, Bryan ran past Millie, arms held high in front like Superman, while keeping eye contact with Millie as he passes. Although each child had their own range of dance movements, there is a point at 10:30 when the two children 'swap' dance moves; Bryan floated his arms into the air and Millie spun and jumped.

The children's meaning making in the museum during this ethnographic study was mostly non-verbal. Therefore, adopting a multimodal understanding of the nature of communication revealed and emphasised the children as "competent and practised makers of signs" (Kress 1997: 10), which is important for a group of participants (young children) who are frequently rendered 'mute' by traditional research methods. The act of creating the multimodal transcription enabled me to trace the nuances of the communication and experimentation which took place between Bryan and Millie. The specifics about how the children made the dancing a social act is not something I would have been able to talk about from a sensory ethnographic perspective. These are examples of what Flewitt calls "micro moments of multimodal meaning making" (2011: 297).

Therefore, the same episode (dancing in the art gallery) can be viewed through two different lenses; within sensory ethnography the visits to the museum were "the production of meaning in participation with them through a shared activity in a shared place" (Pink 2011: 271). From a multimodal perspective, the children were "experienced makers of signs in any medium that is to hand" (Kress 1997: 8). In this example, one of the key mediums that came to hand were the children's emplaced bodies, which they swayed, twisted, stretched and launched into the air in order to make meaning in the art gallery. The need, first, to recognise the competence of the children by developing research methods which resonated and were relevant to them (Christensen and James 2008) and, second, to understand the detail of how the children's non-verbal communication worked, are the reasons for employing multimodality in this specific way within this ethnographic study.

Pink (2011) has critiqued multimodal ethnography by arguing that a modern ethnography, which is about coproduction of experiences with others, cannot be understood by observation alone. Elsewhere, Pink (2009) has also cautioned against processes of data analysis which increase separation between the researcher and their "embodied knowing" (p. 120) of the field. However, for many ethnographers, this sense of disconnect from the field may not be avoidable or necessarily undesirable. Clifford (1990) describes the act of turning away from the field to write the fieldnotes, a sedentary activity which changes a researcher from a participant observer to a reflector. Moving from my running around the museum as a participant observer with young children during the day, I would sit in stillness with my computer at night when my daughter was in bed, writing fieldnotes and doing multimodal transcription. Later in my analysis, I found the fieldnotes and transcriptions I had created assisting me in "a process of re-insertion through memory and imagination work" (Pink 2009: 120). Therefore, I would argue there is a moving back and forth between participation and reflection, similar to what Heath and Street have described as "a constant comparative perspective" (2008: 33).

Recommendations for practice

Flewitt (2011: 308) writes about the sense of moving from the micro to the macro when combining multimodality with ethnography, and highlights the risk that "cultural complexity is over-simplified in the search for semiotic solutions". Kress (2011), however, argues that it is important to bring different methods and approaches together not as permanent unions, but as temporary connections to answer specific research questions. Mason (2011) has recently proposed a facet approach to methodology, in which, like the facets of a diamond, "different lines of enquiry" lead to "different ways of seeing" and "flashes of insight" (p. 75). Multimodal ethnography, as I have experienced it, fits well with this perspective of embracing partial new

Table 19.2 Extract from the multimodal transcription of Bryan and Millie's dance

Time	Bryan		Millie	
	Vocalisation	Expression and gaze	Gesture and body movement	Moving through space
10:12			Hands on hips	Walks towards Millie
10:13			Reaches out arms towards the bench	Changing direction, walks to the bench
10:14		Turns to look at Millie	Jumps, with arms leaning on the bench	
10:15			Arms swinging very high in front of him	Walks away from the bench
10:16			Right arm remains in the air, like Superman	Runs towards the side of the room
10:17			Right arm remains in the air, like Superman	Continues to run to side of room
10:18			Right arm remains in the air, like Superman	Continues to run to side of room
10:19	The music stops		Arms reach up to touch an exhibit	Stands at the exhibit at the side of the room
10:21			Arms reach high to turn a series of coloured wheels on the exhibit	Stands still next to interactive
10:22		Turns head to see where Millie is running	Continues to spin the wheels	Remains still
10:23		Looking intensely at Millie		Steps away from the interactive towards Millie

Moving through space

Gesture and body movement

Expression and gaze

Millie

Arms float up into the air

Continues to walk away from Bryan

Arms outstretched, making circles in the air

Arms float into the air next to each other

Turns slowly back towards Bryan

Hands at each side of her face, next to her cheeks

Running her hands down the sides of her face and neck

Arms in front of her, hands in a begging position

Walls straight ahead, as Bryan passes her

Hands out in front as if making an offering

Continues to walk towards the camera

Turns and walks away from the camera towards the button

Runs very fast across the room towards the button

Arms float up into the air

Arms outstretched, making circles in the air

Arms float into the air next to each other

Hands at each side of her face, next to her cheeks

Running her hands down the sides of her face and neck

Arms in front of her, hands in a begging position

Walls straight ahead, as Bryan passes her

Hands out in front as if making an offering

Continues to walk towards the camera

Turns and walks away from the camera towards the button

Runs very fast across the room towards the button

Walks towards Millie

Changing direction, walks to the bench

Walks away from the bench

Runs towards the side of the room

Continues to run to side of room

Continues to run to side of room

Stands at the exhibit at the side of the room

Stands still next to interactive

Remains still

Steps away from the interactive towards Millie

Reaches out arms towards the bench

Jumps, with arms leaning on the bench

Arms swinging very high in front of him

Right arm remains in the air, like Superman

Right arm remains in the air, like Superman

Right arm remains in the air, like Superman

Arms reach up to touch an exhibit

Arms reach high to turn a series of coloured wheels on the exhibit

Continues to spin the wheels

Looking intensely at Millie

Turns to look at Millie

Turns head to see where Millie is running

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

Looking intensely at Millie

10:24		Runs towards Millie	Reaches up to press the button, which starts the music	Steps backwards
10:25	The music starts	Runs towards Millie	Looking at the button	
10:26	Tina: he he Clare: she's putting the music on again Clare: clever girl	Reaches out arm	Walks very close to the button, to see what Millie has been touching	Turns and walks away from the button
10:27		Stares up at the button	Passing Millie, Bryan walks very close to the button	Walks slowly into the middle of the room
10:28		Stares at button	Steps backwards	Spins 180 degrees, with arms outstretched
10:29			Turns to face Millie	Stands with wide legs, facing Bryan
10:30		Looking directly at Millie	Arms floating outwards away from his body	Jumps and spins energetically almost 360 degrees
10:31			Runs in a circle on the spot with little steps	Walks towards the camera, away from Bryan, swaying
10:32		During each circle, glances up at Millie as his line of vision passes her	Continues to run in a circle on the spot – makes three complete circles, and is still continuing to make circles as the camera pans away	Continues to walk forwards
10:34			Brings arms in front of her in offering position	Arms stretched out in front of her
10:36			Arms stretched out in front of her	Walks in a circle

ways of seeing (“casting light” as Mason terms this) which trouble established understandings, and create “flashes of insight”, rather than comprehensive knowledge. While I would agree with Flewitt’s (2011) concern, in Mason’s (2011) discussion of facet methodology as an approach which is prepared to cross epistemological boundaries, she suggests that the required rigour in the methodology comes from the question of “how best to carve the facets so that they catch the light in the best possible way” (Mason 2011: 75). This need for a deep sense of awareness and reflection on *how* and *why* multimodality is brought together with ethnography chimes with Kress’ (2011) perspective.

The question of *which* research questions are best suited to multimodal ethnography is still emerging from the field, and here I indicate a number of suggestions. First, as Flewitt (2005) argues, multimodality is vital for recognising the (non-verbal) voices of children in research, and this was the source of Kress’ argument that “in learning to read and write, children come as thoroughly experienced makers of meaning, as experienced makers of signs in any medium that is to hand” (Kress 1997: 8). Similarly, ethnographies of the literacy practices of young children have recognised children’s competence and the identity-making processes behind their communicative practices which may run counter to adult or school discourses (e.g. Kendrick 2005; Pahl 2002; Wohlwend 2009). Therefore, this is an area of interest that both disciplines share, and in which it seems particularly productive to combine multimodality and ethnography in order to understand *how* and *why* children communicate, with an emphasis on both non-verbal and verbal communicative practices enacted in a social context.

Second, multimodality and sensory ethnography are both well placed to consider space as an essential component of human experience. As Pink (2009) points out, embodied experience is always situated or entangled (Ingold 2008) in the environment in which it occurs. In addition, multimodality enables a focus on the messages and meaning taken from spaces (e.g. Dicks *et al.* 2006) and objects in spaces (e.g. Rowsell 2011). Epistemological debates about the interpretation of sensory perception (e.g. Pink 2011) are grounded in the anthropological debate about whether the emphasis should be on cultural models of sensory production (e.g. Howes 2003) or on the specificity of individual experience (e.g. Ingold 2000; Pink 2009). However, drawing on Mason (2011) “playing with epistemologies” in this way may be productive in contributing to emerging thinking not only on how literacy practices are dependent on place (e.g. Nichols *et al.* 2011) but on how space is constructed through interaction (e.g. Leander and Sheehy 2004).

Future directions

Ethnography is a diverse methodology, which finds its roots in British Social Anthropology and the experiences of Malinowski who, stranded on the Trobriand Islands became immersed in the local culture. However, following the ‘crisis’ in anthropology I described earlier (Agar 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992) ethnographic researchers have reflected on the processes whereby they produce knowledge about others. From this point of view, recognising the expertise of participants (Lassiter 2005) and recognising fieldwork as emotional identity work (Coffey 2000) which leads to coproduction of experience (Pink 2009), are very much the focus of current ethnography. Multimodality and ethnographies of literacy practices have for a number of years been concerned with multiplicity (of communicative mode, of meaning making, of literacies) and particularly with the non-linguistic aspects of how people communicate. As methodological work continues to develop at the intersection between multimodality and ethnography, ethnographic reflection on the coproduction of field experiences and knowledge about others described above must be combined with an

“epistemological astuteness” (Mason 2011: 82) around the fit, affordances and theoretical assumptions that ethnography and multimodality inherit from anthropology and semiotics respectively.

Mason (2011) argues that “creative engagement across epistemologies” bringing them into “critical contrast” (p. 82) is a benefit of a facet approach to methodology, and I would argue this is the root of the debate about multimodal ethnography. Two contrasting approaches, with different origins, different ways of conceptualising the senses, and in some senses, different epistemologies, multimodality and sensory ethnography could be viewed as two competing and complementary lenses through which to view communicative practices. Moving from the micro to the macro, turning away from the field (Clifford 1990) before “re-insertion through imagination and memory work” (Pink 2009: 120), challenges and demands a critical engagement with both approaches.

This chapter has considered some of the challenges and rewards for scholars who are interested in “merging a social practice account of literacy with a description of communicative systems” (Pahl and Rowsell 2006: 1). In doing so, I hope to have drawn the reader’s attention and critical consideration to multimodal ethnography as an emerging field of study. By thoughtfully, consciously and astutely navigating between and around epistemological fit (Mason 2011), multimodal ethnography creates an opportunity for scholars to refine understandings of literacy as a practice which is both socially constituted (Heath 1983) and a component of wider communicative practices (Kress 1997). As Heydon and Rowsell (Chapter 30, this volume) point out, understandings of literacy must embrace the connections between affect, embodiment and communicative practices. Developing ethnographic practices which lead to an empathetic sharing (Pink 2011) of literacy moments between researchers and participants, combined with a reflective, fine-grained analytic perspective of how those moments were constituted through communicative modes (Flewitt 2005) offers two different facets (Mason 2011) through which new understandings about the nature of communication and literacy could emerge.

Related topics

“The New Literacy Studies” (Chapter 2, Gee), “Socio-spatial approaches to literacy studies” (Chapter 6, Mills and Comber), “Ecological approaches” (Chapter 7, Nichols), “Multimodal social semiotics” (Chapter 16, Domingo, Jewitt and Kress), “Phenomenology and literacy studies” (Chapter 30, Heydon and Rowsell).

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CULTURAL AFFORDANCES OF VISUAL MODE TEXTS IN AND OF JAPANESE LANDSCAPES AND YOUNG CHILDREN'S EMERGING COMPREHENSION OF SEMIOTIC TEXTS

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Introduction

This chapter describes three interlinking studies conducted in Japan (Yamada-Rice 2011a, 2011b, 2014) and brings together some of the findings in order to consider the role of environments and culture in young children's emerging comprehension of semiotic texts. The first two studies considered the relationships between Japanese visual mode texts and landscapes. Specifically, the first project looked at texts that were *in* landscapes and the second was a study of visual mode texts *of* landscapes. Texts *in* and *of* landscapes is an important distinction that will be explored in this chapter because the two emphasise knowledge of the Japanese visual mode in different but interlinking ways. Data of visual texts *in* landscapes were collected from a project that used *Google Street View* to compare texts utilising the visual mode *in* urban landscapes of Tokyo and London. In contrast visual texts *of* landscapes were recorded from televised images of the immediate aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Both sets of data show how the visual mode has cultural affordances that derive from the Japanese context and challenge some of the universality with which the mode has been considered within theory to date (see e.g. Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). The ultimate aim of this chapter is to question how knowledge of young children's emerging understanding of communication practices changes when cultural affordances are foregrounded in thinking about emerging multimodal (the combination of more than one mode, such as sound, gesture, writing and image) communication practices. Thus the final study discussed in this chapter extends previous environmental print research (Goodman 1986; Hannon and Nutbrown 1997) that considered the link between writing in environments and young children's emerging literacy practices. The study was a nine-month investigation into how seven young children (aged three to six

years) living in and around Tokyo made sense of visual mode texts. Child-comprehension was considered in relation to the situated nature of visual texts within physical environments and the role of this in young children's engagement with them. This chapter brings some of the findings of the above-mentioned three studies together in order to consider the role of environments and culture in young children's emerging comprehension of semiotic texts. In particular, discussion focuses on two key points; first, that visual-mode texts use cultural affordances. Second, that when young children interact with and interpret these they do so in relation to their cultural upbringing and the physical environment. These key points relate to multimodal social semiotic theory (Hodge and Kress 1988), which construes that all communication practices are interlinked with social and cultural practices. Social semiotic theory is outlined in the next section that considers the historical perspectives within which this chapter is positioned. Next social semiotic multimodal theory is described in relation to Japanese communication practices within a section entitled 'Critical issues and topics', after which the three interlinking projects are described under the broader heading of 'Contributions to research'.

Historical perspectives

Historical Western perspectives on the role of the visual mode in communication practices has been framed by theories and policies that largely came about with the need to understand literacy. As will be shown in the next section, this is a very specific type of English literacy that makes use of phonetic letters to transcribe sound. Thus until this point the connection between young children's learning of communication practices and the environment has been focused on in relation to print. However, academics such as Kress (2003) have shown how societal changes to the ways in which we communicate, particularly with digital technologies, has altered the relationship between modes. Specifically the visual mode takes on greater affordance. Multimodal theorists (see those contained within Jewitt 2009, for example) have considered these changes in relation to shifts in the ways in which multiple modes are combined in communication practices. By focusing on more than one mode, multimodal theory seemingly questions what it means to be literate and communicate in contemporary times, by illustrating how all messages are always constructed in more than one mode. The next section, on critical issues, further considers how historical perspectives on what it means to be literate and which modes are valued are historically and culturally bound and thus not universal.

Critical issues and topics

Social changes have also brought about advances in digital technologies, which have shifted emphasis on the way in which communication practices are understood, with widening academic interest in studying the combination of modes. Therefore, it is not surprising that multimodal theory has become popular in educational research as a means for understanding, for example, children's literacy practices, play and drawing (see e.g. Jewitt 2009). However, in connection to thinking about modes of communicating in broader cultural contexts, multimodal theory needs to be understood differently from the historical context described in the last section. In other words, the need to consider the cultural roots and thus assumptions attached to multimodal theory is now a critical issue in need of attention.

Multimodal social semiotic theory derives from Halliday's *Language as Social Semiotic* (1978). Halliday showed how language practices are inevitably tied to deep-rooted social and cultural systems, formed by unique histories. Although Halliday's work focused on language as spoken and written, nonetheless, his theory has also been related to specific modes of communication. Kress

and Van Leeuwen adapted his work to the visual mode in their book *Reading Images* (2006) and outlined visual codes and conventions relating to general use of the mode. However, this chapter will problematise this to some degree in relation to an assumed shared history of language as either spoken or written with the visual mode acting as an auxiliary. In particular, the research described in this chapter emerges from a Japanese context where written language is not entirely a transcription of speech but has historically been aligned more strongly to the visual mode.

In the West, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001: 1) state there has been a historic division between the written and visual modes created by the “centuries-long dominance of the written mode”. However, Kress and Van Leeuwen are referring to written English, which is a phonetic representation of speech. Japanese language also has a phonetic writing system; in fact it has three. These are known as Hiragana [ひらがな], Katakana [カタカナ] and Romaji which uses English letters. However, unlike English, the two Japanese phonetic scripts are unavoidably centred on visual affordances. This is because they are used simultaneously with pictorial characters called Kanji [漢字]. Kanji can be pictographs, which relate to ‘pictures’ of physical objects; ideographs, which combine pictographs to create a related idea; or phono-ideographs, which use a phonological aspect and an ideogram combined (Rowley 1992). As a result individual Kanji can be joined to convey a phonetic meaning, but they also centre on a visual representation of either an object or an idea. This allows Kanji to be visually understood even when the words cannot be pronounced (Miyoshi 1974). As a result “the phonological representation is neither the only, nor primary function” (Shelton and Okayama 2006: 158). This is made possible by specific visual components combined within a module-shaped space to form each individual Kanji. Further, Kanji are the essential component to written Japanese. Not only are they a necessary component for structuring writing but their pivotal logics relating to the visual mode have also influenced both native phonetic scripts – Hiragana and Katakana.

It is possible to understand the deep-rooted visual logics of written Japanese further by considering how the modular shape and visual affordances of Kanji relate to multi-directionality. When writing in Kanji the author can place the characters either horizontally right to left, left to right or vertically, starting either top left or right. This is different from the unidirectional, horizontal left to right sequence of written English. In this way Kanji uses space differently from written English. Indeed, space, which is a logic of the visual mode, is highly valued in Japanese writing and spaces between the strokes of every Kanji are important elements because they carry meaning. This is reflected in the precise positioning of every brush or pen stroke that makes up each Kanji. The importance of this characteristic was noted by Kenner (2003, 2004) who found young children learning to write pictographs were taught a set stroke sequence that resulted in harmoniously centric-balanced characters. This can be further understood by considering the squared writing paper on which children are taught to write Japanese, with each square split into smaller quarters. The paper’s structure encourages an emerging Kanji writer to pay attention to the centric positioning and balance of strokes. Therefore, while evolving multimodal research has tended to stress the newness of multi-directionality brought about through disseminating texts with screen-based media, Japan has a history of utilising such affordances in communication practices.

Given the different historic formation of English and Japanese language, one in relation to speech and the latter to image, it is argued here that social semiotic theory that derives from a linguistic background is problematic when transferred to some cultural contexts. As a result using Halliday’s (1978) work as a basis for analysing the visual mode (as evidenced in Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006) appears to make an assumption that there is a universal use of the visual mode which makes slight deviations in relation to different directionality of languages. In contrast, the three interlinking case studies in this chapter provide evidence to the need to

contest these assumptions. In order to understand these conceptual differences more fully the next section presents selected findings of two studies that looked at visual mode representations *in* and *of* landscapes to illustrate the cultural emphasis within modal use. The third case study shows how children comprehend these affordances in their interactions with the visual mode and drew upon their cultural upbringing to do so.

Current contributions to research

Case Study 1: The Japanese visual mode in landscapes

The field of linguistic landscapes shows how the urban environment as a context for language can be used to understand the extent to which texts in a given society are socially and culturally created and understood. Jaworski and Throulow (2010) propose that given the movement away from thinking about writing into a stronger focus on multimodality, it is dated to think in terms of linguistic landscapes as ‘others’ (as evidenced in the work of Ben-Rafael *et al.* 2004, 2006; Backhaus 2007; Shohamy and Gorter 2008) but is more logical to think in relation to ‘semiotic landscapes’. When viewing landscapes in terms of semiotics rather than linguistics, urban environments can be seen as a display of the value placed on particular modes of communication within specific contexts. In relation to this Jaworski and Throulow (2010: 3) state that their interest in semiotic landscapes is in “the way written discourse interacts with other discursive modalities: visual images, nonverbal communication, architecture and the built environment”. Following similar objectives, studying visual-mode texts in urban environments provides comprehension of the cultural affordances of the Japanese visual mode. That is in relation to other modes, the context of the physical landscape, which adds meaning to the text and the degree to which the visual mode is culturally valued.

To illustrate these concepts, Case Study 1 focuses on comparative research that considered the variance and quantity of types of visual media and their relationship to the written mode in the urban landscapes of Tokyo and London using *Google Street View* (Yamada-Rice 2011a, 2011b). The data concerned with the diversity and location of visual media types in the landscape were analysed using Visual Content Analysis that considered the frequency of visual representations of specific categories using “explicit classification and quantification” across comparative data (Bell 2001: 10). Specifically, the visual mode in the two landscapes were defined and codified using two variables – ‘visual type’ and ‘location’ – and a set of values within each. Numerical codes were assigned to each value to allow comparative data for the two urban locations to be produced using the statistical computer package, *SPSS*. Identifying the relationship between the written and visual modes was addressed by colour-coding samples of the two landscapes taken from *Google Street View*, using colours to distinguish between visual, written and texts where the two modes were inseparable.

While the data were drawn from only one small area in each city, and thus it is possible that the examples cannot be generalised across the two countries, the differences presented in the data show that cultural use of modes and the placement of texts is not universal. These differences prompt further discussion and enquiry into the role of culture in understanding multimodal texts.

Overall, the data illustrated fundamental differences in the variance of visual media types used in texts, the location of visual texts in the environment and their relationship to the written mode. These differences seemed to link with the historic connection between writing and image described previously; specifically, how the visual mode is a fundamental part of the Japanese written mode, which is largely pictorial. This cultural foregrounding of the visual mode was reflected in the texts found in the Tokyo landscape where the visual mode was

afforded a higher functional load than was the case in London. At times the Japanese written mode also played with its visual properties, blurring the boundaries between the written and visual modes. This is illustrated in Figure 20.1 which is a sign for a specialised eatery selling eel [うなぎ]. The first letter う for the Japanese word meaning eel is exaggerated so that it appears as an outline of an eel. The use of う in this sign is similar to the brush stroke and shape used when writing う in calligraphy. Thus the blurring of visual and written modes can be seen as both a contemporary and historical practice.



Figure 20.1 Sign for an eel restaurant (photograph © Dylan Yamada-Rice).

In the London landscape the written mode dominated in contrast to the visual mode in Tokyo. Therefore the modal entry point into meaning-making seemed to take place through different modes in the two geographical contexts. This was highlighted in texts serving similar purposes in the two landscapes. For example in London, McDonald's, a fast food shop, was signified by a written sign of the chain's name and a large yellow 'M' logo with which the brand is associated. The Tokyo branch was also signified by the iconic logo but was additionally marked by a larger sculpture representing a batch of fries, which was visually more dominant. Several photographic posters also hung in the windows. Similar examples were seen throughout the Tokyo sample, where Japanese food was advertised with image-rich posters, picture menus and encased plastic models displayed outside eateries. The Japanese environment also contained examples of complex graphs and diagrams on shop fronts, which were not present in the London sample.

The data from the research in Yamada-Rice (2011a, 2011b) further highlighted differences in the location of the visual-mode texts in the two contexts. Knowledge of physical height was constrained by use of Google images for data collection. However, this was unproblematic as the values chosen were able to ascertain the degree to which the visual mode occupied the full extent of height available in each country. These data illustrated a connection between language patterns and the use of space. Visual texts in the London landscape were primarily found at 'ground' level, while in Tokyo, visual texts were more dominant at 'ground' level but existed across the height spectrum. Even considering structural differences in building height, the London sample did not make full use of the locational possibilities available. One argument for this could be that planning restrictions are stronger in England, but there are also parallels that can be drawn with language conventions of each country. For example, the first section of this chapter described how, in the UK, the historic dominant means of communication has been the written mode which is "founded on words in order ... a sound-sequence" (Kress 2005: 15), that is fixed in a linear left to right path. This differs from the Japanese written mode, which utilises visual logics such as vision and space that were described as evident in the distinct stroke order and patterning of each character, and the use of space being orientated from a central point (Kenner 2003). Thus, the Japanese written mode is more flexible in its use of space and messages can be made in multiple directions.

By comparing the manifestation of both written and visual modes in the two geographical contexts, it was possible to see how both visual and written mode representation in the Japanese landscape made fuller use of all available space. This is similar to the properties of the Japanese written mode described above. This also appeared to contrast with the UK landscape, where modal representations were placed in a linear path at primarily 'ground' level, reflecting affordances of the English written mode more generally. These findings were supported by the data collected at junctions where it could be seen that written and visual mode representation in Japan also stand at ninety-degree angles to buildings throughout the height spectrum. This is in comparison to London where signage was predominately fixed flat to walls. As argued previously, it is important to consider the properties of the written mode as this has traditionally been the dominant means of communication, and therefore privileges epistemological understandings adopted by the culture in which this mode is used. Accordingly it is possible to see that the properties of each language are likely to have affected the use of the visual mode and perhaps its placement in the environment. Therefore, "the semiotic 'reach' of modes – what is 'covered' by modes ... is always specific and partial in all cultures" (Kress 2010: 83). Finally, Bal (1991) suggests context is also a message. Therefore by considering the environment as a context, it can be viewed as a text containing meaning like any other. Thus environments are culturally specific at both macro (the landscapes' structure via architecture etc.) and micro

(the texts that exist within them) levels, the logics of which appear to be drawn from the logics of a culture's dominant means of communication. It follows that each culture will contain specific language properties that connect to visual logics and space in ways that tie to a culture's history.

The next section illustrates further affordances of the Japanese visual mode shown in televised news of post-disaster landscapes.

Case Study 2: The Japanese visual mode of Japanese landscapes

The Great East Japan Earthquake struck the Tohoku region on 11 March 2011 at 2:46 PM. This was a reverse-fault, mega-thrust earthquake, which at magnitude nine was the largest earthquake ever recorded in Japan. It also triggered a devastating tsunami of more than ten metres (JMA n.d.), which in turn brought about a maximum Level 7 nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. After the initial impact, months of continuous aftershocks and radiation concerns disrupted life in the affected areas. Television news coverage became one of the vital ways of keeping up-to-date with how the situation was evolving. As described in the previous section I had been interested in visual mode representations situated *in* landscapes. Directly affected by the disaster, I became preoccupied with the news and my attention moved to visual mode representations *of* rather than *in* landscapes. In this way further affordances of the Japanese visual mode and their connection came to light and so I began to record them.

As a result the texts discussed in Case Study 2 were recorded photographically over a six-week period, commencing two weeks after the initial earthquake. As the primary need for focusing on the news was for safety at the time of recording the texts I was unable to consider specific codes and conventions of the visual mode used in the footage. For this reason the images are considered to have been recorded randomly, across a range of times and channels each day, with the view that they would be analysed at a later date for how they might represent cultural affordances of the visual mode. Further, although television is a strongly multimodal medium, with a high functional load carried by sound, sound was not recorded, as I was interested in the connection between the visual mode and landscapes, which connected to my wider research interests.

The traditional connection between the Japanese visual and written modes described in the previous section was also evident in the news footage. For example, written transcriptions in the form of subtitles of speech accompanied all recorded news footage and discussion. Thus subtitling appeared to illustrate a cultural need to see as well as hear what was being said. This reflects the earlier discussion that suggested phonological aspects are only one part of Japanese language and that a large functional load is carried by the visual mode (Shelton and Okayama 2006). This practice thus appears to relate back to the close connection between Kanji and the visual mode. For example, when speaking in Japanese it is common to seek clarity to distinguish the meaning of similar sounding words by asking which Kanji is used to write the word. Knowledge of the written form allows different elements contained in the written character and connections to the physical object they represent to be visualised. This process shows how Japanese language users often need to envisage Kanji's visual components to comprehend meaning. In English there is no need for subtitles for hearing viewers because writing is a phonetic representation of speech, but as has been shown this is only a small part of the meaning attached to written Japanese.

The news data also illustrated the use of visual logics in the written mode in other ways. For example, much of the data that recorded news subtitles contained colour-coding. Colour was added to writing to differentiate between speakers and draw attention to characteristics of the

interviewees, such as their gender or occupation. Colour-coding was also used to display the magnitude of aftershocks and the location of tsunami warnings. In addition, conventions commonly associated with Japanese *manga* (comics) such as speech lines were also used in the communication practices disseminated by television. In particular speech lines were used to indicate subtitled words of off-screen interviewers. Drawing on a range of literature, McGovern (2010: 160) writes that “manga are a very popular form of Japanese literature whose codes and conventions have influenced other Japanese literacy practices”. The news data supported this claim and provides a good example of continuity which exists in the use of visual affordances across different platforms of text dissemination.

Earlier it was described how the individual stroke ordering of Kanji are formed within a module-like space and orientated from the centre to create balance. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) and Scollon and Scollon (2003) also note the existence of centric structures in Asian texts foregrounding the visual mode. McGovern (2010: 31) has described this principle of spacing as modular and centric and a “key organizational structure.” In accordance with these characteristics, at a basic level, modules were used to structure aspects of televised news, such as to show the news headlines, which were divided into modular spaces containing a picture that symbolised each news item. Modules were also used to display a collage of faces that represented interviewees in the upcoming news programme. McGovern (2010: 54) states that “modular compositions can be realised at various macro and micro levels of text”. Again this was evident in the news footage. For example, news discussing overseas assistance after the disaster was divided into macro-level modules to separate the information according to countries that offered Japan assistance. Within these spaces modules also existed on the micro-level to show the detailed items of assistance offered by each country.

The affordance of modules in Japanese culture has been described as offering “an array of alternatives and choices that call for active [mutual] involvement ... between authors and audience” (McGovern 2010: 31). Modules also prevent the entry point into a text from becoming fixed. Returning to the example of modules being used to display the news headlines, even though the news running order would have been decided beforehand, the modules appeared to offer the news anchor a choice in the order he/she presented. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that the use of centric logic in Asian texts is perhaps related to a long-standing cultural appreciation of “hierarchy, harmony and continuity in Confucian thinking that makes centering a fundamental organizational principle in the visual semiotic” (p. 195). Also the affordances of modules as described above offer “mutual involvement in the relationship between author and audience by diminishing the characteristically dominant role that is normally assumed by the text author” (McGovern 2010: 128). This could also be seen by the use of a small module-shaped screen that was layered onto the main televised text. This module contained the images of the TV presenters in the studio. This appeared when the televised news switched to an outside setting and seemed to allow the viewer to take in both the visual interaction (gaze and gesture) of the two sets of TV presenters, those in the studio and those on location, in relation to one another. In so doing the screen visualised the non-verbal communication practices (gestures/body language) between the story and the presenters in different locations.

Finally, the news footage used layers in visual dissemination. It was common for news items first to be accessed through selection of one of the modules that represented a news feature and then discussed in a series of layers. As the discussion unfolded, a new module was placed on top of the last to extend discussion. As with the previous affordances of the Japanese visual mode, the use of layers also relates to other Japanese cultural conventions. Hendry (1993) describes the importance of layers in wrapping. She relates this in relation to both present-giving and space

within traditional Japanese homes. Additionally, Lee (1984) and Suzuki (2006) describe the use of layers in Japanese linguistic patterns. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) describe the relationship between details on the left and right of a visual text as the 'given' information and 'new' respectively and reversed in some Asian contexts. Oyama (2000) challenges this concept as simplistic. Likewise, the news footage recorded seemed to illustrate how affordances of layers in the Japanese context shows how the 'given' can be displayed in lower level layers with the 'new' being added on top. Case Study 2 provided further examples of the cultural connection between the written and visual modes. Overall the examples given from data comparing texts in urban landscapes and in televised news footage shows how the functional load and the affordances of a mode are culturally embedded. Case Study 3 looks at how young children draw on their cultural upbringing to interpret the cultural affordances of texts.

Case Study 3: Young children interacting with and making sense of visual-mode texts in urban landscapes

The data discussed in this section derive from a nine-month study that involved seven children between the ages of three and six years and considered their interaction with and comprehension of the visual mode in their home and public spaces, both outdoors and indoors. Data were collected in three key ways. First, the child-participants were given cameras and asked to photograph visual-mode texts that interested them over the duration of the project. Second, once a month each child was interviewed about the photographs they had taken since the last meeting. Third, each child was accompanied on a walk in a public area in which texts were discussed within the context of the landscape. This section considers only the data connected to urban landscapes which aligns with the focus of this chapter. It also emphasises the cultural backgrounds of the participants – five growing up in Japan, one moving between the UK and Japan and the last an Australian child who had only been living in Japan for a month prior to the start of the project.

The concept of the environment as a cultural text as described earlier, was significant in a study with these young children, where the urban landscape appeared as their 'first text'. In 2014, I described how two three-year-olds' primary desire was to familiarise themselves with the codes and conventions of the urban environment. These two children actively engaged to make sense of the physical environment through their tactile interactions with it. This was also the case for the remaining participants when either they were in environments unknown to them or the landscape had significantly changed such as by the Great East Japan Earthquake. This primary interest in the physical environment motivated interaction with texts and also played a significant role in emerging comprehension of the purpose of texts utilising the visual mode. This is consistent with Scollon and Scollon (2003) who argue in their theorising of 'geosemiotics' that texts' meaning is encoded by their placement within a physical context. Thus from the outset landscapes and texts are strongly connected.

As a result, it is perhaps not surprising that the youngest children drew on the conventions of the physical environment surrounding the text (with which they were more familiar), to aid their interpretation of the visual mode, with which they were less familiar. Moreover, they needed the link between the text's placement and its purpose to be clear for comprehension to be made. At times this relationship was very immediate. For example, when the subject of a text mirrored what was happening in the physical environment they were able to relate the two. This was even more apparent when texts conveying similar meanings were explored. In cases where the physical environment could support the meaning of the visual mode, they were able to comprehend it, but not when these contextual details were absent or contradicted the text.

This was the case even when they recognised the elements contained in the text's image. Without being able to link the placement of the texts to their meaning, they were unable to draw on their knowledge of the text to aid comprehension of its purpose (Yamada-Rice 2014).

For the participants who were able to read, the written mode became one of the encoded systems used to make sense of both the environment and texts within it. For example, when the connection between the visual mode and meaning was more abstract, and the environmental context added little to aid comprehension, the meaning of the text was lost for the children in this study. In these cases, when a participant was aware of the written mode but not yet able to comprehend it, such as was the case for the two four-year-olds, they were aware that the primary mode through which the text could be accessed was the written mode. They realised this in spite of their inability to comprehend the written mode and always asked what was written, or thought of others who might be able to help them read the writing.

With the exception of the Australian child, the three oldest children aged five to six years were able to read to varying abilities and this changed how they understood the purpose of visual texts. To some degree, the context of texts was still used when they described the purpose of texts but this time rather than being used to comprehend the text it was used to illustrate their knowledge of its meaning. The overall data suggests that by the time children could read, understanding of the written mode became another tool they could employ to aid their understanding of texts utilising the visual mode. Added to this, with increasing age and familiarity with the environment, participants seemed to draw on their life experiences within the research setting to aid interpretation of texts utilising the visual mode. This ties with the work of Davoli and Ferri (2000) who write "children's experience of the city is rooted in a complex web of references that are closely interconnected where personal relationships and experiences [which] give shape to understanding" (p. 14). The findings of the study described in this section showed how children's experiences of texts and making sense of them is "rooted in a complex web of [cultural] references" (ibid.) that were connected to their learning of and knowledge of the environment, which each child develops in relation to their individual interests in aspects of it and cultural upbringing.

Next it will be shown how the above findings differed only for the Australian child who had just a month's prior experience of the Japanese environment. Dondis (1974: 182) argues "visual literacy implies understanding the means for seeing and sharing meaning with some level of predictable universality." This chapter has already shown how visual mode use is strongly tied to culture and the dominant affordances of that culture's historic use of other modes of communication. In addition, the notion of universality and comprehension of the visual mode was contested by the data collected from the Australian participant. For that participant the purpose of Japanese texts utilising the visual mode was often unclear, illustrating how the subject matter and the codes and conventions used to convey the message are both culturally produced. This was illustrated on the walks in which she seemed to take pictures of texts she could not understand and then ask me about them. In addition she often had difficulty connecting the context of the sign to its intended meaning even after explanation of its content. For example when she came across an advertisement for steamed buns on a flag outside a convenience store she did not recognise the image. When it was explained to her she remained unfamiliar with the convention of advertising on flags and did not connect its intended purpose as a sign indicating an item for sale within the shop. This example illustrates again that text's meaning is also encoded by its environmental placement, the affordances of which are also culturally specific.

As such, cultural differences in the use of the visual mode and its placement in urban landscapes were also illustrated when the participants became interested in similar texts. For

example, all participants were interested in decorative manhole covers, which are a common feature of the Japanese landscape. However, while the participants who grew up in Japan were able to tell me that these were decorative, the Australian participant could not. Instead she tried to attach a meaning to the sign as if it was a public order notice. Likewise, all children were interested in signs showing a low-modality image of a man bowing on various public information notices. However again the Australian child did not interpret the sign as bowing. By extension she also could not comprehend its meaning as an apology for inconvenience such as when building works are taking place. However the remaining participants who had grown up in Japan had no difficulty in explaining its meaning. In other words they knew that “in Japanese society the physical act of bowing conveys a different measure of sincerity than written or verbal expression of ... apology”, which makes the visual mode the only possible means of conveying this in a text (McGovern 2010: 75). Therefore, their interpretation of the bowing texts links with their culturally derived “stadium, that is the extent to which the visual mode can engage its viewer based on culture” (Barthes 1993: 28).

Viewing visual texts as culturally specific also appeared to be emphasised by the Australian child’s easier interpretation of street signs, many of the conventions of which are similar to those used in her own culture. This was also the case with symbols that were common across cultures such as a tooth shape to represent a dental clinic. The wide universality of this symbol was further illustrated by the fact that she was able to make sense of the sign’s purpose even though she could not access the Japanese written mode (which was the dominant mode foregrounded in the sign), and the text’s context added little additional meaning. To further support the concept that visual texts draw on cultural conventions, the Australian girl was very confident in talking about visual texts in her home domain that she brought with her from Australia.

Although there was only one child unfamiliar with Japan in the study, and so again I am conscious of the need to avoid overgeneralising, it can be argued that the examples given in this section show that the balance between the context of text, the level of visual abstraction and the visual-mode text’s connection to the written mode is constantly shifting in the degree to which each feature aids the purpose of the conveying text. Children make sense of this in relation to their connection to the culture in which the texts are placed.

Conclusion

The initial impetus for the three studies discussed in this chapter came about through a desire to understand the extent to which young children in Tokyo might be exposed to the use of the visual mode in texts found in their surrounding environments, how they interact with such texts and what they can comprehend about the visual mode from these encounters. The findings from the three studies also highlight the strong connections between properties of language, conventions of the visual mode and environmental context and that, above all else, this makes the visual mode a culturally produced sign system like any other form of communication. In addition, the findings illustrate how, when thinking about literacy, evolving multimodal approaches continue to push at the boundaries of what literacy is considered to be as a social practice and as a mode of communication in a much wider sense. The findings illustrate a strong need to push beyond cultural binaries to think about what this might mean in a range of geographical contexts and cultures. From this perspective cultures can be taken to mean wider geographical locations, or sub-cultures such as those specific to different ages or groups of people. This chapter has illustrated this in relation to both Japan and the culture of young children who are foremost interested in the physical environment and then add their interest in texts that exist within cultural landscapes.

Finally, it was also shown how the conventions of space, in both texts and physical environments are also strongly culturally derived. As Jaworski and Throulow argue:

landscape as a way of seeing is not to be confined to the mediated representations of space in art and literature. It is a broader concept pertaining to how we view and interpret space in ways that are contingent on geographical, social, economic, legal, cultural and emotional circumstances, as well as our practical uses of the physical environment as nature and territory, aesthetic judgments, memory and myth.

(Jaworski and Throulow 2010: 3)

In summary, there are significant crossovers between landscapes as a text with other kinds of texts. Moreover, there are additional crossovers in the way in which the connection between space and modes are reflected in texts outside of urban landscapes and often these can be texts of landscapes themselves. There are cultural differences in the modal use that young children living in different societies will be exposed to. The data collected on children's interaction with and understanding of the visual mode in Tokyo has revealed some of the "distinctive resources of the visual mode that are particular to Japanese culture" (McGovern 2010: 14). Understanding how modal use differs across cultures provides a beneficial platform from which to reflect on the changing modal use within cultures and also aids evolving theories for looking at communication practices in the digital era.

These three case studies have highlighted the important distinction between texts in and of landscapes. Furthermore, I have argued for foregrounding the role of culture in understanding multimodal texts. This research indicates the need to consider the relationship between landscapes and embodiment and its connection to emergent literacy more carefully. As Mackey (2010) has suggested, there is a more embodied and physical connection between the way in which young children explore written texts and urban landscapes. Similarly my recent research (Yamada-Rice 2014) suggests that in the changing textual environment (from page to screen – Kress 2003) emergent literacy is as much about the visual mode as the written. In conclusion, further research needs to be carried out into the connection between social and historical practices of communication in relation to wider cultural practices and environments for what this can add to current ways of thinking about literacy and multimodal practices.

Related topics

Multimodality, Emerging literacy, Social semiotics, Geosemiotics.

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SOCIAL DESIGN LITERACIES

Designing action literacies for fast-changing futures

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Introduction

Over just the last few decades there has been a radical expansion in our conceptions of what literacies can be (Baynham and Prinsloo 2008; Bezemer and Kress 2008; Erstad and Sefton-Green 2013; Gee 1990; Street and Lefstein 2007). We have moved from traditional print literacies to new multimedia literacies, from an emphasis on reading as the consumption of others' ideas to authorship and production as the dissemination of our own. From literacy as a competence of the isolated individual, we have moved to a distributed conception of literacies as embodied and practiced by people making meaning together (e.g., Andriessen and Järvelä 2013). From the view that literacy is a politically neutral skill, we have awakened to the role of literacies in re-making the world in the interest of all and not just for the few.

These changes have been responses to the unprecedented rate of change in the means and manner of our technologically mediated meaning making and communication and their role in our institutional and personal lives. If it seems that today everything is a 'literacy,' that is largely because we can no longer be sure which literate practices will be the ones that matter most a generation from now. Because the task of education is to help prepare each next generation for its future, educators have found it necessary to embrace a wider and wider view of the literacies the future will require.

For a very long time, relatively more slowly changing societies could confidently identify what knowledge, which literacies would serve for the future, and by and large these were the knowledges and literacies of the past. But who today can say with confidence what will be the key knowledges and literacies twenty or fifty years from now? The formal educational institutions of our time, schools and universities, are entering a time of crisis, which they may not survive in any recognizable form. They evolved to teach the literacies and knowledges of the past, albeit not very effectively or efficiently for the most part. They are dependent on standardized curricula and disciplinary degree programs that cannot change quickly enough to remain relevant to contemporary needs, much less unpredictable futures.

In this chapter we propose a radical re-orientation in which learning is no longer the goal and literacies are no longer defined by their value in the past. The new goal is social change and social transformation, and learning is seen as an inevitable accompaniment to participation in local projects of social innovation. The key literacies are now those that facilitate movement toward local goals, the literacies of social design and innovation in each present local context.

Designers are in the business of making things work better for people – not just material objects and tools, but modes of interaction, services, activities, spaces and places. Re-making these fundamental means and mediators of human life entails re-making our social lives together. In this sense all design is social design. More specifically, by ‘social design’ we mean design for community improvement: the design of means for better lives. We also believe that good design is local. We do not believe in grand designs for all people or all communities, because we do not accept the concentration of power and resources that such grandiose illusions demand. Grand designs have repeatedly failed to make people’s lives better. They have only succeeded in creating greater social inequities. Social design needs to be local, participatory, iterative, messy, contested, frustrating, exciting, engaged, creative, and courageous. Participation in such social design activity, we argue, provides a context for learning-along-the-way that is oriented to concrete needs and creative dreams, rapid change, the literacies of innovation, and better lives.

Critical issues: the literacies of innovation and change

What do we already know about good practice in social innovation and design, and about learning in the context of activities with goals other than learning?

The fields of Design Research and Design Education have already been developing theories, models, and practices for social innovation design for decades (Findeli 2001; Koskinen *et al.* 2011). The perspective of Social Design affords a bridge between scientific and technical literacies on one side and esthetic and humanistic literacies on the other. It also comprises a number of literacies in its own right.

Classic design literacies are the literacies of the studio, including creating and responding to design briefs, research into user needs, prototyping and testing, iterative re-design and improvement, and design delivery. Recently the application of these literate practices to local and large-scale social problems has led to their transformation in the context of Social Innovation Labs (now also widely known as Change Labs), where video ethnography and empowered user participation, whole-systems modeling and simulation, learning from prototype failure, inter-institutional coordination, and playful creativity have greatly expanded the Social Design repertoire (Brown 2009; Manzini 2007; Meroni and Sangiorgi 2011).

To get a more concrete sense of the kinds of design research tools and design literacies and genres in use in contemporary practice, consider these examples (and the many others listed at www.servicedesigntools.org):

- *Co-designing workshops.* Gather researchers, designers, and students to brainstorm and discuss the needs and possibilities for a future learning platform.
- *Actor mapping.* Map out and visualize all relevant actors (people or institutions) that will be affected by an innovation, their interests, needs, and possible resistance to it.
- *User journey mapping.* Map out and visualize what happens before, during, and after the innovation (across multiple timescales).
- *Experiencing prototypes.* Test how a studio session could play out, for example through role-play.

- *Communicating the project visually.* Done, for example, through storyboards, ‘evidencing’, or video, so as to better envision what the innovation might entail, gain useful feedback, and be able to ‘sell’ the project (for example to secure funding and political support).

Inspired by examples of social innovation design studios such as POLIMI-DESIS in Milan, MindLab in Helsinki, and NESTA FutureLab in the UK (for references see below), many so-called Change Labs (Westley *et al.* 2012) have emerged around the world, dedicated to producing local solutions to local problems and to innovative visions of better futures.

All of these efforts include some form of input from prospective users and stakeholders, at least in the form of “cultural probes” (Gaver *et al.* 1999) and often by means of direct short-term or sustained participation by ordinary people in the design, development, prototyping, and implementation process. The resulting collaborative groups are highly diverse, bringing together people with different experience and expertise, including researchers, designers, artists, and users. They may also be diverse in age and across generations, and this aspect is particularly relevant to the implications of social design participation for learning.

Problem-solving has long been seen as foundational for learning. Design goes beyond solving already-identified problems to the creative envisioning of alternative possibilities that are not completely bound by problem constraints. Design is as much an artistic activity as an engineering activity. It is driven as much by imagination and the impulse to create new possibilities as by the need to solve existing problems (Cross 2011). Design sits at the intersection of the arts, humanities, engineering, and sciences. In the work of developing new ways of doing things, traditional academic boundaries lose relevance.

Social innovation design requires learning and new literacies as well as established ones. In a diverse design team, each member is learning from others who bring different experience and expertise. Junior members are immersed in a “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky 1978) by the challenge to go beyond their current knowledge and know-how and the resources provided by both the situation and their project collaborators. Whatever is learned is learned in the context of knowledge-for-use. It is also learned as one possibility among many, one item in a space of alternative possibilities. It is not abstract, dogmatic, decontextualized knowledge, but an integral part of a lived experience of action toward a goal beyond learning itself. If we seek a foundation for learning that can support successful future application of knowledge in new concrete contexts and the possibility of assuming a critical stance toward what has been learned, design participation would seem to be an excellent candidate.

Apart from, but intimately connected with, such cognitive factors are the emotional commitments and strong feelings that engage participants in creative change activities over time. It is well-known by now that the same students whose performance in the classroom is lackluster and disengaged can and do commit to intensive work over long periods of time with surprisingly good outcomes when they are motivated by genuine interest, exercise substantial independence regarding the what, when, and how of their work, and inspire and challenge one another in peer and mixed-age social networks (Alvermann and Hagood 2000; Black 2008; Lemke *et al.* 2012).

There is a fundamental problem with the academic approach to literacies, one that has long been recognized but not yet transcended because it is rooted in the institutional structures of schooling and the academy. Literacies today are still taught outside the contexts of their real and meaningful uses. Years ago the Whole Language movement tried to take a step away from decontextualized approaches to the teaching of basic print literacies by banning the use of ‘scientific’ basal readers and re-situating reading in the context of reading for meaning with interesting stories and literature for children (Goodman 1986). That constructive approach to

basic literacy in its older, narrower sense ran afoul of the growing, destructive movement for quantitative, management-inspired testing that cloaked itself as 'accountability' even though no one held its authors accountable for either their anti-humanistic values or their innovation-strangling results.

Even situating print literacy in the context of individual story-reading for pleasure remains far too narrow. The great power of print literacy lies in its use for writing truth against power, for rallying communities to great endeavors, and for articulating good reasons for better action. In short, it lies in its political and rhetorical functions, in its context of use as a tool for progressive collaborative action. That same context is also fundamental to the uses of video and multimedia, new online social media, and the media yet to be invented in the century ahead of us. Authorship is spreading. Stories are tools for probing the dilemmas of life and human sufferings and joys. The art of media shows us what the mathematics of science cannot capture. The literacies of media consumption, even critical media consumption, still assume that the few speak and the many listen, the few command and the many obey. The literacies of today are the literacies of production, which encompass and entail those of critical interpretation, just as every author must be an informed reader as well. And the literacies of production make sense only in the context of wider activities and their goals, production for some purpose, producing media that function as tools for making better lives and a better world in every sense.

This need for re-contextualization applies as well to the production of knowledge, which the academy has taken too far in the direction of knowledge for its own sake, threatening to make much of the academy irrelevant to a world that demands innovation, change, and social improvement. Yes, some distance from short-term goals is salutary so that the widest net may be cast in the search for potentially useful new knowledge and creative ways of re-thinking the issues of our times and all times. But from its historical function of serving the specialized needs of a small number of scholars and those they train to succeed them, this single academic model has come to be offered by universities and schools as the paradigm of learning for all purposes and for the whole of society.

The improvement of human life (including improved harmony with the whole biosphere that makes our life possible) requires knowledge. It requires knowledge for the purposes of action, innovation, and change – not knowledge for its own sake. People evolved, not just biologically but also socially and culturally, to learn in the context of collaborative activity, as part of mixed-age groups, juggling the demands of multiple goals and conflicts over choices and alternatives (Lemke 2002). We are not meant to learn in classrooms with only same-age peers, isolated from engagement with social concerns and with our own concerns. What is learned in isolation from meaningful activity is learned without enthusiasm, rarely applied to novel contexts, just as rarely viewed critically as one alternative among many, and quickly forgotten.

Yes, this model has endured for a very long time. It suits the convenience of teachers and it lends itself well to social control. It has never been loved by students, it has never succeeded for more than a small fraction of the population, its procedures for self-evaluation are limited and self-serving, and it has never been a threat to the status quo. Its time is over. The rate of change in which knowledge and literacies are relevant to pressing social problems makes this paradigm of conservative transmission of canonical curricular knowledge unworkable today and for the future. Schools and teachers cannot update their teaching faster than once every ten or so years, and the cycle for change, including new political decisions on a one-size-fits-all curriculum makes the process even slower. The failure to take account of students' own individual and group interests, to leverage the effectiveness of cross-age teaching and learning, and above all to situate learning in the context of meaningful activity beyond the school, makes this old and tired model of education unusable for the human future.

We need a completely new approach to education. No one is going to invent this from scratch out of pure imagination. It will evolve by effort, trial, and failure out of existing institutions with other functions. The core literacies that will define this new mode of learning will be those that support effective learning within the context of other forms of social activity, and among these one emerging paradigm seems to us particularly promising: social innovation design as practiced by Change Labs.

Historical perspective: the emergence of Change Labs

The emergence of Change Labs can be seen as a convergence of several kinds of innovation practice. Conceptually, Change Labs derive in part from research on interaction in small groups as a site for changing people's thinking and feelings (e.g., group therapy, group dynamics; Bion 1961; Lewin 1948) coming together with the contemporary development of systems thinking and cybernetics (e.g., at the famous Macy conferences 1946–1953, see Heims 1991), leading to the thesis that groups of diverse stakeholders working together might succeed in solving messy, complex problems that individuals could not. But the practical realization of this idea in the form of social innovation labs came only much more recently with the proposal to use the methods of design studios, borrowing from architectural and product design work (Kelley and Littman 2005).

Westley *et al.* (2012) provide a brief overview of the history of Change Labs. Their account begins with the intersection of group psychology and complex systems thinking in the Macy Conferences of the late 1940s and early 1950s involving leading figures such as Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson (anthropology and cultural psychology), Ross Ashby and Heinz von Foerster (cybernetics), Kurt Lewin (group psychology), and others (Montagnini 2007). This in turn led to the proposal to use whole systems approaches to solving large-scale social problems (Trist 1963), mobilizing what today might be called collective intelligence (Levy 1997). Designers meanwhile were increasingly being called upon to design large complex systems, including urban social systems, and proposed that 'design thinking' could address large-scale as well as local social problems (e.g., Brown 2009).

The MIT Media Lab is often mentioned as a forerunner of Change Labs, though its focus was mainly on producing working prototypes of media and computer tools, rather than on social innovation as such. But it was very conscious of the social implications of its designs. A key pioneer of the design approach to social innovation was the Italian designer Ezio Manzini, with a group of colleagues in Milan, who turned their methods of product and service design to social problems, most famously in the *Nutrire Milano* project (*Feeding Milan*), which connected local farmers with urban customers and created a new and very successful combination of outdoor market for locally sourced produce and community meeting-place (Simeone and Cantù 2010).

The IDEO design firm in the US developed methods for pro bono (as well as client-funded) social service design, and in the last decade social innovation design studios have sprung up in many parts of the world. Other early pioneers were MindLab in Denmark and the SITRA-funded Helsinki Design Lab, both of which worked directly with their national governments on projects to improve government services with input from citizens as well as experts (Bason 2010; Boyer *et al.* 2011). To these one can add NESTA (www.nesta.org.uk) and its offspring FutureLab (www.futurelab.org.uk) in the UK (government-funded), the SiG Lab (Social Innovation Generation: www.sigeneration.ca) in Canada (foundation-funded), and the d.School (i.e., design school) at Stanford University (<http://dschool.stanford.edu>), as leading models.

Many of these Change Labs also do research on their own design and innovation processes and publish recommendations regarding methods and workspaces (Boyer *et al.* 2011; Doorley

and Witthoft 2011). They are in effect identifying the key design literacies of a new mode of meaning making. In broad terms these include research literacies such as community ethnography and cultural probes to inform design work, communication literacies such as video production to share visions, production literacies such as rapid prototyping to enable exploration of concrete implications, group collaboration literacies to move from divergent brainstorming to convergent consensus, and a host of procedures and recipes for making Change Labs work effectively.

Researchers in the field of literacy and multi-literacies will recognize many features of these extensions of the notion of literacy into the social innovation design domain. There is an emphasis on production over consumption, on group literacy processes over individual ones, on multimedia over text alone (including creating working prototypes). These are literacies in which the distinction between semiotic meanings and material artifacts is blurred; where producing an artifact or designing a social activity is a form of 'writing' in the medium of machine, software, or action. Moreover, these are literacies-for-practice rather than literacies-for-information. The goal is not to find out or know, nor even to communicate knowledge to others. The goal of these design literacies is to enable something new to happen, to produce a concrete result of value to others.

And it should be equally clear that these design literacies encompass and include the older literacies of information and communication. They surpass them by re-situating the older literacies in their contexts of use and value, re-defining their purposes, and also fundamentally changing how they should be learned. So much of the history of literacy education has accepted the social isolation of an academic or classroom context, even for film literacy or critical multimedia literacy. It has accepted that understanding was the goal, when understanding cannot be defined outside the context of what we need that understanding in order to do. Academic literacy education has substituted artificial contexts of doing such as writing assignments for imaginary audiences or media creation with no implications beyond the classroom for authentic contexts of social use.

Design literacies are not just a new addition to the literacy catalogue. They represent a new paradigm of literacies-for-doing rather than literacies for knowing, understanding, or communicating. They are also potentially threatening literacies, dangerous literacies, because they seek to make something new happen, something different from the status quo. Literacy scholars will recognize in this a key feature from the early history of print literacy, when reading and writing, and especially mass-distribution publishing was a new tool for radical social reform and was rigidly controlled and brutally suppressed by powerful elites. Literacies worth learning should be able to threaten the status quo. Social innovation design literacies can and do, and in doing so elevate all literacies once again to the status of tools for human progress. If schools have become the institutions that maintain the safe and sanitized literacies of the status quo, the hope is that Change Labs can become the institutions where literacies break us out of the boxes we are being kept in.

Current developments: envisioning social innovation studios

What do contemporary social innovation design labs look like? What's going on in them?

The d.School and Institute for Design at Stanford University in California, and among its programs particularly the ChangeLabs initiative (<http://changelabs.stanford.edu>) and the Social Entrepreneurship program (<http://dschool.stanford.edu/social-entrepreneurship/>) support and showcase a participatory design-studio approach to social problems such as designing extremely affordable work tools that will protect women in the global south who prepare hot peppers for

market from the chemical burns that can accompany handling them. Their ChangeLabs program focuses on issues of water resources, energy, climate change, and social justice. The labs bring Stanford students and faculty together with experts and stakeholders from government, NGOs, and industry partners.

At New York University, an initial proposal (Goldman *et al.* 2010) to promote studio-based learning (SBL) for master's degree students in Educational Communication and Technology, including programs in digital media design for learning and game design for learning, became the basis for an architectural collaboration with the international firm Gensler Associates to produce the new MAGNET space to house a studio or atelier-style workspace for faculty and graduate students in these programs. This flexible, multipurpose space breaks away from classrooms and seminar rooms to provide open plan spaces where ad hoc groups can collaborate and participants in different projects can encounter one another informally. The interdisciplinary nature of these programs brings together learning sciences specialists, experts in new media and software design, educators, computer scientists, and faculty from the arts. Work of this kind has led to software simulations for urban planners and immersive digital games for training emergency personnel.

Worldwide there are so many new Change Labs emerging that global networks linking them together have already begun to form. A well-curated site is maintained by a major Change Lab group in Canada, SiG: Social Innovation Generation (<http://sigeneration.ca/Labs.html>), itself a collaboration of the MaRS Discovery District, a Toronto-based business incubator, the University of Waterloo, and a philanthropic foundation. Two international networks of Change Labs are the DESIS network of about forty labs in twenty countries including the US, UK, Denmark, Italy, China, South Africa, Brazil, India, and Botswana, initiated by the Milan design group of Ezio Manzini (www.desis-network.org/content/desis-labs) and the SIX Social Innovation Exchange (www.socialinnovationexchange.org/network-nodes) sponsored by NESTA (UK), a government agency, again together with a philanthropic foundation. SIX links many labs worldwide and is developing regional coordinating nodes to promote exchange and collaboration.

In the Netherlands, a government-sponsored initiative Kennisland (www.kennisland.nl/en/) provides research and support for social innovations, often in collaboration with European Union efforts in specific areas such as the *Communia* project to develop policy recommendations to promote open access to public domain data and to restrain the claims of private firms on public domain intellectual property (<https://www.kl.nl/en/projects/communia/>). Kennisland also recently sponsored the Lab2 conference, which brought together representatives from a broad range of Change Labs to share experience with what works for social innovation design locally around the world (<http://lab2.kl.nl>).

Among the most impressive of these was a social innovation design group in Kenya, whose *Ushahidi* project (www.ushahidi.com) developed software to allow hotspots to be reported and mapped geographically in local crisis situations, initially during the violence following a disputed election, but then re-adapted for use during earthquakes and other emergencies in many parts of the globe. Importantly, it allows reports to come in from ordinary people on their cell phones and for these to be subsequently upgraded as they are confirmed independently. Here is a selection of Change Labs of interest listed by Lab2 participants:

- The Bihar Innovation Lab, India
- Unicef Innovation Labs
- Het Sociaal Innovatie Lab, Belgium
- Stanford ChangeLabs, USA

- The Solutions Lab, Canada
- The Finance Lab, UK
- Forum for the Future, UK
- InWithFor
- South Africa Food Lab
- Media Lab Asia, India
- BRAC Innovation Labs
- Social Innovation Lab, Eastern Europe
- ICC Lab, India
- The SID Lab, Cameroon
- SILK Kent, UK
- Citilab Barcelona, Spain
- The Hope Institute, South Korea

Social innovation is a broad category, but a number of social problems in need of innovative solutions are frequently identified across different Change Labs: needs of aging populations, youth unemployment, education for creativity, basic services, and infrastructure in the global south, increased political participation, access to open source information, community health services, locally sourced food supplies, urban public safety, community organizing, environmental quality, and climate change. There are large-scale problems from global equity to global economic justice and very local ones like helping women who process hot peppers for market avoid chemical burns. Social innovation design methods also reject ‘silo-ing’ or the compartmentalization of effort and expertise. For example, a community garden project can require dealing with zoning laws and government; its nutritional aims can lead to community organizing and new employment opportunities. Participation in designing software to monitor garden conditions can lead young people toward software design careers. Seeking out relevant expertise can lead to a university–community partnership that can later expand in other directions.

Real life has never fit the academic model of autonomous specializations. Difficult problems can be solved creatively when the innovation design team includes people with experience that ranges across as many facets of the problem as possible. Everyone needs to be willing to move outside their own comfort zone and beyond their own disciplinary training and individual experience to find what is needed to solve the problem. The social innovation process also poses new problems and identifies obstacles from new perspectives. Designers are not simply troubleshooters-for-hire to solve other people’s problems. They are also working to look at systems in new ways that re-define what the problems are, so that new avenues for creative solutions can be seen (Cross 2011).

Social innovation design processes and Change Labs as continuing small-scale institutions are relatively new on the social scene. No one really knows yet what makes a good Change Lab work or work better, though many proposals exist. One of the key challenges of the social design movement is to design effective Change Labs.

The future of Change Labs

By what path of evolution might Change Labs become the basis for a new mode of learning?

Among the most valuable features of existing Change Labs for supporting learning are their emphasis on: (1) discovering problems and framing innovative solutions that respond to needs people recognize once identified but may not have been able to articulate initially; (2) bringing

together a heterogeneous team that includes researchers, designers, and stakeholders; and (3) developing, testing, and improving prototypes that move from imagination to practical application relatively quickly and in an iterative cycle. In this process members of Change Labs learn to learn from failure, rather than to avoid it. They learn to value playful creativity and esthetic feel in the design process. They learn to see every potential solution as just one possibility among others, differently valued from different points of view. They learn to turn around on past experience and prior solutions, regarding them not just as resources for new solutions but as objects for critique and improvement.

What current Change Labs lack is a strong emphasis on long-term, meaningful direct participation by future users in the design conversation and process, and particularly for social innovation design integral participation by the people who will be living their lives in the futures being designed: the young. Inter-generational design teams, ranging from seniors with long memories and rich experience to junior members with active imaginations and few preconceptions or vested interests, crossing at least three generations, have much to offer the work of Change Labs as well as providing a setting for learning in which the goal is not learning for its own sake, but learning-along-the-way in the process of getting something done to make people's lives better.

It would also be wrong to think of the work of Change Labs only in terms of solving pressing social problems. As design labs, it is also within their brief to create things just for fun, to create with an artistic sensibility, to enliven and make us laugh more and enjoy living more. Social change movements have a history of being rather grimly serious, perhaps because the people who are most active in them feel a weight of responsibility and the acuteness of suffering of those in need of help. There is perhaps also a historical connection between reform movements and the rather grimly un-playful sects of Protestant Christianity, with their suspicion of fun as frivolous and morally dangerous. A better life does not just mean a life with more calories in your diet and warmer clothes on your back. That can never be more than a bare beginning. A better life is one in which you have good reason to smile and laugh, to feel happy, to experience joy and pleasure, beauty and love. They also serve who paint and sculpt, compose and play, write and perform, cook and amaze.

Social innovation is not just about better ways to do what we already do. It is also about new possibilities for action and new ways of valuing. As such it is contested, built out of tensions and disagreements, not out of facile consensus among people afraid to express what they really think and feel.

Nearly all these elements are missing from what we now call education in schools and classrooms. No wonder so many students find it boring and irrelevant to their lives, with little or no scientific evidence that most of the traditional curriculum ever will be. Like the Chinese mandarins of old, we foist on the young a traditional curriculum little changed in a century or more and never very relevant to anything but maintaining the status quo. We do not teach them to question that status quo. We do not teach them how to have fun or create experiences of wonder. We do not teach them how to design, engineer, and change their lives and the world. We do not teach them how to learn from and work together with those older and younger than themselves. We do not teach them how to learn from failure or fail smarter and more quickly. We do not teach them to innovate or start their own enterprises.

How soon after graduation or six months working in a low-skill job will today's students have forgotten how to factor polynomials, the stages of mitosis, the parts of a persuasive essay, and the causes of the Civil War? What reason will they have to regret the loss? Four more years of sinking deeply into debt for a university education will still not prepare them for a job that can contribute more to society than merely helping others maintain the status quo and build up

profits for an ever smaller and wealthier elite. On that academic path they will once again sit in classrooms or even worse in large lecture theatres, listening and not doing, reading and rarely writing much less producing the dominant media of today. They will try to absorb the known and never learn how to reach for the not yet known. They will not learn to become makers and innovators. They will get no experience starting anything new, designing anything useful or beautiful, or working with others to make people's lives better. If the traditional approach was ever an 'education,' it can hardly be called one today. It does not prepare people to make their futures better.

But Change Labs do. Or they could, if they learn to welcome more age-diversity, if they develop a greater focus on mentoring as part of collaboration, if they undertake projects that appeal to the interests and values of the young, if they lighten up and loosen up and make having fun part of the necessary playfulness that supports creativity. Already some new-century organizations such as Google are beginning to understand this (Stewart 2013).

Another change for Change Labs, already underway, is the move to a networked future, not just in the use of online resources, but in networking with other Change Labs and related organizations: design schools, universities, arts organizations, architectural firms, design consultancies, government agencies, NGOs, etc. New Change Labs need help finding such partners and the resources they need in people, funding, access, and information. We need not just Change Labs, but a network of networks across Change Labs that can also help people find labs and studios they want to work with and help labs and studios find the people they need.

Recommendations for practice: Change Labs as improvable objects

Something that Change Labs do informally, but that might better be done more systematically, is to study their own processes with an eye to improvement. Several Change Labs offer summaries of what they have learned about the social design process (Bason 2010; Boyer *et al.* 2011; IDEO 2003), but useful as these may be for new Change Labs, every lab or studio is different and what is needed is a systematic way of reflecting on processes and catalyzing a form of organizational learning within a lab.

This is particularly true with respect to our proposed emphasis on including more direct and continuing participation in all phases of the iterative social design and prototyping processes by young people as interns, apprentices, and full contributors, along with the increased emphasis on mentoring them that will be needed for success. How do all members of design teams learn from one another, from stakeholders and prospective users, from other Change Labs and affiliated organizations, from research and other sources? How can this learning-along-the-way to the goals of the project be improved in the local contexts in which each Change Lab works?

A key component in closing the loop of iterative design is the continuing improvement of the design of the Lab's own work processes. This same component is also critical for any extended function of Change Labs as social supports for learning and education. Formal research on learning, both in the field of education and in the wider learning sciences, has increasingly turned in the last decade from a narrow focus on learning in schools to the study of learning in other environments: after-school programs; museums, zoos, and aquariums; and online communities (Lemke *et al.* 2012; Sefton-Green 2012). It is becoming clear that young people learn very effectively when they follow their own interests and engagements, when they work with peers and in cross-age groups, and when formal curricular outcomes are not imposed on them but instead learning outcomes emerge from the natural course of collaborative activities.

New tools, such as video ethnography and multimedia analysis and promising newer ones such as data mining and analytics offer rich opportunities to monitor, document, and study the

course of learning-along-the-way by all members of design lab teams. For this reason we believe that one good basis for Change Labs with an enhanced educational function is partnerships between design school programs and learning research programs in universities, such as the developing *UChange* partnership in Oslo between the University of Oslo Faculty of Educational Sciences and the Oslo University College of Architecture and Design (AHO).

We do not believe that it is realistic as yet to propose large-scale, society-wide shifts in the social support of education from the schooling model to the social innovation design and Change Lab model. First, we need to develop and study prototypes of enhanced learning and support for junior members of social innovation design teams to better understand what will make them work well both for their primary function of social innovation and for the integral additional function of learning-along-the-way. This includes studies of various models of mentoring within labs and studios and in online groups and communities.

We are also not proposing that this paradigm shift necessarily applies for all of education or for education for all people and at all ages. We believe that the strongest claims can be made for adult education, undergraduate education, and secondary education, including the re-education of those whom our schools and universities have failed (whether or not they have achieved diplomas and degrees). The very youngest students in primary education may not be fully ready to collaborate in mixed-age studios with older peers and adults, though some early exposure to the studio-and-project model of learning could still be beneficial in many ways for them as well. It is also not clear to what extent the studio-and-project model will serve those students whose very basic academic skills, such as print, technological, and quantitative literacies are still poorly developed, though again some participation in this new model should also prove beneficial. But the ways in which these younger and most academically challenged students should participate, for how much time, starting when, and with what connections to more intensive group tutorials and other more familiar learning approaches needs to be carefully studied and examined, and that can best be done once more studio-and-project prototypes are operating across a wide range of local contexts.

Social innovation design labs are not the only vehicles for a paradigm change in the social support of learning. Many other social institutions and programs, from museums to MOOCs (massive open online courses), from after-school projects to local community organizations can also provide valuable settings for learning-along-the-way and natural learning from and mentoring by peers and more experienced group members. We have given here the reasons why we find the Change Lab model a particularly promising one.

Future directions: next steps for practical action

The power of Change Labs lives in the people they bring together. Pioneering labs such as Denmark's *MindLab* and the *SITRA Helsinki Design Lab* have worked on bringing together experts from around the world to address local problems. The *Nutrire Milano* project emphasized including stakeholders, from farmers to consumers. Labs in Europe and the UK have often worked directly with government agencies and policy makers. The wider *DESIS* network that grew out of Milan's approach to social innovation design forges partnerships between Design Schools and local communities. But some important partners are still too often missing: the young people who will live in the new worlds being designed, researchers with the special skills to help labs improve their own operations, and artists, who bring creative and expressive talents that can catalyze innovation.

Modern society is excessively segregated by age. We need more experience of what can happen when the young and even the very young join in the process of re-thinking and re-

designing how the world works. As partners and junior partners in social innovation design teams, young people have much to contribute, not least their enthusiasm and freedom from preconceptions and fixed commitments. They also have much to learn, both about the many aspects of the projects they work on, and about the basic literacies of information and communication that weave across them. Our society has come to see youth as a burden, a large population in need of training and assistance, rather than as a resource. We isolate young people in schools and universities, where their learning is limited by lack of contact with real-world problems and complexities, and where their potential contributions are penned up. We teach them literacies and disciplines that are inevitably left incomplete and distorted by the lack of natural contexts of application and evaluation.

Learning sciences researchers have been increasingly turning in recent years to the study of learning in informal settings – outside schools and classrooms, free from imposed curricula and timetables, where learning is by choice and with enthusiasm, motivated by curiosity and commitment rather than reward and punishment, in museums and zoos, in internships and apprenticeships, in online communities and community action programs (Lemke *et al.* 2012). The research skills that are being developed in these contexts would also allow learning sciences researchers to identify design team activities that are more effective for team member learning, and coupled with design education researchers (Findeli 2001) they could help Change Labs change themselves to become more effective at everything they do.

The field of design has often been seen as a natural bridge between the sciences and the arts, valuing both systematic inquiry and rational production on the one hand, and artistic creativity and humane values on the other. For modern Western culture, this combination is fraught with tension. In every design school you can feel the tension between a more rational, engineering approach to design based on scientific – and in the case of social innovation design, social scientific – knowledge and disciplines versus a more humanistic, artistic approach based on intuitive understanding, personal immersion, unique expression, and esthetic and other humane values. The trend, we believe, both in private firms and academic design schools has been away from the artistic pole and towards the rationalistic one. This ensures a legitimacy with sponsors, clients, and host institutions dominated by rationalistic management philosophies, but it potentially sacrifices both the talents and values which artists and citizens at large, each in their own unique way, bring to the enterprise of design.

The arts are not a luxury in a society increasingly dominated by profit-driven, efficiency-maximizing, fact-based approaches to organizational management and social policy. Effective as these are in relation to their own ends, they are making society less livable, less enjoyable, less humane, more standardized, and more unequal in all respects. The arts are needed more than ever to challenge us and to remind us that being human is not about maximizing profit and efficiency, that those are at best means to other, higher ends. When we resonate with art, we feel what those higher ends are. When we meet artists who challenge us in unexpected ways, we question more openly what we realize we have harbored doubts about all along.

The future of social innovation design and the Change Labs which support it lies, we believe, in more diverse design teams, including: professional designers, design students, local youth and older community members, scientific and technical experts, challenging artists, learning sciences researchers and research students, experienced group organizers, and interested policy makers. Not every team will include every kind of partner, but each of these contributors should be within easy reach in the structure of the overall Change Lab.

The future of education, including literacy education, also lies, we believe, in Change Labs and other similar settings where mixed-age groups of people confront real-world opportunities for change. It lies in a change of paradigm, away from the academic emphasis on specialist knowledge

learned outside contexts of application, and towards learning that everything is one option among many, whose value depends on its context of use. Learning that matters is learning that lasts, as school-based knowledge rarely does. Learning that is part of experience with committed, meaningful action towards goals that matter to us does last, and if learned in the course of examining alternatives and choices, it ought to be more readily re-purposed for new settings and problems.

Human beings evolved to learn through participation in the essential activities of the mixed-age communities we live in, not as participants in the artificially motivated activities of institutionally isolated, age-homogeneous groups. Schools, classrooms, and curricula were invented at the dawn of literacy and urbanism, as the means of training scribes in the basics of record-keeping for the first large-scale economies. Perhaps the basics of early literacy are still best learned in this way, and perhaps also in other fields where those basics remain taken-for-granted and out-of-sight in everyday practice. But all learning is ultimately in the service of the creation of human value in contexts that exist outside the classroom, and the over-generalization of the academic model of learning is at the root of the ineffectiveness of modern schooling, most obviously in secondary and tertiary education. Students do not want to learn in boring classrooms and by and large they cannot use what they do learn there anywhere else. The exceptions remain too few to support a society that more and more requires a high degree of well-informed competence and creativity in its citizens.

Design literacies are the literacies of action. Social innovation design needs to become a universal literacy, because the design of a better world cannot be left to experts alone. Change Labs are a good candidate today for the kind of institutional support for social innovation literacy that can undergird and reinforce all the rest of learning. And Change Labs need to be built on partnerships among design schools and firms, community members of all ages, researchers, artists, policy makers, and organizers.

In Oslo, Norway, the University of Oslo's Faculty of Educational Sciences, through its interdisciplinary EngageLab and other research units, together with the Oslo College of Architecture and Design's Center for Design Research are extending a prior partnership to explore this next step in learning and social innovation design. An international collaborative network, *UChange*, will link with partners at New York University, the University of California at San Diego, and others. We invite your interest and participation.

Related topics

Research for social activism, Participatory and collaborative methodologies, Play and creativity, Social semiotics, Design research.

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PART V

Digital approaches

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POPULAR CULTURE, DIGITAL WORLDS AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Introduction

The term literacy appears to be deceptively simple: the ability to read and write, especially in relation to the printed format. And literacy was thought to be a condition that could be addressed by instructions and educational policies. Yet this conceptualization has been challenged since the late 1970s by considering the learning of additional languages and the impact of technology on communication. And in the midst of this, changes in technology have given learners greater and easier access to popular culture, which could have a greater potential impact than traditional classroom instructions on literacy.

When examining the roles popular culture plays in second language learners' digital literacy practices, it may well be worthwhile to consider what it means by popular culture. Storey's (2001: 1–14) discussion of popular culture gives six alternative definitions (culture that is liked by many; “inferior culture” left from “high culture”; mass-produced commercial culture; culture which originates from the people; culture which results in change; and everyday life where there is no distinction between high and low culture), and each definition is applicable to its own context. For educational purposes, Browne (2005: 19) uses the ‘culture of the people’ to contrast the understanding that popular culture is only about entertainment culture. And increasingly, computers and digital networks are transforming mass-produced popular culture into participatory popular culture, and the boundaries between producers and audiences are blurred to produce new convergence culture (Jenkins 2006). A Facebook page can be an intriguing example of convergence culture. The content of a Facebook page may include: the latest music videos released by record companies; user-generated updates, comments, and photographs; newsfeeds from traditional and online media; user-generated memes... etc. In this chapter, I use the term ‘popular culture’ to mainly refer to all forms of engagement with popular media – popular novels, music, films, television, digital games, online social media and so on. Increasingly, engagements with popular cultural texts have become the dominant domains of youth literacy practices. In this chapter, by contrasting the popular cultural practices of second and third language learners, I propose that popular culture provides essential opportunities for learners to engage in literacy practices beyond the limitations of the classrooms.

Historical perspectives: literacy, new literacies, second language literacy and popular culture

Traditionally literacy has been understood as the ability to read and write (Olson 1993), but it has frequently been framed as a dichotomous variable between literate and illiterate (McKay 1993). Literacy is viewed as a physiological and cognitive process of skills acquisition and, therefore, literacy is a neutral process that can be universally taught. However, this conceptualization of ‘autonomous’ acquisition of literacy through education disguised the inequality in social and cultural structure (Street 1995, 2000). In opposition to this conceptualization of ‘neutrality’ of literacy development, Street (1995, 2000) proposed an ‘ideological’ model that takes social and cultural power structures into consideration. From this perspective, literacy development is as relevant to being situated in particular social and cultural communities and practices as being taught in school. The inclusion of functional literacy and social relevancy as dimensions to understanding literacy as “a set of social practices that exploit the affordances of writing for particular ends” situates literacy as a dynamic construct rather than a mere skill set (Olson 2006: 177). The conceptualization of second language literacy is further complicated by references to first *and* second language literacy: at which point is a second language learner considered to be literate, in the first or second language? The ability to read and write fluently or the ability to operate in a particular language (McKay 1993)?

In addition, the changing medium of communication, namely the use of the Internet, also has a fundamental impact on conceptualization of literacy from word to image and from page to screen. Literacy needs to be rethought as a social phenomenon; and because the inherent nature of new technology use will bring out the “local diversity and global connectedness” (New London Group 1996: 64), literacy needs to be reconceptualised in its full multimodal forms. The change in medium from page to screen does not simply imply the transfer of reading and writing skills from page to the computer screen, but it is a radical rethinking of the ways emerging technologies change the reading and writing processes (Kress 2003). In the digital age, the conceptualization of second (or third) language literacy is thus further complicated by multimodal reading and writing practices, and popular culture may provide an interface for a new understanding.

Since the earliest days, popular culture has been mediated through books, newspapers, magazines, music recording, radios, films and TVs. Increasingly, popular culture is mediated through computers and online networks. Arguably, popular culture has always been multimodal: music, photographs, films, websites, and the modes of representation go beyond language alone. In view of the dominance of English language popular culture since the 1960s, Crystal (2003) argues that popular English-language music is likely the first point of contact for many second and foreign language learners. If English pop music in its audio mode was prevalent in the last century, we can only imagine the increased multiplicity of English pop music at present: official music videos, digital downloads, online streaming, fan-made/remix/mashed videos, etc. Popular culture in the twenty-first century is multimodal in its multiple representation and channels of circulation (Williams 2008).

Research in second language acquisition has paid attention to the roles of popular culture in learning, even though popular culture may have only occupied a peripheral position in the curriculum. However, as Marsh (2009: 313) rightly states, “popular culture creeps into children and young people’s written texts in classrooms despite any overt intention to enable this to happen on the part of the teachers”. By popular culture, I am mainly referring to engagement with popular media – popular novels, music, films, television, digital games, online social media and so on. Around the world, many learners study English as a second or foreign language in

the classroom from an early age in different educational contexts. Research on second language literacy has traditionally emphasized interaction within the classroom, and treated literacy and classroom instruction as one (Benson and Reinders 2011). Assuming that second language learners are lifelong learners and users, classroom learning would only constitute a fraction of their time. What about learning beyond the classroom? What are learners learning? How do they learn outside the classroom? And how will this impact on the concept of literacy, being able to read and write, in a second (or third) language? Gunderson *et al.* (2011) problematize the definitions of second language literacy in relation to the blurred distinction between first and second language. They acknowledged the political implications and added a timely dimension to second language literacy: multi-literacies. Viewing, reading and producing multimodal texts is an essential skill for survival in increasingly complex digital environments (New London Group 1996), popular culture may provide the key to understanding these two perspectives.

Prior to focusing on learners' engagement in digital environments, studies have discussed the possible roles and contributions of popular culture to second language literacy practices in out-of-class contexts. In a study on out-of-class learning strategy repertoires, Pickard (1996) found that German students preferred English newspapers, novels and radio over television for a greater degree of learner control. Hyland (2004) demonstrates that many of the out-of-class activities popular with Hong Kong teachers can be classified as 'passive' receptive activities carried out in 'private' domains (e.g. reading and listening to songs at home). Though contextual factors varied, the two studies highlight an array of learning strategies and an appropriation of popular cultural texts for language learning before the general popularization of Internet access. Both Pickard (1996) and Hyland (2004) privileged the importance of the use of learning strategies over the choice of popular cultural activities, thus making the choice of texts incidental. However, learning English from popular cultural texts might well be more intentional than suggested by Pickard (1996) and Hyland (2004). Ibrahim (1999) detailed the ways a group of francophone African youths in Canada used hip hop and rap music, not only to learn Black English, through listening and memorization, and imitation of Black English accents, but also to forge their identity. Lamb's (2004: 235) study of Indonesian learners suggests that "television, films and pop music are the main ways in which students can intentionally get exposure to English", though the results are inconclusive, since many programmes contain Indonesian subtitles, even though learners reported using dictionaries to aid learning, and not all students actively listened to the English. The actual language gain aside, popular English cultural texts provide additional language learning materials for Indonesian youth (Lamb 2007). These studies highlighted a relationship between second language learning and popular culture that is not often captured in classroom-based second language acquisition research (Benson and Reinders 2011).

Critical issues and topics

The bridging between our knowledge of second language literacy practices and popular culture may come in references to studies on first language literacy practices. A number of home-school literacy projects has shown that literacy and popular cultural practices are intertwined in out-of-class contexts (Plowman *et al.* 2010; Willett *et al.* 2013). With the growing popularity of online digital tools, there exists a growing body of literature that explores the interaction spaces for second language learners. Jenkins *et al.* (2005: 9) argued that "the informal learning within popular culture is often experimental", and this experimental nature of learning is valuable because it is situated in "entirely out-of-school noninstitutional realms of freely chosen digital

engagement” (Thorne *et al.* 2009: 802). The indication of autonomy in choosing the popular cultural digital practices provided researchers with new understandings of second language learning and use in different digital environments. Black (2008) and Lam (2004, 2006) both found foreign language learners receiving various language learning opportunities in supportive interest-driven online communities. Yet these opportunities depend on learners seeking communities to join. These investigations also focused on learners who participate in popular cultural activities as a means of gaining access to English-speaking communities. In a very different online environment, digital gaming reconfigures the ways learners place themselves in naturalistic learning contexts (Chik 2012, 2014; Sykes and Reinhardt 2013; Thorne *et al.* 2009). In addition, interaction in chat rooms (Lam 2004), blogging (Ducate and Lomicka 2008; Murray and Hourigan 2008), photo- and video-sharing sites (Benson and Chan 2011; Lee and Barton 2011) and forums (Hanna and de Nooy 2009) all point to the creation of positive learning spaces and experiences through diverse social networking tools on the Internet. These studies turned to digital spaces as the new realms for language learning, suggesting that out-of-class language learning is now no longer limited to the consumption of popular cultural texts but the participation in popular cultural practices.

The more recent development of considering learning beyond the language classroom acknowledges the contribution and efforts of learners (Benson and Reinders 2011). This is especially important when learners are constantly exposed to popular cultural texts and practices in the twenty-first century. For learners who have access to the Internet, access to popular culture is almost instant: music, films, digital games, social networking, photograph sharing etc. When considering popular culture and digital worlds, we can view the two prongs: the engagement with popular cultural texts in the earlier literature and the engagement in popular cultural practices in the more recent studies. While research on new literacy studies indicates that more and more young people are migrating to digital worlds to pursue their own popular cultural practices, it is less transparent on ways learners use ‘traditional’ mass popular cultural texts. Though smartphones are fast becoming the norm, this does not necessarily mean that learners are not accessing popular cultural texts in more traditional ways. Some are learning and memorizing the English language popular song lyrics from CDs, learning vocabulary from comics in the newspaper, and improving listening skills through film watching in the cinemas and TV dramas on television. These more ‘traditional’ ways of consuming popular cultural texts are frequently hidden because they may not be ‘cool’ enough compared to other digital forms of engagement. I will use the access to popular cultural texts and practices among Hong Kong students to illustrate the impact of such texts and practices on literacy development, and how classroom digital writing can bring these practices to the forefront.

Current contributions: English and German literacy through popular culture

To illustrate the connectedness of popular culture to literacy development, I will draw on two recent projects on English and German learning with university and secondary school students in Hong Kong. The two projects will highlight the importance and impact of access to foreign language popular culture on literacies. In Hong Kong, pupils are required to take English Language as a compulsory subject from Primary One, and they have to pass the English Language examination at the end of their secondary education in order to enter university. It is debatable whether English is a second or foreign language in Hong Kong, as English learning contexts vary greatly (Poon 2010). Other modern languages (e.g. French and German) or Asian languages (e.g. Japanese and Korean) are usually not offered in schools, but are available at tertiary level. English is listed alongside Chinese as an official language. All government and

major corporate websites are bilingual in Chinese and English. According to the 2011 Population Census, 3.5 per cent of the 7.2 million inhabitants speak English as their usual language, while another 46.1 per cent speak it as another language (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2012). In addition to Chinese-language mass media, free access to English-language mass media is available through two TV channels and three radio stations. The two local English TV channels regularly broadcast popular contemporary American and British drama and sitcom TV programmes, like *The Walking Dead*, *Modern Family*, *House* and *Sherlock*, and blockbusters like *Avatar* and *Inception*. In addition, TV viewers can subscribe to premium cable channels like BBC, CNN, HBO, Fox and ESPN. English-language films are the staples of Hong Kong cinemas. Several locally published English-language newspapers and magazines are readily available free or at very low cost. In the daily life of an average Hong Kong resident, English-language media products are easily accessible. Access to German-language texts and speech communities in Hong Kong is much more limited. According to Wikipedia, the estimated number of German speakers in Hong Kong is about 5,000. Though German is offered in universities, it is usually not offered in government-funded or government-subsidized secondary schools. Learners who are interested in learning German have to pay for private lessons at the Goethe Institute, community colleges or private tutoring. Deutsche Welle-TV, the German news TV station, is only available via cable TV subscription. German-language newspapers and magazines are available only in selected newsstands and bookstores in the central business areas. German films are occasionally available during film festivals. In other words, German is not part of the linguistic landscape of Hong Kong.

The first project was an ongoing project on digital language learning histories (LLHs) writing. LLHs were personal reflections of the language learning process both inside and outside the classroom contexts. First-year undergraduates taking a writing course wrote and shared their LLHs online through group wiki sites, and websites in the later cohorts. Students used group wiki sites and websites to post their LLHs and comment on others' LLHs. A total of 323 LLHs were collected between 2008 and 2012. Excerpts related to out-of-class learning were extracted and keyword coded for analysis. The peer comments, numbering over 1,500, were included as part of the original narratives. The excerpts were arranged by categories (e.g. all those related to reading were grouped together), and the categorized excerpts were then content-coded and analysed in the narrative inquiry tradition (Barkhuizen *et al.* 2014). By treating data as narrative units, shared and idiosyncratic themes were identified to provide better insights into the overall landscape of out-of-class learning. In these LLHs, students shared their best-kept secrets of using popular cultural texts and practices to learn English. Taking advantage of the user-friendly platforms to post media texts, students lavishly bestowed pop icons, novel covers, gameworld screenshots, travel photographs and YouTube videos on their individual webpages (see Figure 22.1 for a sample screenshot). Other students created remixed texts with photographs downloaded from the Internet or from their own photographs.

In the 323 LLHs on English language learning written by university students, one commonality is the omnipresence of English language popular culture and the most dominant media text type is English pop music. Crystal (2003) suggests that pop music is one of the most important media through which people around the world have come into contact with English since the 1960s. Many students, most of whom were born after the 1980s, wrote about the presence of English pop songs in their childhood under the influence of their parents. One young man produced a LLH video using Barbara Streisand's *The Way We Were* (1973) as the background music. While his group members were puzzled with the odd choice, as it is an old and sentimental song, he explained in his video that "I used Barbara Streisand's song because I wanted to thank my parents for their influence on my English learning. *The Way We Were* is

Senior Secondary

~My Top 3 Pastimes~

Listening to Music

At the very beginning, I just spent most of my time listening to pop music. As I was introduced some beautifully written English old song, I started to **learn the lyrics** from them, and after some days, I just listen| to almost **all kinds of good music**, especially those with **well-written lyrics!** =D



Postcrossing

Thanks God that I *discovered postcrossing!* I was **crazily writing and busily receiving** postcards and letters for almost half a year. Now I've got piles of postcards from **all over the world** and the most important thing is that, they all **carry wonderful thoughts waiting for you to read!**

Allow me to say --- **English is so powerful and I simply can't live without it!**

Figure 22.1 A sample screenshot of LLH on popular music listening and postcard writing (reproduced with permission).

my mother's favourite song, and I grew up listening to it" (M09, 2010).¹ From the content analysis of the textual and visual elements in all the LLHs, only about 10 per cent of the LLHs did not mention pop music at all. Even when the writers did not make direct textual references to its impact, they included collage visuals of pop music idols or CD covers or YouTube music videos with or without a short caption like "I love Celine Dion's *My Heart Will Go On*" (F29, 2009). Almost all learners discussed their favourite songs and singers, and their nominations varied considerably. But obsession with one song often sparked a learning journey: "One day, I heard a song on the radio, and I searched for it on the internet. I spent three days learning this song, Gwen Stefani's *Rich Girl*. But it was not easy to sing the rap part" (F65, 2010).

Memorizing pop music lyrics is also frequently cited as the most popular way to learn English. Almost every student pointed out that without YouTube, they could not have access to an array of English pop music. And without lyrics websites, they could not have turned pop music into a learning resource.

With the exception of the *Harry Potter* series, contemporary bestsellers are seldom included in school reading lists. This is the distinction between classroom-based and popular reading. Participants reported 'devouring' contemporary bestselling works like the *Shopaholic* series and the *Twilight Saga*. Though most readers viewed reading as a private activity on their own or among a small circle of friends (Hyland 2004), a few took a different path:

I was so obsessed with [*Shopaholic*] that I even registered as a writer on Fanfiction.net. As a new writer, I read a lot of writing from others, and exclusively from those who're also top fans of the *Shopaholic*. However, with most of the writers in the network being British or American, I felt my writing ability was inferior. I was unhappy and I realized that I must improve my ability to write in English so that I could write my mind out! I read more, and I also learned how to write in a more natural way by *asking and trying*. I asked for opinions from other foreigners in the same fan fiction network and tried to improve my writing according to their advice.

(F08, 2009, original emphasis)

When a reader turned private reading into participatory writing in the public digital domain, learning became more rewarding. However, this practice was not widely adopted among the learners. In addition to online fanfiction, students found other venues for creative photography and writing. Ever since the popularity of *Amélie* (2001), travelling toys all over the world have provided their owners with reasons to write and share online:

ToyVoyagers.com are travelling toys that you help on its journey by writing blogs! I totally fell in love with it. I enjoyed writing for my own ToyVoyager creatively as well as being a big host helping other ToyVoyagers for their trips! It's good for me to learn English from blogs written by other. =]

(F05, 2011)

For most learners, the more common tool, instant messaging (IM) was the first authentic digital interaction in English that most experienced. Online chatting appears to be a 'natural' activity that young people do, but many said that it was not easy to move the IM chatting beyond their own circles of family and friends. Popular media texts then became the currency for learners to situate their practices: "When I was in junior secondary, I started to spend a long time surfing the net. What I learned from songs and TV dramas was applied to chatting with foreigners" (F55, 2010).

Popular culture then is not only used as language learning texts but facilitates learning practices (Duff 2002). Similar to Pokémon as the cultural currency of children on the playground (Marsh 2004), knowledge of popular culture is the cultural currency of teenage learners in digital worlds.

All the undergraduates had, at one point or another, played digital games in English, and the more eager gamers were keen to demonstrate learning through screenshots of gameworlds. In my own work (Chik 2012, 2014), I found that digital gameplay points to three domains for learning: online gaming interaction, in-game texts consumption, and game-related texts production. Sharing an interest-driven activity allowed learners to put their English to use:

Thousands of people from all over the world play *Age of Empires II* together. It was fun talking to Americans and Europeans in English... Of course, we use some vulgar language all the time. I also have fans because I make scenarios for other gamers.

(M01, 2008)

Many popular games like *Age of Empires* and *Warcraft* come with a map editor, allowing gamers to create home-brew game maps, 'scenarios'. As games are often language rich, one gamer 'complained' that he "really had to learn the English to play the game" (M04, 2008).

Digital LLHs writing changed the familiar face of the learning cycle in Hong Kong through online assignment sharing and peer commenting. The adoption of wiki sites and websites as sharing platforms provided the necessary platforms for students to showcase the ways they individualized their literacy development through popular cultural texts and practices. When engagements with English-language popular culture enhance literacy development, then engagements with popular culture in other languages might also enhance literacy development. While English learners find it easy to access popular culture, German learners encounter difficulty.

The second project was a school-based online exchange project between Berlin and Hong Kong secondary school students in 2012. German is offered as an additional third language for selected students in an after-school curriculum. The Hong Kong school is matched with a Berlin secondary school that provides Mandarin Chinese as a language option. The Hong Kong team included eight Secondary Three students, and the Berlin team included eleven grade 9 students. It was a coincidence that all participants were females. The Hong Kong participants have been learning German for three years after school, but some had already decided to drop the course at the end of the year. Some had decided to continue in the following year to prepare for the British IGCSE German Examination. The project activities included workshop, survey, blogging, video conferencing, self-portrait drawing and focus group interviewing. Given the diverse data sources from both Hong Kong and German participants, this chapter focuses on the ways Hong Kong secondary school students see themselves as German learners in online and offline environments. In our first group discussion, the participants unanimously agreed that it was ‘extremely difficult’ to learn German because they ‘could only learn and use German in the classroom’. The ‘complaint’ stemmed from a lack of or very limited access to German popular culture. For instance, Lena Meyer-Landrut, a German pop idol and the 2010 Eurovision winner, was virtually unknown in Hong Kong.

The second project was a six-week language exchange project between German-learning Hong Kong and Chinese-learning Berlin youths. The findings are drawn from data collected from a survey, blogging, self-portrait drawing and focus group interviewing (Table 22.1). The focus of the analytical process was to gain a general picture of learning German as a third language and the ways participants positioned themselves in online and offline environments. So a qualitative approach was adopted to create the narratives of learning. The data analysis focused on the ‘subject reality’, in other words, on “findings on how ‘things’ or events were experienced by the respondents” (Pavlenko 2007: 165), and how these “things” were narrated by participants. This is a dominant position in narrative inquiry that pays attention to *what* was related by the participants so I did not try to establish whether what was said was an objective or accurate truth (Barkhuizen *et al.* 2014).

Table 22.1 Activities conducted by the Hong Kong participants (HKS1–8)

Workshop 1	Survey, set up personal homepages and blogs Homepage (English/German)
Blogging	Entry 1: My hobby (English) Entry 2: My neighbourhood (English/German)
Video conferencing 1	Video conferencing in one group
Workshop 2	Self-portrait drawing
Blogging	Entry 3: Language learning stories (German)
Video conferencing 2	Video conferencing in three sub-groups

Participants have been attending German classes provided by the Language Centre of a nearby university in an after-school programme, the textbook used being grammar-oriented with a strong emphasis on vocabulary acquisition. The teacher occasionally brought in German magazines and played some YouTube videos. However, the class was “teacher talks, we listen, we write and we memorize” (HKS7).²

As aforementioned, the participants had a limited repertoire of German-language popular culture knowledge. In order to understand their frustration with German popular culture, we investigated whether they had already cultivated habits to access English language popular culture for learning and use. During the first workshop (Table 22.1), all participants (HKS1–8) undertook a survey of their digital habits of English and German language learning. All were avid users of digital tools and social media (e.g. Facebook, MSN, and YouTube), and they were accustomed to using English language interface on these websites or applications. All further reported that they regularly consume English language print and media texts like novels, TV programmes, popular music and video games. All claimed that using non-textbook materials to learn English is more enjoyable and relevant to their daily lives. While all participants positioned themselves as savvy English popular culture consumers and producers (some kept blogs, most contributed to the Instagram communities, and all were active Facebook users), they were quiet on their German popular culture engagement. All reported reading magazines and watching TV because those were in-class activities, and the biggest surprise was the absence of German popular music. While the participants were experts in English popular music, they appeared to have virtually no (or very limited) knowledge of German popular music. Most had tried to search for German popular music, but soon gave up when their search results were random and unfocused. Among the participants, one (HKS2) never made any attempt to look for additional materials for German learning. Yet all participants wanted their classes to be enriched by popular cultural texts, especially with using German films to replace the usual listening and fill-in-the-blank tasks. Films were advocated because it was possible to watch German-language films with English or German subtitles on DVD. When prompted, participants said that this was a method they picked up from their teachers to improve their English learning: watching English films with English-language subtitles. This knowledge of learning strategies indicated that they were not ignorant of *how* to learn with popular cultural texts. However, they were less keen on using digital tools, like video games or websites, because it would mean resorting to the frequent use of a bilingual dictionary with no space to enjoy the texts.

One result of not engaging with popular culture was a sense of disconnectedness of German in their daily lives (“I just go to the class and learn, I don’t really feel that German is part of my life at all”, HKS3). For the project, we invited both Hong Kong and Berlin participants to blog about their hobbies, neighbourhood and what they did to learn English, German and Chinese. During the first workshop, participants set up their personal homepages and blogs. On their web homepages, they were asked to write a short self-introduction in either English or German. Among the eight participants, only two chose to write in German (HKS1 and HKS2). This was a breakthrough as HKS2 was the only student who did not make any attempt to source German media texts prior to the project. Some reported that they were worried that their German was not ‘good enough’ and the Berlin students would not “understand my broken German” (HKS3). Other than the linguistic concern, participants had a lively discussion on one convention of online writing: the importance of visuals (“You have to have photographs on your homepage!” HKS5). In the beginning, they were shy about showing their own photographs because “I do not know if the Berlin students want to see my face” (HKS3). After the first round of checking out the Berlin students’ websites, the Hong Kong students were happy to see “real faces” (HKS4). It was at this point that the concepts of communicating with ‘real

teenagers in Germany' caught on, even though one could argue that the whole project was artificially constructed. The participants were quick to personalize their homepages by replacing the stock images in the banner section with their own remixed images of themselves and the city. Instead of the standard designs, everyone's homepage started to take on a 'youthful' look.

The Hong Kong participants preferred blogging over video conferencing because it did not demand a spontaneous reaction, and they could write in German at their own pace without worrying too much about making mistakes. The use of a blog was considered an ideal situation because they could combine written texts with media. After the initial self-introduction, participants soon started exchanging knowledge of popular culture. HKS6 concluded her blog entry on hobbies with a request for German popular music recommendation (Figure 22.2 and Table 22.2). Her request was met with GS7 and GS5's requests for Chinese songs. Other recommended German pop or rap singers included SEED, Ich+Ich, Peter Fox, Clueso, Fanta 4

Wie lerne ich Englisch und Deutsch?

05/20/2012

4 Comments

Ich habe viele Art und Weise für Englisch lernen aber ich finde, dass es zu wenige Art und Weise für



Deutsch lernen in Hongkong gibt. Ich mag Englisch Popmusik hören und ich kann viel Englisch lernen von Musikhören. Ich finde One Direction toll und ich mag What makes you Beautiful am

liebsten.

Figure 22.2 A sample screenshot of blog entry (reproduced with permission).

Table 22.2 Comments on HKS6's blog entry, 'My hobby'

HKS6 (May 23, 2012)	Ich möchte deutsche Popmusik hören. Können sie mir Lieder empfehlen? [<i>I want to listen to German pop music. Can you recommend me songs?</i>] You can also ask me to recommend some Chinese songs to you xdd
GS7 and GS5 (May 24, 2012)	can you recommend some chinese songs? :-) :-D
GS8 (May 25, 2012)	Ich empfehle Dir die Band "Wir sind Helden" – das ist deutsche Pop-Musik und manche Lieder und Texte sind wunderschön!!! [<i>I recommend the band, Wir sind Helden, that is German pop music and some songs and lyrics are beautiful!!!</i>]
HKS6 (May 25, 2012)	songs from mayday (a Taiwanese band) are very meaningful and touching. Although the lyrics are in Chinese but the melody are really soft and sweet; DDD!!!!

etc. Similar short exchanges on popular culture included recommendations on chatroom (<http://geschaut.com/>), TV drama (*Türkisch für Anfänger* [*Turkish for Beginners*]), and of course, many of the participants soon befriended each other and started chatting on Facebook.

They were motivated by the fact that some Berlin partners left them comments in German, and they said they did not expect to feel happy about receiving comments, but they did. The writing in German to an authentic audience was something they thought they could not achieve in the classroom, because they had been completing writing tasks for their German teacher and the teacher alone. It was also a 'safe' exercise that "I can think about what I want to say and get some help from the dictionary" (HKS2). Other than HKS6, HKS2 also code-switched in German and English. When asked about her code-switching, HKS2 laughed and claimed that everyone on the project knows both English and German. So it was natural that when she did not know the German phrases to express herself, she code-switched and no one would find it strange ("And no one in real life writes in only one language", HKS2). The last statement sparked a mini-debate on 'what kinds' of people write only in one language in a digital environment: interestingly, they concluded that only 'old' people (i.e. not 'young' people) would do that.

Blogging blurs the learning boundaries. The Hong Kong participants were quite happy to put in a phrase like "Please tell me my mistakes, I would like to correct it! Thanks!" (HKS2) at the end of their blog entries. This was quite different from their preference for not needing to 'learn' German in the classroom. In their online modes, these Hong Kong students were happy to ask for help and guidance in their writing ("Because they may know a slang to say something", HKS1). Participants pointed out that they were less afraid of making mistakes than they normally were in their classroom writing, because trying to tell the Berlin students about their stories was more important than getting the grammar right. But an interesting point raised by HKS7 drew attention to the self-monitoring in blogging: "I was more careful in my writing because I wanted to express my ideas clearly, so I checked the short passage several times before uploading it". All participants found that they had to use the dictionary more frequently because the new blog topics challenged their need to adjust the tone and vocabulary. The challenge to write to an unfamiliar yet enthusiastic audience became "a thrilling experience" (HKS8).

Challenges and recommendations for foreign language teachers

Though McLaughlin (1990) pointed out that multilingual learners use different strategies to learn, the Hong Kong participants initially appeared to be quite conservative in limiting their German learning mainly to the classroom. This was contrasted by how well English learners utilized popular culture for literacy practices in out-of-class contexts. It could be considered that when the participants did not have a working knowledge of German popular culture, they found it difficult, if not impossible, to find media texts of personal interest as additional learning materials. Some learners were frustrated by the random songs they found on YouTube. Some found the German films they went to see were “very serious” (HKS5). These teenagers were struggling to find the ‘right’ popular culture, and felt that they had failed to achieve it on their own. The challenge to find entry points to access German media texts was certainly not helped by their teachers. When faced with the daunting task of searching for media texts, many of the participants opted to give up. The finding was in line with Csizér and Kormos (2008) who held that access to foreign language media texts enhances linguistic self-confidence. However, the participants’ online exchange showed that they were not indifferent to popular culture and digital practices in German; it was simply that they have yet to discover texts and practices that interest them. When digital access to popular culture is abundant, foreign language teachers are recommended to include popular culture for literacy practice. It is simply not enough to just use a random German pop song here and there, but give learners additional pointers to the online popular cultural landscapes.

Future directions

In this chapter, I highlighted the interconnection between popular culture and second and third language literacy development. In the most restrictive sense, literacy is the ability to read and write. It is thought to be a skill to be taught through schooling. This perspective is especially dominant in second or foreign language learning contexts, when literacy is viewed as a causal relationship with classroom instruction (Benson and Reinders 2011). What a learner does beyond the classroom is not necessarily viewed as conducive to second or foreign language literacy. The class- and project-based digital sharing platforms prompted learners to examine and explore the relationship more critically.

Popular culture is frequently the first point of contact with a second or foreign language that language learners have in their childhood, for instance, through TV cartoons, picture books and children’s songs (Crystal 2003). Yet popular culture is like the elephant in the language classroom: it is there, the learners know it, the teachers know it, but many teachers choose to pretend it is not there. Working with young German learners in Hong Kong shows this silence has a strongly negative impact on their third language learning. Popular culture is all about “consuming pleasures” (Hayward 1997), thus not productive and potentially harmful; and it is this fear that has hindered the full introduction of popular culture into the language classroom. Yet our learners are finding ways and paths to both consume and produce popular culture through texts and practices as pleasurable ways to learn and develop literacy. Findings from the two projects suggest that learners *need* popular culture in the target language to help them develop their literacy skills, be it the text or practice. Storey (2009) writes:

My own view ... is that people *make* popular culture from the repertoire of commodities supplied by the culture industries (film, television, music, publishing,

sporting, etc.). I also believe that making popular culture ('production in use') can be empowering to subordinate and resistant to dominant understandings of the world.

(p. xix, original emphasis)

In the same vein, second and foreign language learners *make* literacy practices from popular culture: listening to popular music, watching films, reading bestsellers, playing digital games, using social media sites, etc. The study with Hong Kong and German students shows that our learners are imaginative and creative in their leisure activities and beyond the classroom, but we have yet to know more about these learning initiatives. And these initiatives are not unique to Hong Kong and German learners (see for example Benson and Reinders 2011; Benson and Chik 2014). First, the two exploratory projects show that learners adopt an array of literacy practices based on popular cultural texts and practices, in both online and offline contexts, and this is one aspect that research has yet to catch up on. Some learners would report triumphs and some woes. At present, we simply do not have enough of the jigsaw puzzles to piece together the bigger picture on the contributions of popular cultural and digital practices to second and foreign language literacy practices. There is a strong need to collect and explore further the literacy practices that our learners engage in, which can inform researchers and teachers of the complexity of second and foreign language learning in contemporary worlds.

Another possible future direction is the provision of a shared space to acknowledge the learners' popular cultural practices (for instance, through class or group websites as shown in the first project) and the contribution to literacy development. For instance, teachers may have an initial consensus that foreign language learning through pop music listening is feasible, but it will be another matter to have a good picture of *actual* literacy practices by learners learning out of and around pop music. Another possibility is to induce learners to adopt popular cultural practices (as shown in the second project). Either way, these inclusive acts by teachers are empowering learners to navigate the world in a new second and foreign language for lifelong learning and pleasure.

Notes

- 1 All language learning histories (LLHs) were coded according to gender, author and cohort. For example, LLH (M09, 2010) was written by a male student of the 2010 cohort.
- 2 All Hong Kong and German students were coded according to the location, for example, HKS1 and GS5.

Related topics

Video games, Virtual spaces, Facebook narratives, New Literacies Studies.

Further reading

Benson, P. (2014) Popular culture as education: How it teaches and how we learn, in P. Benson and A. Chik (eds), *Popular Culture, Pedagogy and Teacher Education: International Perspectives*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Benson provides a historical review of relationships between popular culture and education.

Williams, B. T. (2009) *Shimmering Literacies: Popular Culture and Reading and Writing Online*, New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Williams examines the roles popular culture plays in global youths' online digital literacy practices.

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VIDEOGAMES AND LITERACIES

Historical threads and contemporary practices

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Introduction

For more than two decades, epistemological shifts have inspired reconceptualized understandings of literacy that include socio-culturally and multimodally situated meaning making (Barton 1994, 2001; Cope and Kalantzis 2000; Gee 1996, 2000, 2011; Jewitt 2003; Kalantzis and Cope 2012; Kress 2003, 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; New London Group 1996; Rowsell 2013). Additionally, there has been a heightened sensitivity to nuanced learning and participatory cultures (Jenkins 2006), as discussions of design, production, and materiality (Pahl and Rowsell 2010; Sheridan and Rowsell 2010) have come to the fore. With regards to videogames, research has suggested that specific features engage players in active knowledge development and critical thinking (Gee 2007a, 2007b; Salen and Zimmerman 2004; Squire 2008, 2012; Steinkuehler 2011). On the screen, players interact with multiple forms of texts, and game play encompasses “a constellation of literacy practices” (Steinkuehler 2007: 301–302). Looking more broadly at games and digital environments, greater attention has turned to affinity spaces (Gee and Hayes 2011) and the “digitally mediated practices” in those spaces (Curwood *et al.* 2013: 678). It has become increasingly evident that youth are involved in meaning making that has multiple trajectories and directionalities (Abrams 2013; Curwood *et al.* 2013; Leander and Boldt 2013), and recent discussions of social connectivity have addressed interest-driven experiences and the “affordances of new media ... [that can provide] new entry points into learning, opportunity, achievement, and civic participation” (Ito *et al.* 2013: 34).

Whereas these conceptual frames help to support the discussion of videogames and literacies, the swift pace of technological change continues to challenge scholars to study familiar and unfamiliar spaces and practices on and off the screen; often this means that research is reactive to spaces, designs, and/or programs that may become outdated or obsolete by the time a manuscript reaches publication. Nonetheless, discussions about videogames and online spaces help us move forward and frame our *working* understanding of literacy on and off the screen.

This chapter on videogames and online and offline literacy practices begins with a comprehensive examination of videogames from their first appearance as military simulations through their debut as entertainment. Tracing public response and historical concerns and juxtaposing them with contemporary ones, this chapter highlights recurring themes over approximately a sixty-year span as a way to situate the discussion of literacy. By the time the

word, literacies (in its plural form), represented contextualized, socio-culturally constructed meaning making (Street 1995), videogames had become fixtures of entertainment for more than twenty years. Thus, the discussion of videogaming and literacy that follows is situated within this historical context and examined in relation to current understandings of literacy. As the focus shifts from the past to the present, videogame-based learning is linked to other on and off the screen practices. Finally, this chapter closes with implications for research and teaching and a challenge to rethink socio-culturally embedded meanings in light of layers of literacies.

Throughout this chapter, videogames will refer to the digital games played on computers, consoles (e.g., Xbox, PlayStation, Wii), and mobile devices, major components of the \$80 billion industry (*The Economist* 2013). However, in terms of the historical emergence and reaction to videogames, it is necessary to recognize videogames within their technological and chronological contexts. Thus, though played on a computer relic, the game of yesteryear will be referred to as a videogame, as it is the ancestor of today's digital and highly graphical videogames.

Historical perspectives

Between 1951 and 1971, the videogame transformed from a military pedagogical tool to a mainstream form of entertainment. Though Goldsmith and Mann patented their Cathode-Ray Tube Amusement Device in 1947 (Cohen n.d.; Milian and Chan 2012), the device never was publicly released (Cohen n.d.), and the first game that officially became integrated into an established system was a military simulation. In 1951, Brig. General Leighton I. Davis created "an electronic game out of fighting an imaginary war" (*The New York Times* 1951). Three years later the United States Government commissioned Walter E. Cushen to research and compose an Operations Research Office Technical Memorandum, entitled *Generalized Battle Games on a Digital Computer* (1954). Cushen published his findings on the effectiveness of simulations that enabled "a direct translation of the predictions of the model to the real situation. The element of human decision and the sequencing of maneuver emphasize[d] the dynamic nature of the model and its even more dynamic real counterpart" (1955: 315).

Around the same time as Cushen published his article, A. S. Douglas's 1952 release of his software for Noughts and Crosses (similar to tic-tac-toe) became public. It is unclear how the academic community received Cushen's work; however, the general public sentiment toward computer games during the early 1950s seemed to be riddled with concern and skepticism about computers "thinking" on their own. Alan M. Turing (1950) published an article in *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* in which he questioned, "Can machines think?" thereby projecting increased computer capabilities and acknowledging how threatening computers might be to humankind's superiority. These concerns were echoed in newspaper articles throughout the early 1950s, as *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* featured articles referencing a person's abilities paling in comparison to that of a computer. Titles such as 'Chess by machine: At last the human mind can be eliminated in the game' and 'Expert visions machines taking white-collar jobs' (*The New York Times* 1950a, 1950b) suggested an angst about computer domination echoed by Dr. Claude E. Shannon of Bell Telephone Laboratories, who warned that "man's supremacy over the machine was being whittled away rapidly" (Abel 1953). Further, with automation entering the business world, there was concern about machines' exponential production power because factories, such as those owned by Ford Motor Company, could reduce its workers to "250 men, and it [automation] turn[ed] out twice the work formerly produced by 2,500 men" (Freeman 1953: 81). Nonetheless, the media's focus eventually turned from fear to action, and the second half of the decade included calls for

educating workers to use the machinery (*The New York Times* 1956; Hohn 1955) and control the digital computer (Hearst 1956). Automation soon was perceived as providing people “more leisure” (Hearst 1956), and academic journals featured a defense of human ingenuity, consciousness, and ability to reason (Bunge 1956).

Though the introduction of the videogame was followed by other technological advances that raised concern, interest in the game as a simulation resurfaced in 1957 when the American Management Association (AMA) published *Top Management Decision Simulation* (Ricciardi *et al.* 1957), a text detailing the first business simulation game developed in 1956. Underscoring the applicability of computer gaming to the business world (Cohen and Rhenman 1961; Eilon 1963; Hoggatt 1959; Hutchings 1957; Ricciardi *et al.* 1957), the AMA created a successful management game and a subsequent academic course, which enabled players to enter into a virtual business endeavor, make decisions, and immediately witness the benefits or consequences of such decisions. According to the AMA the “game’s major contribution to the learning process obviously lies in the actual *doing* ... and in the subsequent reflection upon and analysis of what, precisely, has taken place” (Ricciardi *et al.* 1957: 111). Likewise, as noted in the 1958 *Harvard Business Review*, the object of the game simulation was to have “transfer of learning from the game situation to reality” (Andlinger 1958: 129).

The AMA’s creation of its management game inspired the development and modification of future management games (Cohen and Rhenman 1961), and computer simulation became part of business training both in and out of the university classroom (Cohen and Rhenman 1961; Cohen *et al.* 1960). Among the offshoots of the AMA’s game were those created or funded by companies, such as the Westinghouse Electric Corporation, Pillsbury Mills, General Electric, and the Ford Foundation (Cohen *et al.* 1960; Cohen and Rhenman 1961; Shubik 1961). Further, schools, such as UCLA, the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University), the University of Oklahoma and Indiana University, were among the first to include simulation games in their curricula (Cohen and Rhenman 1961; Cohen *et al.* 1960). However, unlike the original AMA game, these schools created simulations far more complex and intricate, and provided “players with several hundred pieces of information each ‘month’ of play ... and up to three hundred decisions each decision period” (Cohen *et al.* 1960: 311). By 1962, six years after the introduction of the AMA’s game in 1956, sixty-four schools had integrated games into their business administration programs (Klasson 1964).

Business gaming became popular because the simulations were enjoyable, realistic, fast, and seemingly effective. Students at the Copenhagen School of Economics and Business Administration found their Reinsurance Game “highly satisfactory. The students not only enjoyed the thrill of the game, but said the opportunity of doing reinsurance business themselves had made their understanding of the problems of reinsurance much more realistic than it had been” (Hansen 1961: 17). Further, because these types of games simulated real-world situations, participants of other business games found the training effective as it promoted active learning, offered immediate feedback, and fostered an awareness of various business responsibilities (Cohen 1961; Eilon 1963; Hawthorne 1968; McKenney 1963). Overall, in the early 1960s, the sentiment toward business games was generally positive, with simulation games “as a major educational tool” (Eilon 1963: 140) and the computer as a “teaching machine” that could enable students to work at a self-tailored pace (Hughes 1962) without the “risks and costs involved in dealing with the real thing” (Hawthorne 1968: 12). Though at the time player testimony provided anecdotal proof that gaming was an effective and stimulating educational tool (Bellman *et al.* 1957; Cohen and Rhenman 1961; Hansen 1961), there was a dearth of sufficient research (Bruns 1965; Joyner 1966) to prove what we now know about games and

experimentation, problem solving, and collaboration (Gee 2007a, 2007b; Hayes and King 2009; Selfe *et al.* 2007; Squire 2012; Steinkuehler 2007).

Skeptics in the 1960s were concerned that gamers would accept computer output blindly and avoid responsibility (Johnson and Kobler 1962); others were wary of players applying to real-world practice the “fallacious ideas” caused by the simulation’s programmed restrictions (Eilon 1963: 144). As a result a number of calls for action included a need for more faculty involvement and direction (McKenney 1963), a more effective integration of the simulation into classroom activities (Cohen and Rhenman 1961; McKenney 1963), and a proven methodology to gauge the analytic behavior of gamers (Cohen 1961; Cohen and Rhenman 1961). These suggestions, however, did not address some players’ negative reactions to the games; some who played business simulations felt an increased amount of stress (Eilon 1963), even “dropping from class because of the emotional reaction to the computer game” (Johnson and Kobler 1962: 878). Yet, there was a paucity of research that focused on this emotional response to gaming. In addition to these concerns, the majority of the skepticism that arose at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the next decade extended into the mid-1960s, with a focus on computers being too limiting in application (Bruns 1965; Hawthorne 1968; Wilson 1968) or in cost (Klasson 1964; Shubik 1961). On a more emotional front, one *Los Angeles Times* article invoked the paranoia that had been expressed ten years earlier when it warned that computers were “invading” human activity and the “effect of computers on our society is one of the basic urgent problems of our day” (Bengelsdorf 1965). Almost fifty years later, Sherry Turkle (2011) called attention to people’s emotional ties to technologies and attenuated interpersonal relationships.

Even though some had reservations with the use of simulation games as teaching tools, the computer game became a very popular educational device. Perceived as a form of “new education” (Smith 1969), computerized instruction was embraced by universities and high schools alike. The computer was viewed as “an excellent educational aid” (Mullen 1967) because it could “help each high school pupil achieve his maximum potential, pointing the way to the holy grail – individualized education” (Banas 1968; Moss 1969). Students responded with a fervor that was astonishing. From the creation of a computer club (Philbrick 1965) to requests for simulation and programming courses (Solomon 1968) to entering a computer game into a city science fair (*Chicago Tribune* 1963), students were eager to interact with computer-based games. At the Oak Park-River Forest High School in Illinois, “more than 700 students asked to take part in the [newly offered computer] program,” and, by 1965, “more than 5,000 students from about 200 Chicago area high schools [had] completed a first programming course” (Philbrick 1965). Within the university classroom, the computerized game was seen to be effective enough for New York University’s business school to offer a simulation-based course “to a limited number of students as a substitute for a master’s thesis” (Wright 1968: F16).

By the 1970s, public sentiment toward computer-based videogames had changed, and the entertainment industry had a role in this shift as well. Computer-based games became more widespread and marketed to children (Cook 1970). Display ads in *The New York Times* in 1968 and 1969 featured simple computerized sports games, such as Computer Football, Baseball, Basketball, and Hockey, which were the focus of advertisements by Macy’s, ASC Stores Limited, Abercrombie and Fitch, Abraham and Strauss, Bloomingdales, F.A.O. Schwarz, and Gimbel’s. These advertisements did not associate the game with those from the military, business, or academic world; at no time was the term “simulation” part of the advertisement. The closest alignment with academics was the introduction of the “Comput-A-Tutor,” designed to enable players to “automatically and effortlessly ... start thinking and talking the

language of the computer expert” (Display Ad 79 1969: 80). However, nowhere in the ad were the words “learn” or “learning.” The toy industry appeared to have disassociated itself with the games’ military and academic roots. Therefore, it may be safe to say that, by the time *Computer Space* entered arcades and Magnavox’s *Odyssey* entered people’s homes (Kudler 2007), gaming would have been seen as a recreational, not an academic, activity because games had become mass-marketed in that manner. Thus, when we consider videogames in relation to literacy and learning, such a historical review helps to situate public sentiment and underscore how the move to videogames-as-entertainment solidified a stereotype that obscured the videogame–pedagogy connection.

Though the aforementioned historical discussion reveals that videogames began as didactic tools in the 1950s, the examination of videogames in relation to cognition and literacy only surfaced in the past thirty years. When Greenfield published *Mind and Media: The Effects of Television, Video Games, and Computers* in 1984, she presaged the discussion of games and learning. More specifically, Greenfield suggested that videogames help players develop spatial and cognitive skills, anticipate flexibility and multitasking, read visual images, and learn via discovery. Though Greenfield’s work predates the emergence of research on multimodalities, her discoveries implicitly underscore the multimodal literacy necessary to understand media: “Learning to decode the symbols of film or television is something like learning to read . . . some of the elements a television viewer must decode are visual . . . others are auditory” (1984: 10). Further, Greenfield recognized that videogaming involves embodied learning: “Television had dynamism, but could not be affected by the viewer. Video games are the first medium to combine visual dynamism with an active participatory role for the child” (p. 101).

When players interact with a game, they encounter new game-specific sign systems. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, others whose research or discussions included videogames (Cocking and Greenfield 1996; Gailey 1996; Gee 2003; Prensky 2001; Smith and Wilhelm 2002) also noted that game players appropriated words of a new speech genre and new syntactic structures associated with videogames. Videogame play, though different from traditional reading, required similar meaning-making strategies. Beavis (1998) explained that “in many ways playing computer games resembles other forms of engagement with text,” comparing gaming with elements of the reading process, such as predicting, checking, and revising, while also noting the complexity of games beyond understanding narrative conventions (p. 248). However, videogames, unlike traditional texts, draw upon a player’s motor skills and physical positioning, which are inherently linked to one’s perception of the game: “the protagonist, the reader and the narrative are literally embodied, with all constructed and constrained by the player’s dexterity” (p. 249). These insights also reflected conceptual shifts that eschewed the autonomous model of literacy (Street 1995: 13) and recognized socio-culturally situated *literacies*, expanded notions of texts, and value-laden, embodied meaning making (Barton 1994; Gee 1996; Street 1995).

Such an infrastructure has supported research on videogaming and the continued recognition of digital literacies, or “socially situated practices supported by skills, strategies, and stances that enable the representation and understanding of ideas using a range of modalities enabled by digital tools” (O’Brien and Scharber 2008: 66–67). Buckingham (2006) offered a similar socio-cultural embedded understanding of digital literacy, but he emphasized the critical analysis of technologies’ “new ways of mediating and representing the world” (p. 264). Further, Merchant (2009) invoked the principles of Barton and New Literacy theorists and focused on the combination of practices that are mediated through technology: “I suggest that the central concern of digital literacy is reading and writing *with* new technologies – technologies which involve the semiotic of written representation – recognising that on-screen texts invariably

combine writing with other modes of representation” (p. 39). Overall, the definition of digital literacies has a blurred perimeter – something Lankshear and Knobel (2008) and Bawden (2008) expressed as they respectively discussed the “plethora of conceptions of digital literacy” (Lankshear and Knobel 2008: 2) and traced the origins and metamorphosis of the concept of digital literacy. Nonetheless, what remains clear is that the core meaning includes the socially, culturally and economically situated practices that involve technology – and the critical understanding of technology – as a vehicle for learning and meaning making within and beyond school walls and computer screens.

Subsuming videogaming under a digital literacies category also gives credence to its role in meaning making. However, we cannot solely classify videogaming in terms of digital literacies because of the nuanced nature of players’ on-and-off screen behavior and funds of knowledge (González *et al.* 2005; Moll *et al.* 1992). Beavis and colleagues suggested that the act of game playing – not the game itself – is central to understanding gaming-as-literacy: “Computer games do not exist as texts until they are played; and each player approaches the game differently, depending upon disposition, experience of gaming, and knowledge of the world and texts” (2009: 169). Thus, as the topic of “videogames and learning” continues to permeate contemporary rhetoric, we need to be mindful of the situated, highly contextualized nature of videogaming that impacts meaning making.

In the new millennium, scholarship of learning and videogaming has echoed and/or broadened Greenfield’s (1984) discovery that videogames engage players in active learning, experimentation, critical thinking, and repetitive practice (Gee 2003, 2007a; Green and McNeese 2008; Schrader and McCreery 2008; Squire 2008). Other work has suggested that videogame playing can be motivating and gratifying (Chute and Miksad 1997; Rosas *et al.* 2003; Smith and Wilhelm 2002) and can be academically beneficial (Alberti 2008; Din and Calao 2001; Gee 2003; Lacasa *et al.* 2008; Rosas *et al.* 2003; Squire 2008). Additionally, some have focused on the benefits of frequent playing (Green and McNeese 2008; Schrader and McCreery 2007), proposing that videogames can improve mental rotation and perceptual skills (Boot *et al.* 2008; Cherney 2008), and others have addressed the relationship between gamers’ personal interests and their game choice (Crawford 2005; Malliet 2006). Steinkuehler’s (2007) research of gaming in massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs) has called attention to the “constellation of literacies” or the variety of literacy practices and texts one encounters and navigates in order to achieve within a game. Steinkuehler has highlighted complex on-screen texts and in-game literacy, and such meaning making can be highly contextualized in both online and offline spaces.

Critical issues and current topics: videogames on and off the screen

The historical discussion about videogames helps to reveal the rather mixed reception to games and the ever-developing understanding of videogames and digital literacies. Though issues of computer domination may seem relegated to the twentieth century, contemporary concerns for the potential ills of videogaming – from violence to addiction (Giumetti and Markey 2007; Rettner 2010; Shibuya *et al.* 2008) – echo the emotional response to games that also surfaced in the 1960s. The complexity of the connection players feel to gaming has been further underscored by recent neurological research revealing that a dopamine release related to rewards-based play can inspire and engage players (Willis 2011). Similarly, an affective response to gaming can be rooted in the experience of ‘flow’ (Smith and Wilhelm 2002; Squire 2012), or “joy, creativity, and the process of total involvement with life” (Csikszentmihalyi 2008 [1990]: xi). In this situation, “life” may be on or off the screen, and one’s degree of character attachment may be

directly related to “game enjoyment, time spent playing games, and likely video game addiction” (Lewis *et al.* 2008: 517). What follows is a discussion of players’ emotional connections to games and how gaming concepts have begun to enter the educational realm.

Life on and off the screen

When Gee (2003, 2007a) first published *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, he called attention to ways gamers are situated on the screen. Gee discussed three forms of identity: the real identity (the person playing the game), the virtual identity (the avatar on the screen), and the projective identity (the affective relationship between the player and his/her avatar). This projective identity helps to explain why gamers may feel personally linked to and responsible for their on-screen character and is often punctuated by gamers using the pronoun ‘I’ to explain their virtual accomplishments. The game’s design and the player’s decisions impact the connection one can feel to his/her avatar: “In gaming environments there are multiple levels of identity involvement, and the appropriate level of involvement is decided by both author [game designer] and player” (Keller *et al.* 2007: 82).

In providing a model for videogames as literacy, Catherine Beavis (2013) looked at videogames through two layers of functions. The first layer of the “Games as Action” provides a physical context for games through the three dimensions: simulations, design, and actions. The second layer, “Games as Text,” features four sections: “knowledge about games,” “world around the game,” “learning through games,” and “me as games player.” These focus on the experiences within and surrounding the game, from status building to critical understandings of the game. In all, Beavis highlighted the intricate relationship among the dimensions of design and the dimensions of play, suggesting that videogames and videogame practices “do not fit readily either into available definitions of literacy or into subject-specific parameters within school. Nonetheless, they exemplify the ways in which literacy is evolving in the direction of design” (p. 72). In many ways, Beavis’s comment aligns with Gee’s (2007a) contention that “the theories of learning one would infer from looking at schools today often comport, as we will see, poorly with the theory of learning in good video games” (p. 4).

In addition, when examining the four sections of the “Games as Text” layer, one might see a multifaceted, rather contradictory nature of videogaming; a game can be played both socially and independently, the player is both figurative and literal, and the game is both local and global. Complicating this discussion are the experiences outside of, but directly related to, online videogame play. Beavis explained that the “Me as Games Player” section “draws attention to the nature of players’ interactions with other players, both within the game and ‘outside’ it, whether physically present or absent, and known or unknown, and issues surround the textual representation and interpretation of self and others” (2013: 68). Presence, therefore, has relatively elusive boundaries that also blur the lines between the game world on and off the screen.

Along these lines, Abrams (2011) found that adolescents enacted online-inspired behavior in offline game spaces, and such an *associative identity* not only was related to an embodied learning experience, but also helped students situate themselves in offline gaming milieux. Abrams (2013, 2015) also suggested that adolescents layer their literacies as they move among various modalities and practices that are not specifically related to gaming but that occur within and between online and offline videogame spaces; she observed students maneuvering among their traditional and digital resources, alternating among practices (e.g., gaming, texting, completing homework) in a non-linear fashion. Though the concept of layered literacies has appeared in discussions of scientific communication and rhetoric (Carpenter 2011), technical communication and pedagogy (Cook 2002), tool, culture, information, and communication abilities (Easton

n.d.), as well as reading and writing conventions and computer-based “grammars” (Selfe 1989), the layering of literacies in and around gaming underscores how youth work independently or collaboratively with and across combinations of digital and non-digital texts, modes, and spaces. Additionally, Martin and colleagues (2013) examined the literacy practices of a twenty-five-year-old expert *World of Warcraft* player, Jaea, who engaged in interrelated online and offline activities. They found that Jaea had “shifting distribution of presence,” suggesting that “the expert’s shift occurs because of a holistic understanding of the context and attentional demands ... this ability demonstrates the literacy of the player to navigate the space of the game, the physical world, and the information constellation” (p. 241). In essence, players can move across intertextual experiences that inform understandings of the game and practices that are “layered together” (ibid.). Further, Ege and Koullapis (2009) discussed the extension of the *World of Warcraft* social space into other online venues, such as forums and discussion boards. Within these game-related affinity spaces, students can create “transformative works,” in which artifacts are remixed, recrafted, and repurposed (Curwood *et al.* 2013).

Applied videogame concepts beyond the game

As the focus shifts from within-game activity to out-of-game practices, especially those related to production, classroom connections begin to surface, and videogames can be seen as both motivating and relevant texts. Research has suggested that videogames can help students develop contextual knowledge of academic information (Abrams 2009; Squire 2012) and that when students create game-related texts, such as fanfiction, walkthroughs, blogs, and digital stories, they are experiencing authentic forms of expository, persuasive, and creative writing (Gerber and Price 2011).

When Squire (2012) examined the aesthetics of a game – entertainment, expert, flow, amplification, and narrative – to discuss educational applications, he also focused on the gaming experience. More specifically, he acknowledged how timing, rhythm, repetition, expertise, pleasure, and exaggerated action are part of gaming, and he highlighted how narrative plays a role in building a personal connection to the game and the character: “Games employ narrative techniques to produce these emotions” (p. 149). Thus, videogame design can support affective literacy experiences.

The emotional connection between player and game also underpins gamification, or the application of game-based principles to non-game settings, that focuses on “engagement, story, autonomy, and meaning” (Kapp 2012: xxi). “In any system, the player’s motivation ultimately drives the outcome” (Zichermann and Cunningham 2011: 15). Rewards provide encouragement (Willis 2011), and badges, short- and long-term goals, and “leveling up” can serve as a feedback system that challenges and distinguishes players. At the heart of a gamified system is the adaptive nature of technology and the ability of an individual to work within his/her specified profile; in other words, the system grows along with the individual, “deliver[ing] concrete challenges that are perfectly tailored to the player’s skill level, increasing the difficulty as the player’s skill expands” (Lee and Hammer 2011: 3). Lee and Hammer identified three areas – cognitive (mastery), emotional (real-time feedback and rewards), and social (flexible roles and recognition) – that can be applied in the classroom. In a similar vein, Abrams and Walsh (2014) found that gamified vocabulary instruction enhanced agentive learning inside and outside the classroom and supported the development of meaningful, contextualized understandings of language. Calling attention to user-centered design, Nicholson (2012) underscored that every aspect of a gamified process should address the question, “How does this benefit the user?” In so doing, Nicholson argued that users must receive criteria-based feedback beyond a numeric score and that gamification must be meaningful and appropriately challenging and engaging.

Recommendations for practice

Presently, the concerns of computer domination of the 1950s–1970s may have waned, but skepticism still abounds in relation to videogames and engagement – from questions about addiction to effective approaches to learning. However, with the proliferation of academy-based centers and institutes, such as, but certainly not limited to, the MIT Gambit Game Lab or the University of Wisconsin’s Games, Learning, and Society organization, credence is given to videogames and the practices surrounding game play. Universities across the globe are offering courses that center around principles of videogaming, from designing game spaces to learning within them, and what we are seeing is an educational response to a cultural phenomenon. Between the documented industry revenue and the qualitative and quantitative studies on engagement (be they with positive or negative results), it is clear that videogames have a cultural, social, and economic currency that sustains their longevity.

As we consider videogames in the larger discussion of literacy, we need to keep in mind the material and temporal contexts of gaming. That is, videogame practices are highly situated not only according to the particular game or genre or social setting, but also according to the time and space in which the game, itself, is played. Selfe and colleagues (2007: 32) articulated this point when they explained, “we can understand literacy as a set of practices and values *only* when we properly situate these elements in a particular historical period, cultural milieu, or cluster of material conditions.” Inherent in this conversation is the role of one’s funds of knowledge (González *et al.* 2005; Moll *et al.* 1992) or “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills” (Moll *et al.* 1992: 133). Learners build upon their experiences, thus bringing to light how the material has an affective component and how the nature of games and the associated literacies are socially and culturally situated.

Additionally, in light of Squire’s (2012) discussion about game aesthetics and Martin and colleagues’ (2013) exploration of distributed information and presence, learning is contextualized in repetitive play and intertextual experiences. In this way, videogames complicate the discussion of literacy because there are layers of situated understandings both on and off the screen, and the interconnection between practices in both worlds is essential to a greater understanding of videogaming and literacies. In other words, videogames cannot be viewed as a solely on-the-screen event; there are other external factors – values, experiences, funds of knowledge – that not only impact what others do on the screen, but also materialize in behavior and artifacts in the offline world (Abrams 2011, 2013). We need to continue the examination of embodied learning and the role of affect in literacy, something Leander and Boldt (2013) suggested needs greater attention.

Moving forward to think about research and practice, we are presented with distinct challenges from this point related to the layering of knowledge and literacies: the call for research to pay greater attention to the association between online and offline spaces and resources and the need for classroom practice to provide students adaptive and relevant learning opportunities.

Future directions

The charge for research

Though gaming environments exist on and off the screen, the attention to meaning making in the virtual world can have important implications for gaming studies. Currently, research of the vast online realm has been fruitful, but it also has resulted in dichotomized foci;

investigations of virtual worlds typically have been relegated either to web-based or videogame environments, resulting in two separate strands of study. Nonetheless, research of learning in virtual worlds (Black 2009; Gillen 2009; Marsh 2014; Merchant 2010) challenges conventional education and appears to present similar, overlapping concepts of design, space, and identity that also have been topics of videogame literature (Gee 2007a; Squire 2012). The division of research fields seems to partition findings into field-based silos, and rarely do we see videogame research informed by studies of virtual worlds and vice versa. Even when discussions of the two are housed within an overall conversation about “virtual literacies” (cf. Merchant *et al.* 2013), videogames research remains distinct from online spaces. Further, the concept of “immersive worlds,” often associated with 3-D media-rich embodied environments, has helped to support discussions of videogames and virtual worlds, such as those featured at Brock University’s *Interacting with Immersive Worlds* conference (2011) and Open University’s *Researching Learning in Immersive Virtual Environments* conference (2011). Yet, as with book chapters, conference presentations typically are identified by one division of study – videogames or virtual worlds – thereby perpetuating research factions.

In order to fully understand learning ecologies in online spaces, as well as the relationship between what happens on and off the screen, we need to examine how research of videogames and of virtual worlds converge and diverge. Such a charge extends beyond a systematic review of literature and implores researchers to look beyond the boundaries of their own field to draw conclusions and suggest implications based on data from a cross-section of research from videogame and virtual world studies. This also requires us to create a heuristic to support a common language and classificatory criteria, which would advance inquiries that attend to overlapping, layered, and textured meaning in online spaces.

The charge for practice

Videogames are not a replacement for practice; that is, students should not be blindly placed in front of a game because it tests basic content knowledge. Nor should games simply be inserted into existing curricula. David Buckingham (2007) warned against the overly reductive application of games in the classroom, one which replicates aspects of literature rather than capitalizing on the distinct nature of videogames. Likewise, we are reminded not to overly evaluate “youth’s pleasures with popular media,” something Alvermann and Heron (2001: 121) stressed over thirteen years ago. As blended learning opportunities begin to support student-driven, independent learning (Edutopia 2012a, 2012b), we see the classroom transforming into a space where, in theory, students *can* receive more individualized instruction. However, contemporary assessment-laden approaches to teaching and learning typically do not allow the time and space necessary for integrated and flexible curricula for integrating games or game concepts.

When we consider videogames in the classroom, we need to be sensitive to how the curriculum is designed. Quest to Learn, a school designed using game-based principles, provides students “a series of increasingly complex, narrative challenges, games or quests, where learning, knowledge sharing, feedback, reflection and next steps emerge as a natural function of play” (Institute of Play n.d.). Whereas such a radical change in curriculum design may take years to effect change in mainstream educational settings, there are opportunities for educators to begin to honor videogame-based aesthetics (Squire 2012) and build upon students’ contextualized understandings in online and offline spaces and the “folding” (Alvermann and Hinchman 2012: 272) and layering (Abrams 2013, 2015) of literacies that ultimately are part of a recursive shaping and reshaping of multidimensional knowledge,

interest, and affect. With an emphasis on iterative learning and ideation, classrooms can include more formative than summative assessments, which ultimately will allow students to learn, not suffer, from their mistakes.

Related topics

Multimodalities, Layered literacies, Digital literacies, Virtual worlds, Situated learning.

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24

VIRTUAL SPACES IN LITERACY STUDIES

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Introduction

In Chapter 2 (p. 44), Gee argued that the New Literacies Studies “simply carries over the NLS argument about written language to new digital technologies.” This is a useful starting point, emphasising a conceptual and methodological continuity of Literacy Studies when moving to online and related territories. However, also aligned with pioneering work by Gee, such as his polemical book, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning Literacy* (Gee 2003) is an argument that the world has changed so much over the last twenty years that literacies are necessarily radically transforming too (Coiro *et al.* 2008).

Moving into virtual spaces, Literacy Studies found itself traversing highly contested realms, where rival paradigms of research were more diverse than the discipline of traditional psychology that Gee identified as the first opponent of New Literacy Studies (p. 35). Research into the texts and practices of virtual spaces has permeated the social sciences and far beyond, such as human–computer interaction, science and technology studies and indeed computer science itself. The years following the millennium can perhaps best be characterised as involving the spread of digital technologies, while still leaving far too many globally on the wrong side of ‘the divide’, a contested but material set of obstacles. So there is a vast amount to study, whatever the disciplinary home a researcher emerges from.

As I will explore below, Literacy Studies draws from relatively cognate areas of Applied Linguistics, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Digital Anthropology, Media and Communication Studies and Education. Amid this wealth of disciplinary framings, key questions emerge. What key contributions is Literacy Studies making to the study of virtual spaces? What further opportunities lie open? And what does moving into virtual spaces offer the Literacy Studies researcher?

Before moving on, it is necessary to pay attention to terminology. As already mentioned, Gee has suggested that this area be termed New Literacies Studies. This keys into a recognition that what is significant about Literacy Studies in virtual spaces is not *simply* or *only* or *always* a move online. Literacy Studies researchers discussed here do not conceive of cyberspace as a world apart. What is ‘new’ about New Literacies is not a hard and fast binary distinction between the offline and online but a recognition of new practices with enhanced interactivity and new ways of combining writing and reading. Alternatively, if, for example, one accesses an

informative text online, that allows no opportunities for interaction, direct response or modification, then the text will be read in much the same way as one might read a leaflet. That is, Literacy Studies approaches show the complexities around understanding such situated acts of reading, always in a social, historically informed and spatialised context (see Mills and Comber, Chapter 6, this volume); but the fact that the text is rendered digital is not necessarily the most important characteristic for a Literacy Studies analysis.

For new literacy practices have emerged in what Kress (1998, 2003) terms the “new communications landscape”. There are new opportunities for collaboration involving new materialities, new configurations of time and space that simply did not exist before. These are often associated with exciting affordances of the Internet as perceived and acted upon by people. However, as Lankshear and Knobel (2013) assert, new literacy practices can also be perceived in other contexts, exhibiting connections between highly disparate settings and new patterns of collaboration.

This chapter is not called “virtual spaces” through disagreement with Gee’s preferred term ‘New Literacies Studies’ but rather because of the potential for confusion with ‘New Literacy Studies’. The term virtual spaces refers to a cluster of research areas and overlaps with terms such as *online*, *digital*, *Web 2.0* and *new media*. These are useful ways of drawing attention to relevant phenomena, but, arguably, tend to dichotomise relationships, with, for example, the *offline* or *analogue*, whereas semantic opposition is not the main point of issue. *Web 2.0* refers to highly interactive, participatory spaces on the Internet, especially as created from the first decade of the twenty-first century onwards. Yet it may well exclude some virtual worlds, online gaming spaces, apps and other environments many literacy scholars may be concerned with. The term ‘new media’ as indeed ‘New Literacy Studies’ (see Introduction, this volume) suffers from an intrinsic lack of historicity but if the ‘new’ is removed then all kinds of traditional media will be indistinctively incorporated.

The notion of virtual spaces connotes a continuity with other spaces that the literate imagination has always been able to travel to; as, while still and always embodied, we can move through texts to alternative, even fictional realms. So the term virtual spaces is not necessarily better than alternative or at least overlapping terms: “All have currency and appear to address similar issues, namely the ability to decode, encode and make meaning using a range of modes of communication including print, still and moving image, sound and gesture, all mediated by new technologies” (Larson and Marsh 2005: 69).

In this chapter I argue that there are three key ways in which Literacy Studies offers a specific and indeed unique way of considering texts and practices in virtual spaces. The first of these is a commitment to an ecological or holistic orientation to literacy practices; here is the greatest element of continuity with foundational and subsequent works in Literacy Studies.

The second characteristic is a commitment to studying vernacular or everyday practices in a rapidly changing and contested world, with a broad social justice agenda. As Hawisher and Selfe (2000: 15) point out, the Web: “is far from world-wide ... it is not a culturally neutral or innocent communications landscape open to the literacy practices and values of all global citizens.”

Third, a tremendous asset that Literacy Studies brings to work on texts and practices in virtual spaces is a recognition that while activities in various modes, such as writing, reading and talking may occur in conjunction, and have various relationships with one another, there is value in *analytically* distinguishing between them, as we unpick the subtle details of what people do.

Linked with these characteristics of Literacy Studies’ approaches to virtual spaces is a frequently shared purpose. Recognising the associations between developments in literacy

practices, learning and identity, many Literacy Studies scholars have deployed insights to challenge a generally hegemonic discourse in education that has undervalued the potential roles of popular culture and, in particular, online and digital leisure pursuits (Jenkins 2006; Willett *et al.* 2008; Carrington and Robinson 2009). Experience of popular culture texts provides students with semiotic and rhetorical resources they feel empowered to use (Williams 2009).

An ecological orientation to activities in virtual spaces recognises connections between textual interactions, identity and learning, all interwoven with their social and cultural context (see Bloome and Greene, Chapter 1, and Nichols, Chapter 7, both this volume). Ito *et al.* (2009: 31) refer to media ecology “to emphasize the characteristics of an overall technical, social, cultural and place-based system in which components are not decomposable or separable.” Opportunities are squandered if educators do not realise that young people themselves will make connections between their experiences in different kinds of domains (Barron 2006).

Historical perspectives

Online spaces are extremely diverse today in terms of ownership, accessibility, purpose and other dimensions of inequality that do not disappear when we act online. Davies (2006: 64) points out that the Internet was “originally designed for privileged individuals to communicate about war; it is contemporaneously and mundanely used for capitalist exchange, socialising, and much more ... it serves multifarious purposes for all kinds of people.”

The World Wide Web allowed new possibilities for activities online: the formations of new kinds of fluid networks, a breakdown of firm distinctions between production and consumption, and the possibilities of new ways of projecting individual and collective identity. Thus, far more than mere technological changes, the turn of the century saw social, cultural and political shifts (Castells 2001).

Leu (2000: 743) asserted:

Change increasingly defines the nature of literacy in an information age. Literacy is rapidly and continuously changing as new technologies for information and communication repeatedly appear and new envisionments for exploiting these technologies are continuously crafted by users. Moreover, these new technologies for information and communication permit the immediate exchange of even newer technologies and envisionments for their use. This speeds up the already rapid pace of change in the forms and functions of literacy, increasing the complexity of the challenges we face as we consider how best to prepare students for their literacy futures.

Some educationalists were already alive to such challenges. Deploying the memorable phrase *Page to Screen*, Snyder (1998: xxi) alerted literacy teachers and scholars to the “metamorphosis” of literacies in connection with the possibilities of new technologies. In respect of literacies, notions of ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ appeared inadequately thin to deal with the new kinds of interactions of texts. ‘Design’ was a more appropriate concept to cover meaning-making processes, as people combine resources for their own purposes (Kress and Jewitt 2003; Domingo *et al.*, Chapter 16 this volume).

Particularly influential has been the work of the New London Group (1996), committed to rethinking the whole purpose of literacy education within a broader agenda. Recognising growing interconnections and flows between people, language and technologies, they proposed a framework of multiliteracies to underpin new pedagogies. This broadens attention from

reading and writing print texts to a richer set of concepts around meaning-making through design. A summary of the multiliteracies framework appears as Box 24.1.

Box 24.1 Four components of multiliteracies pedagogy proposed by the New London Group (Cope and Kalantzis 2000: 7).

Situated Practice draws on the experience of meaning-making in everyday life, the public realm and workplaces.

Overt Instruction, through which pupils develop an explicit metalanguage of design.

Critical Framing interprets the social context and purpose of designs of meaning.

Transformed Practice, in which pupils, as meaning-makers, become designers of social futures.

These ideas promote attention to empowering students, working out from their own experiences, facilitated by teachers sharing a commitment to the design of social futures. The critical dimension is essential, being: “the ability not only to use such resources and to participate effectively and creatively in their associated cultures, but also to critique them, to read and use them against the grain, to appropriate and even re-design them” (Snyder 2003: 270).

Many Literacy Studies researchers and others working in cognate areas were alive to the expanding literacy-related activities children and young people were engaging in during their leisure time. Rather than the linear world of print texts, relations of elements of Web spaces are constituted by “bricolage or juxtaposition” (Livingstone 2002: 224). Alvermann and colleagues (1999) pointed out that pupils were growing up in a world radically different from that their teachers had known, and yet showed how discourses of popular culture could be used fruitfully in the classroom (see also Marsh and Millard 2000).

Reviews of Literacy Studies research in online spaces have concurred in identifying these as major concerns with implications for education (Tusting 2008; Burnett 2010; Mills 2010). How can we use or at least draw on in some way the vernacular practices and expertise that children and young people (in relatively privileged contexts at least) develop in order to assist their education?

Critical issues and topics

Inequality of access is the most vital area for action and research on literacy in virtual spaces. As Area and Pessoa (2012: 13) contend, “New literacies amount to a civic right and a necessary condition for social development and a more democratic society in the 21st century.”

The notion of a ‘digital divide’, conceptualised as either having access to online technology, or not, has been shown to be far more complex (Dobson and Willinsky 2009; Selwyn and Facer 2013). Differences in access can be experienced as fundamental in a variety of dimensions, such as the technological, for example whether access is broadband, wireless or via slow, older channels. Divides can also be identified at the national level, or as gendered, as age-related, and so on; all these can be understood as political and economic realities.

Responding to Warschauer’s (2009) call for more research on digital literacies in diverse global contexts, Prinsloo and Rowsell (2012) introduced a landmark collection of papers on “digital literacies as placed resources in the globalised periphery”. Rather than begin with a

focus on deficit or disadvantage, the researchers co-construct situated understandings that nonetheless examine how semiotic resources travel and are refigured locally (Achen and Ladaah Openjuru 2012; Auld *et al.* 2012; Bulfin and Koutsogiannis 2012; Green 2012; Kendrick *et al.* 2012; Norton and Williams 2012; Walton and Pallitt 2012). They demonstrate “how space and place are shaped from without as well as from within, and from above as well as from below” (Prinsloo and Rowsell 2012: 273). Engendered differences in uses of digital technologies become inequalities that can evoke acts of resistance or creativity, in activities integral to performances of identity.

A complementary notion to that of the ‘translocal’ shared in the collection just discussed, is provided by Wellman’s (2002: 13) definition of glocalisation as: “a dynamic negotiation between the global and the local, with the local appropriating elements of the global that it finds useful, at the same time employing strategies to retain its identity.”

A crucial issue for Literacy Studies research grappling with changing phenomena of language online is to understand the effects of greater migration and opportunities for more connections between people of diverse backgrounds. Pennycook’s (2007) concept of transcultural flows addresses the ways that cultural forms including language flow in ever-hybridised productions as people, themselves often mobile, draw on different linguistic repertoires available to them. Working across a range of contexts, scholars such as Lam (2009) investigate how youths make creative selections among the language varieties and orthographic systems available to them. Such work reshapes previous ideas of quite what ‘bilingualism’ or ‘multilingualism’ might mean as language use becomes increasingly fluid in many online platforms (Androutsopoulos 2013; Lee and Barton 2011). The essential understanding of language as code is being shaken, as ideas of superdiversity (Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Vertovec 2007) are exhibited in flexible combinations of online textual practices.

Literacy practices in virtual spaces entail new opportunities then for the performance of identity in ‘affinity spaces’ (Davies 2004; Gee 2004). An appreciation of the specific qualities and characteristics of such spaces can be combined with postmodern approaches to issues of subjectivity and desire, in conceiving of the self as projected or reflected on the Internet, including through avatars. Thomas (2007) explores the authoring of such identities in diverse virtual spaces, engaging with children as they refashion and reflect on their passionate engagements.

Many teachers, teacher educators and researchers have sought to build bridges between the expertise connected with children’s passionate engagements in virtual spaces, and the potential to draw on this fruitfully within schools (Merchant 2009). Further, for many, a contribution of Literacy Studies can be to dig deeper into these issues: in what ways precisely are the everyday, generally leisure practices of young people online of value? Do they actually have any salience in considering learning, beyond the obvious and perhaps seemingly trivial factor of enabling participation in a specific leisure activity itself? How can we persuade policymakers and those in charge of delivering education, where this is necessary, that these are questions that can be answered far more fruitfully than if we stick with the status quo, the styles, aims and values of education worked out in the late twentieth century (and even before)?

Bringing new literacies into the classroom, even when teachers may be alive to its possibilities and enthusiastic, is a risky and difficult affair, as documented sensitively by Leander (2007). In his study, laptops were brought into the classroom in an initiative targeted at improving the ICT knowledge and skills of girls. Leander’s detailed analysis unravels the process through which a well-meaning initiative fails, exposing the misfit between schooled organisation of space-time and those common to everyday online practices.

Such are the key challenges taken on by Literacy Studies in virtual spaces which are likely to resonate for years to come.

Current contributions and research

As one would expect from the emphasis in Literacy Studies on learning from careful studies of authentic activities by people in their everyday lives, this remains the case in investigations concerned with virtual spaces. Online environments are ideological spaces (Squire 2006). Children, as other people, make sense of them drawing from discourses and relationships they engage with in their everyday environments, including offline spaces (Barton and Lee 2013; Marsh 2011). Some online spaces that can provide highly motivating spaces for children, can at the same time be critiqued for narrowness in such features as gender proscription or emphasis on consumerism in the interests of multinational corporations (Carrington and Hodgetts 2010; Evans 2005).

Lam and Warriner (2012) offer a well-synthesised review of transnationalism and literacy, identifying the ways in which new media are taken up by people in contexts of migration. Rather than the earlier prevailing term of globalisation, translocalism better captures how people shape their communications so that they move effectively between specific contexts that matter to them. Researching Nepalese undergraduate students, Sharma (2012: 485) demonstrates how “social media offer affordances for the construction of cosmopolitan personae by certain kinds of people in the world periphery”.

As already discussed, many scholars have recognised that for many children the literacy expertise they develop through popular culture interests is rarely drawn upon in school. Investigations of the literacy practices of schools and indeed subsequent stages of education can often show missed opportunities in terms of the potentials of virtual spaces (Burnett 2010; Greenhow *et al.* 2009). It is challenging to incorporate new literacies in the classroom. Merchant (2013) deploys a financial metaphor in his analysis of what it takes to change practice effectively. Required are learner buy-in, teacher buy-in, entry costs and continuing investment; only after a great deal of effort is interest accrued.

One approach is to use online games or virtual worlds that have explicit goals towards multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis 2000; see Chik, Chapter 22 and Abrams, Chapter 23, both this volume). *Global Conflict: Palestine* for example has been taken up by school teachers in Scandinavia seeking to make use of a combination of gaming activities, complex narratives and literacy-related tasks that involve perspective-taking and the development of understanding of genres (Silseth 2012). *Quest Atlantis* and its successor, *Atlantis Remixed (ARX)*, are projects that have brought together online and offline media of diverse kinds. Commencing with an ethnographic engagement with the experiences of young people at school and at leisure, *Quest Atlantis/ARX* is a bold, international endeavour to combine education, fun and promote social justice. Research into the designers’ concept of “socially responsive design” argued for the effectiveness of “types of participatory design” that are “iterative, distributed, and locally owned, evolving as does a bazaar, rather than being constructed, like a cathedral” (Barab *et al.* 2005).

After several substantial projects in Australia, Beavis (2013a, 2013b) cautioned that it is difficult to domesticate online leisure pursuits and assume it is possible to incorporate them into the curriculum unproblematically. It may be more feasible to consider how they can be made use of in the classroom, for example as sources for investigation into different kinds of texts. She found, as Barab *et al.* (2005), that paratexts can take a very useful role. Reflective texts authored in spaces beyond the original locale can promote students’ sense of agency, immersion and perspective-taking through which they produce effective and persuasive texts. Digital storytelling initiatives at their most effective can be strongly locally oriented, and socially committed, while drawing on innovative blends of semiotic possibilities (Erstad and Silseth 2008; Hull and Nelson 2005).

Although such consciously designed educational interventions may be one way of promoting a sense of community that then underpins the collaborative production of elaborate texts, such an ethos can arise from commercial enterprises and virtual spaces that are chiefly constituted by volunteer labour. Hunter (2011) finds that notions of authorship can be redefined to more communal dispositions or 'habits of mind', bringing about very successful collaborations on a *World of Warcraft* wiki. Black (2008) shows how fan fiction writers can organise themselves into highly effective differentiated roles with respect to authoring, editing, peer review, mentoring etc.

Some successful transformations of practice in schools have drawn on the ethos of such authentic genres of participation (Ito *et al.* 2009). This and similar approaches have been reported as fruitful in accounts of empirical research aimed at transforming practice in schools and tertiary institutions. Lankshear *et al.* (2000) devised a three-dimensional approach to literacy, analytically distinguishing between operational, cultural and critical facets. Their case studies aim at sustainability in the use of technology in education and speaking effectively to practical policy decisions. Pierroux (2012) explores the possibilities created through students being able to move across spaces, physical and online, while carrying their mobile phones. She describes students' meaning-making in encounters with contemporary art: in museums; a virtual world; and interactive Web spaces. Her analyses recognise the complexity of their activities in the face of the school curriculum, literacies demanded by the virtual spaces and the specific knowledge domain of contemporary art.

The multiliteracies framework for pedagogy underpinning Pierroux's work has also been extended to tertiary education. Hafner (2014) describes an undergraduate course in English for science at a university in Hong Kong. Students were tasked to report their experimental findings through making a multimodal documentary, shared with an audience of nonspecialists via YouTube. They blogged about their work in progress. Surmounting the challenges of writing and creating videos for authentic audiences drew on practices they valued and found intrinsically motivating. Importantly, they also dovetailed with the course objectives.

Such alignments can be carried further. Vasquez *et al.* (2013) crafted an inspiring bridge between critical literacy and teacher education. They created opportunities for training and in-service teachers to experience for themselves the kinds of passionate learning experiences that their students enjoy, in, for example, online affinity spaces.

Main research methods

Literacy Studies in virtual spaces are distinguished from much scholarship in other disciplines in that researchers usually display an overall interpretive stance, deploying a mixture of methods. Often with explicit sociocultural framings, study designs tend to be open and flexible to some degree, providing opportunities to investigate the unexpected as it is encountered in the field. Further, Literacy Studies researchers do not render themselves invisible in subsequent writing up; the recognition of personal perspective taking is usually made explicit (Bloome and Green, Chapter 1 this volume).

Research instruments associated with ethnography, such as longitudinal participant observation, interviews, examinations of textual and other artefacts, are often drawn upon, aligning as they do with the umbrella notion of an ecological approach to literacies (Barton 2007). For example, Rowsell (2013) investigates expertise in the production of multimodal texts in a wide range of professional design disciplines. Her holistic approach integrates online and offline domains as specifically appropriate to each of her interviewees. Marsh (2011) used a funnelling approach, combining a relatively large-scale survey with interviewing a smaller

number of students and then intensively videotaping the interactions of three children while playing in a virtual world.

Other researchers signal adherence to an ethnographic sensitivity, the longitudinal dovetailing of emic and etic perspectives, while signalling a restriction in scope in some way. For example Androutsopoulos' (2008) discourse-centred online ethnography, combining textual analysis with interviews has been influential within and beyond Literacy Studies. Gillen (2009) terms her exploration of the diverse virtual spaces associated with a virtual worlds project a virtual literacy ethnography, to underline the fact that all interactions with participants took place online, with identities projected through avatars with self-selected names. Barton and Lee (2013) combine the study of multilingual and multisemiotic sites on Flickr with online interview data.

Computer-mediated discourse analysis (Herring 2004, 2013) provides a four-level framework for investigation: structure; meaning; interaction management and social phenomena, while embracing an array of linguistic tools. The term grew from an initial focus on early Internet genres, yet is now potentially applicable to other domains. Connective ethnography, as proposed by Dirksen *et al.* (2010) for the study of professional contexts, includes the discourse analysis of data from interviews, texts and communicative artefacts as well as findings from participant observation and a social network analysis of log file data. This would seem appropriate for more overtly literacy-focused studies of such complex (online) environments.

Social anthropology, with its long tradition of ethnography, has been a very significant influence on the development of Literacy Studies in virtual spaces. Miller and Slater (2000) undertook comparative ethnographies involving Trinidadians and Filipino families both online and physically situated in migrant and home locations, tracing how meaning-making practices and cultural understandings were deployed in their online interactions. Much contemporary work on transnational literacies aligns with this work in purpose, theoretical insight and methodology (Lam and Warriner 2012).

Other work emanating from social anthropology and influential on Literacy Studies demonstrated that longitudinal, immersive research limited purely to online interactions did not entail any avoidance of the complexities of meaning-making, performance of identity and issues of social interaction that may be familiar in the 'physical world'. Boellstorff's (2008) pioneering ethnography of the virtual world *Second Life* claims a social anthropology heritage all the way back to Malinowski. The handbook of ethnographic methodology in virtual worlds he wrote with other investigators (Boellstorff *et al.* 2012) does not include 'literacy' in its index, but is nonetheless valuable for its ideas, range of tools and attention to ethics.

Ethnography can be applied at various scales, from a microgenetic case study (Martin *et al.* 2013) to the unprecedentedly vast and yet still detailed investigation of young people's digital media practices captured in the Digital Youth Network project (Ito *et al.* 2009).

Recommendations for practice

In researching literacy practices in virtual spaces, three key principles should be borne in mind.

Recognising connections between textual interactions, identity and learning, it is desirable to consider carefully how research methods can capture some of this interplay. Depending on the research field, and the aims and scope of the study, it may not be possible to design a study as holistically as one would want. For example, when working online with young people, the necessity of keeping safety at the forefront of attention may preclude any kind of questioning directed at their offline lives. Nevertheless, retaining an ecological orientation to activities online, all approaches with recognition of a dynamic relation between activities and their social and cultural context, should be fruitful. This is likely to mean using a combination of research methods.

A capacity to distinguish *analytically* between distinct activities such as ‘reading’, ‘writing’ and ‘speech’ is a distinct contribution of Literacy Studies that should be maintained. Such activities are practiced and interwoven in new ways, as users shape their practices in response to the affordances of technologies. Some work by notable CMC specialists is extremely helpful to literacy researchers, making use of careful linguistically based frameworks while also paying attention to issues of material affordances and social context (Herring 2004, 2013). The analytic separability that is needed in order to investigate the details of specific actions should not prevent the recognition of the interrelations between activities, nor the social and collaborative aspects of literacy in virtual spaces (Gillen 2014).

Extending the traditional Literacy Studies’ focus on everyday and vernacular activities will continue to be productive. Many people will continue to bring their knowledge, experience and values gained in vernacular contexts to bear in other settings they meet including technical and professional contexts. For example Papen (2012) takes a Literacy Studies perspective to find out how adults incorporate learning from the Internet into their understandings of medical issues. Jones and Hafner (2012) lay out a promising agenda for more study of new literacies in diverse locations such as workplaces. Channelling attention to bottom-up practices rather than top-down assertions enables a questioning of hegemonic discourses, and can be used to question effects of power in local settings.

Future directions

I have argued above that most attention by Literacy Studies research to virtual spaces has been concerned with learning and education. This is for good reason as these continue to be vital arenas of contestation. In my own local context, England, for example, the government has recently published new consultation specifications for public examinations in English language specifying, “Digital texts must not be included” (Department for Education 2013: 4). The same restriction applied to the English literature specification. I could not help but think immediately of the imaginative ways Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, for example, has been engaged with in virtual worlds (Unsworth and Thomas 2014).

As recent research shows, time and time again, excluding the changing world with its pervasive digital spaces from the realms of school and further education, is an enterprise that is doomed to fail, and that deserves to fail. As Schetzer and Warschauer (2000: 172) propose, “literacy is a shifting target, and we have to prepare our students for their future rather than our past”.

This requires a rethinking of all aspects of education. The professional practice of teachers in classrooms, however enlightened it may be, is, as all human activity, constrained by the nature of goals and targets that are set outside the classroom. As Yelland (2006: 1) asserts, “We should not be mapping the use of new technologies onto old curricula.” Curricula are tied into assessment; not only the propositional content but also modes of assessment are instantiations of the values of those who devise educational policies. If assessments are thought of as demonstrations of the individual acquisition of knowledge, then this is a wholly different paradigm from understandings of learning as processes of participation in purposeful, collaborative endeavours. In a carefully situated study of assessment policies and practices in Nova Scotia, Van Zoost (2011) argues that these can be analysed to provide a basis for the negotiation of the imagined futures of young people.

Literacy Studies in virtual spaces has the potential to offer a great deal of benefit to the arts and humanities as well as social sciences by expanding research endeavours in several directions. One crucial trajectory must be to expand work with policymakers, technology specialists and

others to tackle issues of inequity and access. Working with other professionals on the design of assistive technologies and environments can enhance lives, especially as broadband access and mobile technologies continue to expand.

Methodologically, developing more holistic studies that simultaneously study embodiment as well as interactions online is a desirable expansion of current methods. Literacy Studies can draw from cognate disciplines in content, methodology and concepts. For example, within digital anthropology, Madianou and Miller have developed an empirically based concept of polymedia: “an emerging environment of communicative opportunities that functions as an ‘integrated structure’ within which each individual medium is defined in relational terms in the context of all other media” (2012: 170).

Their comparative ethnography examined long-distanced communication between migrants to the UK and their family members in the Philippines and Trinidad. A key finding was that, consequent with convergent technologies, choices between platforms depended centrally on the exploitation of affordances in order to manage emotions and relationships. The centrality of media selection to the maintenance and shaping of relationships has been captured by the notion in digital humanities of living “in media” rather than “with media” (Deuze *et al.* 2012).

In turn, Literacy Studies has the capacity to contribute to a broader range of issues and settings than so far achieved. In particular, there is much scope for bringing Literacy Studies to more settings, including the workplace. The combination of emic and etic viewpoints that Literacy Studies researchers deploy, combined with a keen reflexivity and commitment to positive action, has the potential to benefit other domains of inquiry concerned with literacy in virtual spaces.

Related topics

Computer-mediated communication, Diversity, Education, Ethnography, Materiality.

Further reading

Ho, C. M. L., Anderson, K. T. and Leong, A. P. (eds) (2011) *Transforming Literacies and Language: Multimodality and Literacy in the New Media Age*, London: Continuum.

This book brings many practical lessons from research in Singapore, Japan, Australia, the UK, the US and Canada; theoretically, a consistent theme is that of the notion of transformation from the multiliteracies approach.

Ito, M., Baumer, S., Bittanti, M., boyd, d., Cody, R., Herr-Stephenson, B., Horst, H. A. and Tripp, L. (2009) *Hanging Out, Messing Around, Geeking Out: Living and Learning with New Media*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wonderfully rich in empirical detail and also contributing to theories about media ecology, this is a very readable work. Its collaborative writing format also enacts a contribution to new literacies dissemination.

Knobel, M. and Lankshear, C. (eds) (2008) *A New Literacies Sampler*, New York, NY: Peter Lang.

It is very difficult to select any single title involving these prolific authors and editors, but I find myself frequently turning back to this superb collection of writings, united by a sociocultural orientation to new literacies.

Merchant, G., Gillen, J., Marsh, J. and Davies, J (eds) (2012) *Virtual Literacies: Interactive Spaces for Children and Young People*, New York, NY: Routledge.

A collection of recent research in virtual worlds and other online spaces for children and young people, tackling challenging issues for educators and researchers.

Østerud, S., Gentikow, B. and Skogseth, E. (2012) *Literacy Practices in Late Modernity: Mastering Technological and Cultural Convergence*, New York, NY: Hampton Press.

The contributors to this book have responded seriously to the call of the New London Group (1996: 60) that the goal of education is to ensure that all students become able to “participate fully in public, community, and economic life”.

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CONSUMER LITERACIES AND VIRTUAL WORLD GAMES

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This chapter explores digital literacies in the context of wider discussions about socially situated literacy practices, focusing on one particular area – children’s understanding of commercial structures in virtual world games. In line with sociocultural perspectives of literacies, I view children’s consumer literacies as embedded in specific contexts and “linked to broader social structuring” (Barton *et al.* 2000: 1). This chapter aims first to explore consumer literacies which are potentially needed in virtual world games. The chapter then investigates these literacies through a research project involving children ages eight to eleven. Readers will gain an understanding of cultural and critical dimensions of children’s digital literacy practices as exemplified by consumer literacies in virtual world games.

Introduction/definitions: virtual world games and revenue streams

There are approximately 150–200 different virtual world game sites marketed specifically to children, and in late 2012, there were an estimated 66.4 million unique active users worldwide aged seven to thirteen (KZero 2012). In 2013, Poptropica, Club Penguin, Moshi Monsters, and Neopets had the most registered users aged seven to thirteen. In general, virtual world games designed for children feature a real-time open-ended experience of a shared visual world through which players navigate and interact using an avatar. Game sites feature some aspect of socialization (e.g., friends lists, restricted or open chat, guilds), and a range of activities such as mini-games, dress-up, educational games, pet care, and ‘creative’ activities (such as building, drawing, music making). Some sites feature in-game money or points which can be used to purchase in-game goods.

Although ownership of virtual world game sites varies and includes academic institutions and nonprofit organizations, the commercial market dominates virtual world gaming aimed at children, and immersive forms of advertising and cross-promotional marketing have developed as these spaces have proliferated. Bob Bowers, CEO of Numedeon (Whyville), stated: “This is a very powerful medium for marketing because it involves this huge engagement. It’s more powerful than a sugar cereal commercial” (Olsen 2007). As early as 2005, Grimes and Shade analyzed what they termed “Neopian economics of play” on the Neopets website, highlighting the capitalist ideology present through the various activities on the site, as well as through product placement, sponsorship, cross-media promotion, and branding. Grimes and Shade

describe Neopets as “a culture which fosters deepening levels of intimacy between marketers and children by dissolving traditional barriers between ‘content and commerce’” (2005: 183).

In 2009, in a survey of over 200 youth-orientated virtual world games, the research group Virtual Worlds Management found that most virtual world game sites employ a variety of revenue streams, including subscriptions, advertising, virtual goods sales, and merchandising (retail tie-ins). Virtual world games referred to as ‘freemium’ businesses are free to play, but a paid subscription provides access to premium services (for example, more clothes for avatars, VIP areas, access to new games). Subscriptions generally run around \$4–\$10 per month. With millions of active players, microtransactions (the purchase of in-game content or premium account features) have the potential for a steady stream of revenue.

Advertisements in virtual world games include banner, pop-up, and embedded ads (which take users to the sponsor’s own website) as well as immersive or interactive adverting in which advertisements are integrated into the content of the site through games and objects (for example, Club Penguin teamed up with Marvel Comics to offer Marvel outfits for avatars). It should be noted that many virtual world games are branded sites, such as bearville.com (by Build-a-Bear workshop) or barbie.com. Finally, peer-to-peer sharing is crucial for these sites, and the activities of players on the sites are one of the things that make them appealing to other players. Using the term “creationist capitalism,” Ruckenstein (2011) details the ‘work’ children do in Habbohotel to create private spaces, conduct reality shows, or even just hang out and chat. Ruckenstein argues that “even if nonbuyers fail to generate cash flow with their micropayments, they are valuable in giving their time and advancing social processes and projects that make up the Habbo world” (2011: 1070). This overview indicates the range of consumer literacies required to read and understand many features of these sites (e.g., various kinds of advertising and revenue generating structures) as well as more advanced critical literacies related to the political economies of these sites (e.g., ownership, cross-platform advertising, peer-to-peer sharing).

Historical perspectives: consumer literacies

Knowledge of children’s advertising literacies or competencies is well documented in research literature, particularly in relation to television advertising. Often driven by questions about effects of advertising on children, research has largely come from a psychological behaviorist tradition (see Department for Education 2011; Seiter 1993). In this research model, children’s understanding of advertising is measured in relation to particular concepts such as selling intent or recognition of bias. Children are then assessed as being competent or incompetent in their understanding of advertisements, and incompetency is often equated with vulnerability (i.e., the potential to be influenced by an advertisement).

In response to this model of media literacy, researchers who take a sociocultural approach argue that by focusing solely on children’s psychological development in relation to media literacies and competencies, research overlooks important social forms and functions of children’s consumer culture as well as social aspects of learning how to consume (see Buckingham 2011; Cook 2010; Seiter 1993). In the early 1990s, Buckingham outlined his view of a “social theory of television literacy” which “would begin by acknowledging that children’s use of television is an integral part of the texture of their daily lives, and of their relationships with the family and the peer group” (1993: 34). In this approach, rather than identifying children’s developmental stage (their psychological capabilities) and viewing children as lacking in their development as they move toward adulthood, the focus is on developing a broader view of children as media consumers in society. This argument was part of a broader discussion taking

place in the 1990s in the field of literacy studies, in which researchers were raising questions about a linear and sequential model of literacy acquisition (see for example, Barton *et al.* 2000; Cope and Kalantzis 1999; Lankshear 1997). In these new approaches the emphasis is on considering the different contexts, purposes and discursive practices connected with children's literacy practices. Viewing of literacy as a social practice allows us to identify the ways social power is operating as children engage in literacy practices and ways literacies reflect the diversity of children's social and cultural identities.

Critical issues and topics

One of the key issues under debate in relation to consumer literacies concerns the impact of commercial culture on children. High profile reports frame children's culture as increasingly dominated by commercial products and focus on potentially harmful effects of commercial messages and products (American Psychological Association 2004; Department for Education 2011; Kaiser Family Foundation 2004). Concerns are increasing as internet and mobile communications offer marketers new ways of engaging children through digital forms of marketing and advertising such as sponsorship, product placement, embedded marketing, and advergames. In addition, converged media are creating platforms for cross-media promotion and branding. Many of these new marketing and advertising techniques blur the boundaries between promotional and other content.

As in the psychological behaviorist tradition discussed above, some proponents of consumer literacy initiatives argue that media literacy is a guard against potentially negative impacts of commercial messages. However, taking the viewpoint that literacies are socially situated, this position can be critiqued as starting from a deficit model. A socially situated view of literacies starts from an asset model (Mackey 2002; Tyner 1998) in which texts are seen as porous (Sipe 2000) and interrelated, and children's encounters with texts are seen to allow for the development of a range of potentially transferable competences. These two contrasting viewpoints position children, commercial texts, and literacies in very different ways. In the former view, children are positioned as vulnerable to the commercial intent of texts due to their lack of consumer literacy skills. In contrast, in the asset model, children are positioned as making meaning from consumer texts and possessing understandings which are relevant in the context of their consumer literacy activities.

Current contributions and research

Although very little research has focused on consumer literacies in virtual world games, there is a small but growing body of research that focuses on children's virtual world games and investigates areas such as literacy, play, and social practices. Some of the research involves content analyses of virtual world sites, and discusses the potential for children to engage in critical literacy practices (Black 2010; Meyers *et al.* 2010). Black, for example, argues that as children engage with automated text and advertisements in Webkinz:

[they] need to learn to read critically for the 'functions and meanings' of such texts in order to balance the desire for cute and trendy virtual goods with the need to maintain enough KinzCash to feed and care for their pet.

(2010: 20)

Several authors, including Black, outline the limitations of social worlds designed specifically for children. Meyers *et al.* (2010) argue that the safety components in environments designed

for children (restricted chat, for example) create tensions in relation to the possibilities for supporting interactions that are developmentally appropriate. Black's analysis also reveals the constraints on children's literacy practices in relation to the virtual world game Webkinz:

the focus is on content that is ratified, standardized, and created by 'experts'; in the case of Webkinz World, all content is created and strictly controlled by the Ganz Corporation. This content is then delivered in formats that position children as novices who are evaluated on the basis of mastering knowledge or skills.

(2010: 21)

Other research has involved more direct work with children, analyzing ways young players navigate the various features of virtual world games, and how they decode, respond to, and create multimodal texts as part of their game play (Marsh 2010; Merchant 2009; Wohlwend 2010). Similar to Black's assertion in relation to critical literacies, Marsh argues that children are critical consumers, and cites one girl who expresses frustration at the way Club Penguin removes pets from players' igloos if users fail to take care of them, reading it as the girls' frustration with Disney's attempts to ensure children keep returning to the site over time (2010: 34).

As indicated above, virtual world games are often commercial environments, and content analyses of popular virtual world game sites have analyzed the commercial structures operating within these sites (e.g., Grimes and Shade 2005). Other work has focused on ways children are positioned as consumers on these sites (e.g., Connelly 2013; Marsh 2013; Ruckenstein 2011). Studying children's interactions on Club Penguin, Marsh (2011: 110) asserts that children are "positioned as economic subjects by Disney and acculturated into shopping as a key cultural practice through the privileging of particular kinds of in-world activity." In a more recent study, Marsh (2013) points to the way in which Club Penguin can replicate uneven distributions of the economic, social, and cultural capital found in offline contexts. This highlights the importance of focusing on the cultural and critical dimensions of literacy practices related to virtual world games, viewing literacy practices as meaning-making processes in social contexts and literacy as including an awareness of the socially constructed nature of texts.

Main research methods

The data analyzed in the chapter are part of a study which explored how children (ages eight to eleven) engage with virtual world games. The study took place in an elementary school in a mid-sized university city in the US. Two researchers collected data, both Euro-American women from the university. The school contained primarily grades 3 through 5 (ages eight to eleven), and also included a new bilingual program for children ages four to seven. There were several Spanish–English bilingual classrooms for children ages eight to eleven, and the student population was 27 percent Limited English Proficiency (LEP) – Spanish; 7 percent LEP – Hmong; and 6 percent LEP – other. The school had a high proportion of free or reduced school meals, and 71 percent of the student population was considered economically disadvantaged.

Parents opted for their children to take part in a 'games study group' that met every day for twenty to twenty-five minutes before school started for three weeks. The group involved twenty-eight children: eleven and seventeen girls; seven 8-year-olds, nine 9-year-olds, and twelve 10-year-olds; representing different ethnic backgrounds, with Latino/a children making up almost half the group (thirteen out of twenty-eight participants). Although we were not able to collect data regarding individual's socio-economic status, the school is an area of the city

with the lowest household incomes and the highest percentages of Latino and African-American families. The school's catchment area also contains higher-income households from outside the local area.

About half the members of our study group were *novice* virtual world game players. These participants played mainly at school because they shared a computer at home and/or they had limited, slow, or no internet access; they had recently started playing virtual world games; they told us about basic experiences in their games, and they displayed no advanced gaming skills. About one third had *mid-level experience* of a virtual world game. These participants played at home and school; they did not have membership and played lots of different games; and they could use some advanced features such as interacting with others in games. The remaining five players were *experienced*: they all had internet access at home; most had membership to one virtual world game, and they had been playing one or two games for over a year; and they navigated their game confidently with some indication of use of advanced features. These levels were largely connected with ethnicity and possibly socio-economic status, with Latino/a and African-American children representing ten out of twelve novice players, and Euro-Americans representing four out of five experienced players.

In line with sociocultural understandings of literacies, the primary focus of the analysis is on meanings children construct in relation to texts, in this case meanings concerned with commercial aspects of virtual world games. In order to access these meanings, a variety of research-related activities were conducted with children. In relation to commercial practices, after a brief discussion in the study group about whether or not virtual world games make money (in which children more or less agreed that games create some revenue), children selected a game they felt they knew fairly well and created a spider diagram of how the game makes money (see Figure 25.1). They also placed round stickers on revenue-creation activities in which they had participated. Subsequent study group sessions took place in a computer lab

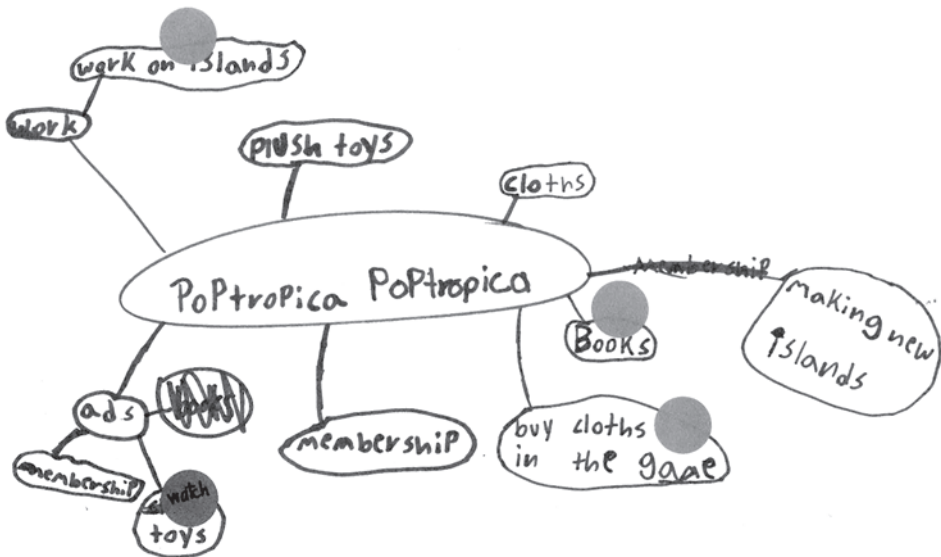


Figure 25.1 Spider diagram: how PopTropica makes money (Brett, age ten).

so that we could observe children playing virtual world games. Semi-structured interviews about their spider diagrams took place at computers, often as children were playing virtual world games, allowing participants to show examples in their games and for interviewers to ask context-based and follow-up questions. We also observed their game play and kept notes about the games they were playing as well as different components of the games in which they were engaged, which provided further areas for discussion in the interviews. The combination of methods (diagrams, interviews, observations) provided in-depth data on children's understandings of consumer practices in virtual world games.

Employing thematic analysis, the study group data were first coded for themes which emerged during repeated review of the data. Codes were informed by reading of literature in the field discussed above, as well as by reviewing data for repetitions, particular repeated expressions (e.g., 'random'), similarities and differences, and missing data (see Ryan and Bernard 2003). Both researchers coded all data separately, and then codes and coding were compared, discussed, and revised. Analytical themes emerged through this process of constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss 1967), and these themes were investigated further in reference to other literature in the field. The analysis that follows discusses children's understanding of the economics of virtual world games in relation to the literature discussed above while taking account of sociocultural practices which help explain their consumer literacies.

Given the literature in the area highlights a lack of research on children's understanding of advertisements in online environments, this is one focus for analysis. Are children identifying advertisements? Do they demonstrate advanced understandings about persuasive intent and bias, for example? How do children understand other economic structures of sites? In other words, how are children 'reading' commercial-related features of the site? Given the view of literacies that frames this study, it is important to have an understanding of the context of children's consumer literacies. The analysis starts, therefore, with a discussion of the kinds of investments children in our study were making online in terms of time and money.

Investing time and money online

When we initially observed our participants playing games in the computer lab, we noticed that many participants did not know their usernames and passwords and subsequently started new accounts (primarily in Poptropica). We were not surprised to find this was the case with our novice players. However, we inquired further and found that our mid-level and experienced players in Club Penguin and other sites also had multiple accounts. We also found that some children played different games on different days of our study. Further, we saw very few children taking part in some of the more advanced features of the games such as guilds in Club Penguin. On the whole, we found the novice and mid-level experienced players (over three fourths of our group) were not invested in developing their characters, spaces, and gaming repertoire/skills; rather their engagement in virtual worlds consisted of play that had fewer long-term goals (for example, some children spent sessions playing mini-games).

Only three participants in the study group (all experienced players) had membership (around \$6–\$9 per month), and two of those participants had membership through Webkinz toys which were given to them as gifts (the toys come with a code to unlock the virtual toy in the online game). The third player had paid for her membership to Animal Jam (\$6 per month) which she said took her "a long time" to save. The five experienced players tried new games during the study group sessions as well as returning to their more familiar games, and the Webkinz players in particular had multiple accounts and even shared one account. These observations indicate the casual approach to virtual world gaming that children adopted, at least in this context. This

casual approach is reflected across the data and is particularly relevant when considering economic investments in these spaces and children's consumer literacy practices online.

As consumers, children are often positioned as having access to economic capital or at least having influence over purchases. However, children in the study group insisted that they did not have credit cards and therefore did not make online purchases, and negotiating online purchases with parents (at least in relation to virtual world games) was rarely done. Further, products are often purchased for children rather than by or with children – one girl mentioned being given ten Webkinz toys as presents over two years, and another girl said her father gave her a one-month membership card to Club Penguin.

This indicates that a majority of our participants were not investing time or money in the games. This contrasts with studies of teens online who are described as “always on” and available for social contact (Ito *et al.* 2009), or studies which indicate that videogamers ages eight to eighteen play for almost two hours per day on average (Rideout *et al.* 2010). In addition to raising questions about the applicability of these studies in relation to younger children's online activities, there are questions about the meaningfulness and impact of advertising and new forms of marketing in virtual world games, given that children may not be investing time or effort engaging in these spaces. These elements (time, effort, motivation, monetary investment) indicate some of the factors which constitute the social context of children's digital literacy practices.

Advertising and other forms of revenue

Our study group activities aimed to investigate children's understandings of commercial structures in the games. The most frequently listed revenue forms on the spider diagrams (in order of frequency) were membership, advertisements (for various kinds of products), electronic merchandise (apps, codes, in-game items), and other merchandise (clothes, toys, books). When we interviewed children at computers, they were all able to identify online advertisements such as banners. With further questioning, we found evidence of children's more complex understandings of online advertising. In an interview about his spider diagram about how Poptropica makes money, Brett¹ (age ten, mid-level experience of virtual world gaming) indicates his knowledge of persuasive intent of advertisers:

Interviewer: ... You put ads on here, right? Advertisements. How do ads, do you think, help the game make money?

Brett: 'cuz like umm... they like show you things that tempt you.

Interviewer: They tempt you? Like what things?

Brett: Like cool toys and clothes... So they can like buy them, with real money, they get the money from them...

Interviewer: What are some reasons kids would buy the toys?

Brett: 'cuz they're cool and some of them [toys] look like their avatars.

Similar to literacies concerned with television advertising, Brett recognizes that advertisements are intended to “tempt” viewers into spending money on products. In particular, Brett mentions the “cool” factor as a way of appealing to children.

Brett listed numerous ways Poptropica makes money including membership fees, in-game advertisements (for books, toys, membership), in-game purchases (clothes for avatars), and franchised items (Poptropica-related books, toys) (see Figure 25.1). On his spider diagram, Brett wrote “making new islands” (i.e., new game spaces) as a way that Poptropica made money. In

explaining this, he mentioned more sophisticated ways of marketing, such as the appeal of membership and the intent of advertisers:

- Interviewer:** ...tell me about that – “making new islands.” How does that help them make money?
- Brett:** 'cuz, more people will play.
- Interviewer:** More people will play if they have new islands?
- Brett:** And usually if you have a membership you can have early access to the island.
- Interviewer:** Oh, you can?
- Brett:** So a lot of people like buying.
- Interviewer:** Oh, do you have a membership?
- Brett:** No.
- Interviewer:** No? Do you want to buy a membership?
- Brett:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** You do? To have early access?
- Brett:** And to, 'cuz you can't get some things in [in-game] stores [with in-game money] if you don't have membership.

This excerpt indicates that Brett recognizes the benefits and marketing appeal of membership, as well as admitting to desiring membership. Poptropica could be critiqued for persuading children like Brett that early access to games is desirable and worth paying for. However, he also indicates awareness of the intent of sophisticated marketing structures in Poptropica. He mentions that new spaces on the site attract players and keep people playing (“More people will play”). Brett recognizes the marketing technique of creating ‘stickiness’ – keeping people on the site. Further, he says “a lot of people like buying [membership]” because of the early access feature – acknowledging that the intent of Poptropica in providing early access is to raise revenue.

Although most children in the study group indicated a variety of revenue forms on their spider diagrams (membership, advertising, merchandising), not all showed the high level of consumer literacy demonstrated by Brett. For example, two girls (age eight) who were new to virtual world games and had limited/slow internet access at home had difficulties expanding their spider diagram beyond membership. Even with further explanations and questioning the girls were confused between in-game and out-of-game economies. The girls mentioned that their avatars find or earn money in the games, but they did not express any understanding of ‘real money’ that a company might make from the game. Further, when discussing activities in their game (Poptropica), the girls said that they “do movie trailers,” indicating that such forms of advertising were seen by the girls as an entertainment activity rather than as advertisements. Many factors might explain the differences between these girls’ and Brett’s consumer literacies (including age, internet access, other consumer experiences). Importantly, the different understandings represented in the data align with growing concerns about implications of digital divides on children’s ability to take part in participatory cultures, their engagement in new literacy practices, and their development of new literacy skills (Jenkins *et al.* 2007).

Ownership

Critical literacies in the context of virtual world games include an awareness of the political economies surrounding virtual world games, for example, understanding that sites are owned by for-profit companies. Some children were aware that Poptropica (part of Pearson Education)

was founded by Jeff Kinney (author of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series), because this had been discussed in some classes and Jeff Kinney had visited the school in connection with his books. No children could say which company owned Club Penguin in spite of the Disney logo and text that appears on the login pages. The more experienced players told us who owned Animal Jam and Webkinz when we were sitting at computers, possibly by reading the logos on the site – as one girl pointed out.

One experienced girl (age nine) told us that National Geographic “owns” Animal Jam, although when asked how she knows this information, she expressed some confusion:

Jillian: It says stuff like AJ [Animal Jam] National Geographic wants to like, sponsor you or something

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Jillian: I don’t know... like it, wants to help someone or something.

Across the interviews, we found ownership to be a confusing concept – ‘sponsorship’ was also mentioned in relation to Minecraft (one boy, age eight, said Mojang was Minecraft’s sponsor, explaining that “Mojang gives money to support it”). Similarly, there was confusion over revenue from advertisements. When asked why an advertisement was on Poptropica, one girl (age nine) said: “I think they just want to, like, help other businesses.”

Similar to the view of Poptropica as “helping” other businesses, Club Penguin took on status as a benevolent company in some children’s minds, as this experienced girl (age ten) indicated:

Nina: Well, like if someone likes the game they could donate if they wanted to.

Interviewer: So, donate real money to Club Penguin.

Nina: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, then do you know who like, what they would do with that money?

Nina: They could, like, make the game bigger or better.

Interviewer: Do you know who owns Club Penguin?

Nina: No.

The idea of a benevolent relationship between the producers of the sites and the children as consumers is reinforced through various media representations of the founders or creators of the sites. The Club Penguin website describes the original founders of the site as parents who wanted to create “a place they’d feel comfortable letting their own children and grandchildren visit” (Club Penguin 2012). Poptropica islands are themed around popular young adult novels, and touted as a new type of reading opportunity and interactive storytelling experience. Minecraft’s main designer Marcus ‘Notch’ Persson is described as “a lone geek in a bedroom” who grew up in a “relatively poor family” and in his spare time wrote the code for the Minecraft which is now “challenging the dominance of global firms over the multi-billion-pound gaming market” (Kurs 2011). Given these dominant discursive constructions, it is unsurprising that children do not see the sites as big money-making businesses. Furthermore, all the sites that participants mentioned are freeview, and subscriptions are affordable for many children. Finally, Club Penguin does not contain third party advertisements and has limited cross-promotional advertising (for other Disney products); and Minecraft is an independently owned company and contains no in-game advertising and very little merchandising. One conclusion that might be drawn from this analysis is that although concerns are raised about the presence of advertising and marketing in children’s online environments, by not portraying online spaces as part of large commercial

businesses, children might also be misled. This is another example of the ways contextual structures impact on children's literacies.

Recommendations for practice

This chapter argues that literacy practices in online spaces, such as virtual world games, include engagements in consumer culture; therefore, as researchers and educators we need to consider children's consumer literacies. The study discussed above indicates the complexity involved in understanding children's consumer literacies in online spaces. I have argued the importance of viewing literacy in this context as socially situated – as structured by a myriad of interlinked factors, as involving cultural and critical aspects of literacies, and as connected with social structures which potentially reinforce and deepen digital divides. As researchers, this indicates that investigations into children's digital literacies need to consider a range of dimensions of literacy practices and account for socially situated meaning-making processes involved in digital activities.

As educators, this indicates the importance of digital literacy practices that allow children to explore and develop cultural and critical dimensions of digital literacies. In relation to the study discussed in this chapter, there seems to be a disconnect between understanding advertising and grasping the larger picture behind advertising and other forms of revenue generation. Attempts to shield children from advertising, by not allowing third party advertisements or using phrases such as 'sponsored by [name of company],' perhaps contribute to children's misunderstandings of the site owners as benevolent benefactors. The key recommendation for practice in relation to consumer literacies, therefore, is to broaden the focus beyond approaches that adopt simplistic practices such as activities in which children identify advertisements and persuasive language. A broader approach involves understanding various dimensions of literacy practices including cultural and critical dimensions – considering the political economies of websites, for example. Children need to be able to analyze literacy contexts and know how to read and write an enormous range of 'texts' in very different contexts, and they need to have an awareness of the power structures embedded within texts and literacy practices.

Future directions

Discussions concerning children and online literacies often include a focus on risk; and children who are literate in online spaces are seen to experience less risk than children with lower levels of experience and online literacy (Livingstone 2009). Although there is heightened concern about the commercialization of childhood, and online spaces are seen to amplify the risks associated with these concerns, very little research investigates how children are experiencing or navigating these particular risks. Much of the research related to children and online risk focuses on issues such as 'stranger danger,' exposure to unwanted content, and bullying (see Livingstone 2009). On the other hand, many people take a more optimistic stance and argue that online media have had a positive impact, creating situations in which children are engaging in online cultures for a variety of purposes, and experiencing and developing new forms of learning, literacy, participation, and communication. Parents and educators are often unsure how to navigate this landscape – recognizing that children are growing up surrounded by digital and mobile media and experiencing a childhood which in some ways is very different than their own.

In analyzing these debates and fields of research, Livingstone (2009) concludes that focusing on the impact of the internet on children has been problematic for several reasons: it takes a

stance associated with technological determinism which “leads us to miss the many social processes of everyday life by which people themselves shape the significance and consequences of internet use,” and this misleads policy by focusing on technology rather than institutions (2009: 24). Livingstone argues that in order to understand children and the internet, we need to start by understanding children rather than examining the internet as an agent of change in society, ignoring other cultural shifts, and positioning children as ‘users’ rather than as members of families, peer groups, classrooms, or as new consumers and producers.

Children encounter a variety of texts, practices and meanings which are part of the lived culture surrounding their online gaming. Children’s experiences and understandings of online environments involve webs of meaning that are formed within and through different contexts, purposes, and discursive practices (Geertz 1973). As with any other form of literacy, consumer literacies need to be understood in this context. In order to understand children’s online consumer literacies, rather than seeing children as at risk of commercial exploitation and in need of protection (including education), or as net-savvy consumers who are already literate, research needs to focus on the sociocultural context of children’s online consumer activities and the social processes of meaning-making and identification in which children’s literacies are embedded.

Note

1 Participants’ names are pseudonyms.

Related topics

Children’s culture, Critical literacies, Play, Socially situated literacies.

Further reading

Buckingham, D. (2011) *The Material Child: Growing up in Consumer Culture*, Cambridge: Polity.

This book provides an in-depth analysis of debates concerning children and consumer culture. The book includes case studies in key areas such as obesity, sexualization, children’s broadcasting, and education.

Buckingham, D. and Tingstad, V. (eds.) (2010) *Childhood and Consumer Culture*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.

This edited book contains contributions from key researchers in the field of children’s consumer culture and covers a variety of topics including history, theory and method, practices of marketers, social contexts, and childhood identities.

Livingstone, S. (2009) *Children and the Internet: Great Expectations, Challenging Realities*, Cambridge: Polity.

Livingstone has published widely on television audiences and on new media and youth. This is among her most comprehensive assessments of the importance of new media in children’s lives.

Seiter, E. (2005) *The Internet Playground: Children’s Access, Entertainment, and Mis-education*, Oxford: Peter Lang.

This book is a short but sharply focused series of reflections on how young children engage with new media – particularly the internet – in a school context. It is concerned both with how children make their experience of the internet meaningful and with drawing attention to the overarching commercial logic of the medium.

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FACEBOOK NARRATIVES

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Introduction

In this chapter I accept the argument that storytelling is a basic human impulse and suggest that Facebook provides a new medium through which individuals can articulate and share their stories and experiences. I describe how the ‘narrative turn’ in social studies research situates narratives as a process of cultural reproduction and drawing on this perspective, argue that the affordances of Facebook shape stories in ways that reinforce particular cultural meanings.

Definitions and historical perspectives

The Russian formalist Vladimir Propp has been widely credited with the brokering of new ideas that influenced contemporary narrative research. First published in 1928, Propp’s analysis of fairytales proposed a finite set of narrative plots lying at the root of all stories. Propp’s attempt sought to demonstrate that irrespective of the number of possible stories individuals could ever invent, plots themselves would always be limited in number. Propp’s theory thus sought to describe a basic grammatical structure, a core set of rules, which could generate an infinite number of stories. Interest in narrative extended to the social sciences and later the sociolinguists Labov and Waletzky (1967) explored the structures of oral narratives. Again, they argued that stories had a core grammar, a syntax that could be identified, and that by first studying simple narratives, more complex stories could be similarly theorised. The work of such scholars, along with that of Bakhtin (1986), fused connections between literature, spoken language and sociological studies. Thus, a third way of looking at narrative evolved, which considered the purpose of narratives in our everyday life and how we use stories to tell the world back to ourselves. The transition of narrative study from literature to social sciences, which has been described by some as ‘the narrative turn’, is one which allows us to think about social life as a set of actions and events that we can report upon through particular narrative forms. The study of narrative, passed on through language and literature has an even longer history, going back to the Bible, the Koran and other religious texts, preceding even Propp’s work, who followed the formalists and Russian structuralists (see Czarniawska 2004). In this chapter though, we consider the history of narrative research from the mid-twentieth century, before exploring

how it has been used and could be used, to explore one of the most recent text types, from the social network site of Facebook.

Critical issues and topics

In this section I discuss how narrative has been theorised as part of the social science narrative turn. I discuss important examples of theories from a range of disciplines in three broad but overlapping sections, acknowledging the idea of narrative, first, as a human impulse; second, as an act of identity; and third, as an indicator of culture, or Discourse.¹

Narrative as a primary act of mind

In her study of the novel, English Literature scholar, Hardy (1975: 4) reflected the zeitgeist influence of social psychology on her discipline, describing narrative as a “primary act of mind” going on to argue that it is:

crucial in life and ... our ordinary and extraordinary day depends on the stories we hear. One piece of news, a change of intention, even a revision of memory, a secret, a disclosure, a piece of gossip may change our lives.

(Hardy 1975: 16)

Here Hardy talks about stories not just as elaborated literary texts, but as scraps, as “gossip”, suggesting the idea of narrative fragments. This drive to story our lives is seen by education researchers Sikes and Gale (2006) as definitive: “Human beings are storying creatures. We make sense of the world and the things that happen to us by constructing narratives to explain and interpret events both to ourselves and to other people”.

Ethnographic linguist, Hymes (1996: 118), similarly highlights how the quotidian underpins the stories we tell, that the everyday is structured by our stories and that we modify the way we see our lives in every telling and re-telling; it is an iterative process. This telling and re-telling is something that the work of Bakhtin also emphasises. He talks about how we voice, re-voice and even ventriloquise the words of others, weaving the meanings of those we have heard and read, within our own utterances. In this way we are seen to take on the voices of our culture; the language we speak is infused with cultural meanings that bring with them the stories of each other and of our own biographies (Bakhtin 1981). Bakhtin’s study of the novel, like Hardy after him, connects the written language of novels with the culture from which they have arisen.

Clearly then, narrative is not just of literary interest, it has become established as an important object of trans-disciplinary study – as a source of data, as lens through which to regard data, and as a vehicle for the presentation of data (e.g. see Bold 2012).

Narrative and identity

Narrative has also been a crucial foundation for much psychological theory; the elicitation of biography and dreams in spoken form are the staple of Freudian therapy, for example. The psychologist Bruner (1990) discusses how in telling stories of our lives, we do not simply re-tell, uncover or explain, but that the self-narrative process is essentially creative. He is not referring to the act of creation as a purposeful misrepresentation of ourselves or events in our lives – though misrepresentations may of course become part of our repertoire and reflect something of our reality – but rather, the idea of creation refers to our post-modern struggle to interpret

‘what is true or real’. For Bruner, our lives are constituted by the narratives we create or to which we subscribe, so that through our stories we construct not just our reality, but who we are. Bruner describes how stories are less about ‘uncovering’ past events, and more about a process of construction. He explains, “We seem to have no other way of describing ‘lived time’ save in the form of narrative” (2004: 692). Further, evoking the work of Bakhtin (1981), Bruner describes biographical narration as being more than about the individual, it is a social practice, a collaborative process, where each story is “enmeshed in a net of others” (Bruner 1990: 113). The cultural context of our stories is thus constituted by the voices of others and by the wider cultural Discourses of the context; in this way the autobiographical stories we create are co-constructed by those around us. Likewise, Bakhtin’s work reminds us that all our words come from others; and that even, “The ideological becoming of a human being ... is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (Bakhtin 1981: 341). Across the social science disciplines, then, we see narrative theory becoming embedded into the way social science researchers and theorists make sense of their data.

Giddens emphasises both the individual and social importance of the process of storytelling, describing it as an essential part of establishing who we are, creating ourselves in particular ways for ourselves and others:

A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self.

(Giddens 1991: 54)

Here we see Giddens discuss narrative as “the reflexive project of the self” (p. 32), and like Bruner, he sees individuals’ narratives as essentially embedded within wider societal Discourses of, for example, romantic love (Giddens 1992). He sees how individuals provide accounts for themselves that ‘make sense’ alongside taken-for-granted culturally accepted broader narratives. Giddens’ work suggests narrative research provides insights into how people see the world and their place within it; by making sense of people’s stories, we gain insights into societal and cultural values and norms. Langellier and Peterson (2004) describe how the act of telling a story is an act of performance, that articulating stories for others can, for example, help us demonstrate how we position ourselves and others in the world. They discuss the process where recounting family stories within families help us talk particular roles and histories into place, establishing and re-establishing each person in their family ‘role’. In this way we see how stories can be used to position ourselves in particular ways, as well as to position others.

Narrative and culture

Despite our predilection towards narrative, storying our lives is not necessarily easy; Bruner describes it as a “cognitive achievement” (2004: 692) and suggests, “recounting one’s life is an interpretive feat” (p. 693). This feat is not just about being verbally dexterous or articulate; this can be challenging of course and can make autobiography semantically problematic/unstable, but because we can only use culturally produced resources to tell our stories, we must use words and other modes which are already saturated with meanings from our culture. We may struggle to articulate lived experiences in new ways, to say something new; or we may too easily use the words of others which can feel wrong, clichéd, clumsy and ‘ill-fitting’.

As Bakhtin (1981: 293) explains, “The word in language is always someone else’s”. To tell a story that makes sense to others (and ourselves), it must be contextually appropriate; we craft the narrative from cultural resources so as to fit what others understand. Bruner describes how narratives reflect what is a ‘possible’ life within a culture, explaining like this: “Indeed, one important way of characterising a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life” (2004: 694). Thus only the stories that are supported by any given contextual discursive repertoire can be articulated (Bruner 2004). It is through cultural materials that we voice our stories and if these are not shared, then the story cannot be made manifest. As an illustration, Bruner provides the example of a series of stories from one family, who even when they might disagree with each other’s evaluation of events in the stories, all draw upon similar ideological discursive structures to make their evaluations. Thus we see how they share the same basic parameters, the same Discourses, even where their interpretation of the same events may vary. The family shares an underlying view of the world, of what is possible and how events can be evaluated and by analysing the narratives, one can discern the prism through which the family views the world. This is not to say that culture is static; Street and Thompson (1993) and later Maybin (2006) use ‘culture as verb’, highlighting the way culture comes into being, is negotiated, ideologically sensitive and malleable. Over time, through the negotiation of meanings within stories, it is possible for cultural groups to shift cultural understandings and definitions.

Terminology: narratives/stories

I have used the terms narrative and story almost interchangeably and it is useful to take a moment to discuss these terms. Copley (2001: 6–7) provides a ‘simple’ explanation of the distinction between narrative and story, where story consists of the events to be depicted, while narrative is the ‘showing or telling’ of the story, how the story is told and what details are included. This definition assumes that stories pre-exist their narration; that narrative is the vehicle through which existing stories are conveyed, and that we can separate one from the other. However if we see stories as emerging through narrative, even where stories originate from lived or observed experience, or are drawn from pre-existing narratives (such as in the re-telling of a story), then the story is an integral part of the narrative. Every story is created anew through each re-telling, nuanced within every new context or given expression in a new mode or form.

Ochs and Capps (2001: 18) provide a wide definition, subsuming stories within narrative and arguing that narrative is a “cognitively and discursively complex genre that routinely contains some or all of the following discourse components: description, chronology, evaluation and explanation”. Page (2012: 9–10) refers to ‘narrativity’ and provides a summary of three ways of recognising it:

it is generated by the recognition of reported events within a temporal framework. Second, the inferred connections between temporally ordered events are attributed with distinctive degrees of narrativity where causal events are attributed with distinctive degrees of narrativity where causal connections are understood as more narrative-like than temporality. Finally, narrativity is associated with sequences that signal a teleological focus, an overarching framework of complication and resolution, or a clearly defined point of closure attributed with interpretive significance.

In her study of stories in social media, Page (2012: 12) suggests that such stories often deviate from “narrative dimensions associated with canonical forms of personal narrative”, saying they

are more “emergent, collaborative and context-rich”. These features of Facebook narratives mean that analysis necessarily takes into account the ways in which individuals participate in the creation of stories collaboratively and over time.

Story basics: the Facebook template

In this section I consider the fabric and structure of Facebook and the way in which the affordances of the space structure text and thus affect meaning-making. I have not included a comprehensive description of Facebook or of social network sites as these can be found elsewhere (boyd and Ellison 2008; Davies 2012) but here I focus on those elements that impact on the fabric and structure of narrative within Facebook.

Kress (2010) refers to the cultural resources that can be used for meaning-making and his work on multimodality provides a thorough and sophisticated discussion of how meanings are culturally situated within texts – both in words and multiple modes – multimodally. Facebook allows users to update multimodally, using written words, acronyms, emoticons, images, web links and a number of textually expressed para-linguistic features unique to the space such as ‘liking’ and ‘poking’. Thus any analysis of Facebook stories needs to take into account a repertoire of cultural meaning-making resources, including language. Despite the range of modes that co-exist within, or that even ‘produce’ (Leander and Sheehy 2004) the space of Facebook, the affordances of the site also constrain the way stories can be communicated.

Facebook updates appear within an online template; self-evidently, this template structures updates or ‘statuses’ in a particular way so that self-representation is to a great extent controlled by Facebook – including the fact that online interactants are (sometimes controversially) all referred to as ‘Friends’. Outside Facebook this term may be used somewhat differently, referring to established relationships of a particular nature; whilst the meaning in Facebook may overlap with the way the term is used beyond its perimeters, it does simply refer to the people who have been ‘accepted’ by a user and thus allowed to appear on a list of Friends and to share certain bits of information in Facebook. Notwithstanding that optionally, other familial relationships can be signalled (e.g. partnerships, marriages, maternity and paternity), the site frames the way relationships are perceived by others in a somewhat deceptively homogeneous way.

Online entries, or updates, are all date and time-stamped at the point of upload. As in blogs, they appear in chronological order, with the most recent item appearing at the top of the screen. Posts immediately show how long ago they appeared e.g. ‘a few seconds ago’; ‘two minutes ago’. After a while this detail changes to give specific times and dates. Device brand names used to upload text can be automatically detected and stated by Facebook – e.g. ‘mobile’ or iPhone™/Android™/BlackBerry™ etc.; for example, one update from one of my Friends was annotated as: ‘a few minutes ago in Sheffield via BlackBerry™’. Such a template emphasises the importance of time and place within the narrative and suggests a diary, a logging of events, maybe for posterity. It also reflects the importance of branding for the sustainability of Facebook; this branding also locates the story materially in a world where smartphones are selected with care and whose marketing is tied up with identity presentation. As one seventeen-year-old told me, “You have your phone out nearly all the time. It has to look good and you can’t be ashamed of it. You have to upgrade when you can and people can tell what <brand> you’ve got by your updates.” In this way we see how the trademarks form part of the stories, part of the grander narrative of individuals’ lives as consumers of products, where my participant in this case cared about her mobile “matching <my > outfit” as well as “not looking lame when it says what you’ve got on Facebook”. This awareness of brand, but also her meta-awareness of the function of branding in her life seemed all to contribute to the notion that there was some kind

of management going on in terms of presentation of self within Facebook as well as beyond. These identity markers of branding and style suggest that identity work in Facebook narratives is performed not just in the textual elements but in the material reality of the person creating the texts as she holds her smart device. The work of Ochs and Capps, who refer to the ‘performance’ of stories, resonates here; it is not just the substance of the stories but the way they are delivered in terms of mode and medium, maybe the style, contribute to overall meanings.

Facebook users can opt to upload images alongside status updates and choose to name Friends they are with; these ‘tags’ hyperlink to Friends’ profiles so that readers can cross-reference to these people’s profiles too. A digital signal alerts tagged (named) Friends, sending a textual notification, usually with an accompanying sound on a mobile phone. In this way the tags serve to multimodally outline the network of Friends; to immediately involve Friends who have been mentioned and to facilitate, even nudge, their participation in the latest conversation/story/event. Tags help define social perimeters/parameters in this way; they *delineate* as well as *make* connections and operate as a kind of socio-digital-syntax, joining online texts as well as people. Thus Facebook affordances draw in collaborators and actively encourage co-authorship across time and space – since Friends may respond immediately or later. Friends are of primary structural significance in Facebook; in making stories about oneself and others, the naming of Friends digitally and syntactically binds them to that story. The network of Friendship is the key socio-digital-syntactic structure and so this becomes a prominent aspect of the semantics in Facebook. Here we can begin to see that while Facebook provides a template and emphasises certain aspects of communication, the communication itself works both within and beyond the virtual network, so that stories are not pinned down to time and space.

Images are easy to upload even from mobile devices and the software prompts authors to consider uploading images within the text box where they write updates. This fact, alongside the ease with which smartphones can now take pictures, means that the still image is a prominent textual feature of Facebook. The template thus encourages users to seek opportunities to use images as part of a multimodal message; texts become rich with images as well as words (see Figure 26.1).

Images that are uploaded alongside a status appear in the original author’s photo album called ‘timeline photos’ as well as in tagged Friends’ albums. Thus, one image can be displayed in multiple ways and appear in a range of online contexts; a single image can be a component in

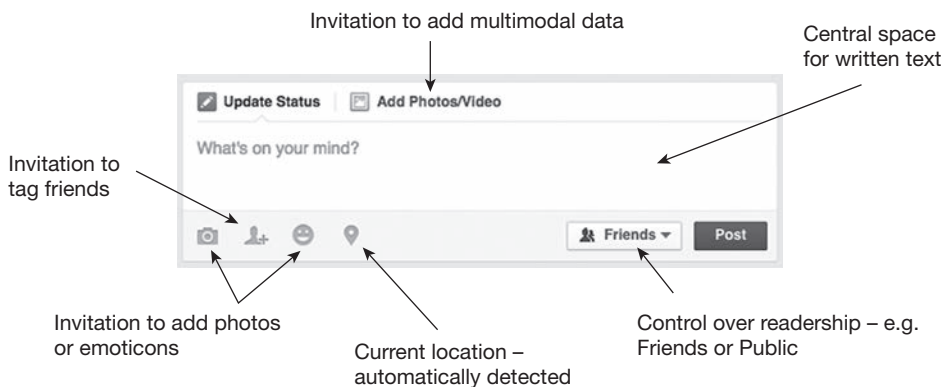


Figure 26.1 Facebook textbox with prompts.

a range of stories. Cultural resources are therefore replicated in multiple stories and take with them meanings that are traceable via hyperlinks. An image may appear within a story of one person's night out, but may also appear as part of a set of images shared with someone else on a story in their timeline too. These stories can be linked to each other or read independently. Particular stories, embedded in multimodal texts, can become particularly rich with a range of accumulated meanings as they are shared across spaces in different ways – but all drawing on similar cultural understandings or Discourses (e.g. see Davies 2013 for ways in which Discourses of gendered behaviour are disseminated and reinforced).

Finally, a 'Like' button (with a 'thumbs up' icon) is adjacent to the comment button, so those who perhaps have little time to upload text can simply affirm, or give a positive acknowledgement about the status update. In sum, through its prompts, Facebook gives Friends, images, place, time and affirmation from Friends, high value. As Donath and boyd (2004) observe, social network sites are at least partly about "public displays of connection" and even where stories are not ostensibly about the display of Friends, signalling of Friendship occurs throughout the narrative frame that is the Facebook template.

Facebook stories

Page (2012: 69) identifies that the majority of Facebook status updates are self-reporting stories; they fall into Ochs and Capps' (2001) categorisation of stories with 'low tellability' being mundane, often lacking obvious relevance, and rhetorical finesse. They tend to fit with what Georgakopoulou (2007) describes as "small stories" and can include projections for the future, 'breaking news' stories and 'shared stories' which recall or re-tell stories. As Page (2012) also points out, small stories tend to typify Facebook updates and tend to foster social connections.

A single phrase can constitute more than one short story, such as this one posted by one of my Facebook Friends: "Today I washed the cats paws and baked a cake. Who am I???" Whilst this update is just a few words long, it comprises a story with temporally organised events, and implicitly, character delineation; the story is stylistically interesting, concluding with what feels like a disconnected question, but which foregrounds the first person narrator in an interesting way. 'Who am I?' Intertextually, its structure, with its interrogative affix, references a riddle and creates a poetic sensibility. The freshness of this free-standing update exemplifies the "creativity" of language that Carter (2004) demonstrates is embedded in everyday "common talk", yet here, unlike the face-to-face conversations Carter analysed, in Facebook this story is time-stamped, and in this instance, read in the absence of the author and 'liked' twelve times. The story is quite abstract, absurdist even and plays with the notion of identity, where the writer purposefully constructs herself as intriguing, hard to pin down. It fits with a genre of game playing too and as part of a wider set of updates in this Friend's site, forms part of a wider delineation of her character, her evolving biography for others to read over time if they wish.

A Facebook update can constitute one, or multiple stories, while a single story may also be told (or enacted) collaboratively across a series of updates, perhaps across days or weeks as an individual or several people add to Facebook text through comments, hyperlinks, images, and even through the addition of tags to images. Such updates allow individuals to narrate aspects of their lives for others to read, for themselves to reflect back upon, and for collaborators to amend or contribute to over time (see Davies 2012, 2013; Page 2012). Each person's Facebook Wall or site could be viewed as a series of episodic stories told collaboratively across time, accumulating to a jointly told biography. While the voice of one Facebook Friend may lead a story with each of her updates, the comments of others (and herself) contribute perspectives and evaluations that add to each story. Stories that participants share on Facebook form part of the

broader narrative that they make for themselves and others; participants' life narratives comprise the accumulation of many stories some of which may be presented through Facebook, some of which may cut across a range of sites – perhaps going from Flickr to Facebook and Twitter and into a blog, for example (see Davies 2008, 2014).

Some Facebook stories evolve where participants simultaneously interact both face to face and online at the same time. Such interactions are also made more complex when additional interactants occupy different geographical spaces but join in the conversation. This can be seen as collaborative text making with participants in both distributed and onsite locations, as shown in Figure 26.2.

The diagram illustrates how each set of friends occupies different spaces whilst simultaneously sharing a space. They can filter information from one remote space into the shared space and this can form a story which can be read by interactants and others. Other Friends can contribute from numerous other distributed locations, perhaps sharing information from where they are or adding commentaries and details to the shared interaction. This kind of dynamic means that stories can be situated in a space that is difficult to geographically locate but which can develop meanings from shared socio-cultural understandings that seem to create new 'online' centres. In this way we see how the notion of 'online' has resonance for many users and how stories can seem to be situated virtually. Nevertheless, because many updates begin with a geographically located story (such as an image shown of friends in a bar), the evolving story develops around that particular location irrespective of the location of other interactants. In this way we see how the story meanings work differently for differently located audiences and interactants.

Page (2012: 146) provides a useful diagram (Figure 26.3) to illustrate the possibilities. The diagram represents the distinction between endophoric (onsite) and exophoric (offsite) interaction as well as the dimension of time, which shows the varying points of contact that are possible in online story-making:

Interaction within a space is endophoric, while interaction with people outside of a specific place is exophoric. In her example Page refers to oral histories, but the diagram can be adapted to suit Facebook. This kind of interaction has layers of participation, with those present able to communicate via two media and modes – using digital technology alongside physical voice and gesture, etc. Others are able to participate just through digital technology. For example young women in a nightclub are able to take a photo of themselves, jointly compose a comment to

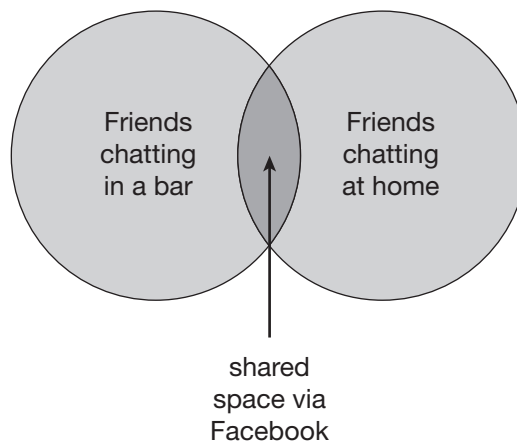


Figure 26.2 Synchronic Facebook interaction.

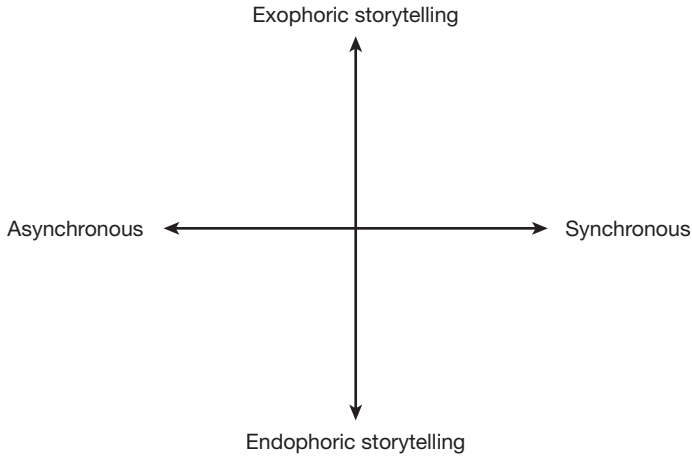


Figure 26.3 Facebook storytelling across time and space (based on Page 2012).

accompany it and upload it to Facebook, tagged with all their names. They can comment on the image and show each other their comments. Such activities (e.g. see Davies 2014) see Friends narrating their lives as they live it, and collaborating on how to create a story of current activities. The text-making activity is an important narrative line that is made on a moment-by-moment basis, like an extra semantic layer within the present context. Friends who are not physically present may see the images, the comments and participate in the interaction around the images. Thus while the narrative is shared, authors are distributed across space; the ability of multiple participants to comment and contribute to meanings allows Friends to create stories of their lives and participate in ongoing events in different ways. As Gee (1996) argues, these are Affinity Spaces, where different people are able to access content in different ways and all types of contribution are valued.

Current contributions and research

Facebook is a relatively new phenomenon; it was launched initially in the US in 2004 first just to Harvard students, but later to anyone aged thirteen or over with an email address. Facebook is not accessible globally however, since in some places such as China it is not accessible. Because it is a relatively neophyte field of research, analyses of Facebook narratives are also emergent. Nevertheless, responding to the legion numbers of people taking up opportunities to use online social networks across the globe, the field has attracted research interest from a wide range of disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, linguistics, education and medicine. Within language and literacy research, Facebook has been studied from many angles. For example, Losh (2008) uses a linguistic analysis to explore five ways in which a group of users expressed politeness on Facebook; Placencia and Lower (2013) look at complimenting behaviour; Maíz-Arévalo (2013) explores interactants' uses of the 'like' button, while Eisenlauer (2014) refers to Facebook as a 'third author' which provides a template for the ways in which people are able to narrate their lives. Page's study of stories in social media specifically addresses this topic and provides a wealth of examples in a range of sites, including Facebook. Her work sets out the field very clearly from a sociolinguistic perspective and provides useful analytical frameworks.

In higher education, work has explored how Facebook might be harnessed to support learning (Stirling 2014), while in schools the widespread blocking of the site would render parallel projects redundant. Thus much of the work about Facebook has explored ways in which people use it to perform particular identities, to make particular types of relationship, but less has been done to explore specific narratives, or ways in which narratives emerge. Such narrative analysis may be embedded in studies looking at specific issues, as opposed to analysing the stories themselves *per se*, thus my own work explores how people represent themselves through Facebook, how they performed gender in Facebook and how Facebook allows people to manage complex relationships by filtering different kinds of access to profiles in different spaces at different times (Davies 2012, 2013, 2014).

Research methods implications

Many written narratives – novels, for example – are self-contained, intended to be read without the writer present; authors, film directors, playwrights and so on expect their texts to be independent, autonomous, self-standing, to be read beyond the context in which they were written and consumed in places unknown to them as the text producers. Thus we have global distribution of books and films which can be broadly interpreted – sometimes with alternate cultural lenses – without the need for continual recourse to ask questions of authors. This is not exclusively the case, especially where the culture of a film requires background knowledge in order to fully understand the plot. In oral presentations of stories it is often the case that knowledge of the teller and his/her life is crucial in order to understand – as Langellier and Peterson (2004) demonstrate. For example in telling family stories, insider knowledge as a family member may be crucial for frames of reference to be understood. Facebook stories often tend to be similarly deeply rooted in contexts and often, because Facebook is used ‘on the move’, with Friends interacting using mobile devices, can be cryptic. As in speech, explanations tend to be minimal and this is also partly because the audience is usually assumed to know something about the teller – they are, after all, Facebook Friends. Bernstein (1971) referred to elaborated and restricted codes; the former being associated with stories where context is carefully set out and the narrator makes it possible for people who are not part of the story’s context to understand. Restricted codes refer to ways of telling, explaining and narrating that are less explanatory and more associated with intimate circles. Whilst restricted codes have long since been assumed to imply lack of linguistic dexterity, being cryptic and witty can conversely require skilful manipulation of communication modes. Indeed it should be noted that Bernstein did not see either code as intrinsically better or worse than the other, and argued that, “Clearly one code is not better than another; each possesses its own aesthetic, its own possibilities. Society, however, may place different values on the orders of experience elicited, maintained and progressively strengthened through the different coding systems” (Bernstein 1971: 135). (This tendency for Facebook stories to be strongly contextualised and cryptic, is perhaps the reason why it is often seen as a waste of time, unbeneficial and inane, with pictures of people’s breakfasts being cited as common instances of impoverished communication.)

Since Facebook updates are so often semantically dependent upon specific socio-cultural settings, Facebook researchers are likely to need to seek clarification with those who have authored and read the texts they want to cite in their work. Thus in my own Facebook research, for example, I have recruited all participants face to face. Some of them, I asked permission to ‘friend’ on Facebook, and talked with them about events of which their Facebook updates were a part. With others, I talked to them about their Facebook pages and asked them to show me aspects of their Facebook they were happy to share and explain. Explanations of the Facebook

texts were crucial, not just because I needed to be told simple contexts, but also it helped me uncover the extent to which online contexts are somewhat slippery; boundaries are fuzzy and interaction is frequently embedded in a variety of contexts at once and this is not always apparent from simple screen-reading (Davies 2014). Thus I have taken a ‘connected approach’ (Leander and McKim 2003), looking at the online texts but referring also to explanations offered by those involved in their authorship.

Ethical research implications

As with any research setting, it is important to become comfortable with a research site and to abide by the usual protocols of behaviour within that setting. The same applies to online research, that it is best to exist as a ‘quiet member’ or ‘lurker’, at least in the beginning and not to participate until and unless you have started to understand the rules and etiquette of the space. Even if a researcher has already been a member of Facebook for a while, the ways of behaving amongst her/his Friends may be different to those of the research participants. This is especially important on a site like Facebook where, owing to the variable ways in which Facebook Friends may have organised their permission settings, a person’s behaviour may be witnessed by many, even if they are unaware of it. Thus, because some Facebookers may not have closed down all their interactions to ‘Friends only’, a researcher may come across updates that they had not expected. This may not be of a concern to some people, but for others, it will feel like an invasion of privacy and it is the responsibility of the researcher to behave responsibly about the data they come across. It is crucial that researchers obtain the trust of participants since photographs of their relatives and friends may often also be visible to researchers without friends’ or relatives’ knowledge. Clearly researchers should follow protocols as set out in their institutions’ ethical codes of practice and acquire permission to use anything at all from Friends’ pages. All these factors need to be discussed before, during and after the process of research. Sensitive issues, such as arguments that may occur, revelations about lives and so on, should of course be respectfully treated and additional permissions acquired should such episodes be used as data.

Ethical advantages in using Facebook as a research space includes the reciprocity of access to private spaces. Thus while a researcher can see all the data on their participants’ sites, so too can they see the data on the researcher’s site. This can support a more balanced relationship. Participants can easily contact the researcher and vice versa, can ask for clarification and chat ‘backstage’ in private messages if required.

While Facebook data will often reflect unremarkable everyday aspects of people’s lives and mainly portray the quotidian aspects of living, mundane stories of relevance to only a few, the data is also likely to be rich. The data will show how people make relationships through a range of communication modes and will reflect idiosyncratic behaviour patterns and established ways of doing things that bind individuals in groups. They will behave and communicate in ways that mark out their groups in all kinds of creative ways (Carter 2004). The analysis is likely to be both linguistic and multimodal, but also likely to have an ‘ethnographic texture’ (Green and Bloome 1996), where researchers seek to understand the contexts in which texts are produced and read.

Educational implications of this work

Page (2012: xv) gives two reasons for studying the stories that people tell about themselves in social media formats. She succinctly argues the first as, “Stories remain one of the most pervasive

genres people use to make sense of themselves and the surrounding world”. Second, she refers to the “unprecedented measure” of stories that are daily documented online in the twenty-first century. These arguments are also the basis upon which I have justified my own work; however further than this, as an educational researcher, I argue that while so many of us and our students are actively involved in creating stories online, as a society and as individuals, we have not yet fully come to terms with the wider socio-cultural implications of these acts. As mentioned above, Bruner has described how the stories of our lives are created in conjunction with meanings that are “enmeshed in a net of others” (Bruner 1990: 113). Digital technologies allow us to distribute local meanings amongst friends across wider networks. This allows us to draw in wider communities to local meanings, extending intimacies in ways that we may not always remember or imagine. The additional social and creative possibilities and dimensions that Facebook has opened out allow Friends to enrich their lives and to be creative in new and exciting ways (Davies 2012, 2013, 2014; Page 2012). The ubiquity of Facebook suggests that millions of Friends find its affordances seductive; the allure of creating narratives about our lives has long been established, but this is a new medium with unprecedented power. It can be used synchronically, asynchronously and across spaces. As such our meanings, grown through local understandings, may appear in networks where the semantics may be misconstrued, mis-used or be seen as inappropriate in new contexts. It is exciting and invigorating to be able to distribute stories to many others, yet we do not always understand the range of meanings that will be brought to our texts from elsewhere. This is an area where education is appropriate; currently Facebook used at home for leisure activities tends not to be taken seriously in academic circles. Yet the texts are powerful and need to be acknowledged as worthy of educators’ attention – beyond dismissal or the banning of social networking sites from school premises.

Future directions

There remains a good deal of research to be pursued in the whole area of social network sites through multimodal analysis. The educational implications for literacy and language research in such spaces are yet to be fully understood. We are not yet clear on the nature of the impact of digital technologies on our communication with ourselves and with others, but it is clear that there are a great many. We need to research more in order to understand the social and educational implications so that we can inform policy and practice in schools and beyond. There exists work looking at time and space, (im)materiality as well as re-examinations of what we mean by literacy. Until this point social network sites are generally deemed as unsuitable for use in schools and so learning in this sphere happens offsite and often unsupervised. In higher education the use of Facebook tends to be directed towards harnessing it as a means for formal learning. Whatever its future in formal education, Facebook, or its successor, is likely to remain a space where stories are mediated and as such a site worthy of investigation into meaning-making practices.

Note

- 1 This capitalisation honours the distinction between d/Discourses following Gee (1996), where Discourses refers to wider cultural narratives and discourses to spoken words.

Related topics

New Literacy Studies, Affordances and constraints, m/Literacy, (Im)Materialising literacies.

Further reading

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PART VI

Hermeneutic approaches

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LITERARY THEORY AND NEW LITERACY STUDIES

Conversations across fields

Richard Steadman-Jones and Kate Pahl

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Introduction

Below we present a conversation between two people, one working as an ethnographer of literacy practices (Kate) the other a historian of ideas who teaches undergraduate students of English Language and Literature (Richard). The dialogue focuses on the treatment of reading in *Local Literacies* (Barton and Hamilton 1998), a book widely cited as foundational to many scholars within the field known as New Literacy Studies (Gee, Chapter 2 this volume). We use this as a starting point for a discussion about literary theory within Literacy Studies. We hope that this conversation is useful to readers in situating the disciplines we describe.

Note: In the discussion RSJ is Richard Steadman-Jones while KP is Kate Pahl.

Conversation

RSJ: Hello, Kate – following your suggestion, I’ve been reading *Local Literacies* again and I’ve very much enjoyed it. I like the chapters that look in detail at the literacy practices of four participants – Harry, Shirley, June and Cliff – and I especially enjoyed reading about Harry’s war books. I read a lot of thrillers myself and Harry’s books have great titles: *In Danger’s Hour*, *The Longest Battle*, *Fly for Your Life*. Actually, I was a little surprised that the research didn’t look more closely at the books themselves. If it were me, I’d have wanted to read them. I suppose that’s an instinctive response for someone who works in English and I was wondering how the research looked from your point of view. Does it strike you as interesting that the authors don’t examine the texts that their participants were reading?

KP: Hello, Richard – I was interested in Harry’s war books too. It’s striking that he considers them ‘authentic’ in the sense that they are ‘real-life stories’ and strongly repudiates the idea of the ‘imagination’ when he’s asked about them. Have you been reading them? I wonder what you made of them?

Anyway, back to *Local Literacies*, which is a significant book for me. When I was teaching adult literacy in the late 1980s in Hammersmith and Fulham I started to realise

that many of my students, although they saw the need to master relatively straightforward tasks such as form filling, reading a bus timetable, letters to school and so on, also had a persistent interest in literature. One teenage girl insisted on reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1993 [1947]) despite having missed so much school that her basic literacy skills were fairly limited. Many students enjoyed poetry, the Bible and the *Sun* letters page and seemed able to read these texts while still professing the need for basic literacy lessons. In many cases it obviously mattered to them how the text was written – in a way, the main point of reading poetry is to enjoy the language, isn't it?

RSJ: So, that experience led you to think that it might be interesting to examine these texts *as* texts? To look directly at the material your students liked?

KP: Well, yes, but I was also interested how literacies were located in communities. One group of parents wanted to record their life stories, as well as write about their dissatisfaction with the closing of the local toddler group.

RSJ: Harry had taken up writing too. He was writing his own war story when the research for *Local Literacies* was in progress.

KP: Yes, situated literacies include both reading and writing, and both were present in all sorts of contexts. The market was a key site for many students, as well as the Asian women's sewing group and the local nursery. Literacy ran through all these experiences, but also, accompanying them, were the texts of the everyday, the sayings and literary experiences students encountered.

RSJ: And that's the main concern of Barton and Hamilton's book.

KP: Exactly. One of my colleagues suggested that I join an organisation called RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacy) and through that organisation I met David Barton and Mary Hamilton. I heard about their study in which they wandered about the streets of Lancaster, recording and documenting literacy practices – the study that became the book. They sat in allotments, and thought about ways in which people used literacy in their everyday lives. They considered ways in which literacy practices could be situated within particular domains, such as homes, schools, community centres or faith settings. They acknowledged ways in which the work of Shirley Bryce Heath (1983) had shaped their ideas, with its focus on literacy and language practices in different contexts, as well as the work of Sylvia Scriber and Michael Cole (1981) in Liberia, who had begun to look at different domains of literacy in different contexts and that of Brian Street (1984) in identifying how different literacy practices could be associated with the market, with the school, and with the mosque.

RSJ: So what is the disciplinary context of all this work? What traditions of scholarship did it emerge from?

KP: It came out of disciplines such as social anthropology (Street), the ethnography of communication (Heath) and cultural psychology (Scriber and Cole). These perspectives provided a social science lens on literacy, which had hitherto been the province of the 'expert' who worked on language acquisition using a perspective from scientific inquiry, including cognitive psychology. While cultural practice was threaded through these literacy practices, as Street observed in his paper 'Culture is a verb' (1993a), the focus of these researchers was on everyday practice. Using tools from social anthropology, particularly ethnography and linguistic anthropology, the work of locating and identifying literacies in community contexts was a task for a persistent and engaged research team, schooled in noticing the everyday.

RSJ: That's very interesting! Reading *Local Literacies*, I felt that there was a kind of 'urgency' to the writing and that's clearly to do with this business of changing the agenda: examining

literacy in a social context rather than only focusing on the psychology of reading and writing. It isn't really any wonder that the book doesn't spend a lot of time on the specific texts that the participants were reading – there was plenty of other ground to be covered!

KP: Yes, that's right, and, returning to the theme of the books people read, I wonder if there was a disciplinary boundary – a different one – that had not yet been crossed. The potential for hermeneutic and more text-focused responses to everyday literacies was there and it did later emerge in the work of Mike Baynham and Mastin Prinsloo (2009). But the literary properties of the texts that adults read were less considered. I wonder why?

RSJ: I must admit, I'm very intrigued by some of the more 'literary' issues that are implicit in Barton and Hamilton's book. When I was reading about Harry's war books, I was struck by a point you mentioned earlier. Harry loves reading narratives but it is important to him that they are 'authentic' and not the products of 'imagination'. This is how Barton and Hamilton (1998: 90) put it:

For Harry the only stories worth telling or reading are *authentic*, real-life stories. He seems to look down on novels. His wife used to read a lot of novels and also stories to the children. He didn't understand what she saw in the stories. Harry appears to feel a clear distinction between reading factual books and reading fiction – one is educational, the other almost a waste of time. Interestingly, Harry received praise at school for his imaginative stories. It was fine as a child but not as an adult. He accepts that a child reading a novel might be learning something from it, but there is an edge to what he says which somehow implies that some other activity might be preferable. Also, it is fine to have his own imagination, but he does not want anyone else's.

In this passage, Harry's opinions about fiction are presented in isolation – there isn't really much attempt to relate them to any broader discourse about the status of fictional narrative...

KP: Well, that's not entirely true. There's a later section on 'The patterning of practices', which teases out the many activities that the team observed 'in the home' (p. 176), and they do mention Harry's aversion to fiction there. It's very much set up in terms of gender. Harry and other male participants are said to have been critical of 'women's reading' on the grounds that one supposedly couldn't learn anything from the books that the women they knew typically liked. The women were far less critical of 'men's reading' – the war narratives and so on – and, indeed, Harry's daughter said that it was important for him to read war books because it was a way for him to make sense of his own experience.

RSJ: Sorry, yes – you're absolutely right. But there's still a problem here and it lies in the claim that Harry 'seems to look down on novels'. He may have looked down on the fiction that his wife read but, in fact, some of the texts he is said to have read are themselves novels. An example is *In Danger's Hour* by Douglas Reeman, which is set on a minesweeper, one of the ships charged with keeping the shipping lanes around Britain safe during the war.

KP: And it's a work of fiction?

RSJ: Yes, absolutely. Reeman is the kind of writer who does a lot of historical research and whose books include a great deal of technical detail about operational matters, so it's certainly reasonable to call it a 'real-life story'. But it isn't a work of history or even a

memoir. It is a fictional text and, as well as describing the work of the ship, it also tells us about the interior lives of its characters. To resort to a word that Harry doesn't like, it engages in an *imaginative* reconstruction of how different kinds of people might have felt in what was a horrifyingly dangerous situation.

KP: So what might you do with an observation like that? What kind of research might it generate?

RSJ: That's a good question! In a way, Harry's views of reading have an ethical character. He is concerned with the value of what he reads and I'm not talking about literary value – whether it is 'good' or 'bad' writing. He is interested in what a narrative can *do* for its readers. Will it inform them? Will it help them to understand the world in a way that is valuable to them? It's interesting to me that he obviously reads more fiction than Barton and Hamilton suggest but he wants to read fiction that fulfils these kinds of ethical functions.

This reminds me a little of the debates about literary realism and naturalism that took place in the nineteenth century. The rise of these movements has a connection with increasing confidence in science as means of understanding the world. The realist novel was sometimes seen as a scientific response to social reality and the notion that fiction could 'investigate' society scientifically and provide a 'truthful' and 'accurate' account of social reality went hand in hand with the idea that it could have a transformative function and, like scientific research, work as the driver of social change. The realist movement treated the novel not simply as an aesthetic form but as a means of engaging actively with, even changing, the world it represented. Of course this raised the question of how one could mobilise such concepts as 'truth' and 'accuracy' in relation to narrative treatments of obviously fictional events. If one values a scientific response to society, then why not write about actual events rather than inventing ones that are merely *similar* to those occurring in the real world? To resort to one of Harry's terms, what is the role of 'imagination' in all this? Why choose fiction if your aim is to tell the truth of the world around you? A good text to read on these issues is Zola's essay, 'The experimental novel', originally published in 1881. It's a polemical statement that deals with exactly this problem and finds the answer in the idea that fictional narrative can constitute a kind of scientific experimentation.

KP: You're not suggesting a line of research that connects *Local Literacies* with the nineteenth-century novel?

RSJ: No, not exactly. My point is just that Harry is thinking about a recognisably literary issue and I think that's what I meant when I made that rather too sweeping statement about Barton and Hamilton's discussion not connecting his opinions with a broader discourse. He isn't only engaged in *practice* – he is also expressing *ideas* about the uses of fiction itself, ideas about what fiction can and can't do, and that is something that a researcher might be interested in exploring. To understand this, we had to go back to the text itself and notice that some of his 'factual' books are in fact examples of fictional narrative.

KP: Do you see this as connected with Barton and Hamilton's discussion of gender?

RSJ: Yes, I think so, because it doesn't seem to be true that the men just rejected fiction entirely in favour of non-fictional genres. The term 'factual' is mobilised in stating the value of a particular kind of fiction rather than in drawing a distinction between fiction on the one hand and, say, military history on the other. So what we're seeing is the gendering of different kinds of fiction. In part this is obviously to do with the subject matter – romance is associated with women's reading and war with men's. But it also involves claims about the relationship between fiction and reality – how narrative relates

to the world it purportedly describes. Ideas about literature are not politically neutral. They can be brought forward in the defence of particular ideological positions, including gendered ones.

KP: What you've said has reminded me of a conversation we had when we were working on a project called 'Writing in the home and in the street'. It was then that you first read *Local Literacies*, I think. One of the strengths of the book is simply the idea of looking at literacy in a whole community. This involved not only knocking on doors but visiting allotments and following an anti-poll tax campaign. When we did the 'Writing in the home and in the street' (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UK, AH/I507639/1) project, we did that kind of thing ourselves. You worked with an artist, Steve Pool, looking at writing in public space, while my part of the project was to investigate home writing practices. I decided to build on an ethnographic study I had been doing of a British Asian family, consisting of three girls, then aged two, eight and eleven, along with their parents.

The eldest, Lucy, spent the summer using a Flip camera to make a home video of small pieces of writing within the domestic space – textiles, and nail art, inscriptions on purses, and writing in glitter and paint (Pahl 2012). Then, in the autumn and spring, she began writing stories. She had been reading the 'Twilight' books, which were very popular at the time, and she also had a long history of reading Jacqueline Wilson's books, which are lively, passionate stories about girls overcoming obstacles and living with single mothers, often in difficult circumstances. Early the following year, she told me how she had composed one particular story 'How to Drown a Blondie' (see also Pahl 2014). In this story, the main character murders her best friend, Lauren: "And it is about this blonde girl and she thinks she is really pretty and everything. Looking in the mirror and she takes the mick out of people who aren't as pretty as her" (excerpt from beginning of an audio recording of Lucy's oral story 31 January 2011).

Here is the opening of the story:

How to drown a Blondie!

Right, let's get this straight. I am writing a story about a selfish, evil, cold-hearted girl whose life I took away. Everything in this story is the truth. 100% I guarantee you. The girl's name was Lauren. She had beautiful hair. It was blonde and shoulder length with beautiful eyes which were indigo-blue. But if you looked closer you could see her eyes were raging with fire and jealousy if she met someone more beautiful than her.

What interested me about this story – and this reminds me of your comments on Harry – is what it shows about Lucy's engagement with the aesthetics of a popular genre of fiction. Lucy told me about a particular episode in the 'Twilight' series that seems to have provided the inspiration for her story: "'You know how you drown a blonde, Rosalie?' I asked without stopping or turning to look at her, 'Glue a mirror to the bottom of a pool'" (Meyer 2008: 271).

This quotation alludes to the genre of 'blonde' jokes (sexist in tone and nature) that were circulating in British schools. But, in Lucy's story, the focus on bloneness and blue eyes transforms the narrative into a fable of revenge. Lucy told me she had been one of two British Asian girls at her local secondary school and experienced a high degree of racism and bullying. This was how she took her revenge, writing the story and circulating it to her cousin down the road. Meyer's text resonates with powerful descriptions of beautiful white girls who are also other-worldly and deadly:

My first reaction was an unthinking pleasure. The alien creature in the glass was indisputably beautiful, every bit as beautiful as Alice or Esme. She was fluid even in stillness, and her flawless face was pale as the moon against the frame of her dark, heavy hair. Her limbs were smooth and strong, skin glistening subtly, luminous as a pearl. My second reaction was horror.

(Meyer 2008: 403)

Lucy's story alludes to this kind of self-consciously descriptive writing and uses that technique as a way to dwell on the source of the murderer's anger – the ethnic difference represented by the “indigo-blue” eyes, which were “raging with fire and jealousy”.

RSJ: Again we're looking at the ethical dimensions of fiction – what fiction can *do* for readers. For Harry it was at its best when it was telling him about something ‘real’ and now you're reading Lucy's story as a symbolic enactment of vengeance. But there's also an aesthetic element in play here. The descriptive writing is an important aspect of the genre.

KP: When I thought about Lucy's story, I was reminded of *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (1979 [1970]), which had a powerful effect on me when I read it in my early twenties. In this novel, a young black girl who is experiencing extreme racism in the deep south of America, longs for blue eyes.

RSJ: You're looking at the wider literary context – like me with Zola!

KP: I think what I'm doing is situating Lucy's text within a much wider web of allusion, a particular style of writing...

RSJ: ...and certain narrative tropes – the blue-eyed white woman in African-American writing.

KP: This may come out of my experience of reading literature at university, where we were encouraged to look at the formal properties of texts but also to situate them within the societies and cultures of which they were a part. I think the key thing is that the words on the page matter very strongly to Lucy. She isn't just interested in text as a means of transferring information. As you say, the aesthetics of the writing are important and Lucy's sense of literary aesthetics arises out of her reading. Actually, there are hints of this idea in *Local Literacies* – in the section I mentioned earlier, ‘The patterning of practices’. On page 173, there is a discussion about greetings cards in which Helen, another informant in the book, “kept cards sent to her by her eldest son who he says cares about the words like I do”. I am interested in what happens when people care about the words.

RSJ: I like that. I think it's clear from Barton and Hamilton's discussion, that Harry ‘cares about the words’ in which narratives are presented. This emerges in a passage where they discuss Harry's own writing. (There is a striking analogy here with Lucy's experience – her movement from reading texts by other writers to making stories of her own.)

During the period when the research was taking place, Harry began to write his own ‘authentic war story’ – an account of his own wartime experiences – and the detailed process of casting these experiences into words evidently became important to him:

When writing about the war he questions what style he should use: should he keep his story fairly light and amusing for the reader – *there's plenty of humour in war* – or should he describe the darker side and the dirty side of things as well? Would this shock or disturb people? In many ways he needs to make sense of everything that happened. He writes it out by hand and his son will type it up for him and will *flower it up a bit ... not the actual thoughts but the words but flower it up a bit ... like the dawn broke. It was cloudy, rainy, anything like that, you see.*

As Barton and Hamilton summarise it: “He feels he needs to include more literary passages, with descriptive language to convey atmosphere and weather, to conjure up storms with.”

KP: It’s interesting that descriptive writing is important for both Harry and Lucy. (You know – those eyes, “raging with fire and jealousy”.)

RSJ: Yes, absolutely, and I think it’s interesting that the term ‘literary’ is used here of descriptive writing. It seems to acknowledge that Harry’s sense of how best to tell a story derives, like Lucy’s, from his engagement with a range of published narratives. Even stories that are firmly rooted in the ‘factual’ can be told in different ways and the form of narrative that Harry values are evidently influenced by a web of interrelated texts, all of which have some relationship with the novel, even if the stories they tell are not fictional.

KP: So even the non-fiction that Harry reads is novelistic?

RSJ: Yes – it has more in common with fictional narrative than, say, military history. As an example, we could look at another of the texts that Harry apparently read: *Fly For Your Life* by Larry Forrester, which was issued in 1956 by the publishing house, Frederick Muller. (It was also reprinted in 1958 by the Companion Book Club, which reissued a wide range of what is now seen as classic popular writing by authors such as Hammond Innes, Alistair MacLean, Dick Francis, Len Deighton and Rumer Godden.) The book tells the story of Robert Stanford Tuck, one of the great fighter pilots of the Battle of Britain, who was shot down over northern France in 1942, spent three years in POW camps in Germany and Poland, escaped in February 1945, fought for a time with the Russians, and finally made his way to the port of Odessa, returning to Southampton by sea and beginning a new career as a test pilot after his retirement from the RAF in 1949. He won both the Distinguished Service Order and the Distinguished Flying Cross with two bars, as well as being mentioned three times in despatches.

Forrester’s book begins with an affirmation of the truth of the story it tells and this passage resonates with Harry’s own professed commitment to the ‘authentic’:

There are no fictitious characters in this book, but there are a few fictitious names. It seems to me that so long after the war it would be needlessly cruel to reawaken anguished memories for the families of those Royal Air Force men who did not die quickly or cleanly, or who died stupidly; those who contracted unpleasant disease or suffered extreme hardship in Nazi prison camps or ‘on the run’; the one or two who weakened and failed their comrades...

So I have changed some names, but not the facts. The facts are part of the story.

Larry Forrester
1 March, 1956

KP: Interesting that the only justification for departing from the facts is to protect people when the truth is too painful!

RSJ: Yes – everything is real except what is too distressing to report in undisguised form. Right from the start of Chapter 1, though, there is a curious sense in which the narrative voice seems to claim a little more knowledge of the details of particular conversations or the contents of individuals’ thoughts than a historian, say, might want to assert. The first chapter recounts what happened on 28 January, 1942, the day when Tuck was shot down

over France, and it begins with a conversation between Tuck and his friend Wing Commander Peter Blatchford at Biggin Hill:

After lunch Blatchford and Tuck had one more beer together.

‘Like old times,’ Tuck said as they raised their tankards.

‘Sure,’ the Canadian agreed. But it wasn’t. Now their talk was too quick, too fiercely gay, and their laughter too loud. Too much that each remembered, but kept to himself—because there were so many names that couldn’t be mentioned without a pang. Men like these had changed the war, but the war had changed them.

(Forrester 1958: 13)

It might be that Tuck himself recounted this conversation to Forrester but the narrative voice does not concede that its representation is in any way mediated. Instead, the passage has the quality of omniscience that one finds in a certain kind of realist novel, as if the narrator had witnessed all the events of the narrative and, more than that, had direct access to the participants’ mental states. So, the narrator claims to be quoting exactly what was said (“‘Like old times,’ Tuck said as they raised their tankards.” “‘Sure,’ the Canadian agreed.”), to be describing the manner of both participants as if he personally witnessed them speaking (“their talk was too quick”, “their laughter too loud”), to be recording the mental states of both participants as if their minds were transparent and available for scrutiny (“too much that each remembered, but kept to himself”, “so many names that couldn’t be mentioned without a pang”). In short, the narrative voice assumes a level of authority in excess of what could strictly be claimed in a work of academic history, for example.

KP: The narrative is based on real events but the author treats the participants rather as novelists do their characters.

RSJ: Exactly! But commenting on the text in this way is not to suggest that Forrester’s claims about the factual properties of his material are in any sense problematic or that there is anything deceptive about how the narrative is constructed. It is completely obvious that this is a dramatisation of events that the author did not himself witness, a dramatisation that makes use of certain novelistic techniques to interpret the events described.

This exploits the convention of the omniscient narrator to reveal the psychological state of the figures described in the narrative and also the particular mood of the year 1942, when the tide of the conflict had not yet turned in favour of the allies.

KP: It has a scene-setting function.

RSJ: And this emerges further in the next paragraph where Forrester uses a description of the weather to comment upon this low point in the war and also to foreshadow the disastrous end to the mission that Tuck is about to fly:

It was [...] a dank, grey day on which normal operations were impossible. Legions of tattered clouds, the colour of fractured iron, were scudding over southern England at only a few hundred feet and the airfield at Biggin Hill was shrouded in drizzle and mist. A mean and narrow day, infinitely remote from those they had shared in that blazing, screaming summer of 1940...

(Forrester 1958: 13)

Again, the passage moves beyond strictly factual reporting of the weather conditions and turns the weather into an image of both future event and present mood. The

image of clouds “the colour of fractured iron” has a prophetic relationship with the description of Tuck’s plane after it has been shot down, “smashed and black-smoking in a French field”. Furthermore, the description of the summer of 1940 (when the Battle of Britain was at its height) uses the highly figurative term “screaming” to suggest a contrast between the war-weary present and the disturbing energy of that first summer of the war. The novelistic description provides a way to interpret events and communicate the atmosphere of the period in a way that helps to make sense of the central events.

To look at Forrester’s text provides some sense of what is at stake for Harry when he talks about the need to “flower up” his own writing. Indeed, Hamilton and Barton specifically mention his urge to “include more literary passages” in order to “convey atmosphere and weather” and this description of the clouds over Biggin Hill on 28 January 1942 provides an object lesson in this use of weather imagery in building the mood of a day or a period. There are hints in *Local Literacies* of Harry’s engagement not only with the content of his war books but with the aesthetics (or stylistics) of that body of material, especially its fusion of ‘factuality’ and ‘literariness’ or, rather, with the tensions arising in the dramatisation of real events by means of novelistic techniques.

KP: I’m interested in this idea of ‘flowering up’ stories. It reminds me of some work my RA, Sam Rae, did with me in Rotherham. I decided I was focusing on oral storytelling and I was interested in the processes by which stories came to light. I had the support of a youth worker, Marcus Hurcombe, and I worked with a group of girls, Chloe, Ella and Georgia, all aged thirteen, who came to an after-school club.

I met with them weekly and we told stories. One particular story became told and re-told over the time of the project, and this became the story that was called ‘Reunion’ by the girls. The story concerned the experience of five-year-old girl twins, who were brought up in Sheffield in the Second World War and who loved to play outside. One day, during a bombing raid, they wandered into an abandoned warehouse. The bombs fell on the warehouse and the twins were killed. In the story, the twins become ghosts and continue to live in cardboard boxes inside the warehouse. A young girl, Maria, who is interested in seeing what is inside the warehouse, finds them fifty years later. She is scared, but intrigued. The twins tell her their story and ask to be reunited with their mother. With the help of Maria’s Nanan (her grandmother) and a Ouija board, this happens and the twins and their mother are reunited in the spirit world.

RSJ: That’s quite a story!

KP: It certainly is. It was first told in April, with myself, Marcus, Chloe, Ella, Georgia and a fourth girl, Dina, present. At that very first meeting the salient aspects of the story, the warehouse, the Second World War, the girls, their death, and the character of Maria came together within the group. The girls then re-told this story to Steve Pool and myself. This was a month later. Here is the beginning of the story, as told by Georgia, to me and Steve:

Georgia: As the area’s sirens... as the area’s sirens wailed, two girls were seen sneaking out of the door. They went into the back garden and started playing, screaming, running and laughing.

Kate: What were they wearing? And what did they look like?

Georgia: Their red chequered – their matching red chequered dresses um, lifted up as they twirled around in the wind, but their hair went – their hair was neatly plaited into two plaits with red chequered

ribbon at the ends matching their dress. They didn't have a jacket or any shoes on.

(Transcription May 2012)

I'm interested in how certain descriptive details are included – material which you could label, in Harry's terms, 'flowery'. Georgia often contributed this kind of detail (as she did with the 'red chequered dresses' and the 'neatly plaited hair'), and, as an avid reader, she often drew on her reading in developing the story.

Sam and I were interested in when the 'flowery' descriptive language was used and when it wasn't. For example, Chloe located her descriptions within a closely observed everyday. When the young girl, Maria, meets the twins, in the abandoned warehouse, Chloe demonstrated a capacity for precise, imaginative description:

Chloe: She hears laughter, like little girl laughter.

And she like went up box lid just like one – when they open like two ways,
like that, one of em's short and made like a bang,
but um she'd been able to like,
she'd seen people
(laughs at something the other girls said)
she'd seen people that nobody else had seen before
because they were ghosts,
but she never told anybody
cos she didn't want like people to think that she were weird and everything,
so she thought that she might see some more ghosts if she carried on looking.

(Transcription May 2012)

Chloe here described the cardboard boxes in which the girls hid. She also evoked the exact sensation, both the sounds and the physical experience, of opening a cardboard box. This was the most specific piece of everyday description in the entire group narrative. Chloe's images, drawn to accompany the story, were similarly specific. Her drawn image paid attention to the lids that go with cardboard boxes and portrayed them resting one on top of the other.

RSJ: So Chloe and Georgia both contributed to the descriptive richness of the story but their individual styles were different.

KP: Yes, and it was interesting to see the two approaches emerging in the co-construction of the narrative. When I worked on 'Reunion' with Sam, I was conscious that I, as an ethnographer of literacy practices, was working with someone based in English Studies. Sam suggested that phrases such as "red chequered dresses" could be seen as 'tropes' of literary-ness – markers that signal the 'literary' intent of the writing.

RSJ: I guess he was thinking about the adjectives piled up in front of the noun – "matching red chequered dresses".

KP: Yes, and it was interesting to have that kind of emphasis on the analysis of the text complementing my focus on the making of narrative as a cultural practice.

RSJ: So, to go back to my original question, you do think that ethnographic work on literacy might benefit from some focus on the words on the page?

KP: Well, perhaps the point is we need both the focus on 'what is going on here' that is so crucial in New Literacy Studies – that emphasis on practice and what people do with literary texts – but also an understanding of how people think about different styles of

writing and specific literary forms – an attention to the specific nature of the texts that people read and, indeed, write.

What is going on here...

Below we pull together our conversation and relate it to the wider issues raised in the *Handbook* concerning the nature of Literacy Studies and the intersections of that field with literary theory and theories of language and literature.

Thinking about New Literacy Studies

We begin by considering historical perspectives in the field, starting with a discussion about the New Literacy Studies (Gee, Chapter 2 this volume). The New Literacy Studies, which is a key touchstone in *Local Literacies*, begins with the idea of practice. *Local Literacies* begins with this sentence: “Literacy is something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text” (p. 3). However, in the second sentence the sense of an argument emerges with the words, “Literacy does not just reside in people’s heads as a set of skills to be learned” (ibid.). Here, a history is invoked – that of a move away from a skills-focused view of literacy. Brian Street, in his book *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy* (1993b) talked about the difference between an ‘autonomous’ view of literacy, which was often held by officials at the World Bank and by governments, that saw literacy as a set of skills to be learned, and the more complex ‘ideological’ view of literacy in which literacy was seen as cultural and contingent on everyday practice. The strength of *Local Literacies* was that the research David Barton and Mary Hamilton conducted was empirical, and situated in everyday life.

Thinking about Cultural Studies

Studies of literary texts in everyday life have historically been associated with the field that is now considered as Cultural Studies. Following on from the work of Hoggart (1957), Williams (1961), Willis (2000) and Hall (2007), cultural theorists have sought to discover, through close analysis of everyday texts, the ways in which ordinary cultural texts themselves have resonance within the social life of texts. A tradition of analysing popular cultural texts has also been strongly profiled within Literacy Studies. The work of Jackie Marsh (2011) and Bronwyn Williams (2009) has been important here in considering the ways in which young people draw on and manipulate everyday cultural texts, whether they are online or offline, digital or experienced through television, film or text based. This fluid and complex account of culture takes from Cultural Studies an interest in ordinary texts, and looks closely at the everyday as a source of cultural improvisation (Hallam and Ingold 2007).

Thinking about literary studies

It is certainly productive to conceptualise everyday literacies in terms of *practices* and, when discussing readers’ engagement with genres such as poetry or the novel, this analytic category is as relevant as it is to the analysis of activities such as filling in forms or writing text messages to friends. However, there is also value in working with another category of description and considering how *ideas* about poetry and fiction circulate among readers. To engage with participants’ conceptualisation of the material they read often involves engaging directly with that material. When Harry says that he values narratives about ‘real

life', for example, it would be easy to misunderstand what he is saying and assume that he only reads non-fiction. But, by looking at the titles that he mentions, we find that he does, in fact, read novels and hence that his category of 'authentic stories' is a little more complex than we might have assumed. Similarly, by looking at these texts, we can give some content to his concept of 'flowering up' narrative and, again, we find that this concept brings some complexity to his sense of 'authenticity'. Both literary studies and stylistics provide useful tools for developing this kind of analysis. We might mention Monika Fludernik (2009) on narrative, for example, or Paul Simpson (2004) on literary language, both very useful overviews of relevant approaches. Within stylistics, furthermore, there is growing emphasis on how 'real readers' (as opposed to 'implied' or 'ideal' readers) respond to the language of literary texts. Studies of this kind often work with participants in reading groups and useful examples of this practice can be found in Swann and Allington (2009), Whiteley (2011), and Peplow (2012).

Critical issues and topics

What we are arguing for here is a conversation between disciplines, a conversation that looks at ways of considering texts from the perspective of readers and writers, but also situates that experience within a more nuanced account of fictional style. We suggest that in order to make sense of Harry's reading experience, of Lucy's writing, or the oral story 'Reunion', a lens is required that includes aspects of style and ways of thinking about different kinds of texts and how they might engage the reader. The history of genres such as the novel can inform these understandings.

Future directions

We have written this piece as a conversation, partly to argue that the conversation might be a useful way of imagining a future direction for the intersections between New Literacy Studies and literary studies and stylistics. Ingold's concept of 'correspondence' (2013) might also help conceptualise the way in which different disciplines can usefully cross and relate to each other in a way that acknowledges the differences between them but learns from those encounters. We would like to see more research in this area that cross between literary theory, aesthetic theory, stylistics and New Literacy Studies.

Related topics

Aesthetics, Hermeneutics, New Literacy Studies.

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LOOKING GOOD

Aesthetics, multimodality and literacy studies

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Introduction: looking good

Today, writing must do more than inform, more than communicate, it must also ‘look good’. New technologies provide templates for invitations, invoices, company brochures, course assignments and many other genres that all focus on presentation, on visual style, on the use of illustrations, diagrams, layout, colour and typography, rather than on content.

“If you think a document that looks this good has to be difficult to format, think again!” says a Word template for company brochures, and “We have created styles that let you match the formatting in this brochure to your company fonts and colours with just a click”. Another Word template lays out how to design course reports: “Look great every time”; “Add professional quality graphics which automatically match the look of your report”. And if the cover photograph is “not ideal for your report”, no problem, you can change it – the only thing you cannot change is that there should be a picture on the cover.

PowerPoint, similarly, presents a wide range of decorative designs for a more limited set of text patterns such as ‘title plus list of bullet points’ – backgrounds range from abstract patterns to tranquil seascapes and soft focus rust-coloured autumn leaves, and the frame lines that divide titles from ‘content spaces’ range from abstract Bauhaus-inspired motifs in red and black to late-nineteenth century flower flourishes. “Something is provided for everyone, so that none may escape”, as Adorno once said (Horkheimer and Adorno 1986 [1972]: 123)

Educational texts must also look good. Textbooks and electronic learning materials are replete with pictures, drawings and typographic excess. A junior high school history textbook tells students to use graphic learning tools: “A mind map allows you to remember, organize and present your thoughts and understandings on a given topic. Use sketches, colour, symbols and short labels” (Addison *et al.* 2011: xix). A science textbook explains how to interpret diagrams: “Find the meaning of any words you do not know and study the diagram thoroughly before answering any questions” (Williamson and Garton 2011: 86). The diagram in question in fact uses a complex colour code and three different kinds of arrows, and gives nerves and blood vessels the same red colour, but the meanings of these visual signs are never explained in words.

What does it mean to look good? Why has it become so important? Why has it moved beyond what we might call ‘aesthetic texts’ to company reports, course outlines, bureaucratic documents, invoices and many other types of text to which not long ago only functional criteria

applied? Has it become a new kind of literacy, now required in a wide range of professions, so that we can no longer continue to mystify it as ‘creativity’ and segregate it from the mainstream of communication? If so, how do we get a handle on it, and how might we teach it? These questions lead us back to the perhaps somewhat neglected field of aesthetics.

In what follows I will try to foreground some critical issues and topics from the history and literature of aesthetics that may help us understand what it means to ‘look good’ and why it has become so important. I then outline how aesthetics may be reintegrated into semiotics in a new way, and how this may help us develop an approach to aesthetic literacy.

Critical issues and topics in aesthetics

Aesthetics confined to high literature and the fine arts

The term ‘aesthetics’ has gradually become confined to the fine arts and high literature. Even though it ultimately derives from Ancient Greek theories of the beauty of the cosmos, its regularity, symmetry, proportionality, harmony, unity in diversity and so on, the beauty of the world, of people, places and things, in life as important as ever, does not have much of a place in contemporary aesthetics – and even in art and literature the idea of ‘beauty’ has become somewhat of an embarrassment (cf. Fresco 1977: 160–162).

Linguistic and semiotic accounts of aesthetics (e.g. Mukarovsky 1964a [1932], 1964b [1940]; Jakobson 1960; Eco 1976) have also focused on literature and the arts. Mukarovsky saw the aesthetic (the ‘poetic’) as a use of language which is “not in the service of communication”, but foregrounds “the act of expression, the act of speech itself” (Mukarovsky 1964a [1932]: 19). Literary stylistics (e.g. Fowler 1966; Leech 1969) also focused on expression, on identifying formal style features such as alliteration, rhyme, vowel harmony and assonance, parallelism, anaphora, without reference to meaning and function, which were often thought to be too ‘impressionistic’ to allow linguistic analysis (Leech and Short 1981: 46–47).

Nevertheless, there are counter voices. In his examples Leech often commented on the meanings expressed by poetic devices, albeit without fully integrating this in the theory. Mukarovsky’s were mainly drawn from literature, but he also said, though with much less emphasis, that aesthetics plays a role in “almost all acts of man”, including “sexual selection, fashion, social amenities, and the culinary arts” (Mukarovsky 1964a [1932]: 19). Jakobson, similarly, saw the aesthetic as functioning alongside other communicative functions in *all* uses of language. In discussing aesthetic devices such as rhyme and assonance, he stressed that they are used, not just in poetry, but also in everyday speech, and that the ability for aesthetic expression is just as much a part of people’s linguistic competence as the ability to create grammatical sentences (Jakobson 1960: 356–357):

“Why do you always say *Joan and Margery*, yet never *Margery and Joan*? Do you prefer Joan to her twin sister?” “Not at all, it just sounds smoother.” In a sequence of two coordinate names [...] the precedence of the shorter name suits the speaker as a well-ordered shape for the message. A girl used to talk about “the horrible Harry”. “Why horrible?” “Because I hate him.” “But why not *dreadful, terrible, frightful, disgusting*?” “I don’t know why, but *horrible* fits him better.” Without realizing it, she clung to the poetic device of paronomasia.

Ong (1982: 34) discussed the use of what we now call poetic devices in all aspects of the life of oral cultures, cultures without writing. In oral cultures, people think “in heavily rhythmic,

balanced patterns, in repetitions and antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetics and other formulary expressions". And although Ong mainly focused on the mnemonic value of such formulations, he also said that, in these contexts, "fixed, often rhythmically balanced expression [...] forms the substance of thought itself: thought in any extended form is impossible without them, for it consists in them" (p. 35).

Clearly, in an age where writing has to 'look good', these ideas acquire new relevance and need to be developed further and broadened out beyond language. Building on the linguistics of Halliday, the study of multimodality has developed detailed accounts of the communicative functioning of images, music and other semiotic modes. But Halliday's functional linguistics, though inspired by the Prague School, does not recognize the aesthetic function. Perhaps multimodal studies can build on the work of the Prague School and the linguistic stylisticians to develop methods for analysing the aesthetic functioning of multimodal communication. But this will need a semiotic basis. It will need to consider the signifiers as well as the signifieds, the forms as well as their functions and meaning potentials.

Form without meaning

Medieval manuscripts were richly decorated with initials, marginal elements and miniature pictures, and burnished with gold and silver, a source of aesthetic pleasure as well as an expression of the greater glory of God and the valour of knights and kings (cf. Eco 2002). But already in the sixteenth century aesthetics and meaning started to go their separate ways. The philosopher and rhetorician Peter Ramus (1511–1572) simplified Aristotelian rhetoric by separating meaning ('invention', 'disposition' and 'memory') from artful expression ('elocutio' and 'delivery'), "a division whose implications remain with us to this day" (Hawkes 1972: 22). By the time the term 'aesthetics' was launched, by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762), the separation of aesthetic form and meaning was a fact. Baumgarten defined 'aesthetics' as the study of the sensory perception of beauty, and beauty as formal perfection, based on the classical ideal of beauty as regularity, symmetry, proportionality, harmony and unity. This approach was further worked out by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), in *Critique of Judgement* (2007 [1790]), which consolidated the idea of aesthetics as subjective, sensual appreciation resulting in pleasure and in free play of the imagination, and as radically different from objective rational judgement. At the same time many forms of Protestantism focused on Puritan values – plain clothes, plain churches, plain language. "‘Plaine delivery’ of the word was the aim, ‘painted eloquence’ the enemy" (Hawkes 1972: 28).

This separation between form and meaning deeply influenced linguistic and semiotic accounts of the aesthetic. As we have already seen, Mukarovsky defined the aesthetic as foregrounding expression, causing expression to draw attention to itself, and thereby backgrounding content, creating "semantic emptiness" (Mukarovsky 1964a [1932]: 20). Jakobson similarly defined the 'poetic' function of language as foregrounding form, though he did indicate, in passing, that "it would be an unsound oversimplification to treat rhyme only from the standpoint of sound. Rhyme necessarily involves the semantic relationship between rhythmic units", and he applied this reasoning also to other forms of parallelism (1960: 368). Rodway (1966: 67), though focusing only on literature, also discussed rhyme as combining the aesthetic and the semantic, for instance by signifying formal similarity at the same time as semantic difference (as e.g. in the line from *Othello*, "I kissed thee ere I killed thee"), and he argued for "refurbishing aesthetics" so as to reunite rhyme and reason and create "an aesthetic of intellection – not the pleasure of thinking itself, but a pleasure deriving from the same area

of mind”. And, as already mentioned, Leech (1969) was perhaps the first stylistician to recognize the meaning and function of poetic devices, even if this remained somewhat in the background.

Umberto Eco also defined the aesthetic as “a particular *manipulation of the expression*” (1976: 261, original emphasis), focusing on the materiality of the signifier, which, he said, may sometimes have established meanings (e.g. the medieval significance of precious stones on account of their size, weight and transparency) but more often does not have clearly definable meanings and only establishes a ‘presence’ that “has perceptual and emotional effects, but does not communicate contents” (p. 267). He does recognize that art is meaningful, but its meanings, he said, are new and as yet very open and unstable. The American semiotician Charles Morris, on the other hand, neither referred specifically to art, nor saw aesthetic communication as meaningless, defining the meaning of aesthetic signs as “value” and “interest” (1938: 418). He illustrated this idea with a simple example: while ordinary signs might refer to objects (e.g. food), aesthetic signs refer to values and interests *connected* to objects (e.g. hunger) and in that way “release a reassessment of the content” (ibid.).

Form follows function

Philosophical ideas relate closely to economic and social events, sometimes reflecting them, sometimes anticipating them. When Baumgarten introduced the term ‘aesthetics’, the industrial revolution had started. Questions were raised about the difference between handmade and machine-made objects, and about the nature and purpose of aesthetic decoration, which had always been part of everyday objects, and many of these questions centred on the relation between aesthetic judgement and meaning. An influential mid-nineteenth century textbook, *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856) by Owen Jones, closely followed Kant (cited in Brett 2005: 109): “Ornament [...] has no business beyond appealing to the eye, in order to entertain the imagination in free play with ideas, and engage actively in the aesthetic judgment independently of any end.”

William Morris, on the other hand, in *Some Hints on Pattern Design* (1895: 177), insisted on meaning:

You may be sure that any decoration is futile when it does not remind you of something of which it is a visible symbol, As a Western man and a picture lover, I must still insist on plenty of meaning in your patterns.

But soon decoration would be banned altogether. In a famous tract, *Ornament and Crime*, written over a hundred years ago, the Austrian architect Adolf Loos wrote (cited in Brett 2005: 195): “Herein lies the greatness of our age; that it is incapable of producing new ornament. Ornament is no longer organically linked with culture. The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects.”

And Le Corbusier (1987 [1925]: 188) followed suit, declaring that “every citizen must replace his hangings, his damasks, his wallpapers, his stencils, with a plain coat of white Ripolin.”

Such arguments revolved around functionality: in the late-nineteenth century, alongside the still heavily decorated settings and objects of the private sphere, plainer, functional forms of dress, interior design and architecture had developed in the industrial sphere. These purely utilitarian types of design were preferred by the artist-designers of the Bauhaus in Germany, the Werkbund in Austria, and so on, and paradoxically endowed with moral and aesthetic, rather than only utilitarian values, on the basis of discourses inherited from earlier Puritan styles of dress and design.

All this also applies to language and to linguistics. In the early twentieth century, journalism set out to strip language of everything that was not functional in the transfer of information. In a 1915 brochure, Reuters already wrote of “compressing news into minute globules” which would condense news stories to their absolutely essential information transferring function (Palmer 1998: 184). A study of an English-language Vietnamese newspaper (Machin and Van Leeuwen 2007) showed how the Western subeditors who introduced this style to local journalists discouraged the wordplay and poetic flourishes which were prized by the Vietnamese journalists. As for linguistics, while the Prague School still had a place for the ‘aesthetic function’, in Hallidayan functional linguistics (e.g. Halliday 1994) the aesthetic disappears, and ‘form follows function’. The human ability to play with language, to create rhymes and other parallelisms, no longer plays a role here in understanding language and its uses.

History is never simple, however. As functionalism triumphed, advertising and branding had already started to sow the seeds for the reintroduction of aesthetics and decoration in communication, as will be discussed in more detail below.

Style and identity

We have already seen that style and aesthetics are closely associated. Sometimes this is a matter of personal style. For Mukarovsky (1964a [1932]: 61), the “de-automatization” that characterizes poetic language “individualizes”. He approvingly quotes the eighteenth-century French stylistician Buffon, who argued that style is more important than content. Content, he thought, is transferable, style unique and lasting, expressing the personality of writers and speakers and their attitudes to what they are writing or speaking about (p. 56).

Today, marketing experts have introduced the concept of ‘lifestyle’, in which values and attitudes are expressed by aesthetic choices, for instance by styles of dress and adornment, interior decoration and so on. Although these lifestyles are shared by groups, they may be experienced as individual and even related to art, as in this quote from lifestyle icon David Beckham (2000: 94):

We’re individuals and should be prepared to show that in our behaviour. Clothes are just one way of expressing your individuality, but it’s an important one for me. I also think of dressing as a way of being artistic and art is something I’m quite into. I probably would have gone to art school if I hadn’t been a footballer.

The contemporary imperative for writing to look good is therefore also an imperative to express identity, whether personal or corporate, in all kinds of writing – PowerPoint slides, web pages, company reports, and even invoices and other everyday documents. Expressing identity, in turn, is not just a matter of taste, it also expresses values, just as Charles Morris argued more than seventy-five years ago. And as we know, style, today, regularly wins out over substance, even in such matters as the election of political leaders.

Pleasure and transgression

Pleasure is another key theme in discussions of the aesthetic. Perhaps the emphasis on pleasure in post-structuralism was an early sign of the return of the aesthetic. In *Le plaisir du texte* [*The Pleasure of the Text*] (1973), and elsewhere, Roland Barthes contrasted the world of meaning, by definition social and cultural, with an experience of pleasure that somehow escaped the social and the cultural. On the one hand, he argued, there is *plaisir*, a kind of pleasure which is linked

to culture and society, on the other hand there is *jouissance*, a kind of pleasure which is individual, *pour moi*, which escapes “the laws of history, culture, psychology” as well as the reader’s “taste, values and memories” (Barthes 1973: 25–26, my translation), and which cannot be reduced to communication representation, or even expression. This kind of pleasure is then linked to particular signifiers, which thereby become forms without content, for instance the ‘grain of the voice’ in Barthes’ essay on the singing voice (1977), or, in the work of Julia Kristeva, rhythm and colour, which she saw as on the one hand “situated within the formal system of painting” (1980: 216) and expressing the “ideological values germane to a given culture”, but on the other hand, as “an instinctual pressure, an erotic implication of the subject” and “a physiologically supported drive” (p. 219) which can “destroy normativity” (p. 221): “Colour is the shattering of unity. Thus it is through colour – colours – that the subject escapes its alienation within a code (representational, ideological, symbolic, and so forth).”

Like Barthes and Kristeva, Kant (2007 [1790]) had also distinguished between two kinds of pleasure, though rather differently. There was, on the one hand, an *interesseloses Wohlgefallen*, a ‘disinterested appreciation’ of beauty, rational and reflective in its own way, on the other hand the kind of pleasure that seeks gratification and so distracts from the pure contemplation demanded by the beautiful, the ‘sublime’. Schopenhauer, following Kant, even condemned seventeenth-century Dutch still life paintings, as the deceptive likeness of their representations of food would excite the viewer’s appetite rather than lead to aesthetic contemplation (cf. Bourdieu 1979: 487).

Today, pleasure is not, or no longer, private, detached from society and culture, but deeply interwoven with it. We are called upon to invest pleasure in everything we write and to make everything we write pleasurable for the reader or user. Here, again, advertising was a forerunner, a form of communication which from the start combined functional communication with an appeal to pleasure and desire, thoroughly mixing the two kinds of pleasure which both Kant and Barthes had sought to separate.

Closely related is an emphasis on transgression. We saw that both Mukarovsky and Eco see the aesthetic as transgressive, as violating the norms and routines of standard language. And we also saw that the post-structuralists saw pleasure as ‘outside of any law’ and “destroying normativity”, and hence by nature transgressive.

Bourdieu, finally, critiqued Kant’s separation of the aesthetic from the good and the true as licensing artists to transgress, shock and bypass moral judgement (1979: 47):

Aesthetics [...] implies a sort of moral agnosticism, the perfect antithesis of the ethical disposition which subordinates art to the values of the art of living [...] The easiest, and so the most frequent and most spectacular way to ‘shock the bourgeois’ by proving the extent of one’s power to confer aesthetic status is to transgress ever more radically the ethical censorships (e.g. in matters of sex).

The aesthetic imperative is therefore also an imperative to transgress, again pioneered in advertising, which from the start transgressed not only the rules of spelling (something which has now spread more widely) but also the rules of civil behaviour, albeit under the cloak of humour, which, as Freud has taught us, allows a momentary escape from the censorship that normally bars socially unacceptable unconscious thoughts and desires from surfacing.

Aesthetic literacy

Drawing together what has been discussed so far:

- 1 Aesthetics relies on specific signifiers – alliteration, rhyme, parallelism, anaphora and so on – which have been studied in detail both in rhetoric (rhetorical figures) and in literary stylistics and poetics. In many cultures such signifiers characterize all communication so that the semantic, pragmatic and aesthetic functions of communication are well integrated. It is only in the Western tradition of the last few centuries that these two have gone their separate ways. And it looks as if this may now be reversing.
- 2 It is possible to describe ‘looking good’ by drawing on this literature and extending it to other modes of communication, in other words, by conceiving of parallelisms and other poetic devices as multimodal principles. This has already been done, for instance, by Jacques Durand (1970) who systematically showed that all the rhetorical figures described by classical and Renaissance rhetoricians have visual equivalents (see also Dyer 1982: Chapter 8). An ad for a particular kind of biscuit depicted the biscuit next to a finger – a visual rhyme. An ad for detergent showed a man dressed in white on top of a heap of coal – a visual antithesis. And so on.
- 3 Several key characteristics of aesthetic communication have been dominant in advertising from the start, and advertising can be said to have paved the way for the introduction of affect into functional communication and for affect to closely relate to forbidden desires and to the transgression of social taboos in the pursuit of pleasure. But ‘form without meaning’ was never part of advertising. Even Mukarovsky recognized this when he said that advertising uses “a euphonic sequence, an unusual pattern [...] to attract attention first to the wording, and then to the thing advertised” (1964a [1932]: 39). The aesthetics of advertising is now gradually permeating other areas of social communication, so much so that advertising loses its distinctness and dissolves into a new, broader approach to social communication. Just as medieval communication integrated aesthetics with the communication of theological and chivalrous concepts and values, so contemporary communication integrates aesthetic pleasure with the values of global corporate culture, whether in the form of personal lifestyle identities expressed in terms of consumer goods or in the form of corporate branding. It is this that makes ‘looking good’ so important and so all pervasive in contemporary society.
- 4 To be literate in contemporary aesthetics is therefore to be literate in style as identity, and to be able to understand the multimodal communicative potential of aesthetic signifiers. In an era where the ability to create texts that ‘look good’ is no longer the province of specialists, of artists and graphic designers, but accessible to everyone through software such as Word, PowerPoint, Photoshop etc. and a valuable skill in many professions, an informed appreciation of aesthetics, and an ability to make functional communication ‘look good’, should become an integral part of learning to read and write, at all levels. In what follows I will outline some of the directions this might take.

The elements of aesthetic literacy

Provenance

In Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001: 10, 23) we defined ‘provenance’ as the introduction, into a particular context, of signifiers from another context (another era, another social group, another culture), to signify the ideas and values associated with that other context by the context which

‘imports’ the sign from the other context. Meaning is therefore based on provenance, on ‘where the signifier comes from’. As an example we used the 1960s ‘importation’ by the Beatles of the sitar into Western pop music, so as to signify the values which, in the ‘psychedelic’ youth culture of the time, were associated with the sitar’s country of origin – meditation, drugs as ‘expansion of consciousness’, and so on. We were inspired by Barthes’ concept of ‘connotation’ and his classic example of a Panzani ad for pasta that signified ‘Italianicity’, “the condensed essence of everything that could be Italian, from spaghetti to painting” (1977: 48).

Provenance plays a role in poetics and stylistics too. For Mukarovsky (1964b [1940]: 338–339), archaisms, ‘foreign expressions’, ‘dialect words’ and the “intermingling of standard with folk speech, of written with conversational speech” have an aesthetic effect as they can disrupt the ‘automatization’ of the ‘standard language’ and draw attention to language itself – but they of course also introduce the ideas and values associated with the periods from which the archaisms come, the groups which speak the dialects, and so on. Leech (1969: 57), too, recognizes this as an important aspect of poetics and uses an example from *John Lennon in His Own Write*: “Henry was his father’s son and it were time for him to go into his father’s business of Brummer Striving. It wert a farst dying trade which was fast dying.”

Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007: 138–148) describe the writing style of *Cosmopolitan* magazine as a hybrid of advertising style, fashion caption style, expert style, youth street style and conversational style which connotes what the magazine seeks to be and do – promoting consumer goods and fashion as a passport to identity, glamour, success, sexuality, etc. (advertising and fashion style); providing reliable and trustworthy information (expert style); being up to date on the latest trend and a touch provocative (youth street language); and providing vicarious companionship (conversational style).

The principle of provenance can be applied beyond language, as it in fact already was in Barthes’ discussion of the Panzani ad. Figure 28.1 imports into fashion for young, glamorous women a military flakvest, a foxtail and tweed, a fabric perhaps more usually associated with an older and more conservative generation. Thus connotations of the military and hunting (wearing the outfit is a ‘manoeuvre’) are combined with a mixture of conservativeness (the tweed) and sexiness (the mini skirt). Together with the energetic, almost defiant pose, this creates a new identity model for women – sexy, yet conservative, forceful and potentially dangerous, yet playful.

In Figure 28.2 the logo of a design magazine uses hand-embroidered lettering. Made by the designer’s mother, the logo ‘imports’ the traditional handcrafted object into the world of logo design. By doing so it announces the magazine’s values, rejecting the conventional styles of the corporate logo as too slick, too institutional and too technologically driven, and affirming the values of home-made, handcrafted, traditional forms of expression.

Figure 28.3 is a more mundane and non-professional example. A cross-modal pun links the ‘general’ of ‘General Trades’ to a cartoon style drawing of a general, allowing the plumbing company to import military values such as authority, distinction (the medals) and ‘at your service-ness’ (the customer is saluted with a wrench) into the domain of plumbing, but, not unlike the other examples, with an attempt to introduce playfulness and humour.

The importance of provenance in aesthetics means that aesthetic literacy is not only a matter of recognizing rhetorical figures and parallelisms, but also of recognizing cultural references. Advertising has of course always drawn on such references, but this did not mean that audiences had to be consciously aware of them. As John Berger memorably noted (1972: 140), advertising works with “vague historical or poetic or moral references [...] The fact that they are imprecise and ultimately meaningless is an advantage: they should not be understandable, they should merely be reminiscent of cultural lessons half learnt”. But designers *do* need to be consciously



Figure 28.1 *Vogue* magazine 'Tactile Maneuver' (page from US *Vogue*, January 2010, reprinted with the permission of David Sims/Trunk Archive).

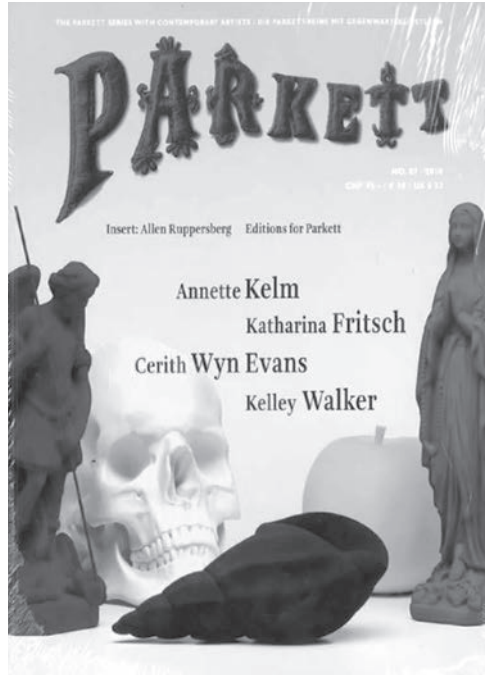


Figure 28.2 Logo of *Parkett* magazine (*Parkett* no. 87/2010, reprinted with the permission of Parkett Publishers, Zurich/New York).

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Figure 28.3 Plumber's partner programme.

aware of such references, and in an age where writing has to 'look good', cultural references are a key resource also for everyday writing, and knowledge of the visual culture of the past, and of other cultures, is therefore an important aspect of aesthetic literacy.

Parallelism

Parallelism, whether metrical, phonological or syntactical, is part of the stock in trade of literary stylistics. To borrow some examples from Leech (1969), in "Where wealth accumulates and men decay" (a quote from Oliver Goldsmith) there is syntactic similarity between "wealth accumulates" "and "men decay", and in "I kissed thee ere I killed thee" there is syntactical similarity as well as phonological similarity between "kissed" and "killed". The many forms of parallelism have been named and catalogued as rhetorical 'schemes' and include rhyme and alliteration, anaphora (the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of subsequent portions of text), epistrophe (the repetition of a word or phrase at the end of particular portions of text), chiasmus (the juxtaposition of phrases which are each other's inverse, as in 'never let a fool kiss you nor a kiss fool you'), antithesis (the putting together of opposite ideas, as in 'speech is silver, but silence is gold') and so on.

But parallelism is rarely a matter of form alone. Formal identity or similarity signifies identity or similarity of content, and formal contrast signifies contrast of content. The meaning potential of parallelism is therefore based on these three possible relations, identity, similarity and contrast,

often in complex ways, because similarity and difference may well go together to create more complex meanings, as in this example from Leech (1968: 69):

In 'I kissed thee ere I killed thee' [...] the parallelism urges a connection between kissed and killed [which] [...] combines contrast with similarity. Kissing and killing have opposite connotations, the former being associated with love, the latter with hatred and aggression. On the other hand, the sentence as a whole suggests that they are similar: that kissing and killing are compatible actions. On a wider scale, therefore, this parallelism summarizes with great concentration the paradox of Othello's jealousy, and the irony of his final tragedy.

Parallelism is clearly a cross-modal principle which can apply to time-based as well as space-based media. Here we will focus on the visual and briefly discuss parallelism of composition, form, colour and texture. Durand used the classical distinction between 'schemes' and 'tropes', figures based on formal similarities and contrasts (e.g. rhyme) and figures based on similarities and contrasts of content (e.g. similes and metaphors). Here I will focus on the former, but on the understanding that *formal* identities, similarities and contrasts signify identities, similarities and contrasts of *content*, whether concretely, as in the earlier example of the biscuit and the finger, or more abstractly, as when colour similarities indicate that two elements share a quality of 'warmth' or 'softness'.

Starting with composition, symmetry gives different elements the same size, the same orientation to the vertical and horizontal axis, the same distance from each other, and so on. In Figure 28.4 the six women are all in frontal close-up and all framed by equal-sized rectangular frames which are more or less symmetrically arranged – more or less, because there is deliberate irregularity here as well. The point is, these are different women, who make different choices, but they have this in common that they use cosmetic contact lenses and are FreshLook customers.

In Figure 28.3, too, there is compositional balance and similarity of colour and texture (the camouflage motif) between the 'Ideal' and the 'Real' – the top part which signifies the company's identity and the bottom part which provides practical information (cf. Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). Thus the meanings signified in the former also resonate in the latter, uniting the 'aesthetic' and the practical.

So, apart from access to cultural references, aesthetic literacy also means being able to discern and create identities, similarities and oppositions of composition, shape, colour and texture, and knowing how this can create meaning.

Elsewhere I have explored the meaning potential of form parameters, e.g. of roundness and angularity, and of horizontal and vertical elongation (Van Leeuwen 2006) and of colour parameters such as value, saturation, purity, temperature, modulation and differentiation (Van Leeuwen 2011). Clearly, parallelism can compare and contrast visual elements in terms of all these parameters, whether the elements are words, abstract graphic forms or pictorial elements. Only when parallelism is employed in tandem with the meaning potentials of composition, form, colour and texture can the creative potential of aesthetics find its full expression.

A tentative postscript on beauty

Bourdieu, in *Distinction* (1979) strongly criticized the dominant view of an aesthetics in which beauty relies on style rather than substance. An evaluation of beauty which can only see beauty in the formal qualities of art works and other humanly produced artefacts is, for Bourdieu, the

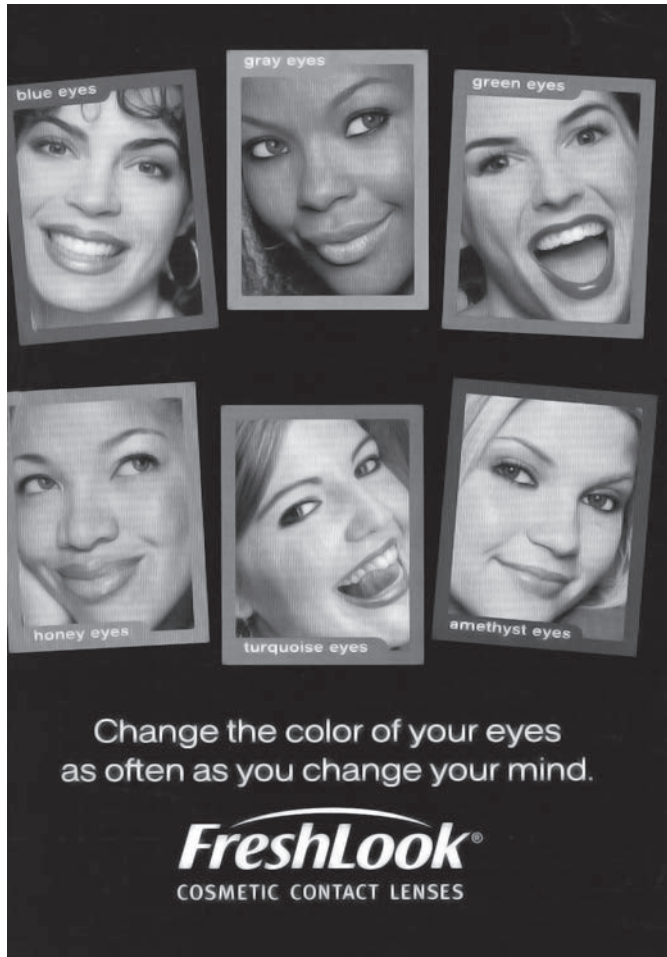


Figure 28.4 FreshLook advertisement.

'cultural capital' by means of which the middle classes try to distinguish their taste as superior to the 'popular taste' of the working classes. Bourdieu then defends the popular taste which does *not* separate the aesthetic from meaning and morality, and which can find beauty in *what* is depicted rather than in *how* it is depicted. He discusses viewer reactions to a famous photograph from *The Family of Man*, a landmark photography show from the late 1950s. The photo is a close-up of the gnarled hands of an old woman. Bourdieu then shows how 'bourgeois' comments focused on formal composition and technique, and on knowledge of art (e.g. "I find this a very beautiful photograph. It is the very symbol of toil. It puts me in mind of Flaubert's old servant woman...") while working-class comments focused on life experience, moral judgement and empathy, thus forming "the negative opposite of the Kantian aesthetic" (1979: 41) (e.g. "poor old thing, her hands must really hurt her").

For a semiotician, however, these two need to be brought together. Forms create meanings and meanings need forms to come into being. Discourses that focus on form (e.g. musicological

discourses) need to take a step towards meaning and discourses that focus on meaning a step towards form.

But I would also suggest that ‘looking good’ is not all there is to beauty. Yes, the contemporary emphasis on ‘looking good’ has moved aesthetics into the foreground again, and united it with functional communication, and in many ways that has made the world more colourful and multimodal, but it is also a particular aesthetic, albeit an increasingly dominant one, the aesthetic of today’s global corporate culture and its values. For the word beauty we should perhaps claim a wider remit.

Related topics

Design, Literary theory, Rhetoric, Social semiotics, Stylistics.

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29

POETRY, METAPHOR AND PERFORMANCE

Literacy as a philosophical act

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Beginnings

Poetry is not information. Information is a corpse. Poetry is alive because it knows it is mortal. A poem is a manifestation of affect, of life, desperate life.

(Young 2010: 166)

Thinking poetry, metaphor and performance *together* constitutes a different way of conceiving literacy: this is literacy as a philosophical act. My basic premise is that to think metaphor and performance together is to think about the *life* and the *activity* of literacy rather than its components and mechanisms. In this chapter, I have leaned on various contemporary poets, thinking themselves about their art form, to help me use philosophical ideas to communicate differently about literacy. Thinking literacy in this way resists the sewing up of ideas, the neat summations we often expect from academic writing. Thinking literacy *creatively* asks of readers that they wander a while in their own thoughts and on their own terms. Writing with just such an invitation is what I wish to do here and in order to think philosophically about a field that is so beautifully open to possibilities – a field like literacy studies – invites us to enter into a different communication, a different kind of engagement. So, dear reader, please take the following as my simple invitation to think the field differently. Together.

In the chapter, I will make explicit the connections between drama and literacy by pursuing a relationship drawn between poetry, philosophy and performance by young people in India and Canada participating in a global ethnography of engagement in complex classrooms of socio-economically disadvantaged schools. Using stories of writing and performing poetry, two young people's works and reflections on the place of writing in their lives will open up questions about the function of writing and the value of metaphor in young people's creative worlds and literacy engagements. This is also a section about contagion, that is, how one form of creative expression spawns other forms of expression, how a kind of multi-modal inspiration happened for students in our Toronto and our India sites and ultimately, how thinking the field of literacy studies as a philosophical act, and in community, may allow it to breathe new air.

In an age of constant threat of communicable disease and super-virus paranoia, I am speaking of a different kind of contagion, also powerful, unstoppable and incurable: the contagion of social-justice seeking arts, of literacy that finds unique expression through the arts, of one's desire to express oneself as a literate and creative being in order to communicate with an imagined other. There is something of an alchemical reaction that takes place when a commitment to justice for self and community searches for unique expression through the arts. There is a further kind of transformation when one genre of creative expression ignites the impulse for other forms of expression.

I have been privy to such alchemical reactions in two schools in the cities of Toronto, Canada and Lucknow, India in the context of a global, multi-sited ethnographic research project called: *Urban School Performances: The interplay, through live and digital drama, of local-global knowledge about student engagement (2008–2013)*¹. The project involves teachers, students, artists and researchers in the cities of Toronto, Boston, Taipei and Lucknow. The study is about engagement understood socially, academically and artistically, how students come to engage and disengage through complex relations of power, subjectivity and performance. In this chapter, I would like to focus specifically on the translation of phenomenological experience to forms of writing, through genre experimentation, and to performance for two specific students in two different drama classrooms in Toronto and Lucknow. I will draw especially on the philosophical writings of contemporary poets, Dean Young, Mary Ruefle, Tim Lilburn and Robert Bringhurst, to draw the connection between writing poetry and thinking the world.

The sites: Middleview in Toronto and Prerna in Lucknow

Middleview is a richly multicultural/racial/lingual urban high school with 1,797 students (62 per cent male, 38 per cent female; 56 per cent of students with a primary language other than English). It is the largest technological school in Ontario, offering a comprehensive selection of academic and technological study programmes. The Greater Toronto Area has a population of 5.5 million people. The school is located in downtown Toronto, which has a population of 2.79 million people, and draws its students from across the entire city. The drama classes we observed drew students from all programmes within the school.

Prerna, meaning 'inspiration' in Hindi, is a school located in Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh, which is the most populous state of India with a population of more than 199 million. The city of Lucknow itself has a population of 2.81 million people. Prerna is located in the area of Gomtinagar, which is a neighbourhood like many in Indian cities, where affluent residential homes are situated alongside very poor slums. The majority of students come from the slums of Gomtinagar, some travelling from other, more distant, slums. The school is housed in a fairly large, well-equipped and well-furnished building of a private fee-paying school for middle-class children, called Studyhall. Prerna operates in a second shift in the afternoon (2 PM–6 PM), after the Studyhall day is over. Prerna is an all-girls school.

The students

Poetry, Aristotle argued, is truer than history. Storytelling as literature (narrative poetry) must also then be truer than history, Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) has argued. Shashaq (self-selected pseudonym), a female, self-described Jamaican-Indian, who calls Patois her first language and describes her social class as "single-parent, middle to working class" and herself as a "determined, hard-working, intelligent and honest girl" explained to us that she began to write poetry after seeing *The Middle Place*, a Verbatim piece of theatre about homeless youth, living in a shelter. After seeing the play with her class, she proposed to the teacher that she write a poem instead

of a monologue for her drama class assignment. Seeing the play had ignited in her a real love of poetry writing. Our interview with Shashaqe began to uncover a process of self-expression through the writing of poetry, as inspired by theatre, revealing an economical and artistic way of sharing her complex life history.

At Prerna, a group of seventeen- to eighteen-year-old female students became inspired by watching (through digital recording) the theatre performance of a group of Toronto students from Middleview who had explored the metaphor of 'doors' in their lives – doors that open and doors that close – and devised a collective theatre piece from their individual monologue writing. The Indian girls felt compelled by the storytelling and wished to respond to the Canadian students with creative work of their own. In the course of their work, one seventeen-year-old girl, Khushboo's, very difficult domestic life came to light offering a vivid, if painful, picture of the kinds of doors that close for young women in a deeply patriarchal Indian culture. Khushboo's classmates responded to their friend's challenges through poetry. This process also had them ultimately create a theatre production, with a very different kind of aesthetic from the Toronto students, built from their individual reflections of doors and their sympathetic critiques of Khushboo's challenges. The work was shared, digitally, with students and researchers in Toronto but the Indian students also had the opportunity to take their performances of poetry – their choreographed enactments of individual poems and their collective poem performance – to a global youth conference in Plymouth, England.

Poetry: the plane of immanence

In my research on drama and engagement, the question, 'why poetry?' might well be asked. What's more, why draw such a thread between poetry and philosophy in the study of literacy engagement? Canadian professor of philosophy, Mark Kingwell (2012), offers a compelling answer. He writes: "What is clear is that, at their best, philosophy and poetry are engaged in the same kinds of beginnings and endings, working on the same plane, the plane of immanence" (p. 235). In his writing, Kingwell does not confuse the narrow notion of truth with the expansive notion of meaning, adding that, "[even] the dominant sign-making machine of writing cannot govern the realm of meaning entirely. Meaning sprawls and expands, folds and collapses" (p. 231). Kingwell is not the only thinker to name this relationship between beginnings and endings in poetry and philosophy. Dean Young (2010), a contemporary American poet, makes the very same case, writing, "Poetry is an art of beginnings and ends. You want middles, read novels" (p. 86); I will return to this idea of endings and beginnings, and Dean Young's insights, when I turn to the poems of the students themselves.

I am not sure how poetry is taught in school English classrooms now but when I was in school, learning poetry was a slow form of torture and not much about being in school inspired the writing of poetry. I hope and trust that engaging with poetry formally in school has improved over the intervening years. It was in an essay by American poet Mary Ruefle (2012) that I discovered the most compelling answer to the question, why poetry for young people? In *Poetry* magazine, in her essay titled "On fear", she writes:

One of the fears a young writer has is not being able to write as well as he or she wants to, the fear of not being able to sound like X or Y, a favourite author. But out of fear, hopefully, is born a young writer's voice: 'But now,' says Kierkegaard, 'to strive to become what one already is: who would take the pains to waste his time on such a task, involving the greatest imaginable degree of resignation? ... But for this very

reason alone it is a very difficult task ... precisely because every human being has a strong natural bent and passion to become something more and different.'

(cited in Ruefle 2012)

The accusation often levelled against poetry, however, and especially the poetry of adolescents, is that it can be self-preoccupied, some kind of brooding self-absorption, that cannot think outside its own petty concerns. But this is not the kind of poetry we witnessed in our study. In all cases, in Toronto and in India, the students had made something of their theatre spectatorship by responding to the drama in poetic form. Poetry then became a way to leave themselves behind and become involved in something larger. They were translating one genre of communication, of cultural production, into another, working across multiple modes and finding expression in just the right way.

In his introduction to his edited collection of prominent Canadian poets, Tim Lilburn (2002: 1) argues that poetry is a way of knowing that surpassed the disciplines: "The hunch slowly grew in me that poetry was a particular form of knowing that dominant, current thinking – contemporary philosophy, economics, sociology, psychology – didn't know or had forgotten".

The poetry we read and watched performed in our study sites, was indeed a different kind of knowing. It was a self-knowing that sought reception, a knowing that needed a community.

Why philosophy?

Bringing poetry together with philosophy is not a common practice. Poetry has tended to remain a genre distinct from prose and philosophy. But poetry is becoming more performative, the lines of connection to theatre becoming more pronounced. Witness the proliferation of spoken word poetry among young people, owing much to music. For our students, the poetry they wrote was inspired by theatre and then became itself performative, that is to say, it moved from page poetry to stage poetry. West coast Canadian poet, Robert Bringhurst (2012) suggests something quite important about the relationship between poetry and philosophy for our purposes here. He writes that poetry is a quality or aspect of existence. "It is *the thinking of things*" (p. 155, emphasis original). The relationship between poetry and philosophy for the young people of our study had a lot to do with the aesthetic and pedagogical dimensions of their literacy learning, and by that I am meaning the ways in which they came to engage with different communicative art forms.

There is yet another way to characterize how the young people of the study put poetry to work, on their own behalf and for others. In responding through writing to performance, they were making sense of things, driven also by a desire to share that sense-making with others. The students in Toronto were seeking justice for themselves, their pasts, their fears and their dreams. The students in India were also seeking justice for their friend, and for themselves, for a history of unrealized dreams, gender discrimination and a community of silenced members. Again, in his essay bringing poetry and philosophy into dialogue and naming precisely the drive I observed in the classrooms, Bringhurst writes:

Poetry, like science, is a way of finding out – by trying to state perceptively and clearly – what exists and what is going on. That is too much for the self to handle. That is why when you go to work for the poem, you give yourself away. Composing a poem is a way of leaving the self behind and getting involved in something larger.

(2012: 161–162)

Bringhurst brings us to the crucial point of poetry as a particular communicative language, a literacy engagement that contains both the enormous human, autobiographical urge and the equally profound desire to communicate a past into a present and a future. The poems of the Toronto youth, like the poems in India, clearly illustrated these two great urges. It is to their words that we must now turn.

Making poems for ourselves and others

When you think intensely and beautifully, something happens. That something is called poetry. If you think that way and speak at the same time, poetry gets in your mouth. If someone hears you, it gets in their ears. If you think that way and write at the same time, then poetry gets written. But poetry *exists* in any case. The question is only: are you going to take part, and if so, how?

(Bringhurst 2012: 160)

In the third year of the study, Shashaqe was one of the students from Middleview who saw the production of *The Middle Place* at Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto. Following this, the students began a unit in their drama classroom on creating a piece of Verbatim theatre. Verbatim theatre uses the actual words of people, often in direct first-person address or testimonial style, to raise issues relevant to a particular community and to activate broader social engagement. It is a form of documentary theatre in which plays are constructed from the precise words spoken by those interviewed about a given topic.

The students roamed the school and interviewed their peers. They transcribed the interviews, verbatim, and then set about creating monologues from their interview data. But Shashaqe had

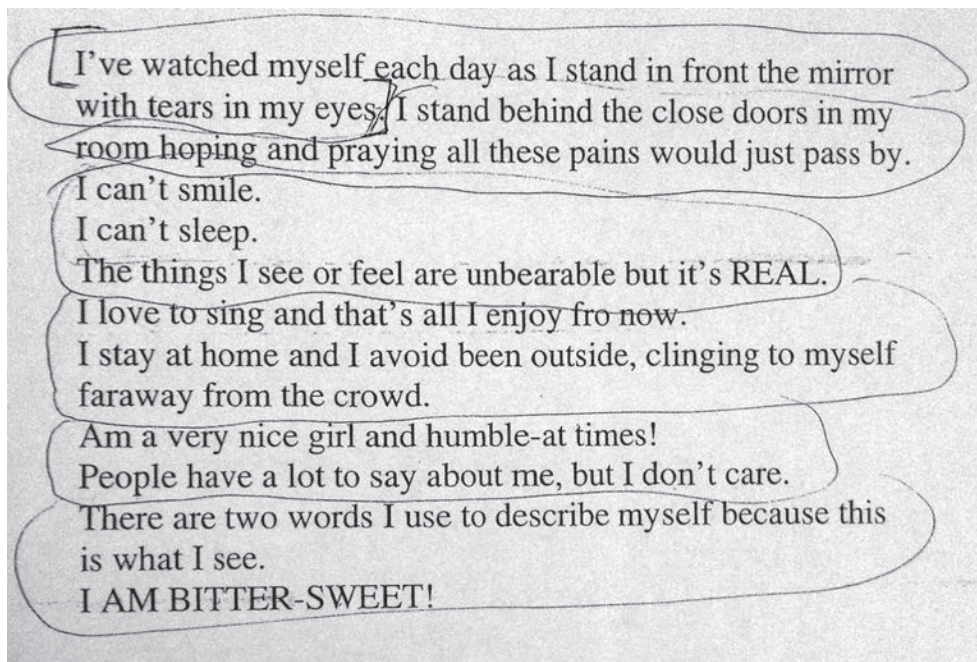


Figure 29.1 Poem by Shashaqe inspired by the play *The Middle Place*.

spoken to her teacher about creating a monologue from *her own* life rather than from the lives of those she had interviewed; her teacher permitted her to adapt the assignment. Shashaqe also requested that her monologue be written as a poem. We had not appreciated at the time why she wanted instead to mine her own story rather than those collected from her peers but that came to light in our interview with her. We also had not fully appreciated the extent to which poetry was an escape and a strategy for Shashaqe. She explained in her interview with us that she had chosen to write a poem instead of a monologue but what we also learned in that interview that we had not previously known was that Shashaqe was living, herself, in a shelter.

Anne (White, Canadian of European descent, Female Research Assistant): What about doing verbatim here, in the class? When you went out, I remember you were transcribing an interview. What was the verbatim like for you to do here at Middleview?

Shashaqe² (Female-feminine, Jamaican/Indian, Straight, Class: single parent; middle to working class, Christian, First Language: Patois (Jamaican dialect), Born: Jamaica): It was good. At first, I was kind of scared, because like, how people gonna react to you just asking them their opinion. And then it's shocking because when you hear what other people have to say, some of the things you can relate to, and sometimes you will be like, 'Oh, I never knew of that.' You get to learn while you do it. I think that was good, because I thought it would be rewarding. I think it was good.

Anne: So you actually came away learning more about your own school and people who are here?

Shashaqe: And you get to see a different kind of ranges of kids, like what they think, why did they come to school. You get to learn so much. That's why it's good.

Anne: So were you really pleased with the interviews that you did?

Shashaqe: Yeah.

Anne: They went pretty well and people were willing to talk to you?

Shashaqe: Yes.

Anne: Yes. Do you wish that you could have continued with that, building it into a monologue?

Shashaqe: Yes. I like that, because you get to hear what other persons have to say. You don't have to change anything. It's their direct words. That's how they feel. I really enjoy that.

Anne: But you made a choice to do your own monologue rather than your verbatim monologue, right?

Shashaqe: Yes.

Anne: Why did you choose that?

Shashaqe: What inspired me to really write this poem that I have? It kind of explains how I felt when I just moved into the shelter. And other people used to judge me and say all kinds of stuff. Sometimes, I was used to being this hobo at this time. I have this rage, so I have to lay it on everybody. Then I tried to get out, and people are, like, trying to give me a hard time. So that's what my poem is about.

Anne: So the point of your poem is sort of related then to the play *The Middle Place*?

Shashaqe: Yes. That's what pushed me to do it.

Anne: Okay, okay. That's really interesting that you've made that connection to the play.

Shashaqe: From that day, I started to write more poems about what you go through as a teenager, especially in Toronto, especially when you are not used to a certain kind of lifestyle at the centre of downtown. So it's kind of hard.

Anne: Yes. And how much do you write? Do you write a poem every day? Once a week?

Shashaqe: I mostly write lyrics. I do it in a poem form, and then I make it into a song. That's what it's like most of the time... I do that regularly. It expresses what I feel. The part of my poem that really touch me is the part I say 'I stand behind...', because at that time I was unsure about so much stuff going on. I used to go into my room and cry. When I went there, I couldn't do that.

Anne: You had no privacy?

Shashaqe: I couldn't have no privacy. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't smile. The things... I have so many different experiences. I had all kinds of stuff around me, so it's like really unbearable. So that [the play] was all summarizing everything living in the shelter. So I was like 'Wow!' when I went to see the thing. Wow, they are actually talking about what I'm going through. So I really enjoyed it.

Anne: So do you share your songs and your poems with other people at the shelter, or no?

Shashaqe: No. At the shelter... I'm in a transitional programme. [It's] still the shelter, but you are more independent. I don't stay in my room. I also see it differently.

Anne: Do you have your own room now?

Shashaqe: Yes.

Anne: Okay. So you've got some privacy now. So you could even have quiet to write your poetry, and sing your songs.

Shashaqe: That's what I mostly do. And because I've done that, people have seen a lot about me. That's what I like to have people see about me. But I don't care.

Anne: Yes.

Shashaqe: All of this is just summarize from everything from front to the back.

Anne: Yes, because that was one of the questions we were going to ask you: how does this monologue relate to your own life? What, in your own life, is living in this monologue?

Shashaqe: Everything. Especially, like, the first part when I said "I watch myself each day as I stand in front of mirror. It cures my eyes." I usually literally used to do that, because the person I saw in the mirror was the one the worker saw, or the kids that lived in the shelter didn't see. They saw a different person. I was like 'Wow.' They are like, 'Oh, you are either too fat. You need long hair. You wear too much weave. You need to do this, you need to do that.' I used to be afraid to go down the stairs. That's why I buy these big baggy T-shirts in the summer time. Put on jacket because I was afraid of guys looking at me. It was just...

Anne: So was a guy saying those comments?

Shashaqe: Both. Guys and girls.

Anne: Okay, and they felt they have the right to judge you?

Shashaqe: Yes. It was a whole judgemental thing. So it led to a lot of depression. I don't want to go to school. I tried to run away, I guess. You know, find some other remedy. I guess praying and hoping. That's what I thought about.

As is evident in the above interview excerpt, Shashaqe's life has presented her with many challenges. The idea that poetry is about beginnings and endings seems especially relevant. There is both the sense of an ending to difficult living conditions and interpersonal relations as well as the

promise of a new beginning. Consistent with her interview, her poetry in this regard acts as a kind of witness to a past and a pledge to something as yet unknown, recalling here Mary Ruefle citing Kierkegaard who believed that every human being has a strong natural bent and passion to become something more and different. Young very deftly captures this vacillation between a past, or that which holds us back, and a future, or that which sets us free, in the work of poetry:

The problem then for the author may be seen as a dramatic problem too; he must use the present tense to create suspense but he must also employ a retrospective, reporting voice to indicate the lasting ramifications and significance of events. The challenge then is in creating coherence.

(2010: 128)

In her account of her life struggles in the interview and in her poetry, Shashaq is both facing and challenging the circumstances of her life. She is using the impulse of autobiography and the propulsion to represent the significance of life events in her work, calling for a new beginning. One might question why Shashaq uses poetry, and her drama class assignment, to make public such personal trials. But that is what theatre does. It makes public what might ordinarily be experienced as private or solitary. It reaches out and asks spectators to witness. Shashaq was trying to reach out to others in her poetry writing. Seyla Benhabib (1992: 100) asserts that “All struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by defining what had previously been considered private, non-public, and non-political as matters of public concern, issues of justice, and sites of power”. This same impulse was the *modus operandi* of the girls in India. In both cases, an experience of theatre, of the shared communal event of spectating, inspired justice-seeking self-expression and a creative move across genres.

At Prerna, the students gathered around computers and watched the play created by the Toronto students called *The Doors*. The students in Toronto had explored the metaphor of doors to see how they figured in their lives. Some shared doors that closed, others doors that opened. But all had placed a frame of significance around the idea of the power of doors in our lives. Our Indian research collaborator, Dr Urvashi Sahni, had shared with us how inspired the girls felt after watching the Toronto students’ stories. And ‘the story’, of course, is profoundly connected to the philosophical impulse, which Bringhurst insists is deeply connected to language because we think in language:

Another way of answering the music of the world is, of course, by telling stories. This is the most ancient and widespread of philosophical methods. But story, like song, is not a genre that humans invented. The story is an essential part of language, a basic part of speech, just like the sentence, only larger. Words make sentences, sentences make stories, and still stories make up a still larger part of speech, called a mythology. These are essential tools of thinking. The story is just as indispensable to thinking as the sentence.

(2012: 163)

The stories at Prerna, told first as poems and then as a choreographed collective theatre piece called *Danvaze* (see YouTube video www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5I3hM4_Cvo), were fundamentally about thinking through life, thinking the world, and about understanding. The first act of the performance tells the story of Khushboo having to live with her grandmother because her father threw her out of the home when she insisted on continuing her studies at school rather than marrying at sixteen. The second act of the play brought together the individual poems written by the Prerna girls, taking up the metaphor of ‘doors’ in their lives.

This work was shared at their school and in their community but its culmination was at a youth conference in Plymouth, England. Though Khushboo was forbidden to attend, her story was still told. In a personal correspondence with our collaborator, Dr Sahni shared:

We did the Doors project in June. I was supposed to take 5 girls to Plymouth, England from Prerna – Khushboo, Laxmi, Sunita, Kunti and Soni. Khushboo's dad refused to let her go ... not satisfied with that he also refused to let her go back to school. She had just passed her class 10 exam and topped her class. He insisted that he would not allow her to study any further ... He threatened to throw her out, beat her up and also threatened to kill her if she defied him and went back to school. We had to intervene with help from the police and Child helpline.

So I sat with the other four girls and we discussed 'Doors' – in our lives. The ones that open and the ones that are shut. We discussed Khushboo's life and spoke of the doors that were being shut on her because of the psychological doors that were shut in her father's mind. They then spoke of doors as they experienced them. I asked them to put down as many words as came to their mind when they thought of the term 'doors' – they said 'protection', 'oppression', 'happiness', 'privacy', 'darkness', 'safety', 'security', 'imprisonment'. Then we all decided to write poems about our experiences with doors. So that's what we did. Then we read them out to each other. They took them home and then edited them and came back with a fair draft.

Then they acted them out. Most of the movements were theirs, again with minor editing help from me. They then put all their poems together into one long poem. Then we choreographed a dramatic movement to the group recitation of this poem too. Will send video.

We also scripted Khushboo's story and dramatised it. We used verbatim theatre. I used Khushboo's Dad, Mom and her own words almost exactly from a meeting with them the previous day.

So for our presentation in Plymouth at the ARROW Global Congress, we presented a small video clip taken on an Iflip video camera of Khushboo's interview, then presented our playlet, then the enactment of their individual poems on Doors, and then the collective poem. Everything is in Hindi, with an English translation in subtitles from me.

Their presentation brought the house down. They received a standing ovation.

(Correspondence, 15 August 2010)

Dean Young eloquently expresses the flight of fancy for poets, again the move from a past to a future, from an ending to a beginning:

The poem often seems like learning how to pilot an airplane so that you can jump out of it. So there is the self of the past that is to be related in the poem's future, the self that is recollecting and as such employs a more stable language, and the more propulsive self that is pointing forward, ejaculatory and unruly.

(2010: 128)

(These poems are translated from Hindi.)

DOORS

A door –
Open or shut
An open door reveals a vast, wide world
A closed door shuts out the truth
Offers despair, only despair
Hope beckons through the open door...

The door firmly shut
Blocks my path
How shall I come out?
Society closes around me like a prison
No hope for the future
Do I see in this closed space

Nothing to live for
Behind this closed door
Why am I condemned behind it?
What is my fault?
Just this – that I am a girl?
Don't I have a right to know
What lies beyond?

How shall I imagine
The universe of my dreams
Behind this shut door?
Do I not have the right to dream
Do I not have the right to know and
Be my 'self'?

(By Khushboo, Class 10)

DOORS

Door – a familiar word
What is the reality of its being there?

Somewhere open – somewhere closed
The doors of the mind –
Resistant – not yet open

Confusions, doubts and
The fear of society
Close the doors of my mind

Door – a familiar word

Today
I have smashed all the doors
Doors that confused my mind

Come let us fly away
To a world where
No doors are closed
Ever...

Door – a familiar word.

(By Soni, Class 12)

DOORS

A closed door hides many secrets
Secrets – hard to conceal
Hard too, to reveal
Secrets that everyone knows about
Feeling Bitter, so bitter
More than their truth
Bitter feelings turning into a maelstrom

All my dreams trapped
Behind closed doors
Dreams that crave free flight
But how shall they fly
I can see no sky
Behind shut doors

Why are the doors locked only for me?
What have I done wrong?
Done wrong
That I am a girl?
We must break the chains
And unlock this locked door
Chains that are strong
But stronger is my determination
It shall break closed doors

Now my dreams can fly
Leaving behind locked doors

Maybe the chains want to be free too?
Maybe they want the open skies too?

(By Kunti, Class 10)

Endings

Young (2010) contends that one of the powers of poetry is to bring us up to the unutterable and then to go on speaking. This is the obligation to break with detachment and to begin again. In both Toronto and Lucknow what seemed unspeakable and private was expressed, through words, stories and performances. And once ideas are expressed and manipulated, they have the chance to become art. In our study, theatre of 'the other', the stories of others, became an invitation to excavate one's own stories and histories. Having claimed these stories, young people turned outwards to a public through performance, seeking community; a multi-modal cycle of literacy engagement and a cross-disciplinary approach to thinking the world. This kind of creative expressive writing and performance is a powerful antidote to the constraints of a schooled imagination. And for adolescents, it may come just in time:

All third graders are surrealists, saboteurs, reckless, ready to plunge into the deepest abyss laughing. Their hearts are kites flown trailing a hundred tongues. Their language capacities are growing at an extraordinary rate, they have conviction in the power of language, they know it can get them into and out of trouble. Language is a device with which they can probe the world's exfoliation of detail and stroke the whiskers of the dream. They are at liberty with its intoxications. After third grade the terror of social life, of trying to fit in, begins to hinder that expressive range, their crazy what-the-hell zeal – why not make a rabbit talk? – their sense of the singing in the word is tramped down by the responsibility to refer to the clichéd and the acceptable. They are more and more orphaned from their primal urges. They become socialized, a word that could kill any glee.

(Young 2010: 160)

Many of the poets and philosophers I have engaged in this effort to understand the choices and processes of young people's meaning-making practices and their deep desire to connect have understood this engagement with language as fundamental, even primal, in our efforts to name our multiple endings and beginnings, to reinvent ourselves through language, stories and performance. For our students in Toronto, they were witness to a powerful piece of theatre about youth without shelter and, for some of them, through processes of identification, they named and reclaimed their own stories, offering them up in artistic expression for a world primed to witness their new beginnings. In Lucknow, critical dialogues, so much a part of their everyday life in school, spawned the writing of poetry and the performing of a collective poem. Inspired also by Toronto students' performances and the metaphor of 'the door', they rallied their forces, daring to imagine beyond the doors of their own lives. Endings and beginnings, say these philosopher-poets, new engagements with literacy through the aesthetic languages of art.

Poetry is not a discipline. It is a hunger, a revolt, a drive, a mash note, a fright, a tantrum, a grief, a hoax, a debacle, an application, an affect. It is a collaboration: the bad news may be that we are never entirely in control but the good news is that we collaborate with a genius – the language!

(Young 2010: 156)

Future directions

The research shared in this chapter was concerned with how young people engage in school contexts using theatre as a way into the complexity of their highly changeable relationships with school. In our Toronto and Lucknow schools, poetry surfaced as a mode of expression that seemed to offer students an inviting flexibility, a way to author and communicate difficult feelings and experiences. These engagements with theatre and poetry will be carried forward into a new project, which will concern itself with youth civic engagement across sites in Canada, India, Taiwan, Greece and England.

Civic disengagement has become a distinctive characteristic of contemporary perceptions about young people. However, the emphasis on individual irresponsibility within neoliberal characterizations of youth neglects the crucial components of community and communication in young people's civic interests. My new SSHRC-funded study, *Youth, Theatre, Radical Hope and the Ethical Imaginary: An intercultural investigation of drama pedagogy, performance and civic engagement (2014–2018)* builds on the fundamental argument that the process of creating theatre together is itself a process of civic engagement with symbolic and material value, as well as being an important rehearsal for broader forms of civic engagement beyond schools. Two fundamental findings from the previous research project concerned the place of 'hope' and 'care' in the lives of young people living in socio-economically disadvantaged communities. These concepts of *hope* and *care* will be artistically explored in the new project to contemplate how they function in the lives of diverse young people today. Drawing again from arts-based methods, the new project will further explore how participation in artistic practices and local–global social relations might provoke forms of engaged citizenship worth considering in times of increasing youth social unrest.

Notes

- 1 This project is now published by the University of Toronto press in a book titled, *Why Theatre Matters: Urban Youth, Engagement, and a Pedagogy of the Real*.
- 2 As noted, we invited the students to choose their own pseudonyms and any other social identity markers they would like us to include. In addition, I invited the students to respond to two questions: (1) Describe yourself in a sentence and (2) If I were to describe you in a book, what should I say? Shashaq's responses were as follows: (1) Observant. Realistic. Courageous. Determined. Hard working. Intelligent. Honest. Loyal. Easy to snap. Moody. Emotional. Helpful. (2) Shashaq is a very quiet person. She is very smart. She likes to talk about how she feels. She liked to be in control and thoughtful. She could be sensitive at times but is overall loving.

Related topics

Theatre as methodology, Embodied literacies, Youth civic engagement, Aesthetics, Creativity and play.

Further reading

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PHENOMENOLOGY AND LITERACY STUDIES

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Introduction

Marg, an elder, and Mackenna, a child, worked side-by-side in a lounge planning and drawing a collage of lines from beloved songs. Old and young exchanged songs, sometimes singing and sometimes gesturing, a full-bodied sharing of histories, experiences and emotions through song. This moment occurred during a study on intergenerational multimodal practices and to us, crystallizes how affective and embodied literacy is and can be. Creating a collage. This negotiation of stories through music across generations can be didactic as in a child learns from an adult about language, sounds and visuals *and* it can also be more subjectively laden with histories, emotions, associations and feelings. The act of doing creative work with a child is never a neutral act; what flows through such literacy events are messages and questions and, often, strong affect. Though sometimes couched or hidden, literacy is an embodied experience (Leander and Boldt 2013) and the purpose of this chapter in a handbook on literacy studies is to foreground how perceptual, in the moment, and reliant on affect literacy is. In this chapter, we draw on literature in phenomenology to encourage researchers to loosen their grips on theories, grammars and frameworks to embrace a more open, immaterial and *perceptual* perspective on literacy practices.

We ground our discussion of phenomenology and literacy studies in a study of the Intergenerational Multimodal Literacy Programme. The programme brought together one kindergarten class from a school in Ontario, Canada with elder partners to engage in the creation and sharing of multimodal ensembles that featured art, singing and digital media. A study objective was to understand the constituents of curricula that can create opportunities for participant wellbeing by expanding their communication and identity options. Thirteen children (ages 3.8–5 years) and seven elder participants aided by the children's teachers met once every two weeks over most of a school year for intergenerational sessions at a Rest Home near the school. The programme's curriculum was premised on previous intergenerational multimodal curricula (e.g. Heydon 2013; Heydon and O'Neill 2014) but adapted by the school, Rest Home and research partners to respond to local needs and desires. Given that the programme was being run during school time, for instance, the curriculum had to address mandated literacy outcomes from a programmatic kindergarten curriculum (Ontario Ministry

of Education 2006), and the partners had perceived a need to (re)connect community members in a rural setting that had recently experienced attrition and economic hardship. The partners reckoned that connections between people might be fostered and maintained even beyond the programme boundaries should participants expand their facility with various modes and media, most notably iPads. The programme thus purchased iPads for all of the participants who received support to use them both in and outside of the programme.

Working as participant observers we employed ethnographic methods to collect data during programme planning and sessions, pertinent kindergarten classroom lessons (e.g. when the children were learning a new application), and extra-curricular intergenerational meetings (e.g. a Christmas concert). We audio- and video-recorded programme sessions, took photographs of participants' interactions and texts, and audio recorded our conversations with participants about the programme and their text-making before, during and after sessions. We conducted summative interviews with the elders to understand their past experiences with the modes and media used in the programme and their perceptions of the programme and summative multimodal interviews with the children where we asked them to draw their programme experiences and discuss programmatic issues with a puppet. Lastly, we conducted member checks with the partners and continue to collaborate with them (e.g. Heydon *et al.* 2013).

Given the emotions and sensory experiences elicited by and within the programme, in this chapter we explore the data through a phenomenological lens and consider the affordances of this lens for literacy studies.

Historical perspectives

Historically, there have been a number of key theorists who have been associated with phenomenology. Phenomenology emerged from a movement to explore relationships between the mind and body. Edward Husserl (1913) talked about how phenomenology investigates essences or meanings underlying appearance. Often analysing emotions, perceptions and embodiment, Husserl looked at phenomenon in the moment, as it is lived. Heidegger (1962), on the other hand, focused on *sensory perceptions* in the moment, as opposed to the moment being a reflection of subjectivity. In other words, Heidegger kept a tight focus on the essence of the experience.

Within his writings about the properties of sense perceptions, Merleau-Ponty (1962) moved the field of phenomenology forward. Rather than isolating and analysing an object to be perceived, Merleau-Ponty looked at how someone perceives and experiences an object. Describing the moment when we perceive something, Merleau-Ponty talks about our participation as bodies in the 'flesh of the world'. There is a reciprocal relationship between objects and landscapes and it is in this reciprocity that we develop and hone our subjectivities.

Merleau-Ponty theorizes perception by talking about 'digging down to the perceived world':

Now if perception is thus the common act of all our motor and affective functions, no less than sensory, we must rediscover the structure of the perceived world through a process similar to that of an archaeologist. For the structure of the perceived world is buried under the sedimentations of later knowledge. *Digging down to the perceived world, we see that sensory qualities are not opaque, indivisible 'givens,' which are simply exhibited to a remote consciousness* – a favourite idea of classical philosophy. We see colours (each surrounded by an affective atmosphere which psychologists have been able to study and define) are themselves different modalities for our co-existence with the world.

(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 5, emphasis added)

In italicized text, we have highlighted text that underscores Merleau-Ponty's belief in existing within perceptions – colours in a painting or on a wall can be experienced in their own rights. Eclipsing subjectivities to experience a mode when we experience an object or mode, we can perceive things in their own right. Merleau-Ponty talks about unearthing perceived worlds hidden under a sediment of history; our bodies inhabit space and serve as a means of expression in the world. Colour, smell, texture, angles call forth perceptions of ourselves in the world. Merleau-Ponty claims that we never cease to exist in this perceived world, even though we often inflect our own meanings and idiosyncratic reflections into the experiencing.

Merleau-Ponty talks about the roots of the mind being “in its body and in its world, going against doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 3). In his work, he severs texts from their contexts, concentrating instead on the text as “a spectacle which is sufficient unto itself” (p. 93). The world of perception is filled with in-the-moment sensations garnered from the details of material worlds. Merleau-Ponty offers the example of a table to illustrate his point:

... when I perceive a table, I do not withdraw my interest from the particular way it has of performing its function as a table: how is the top supported, for this is different for every table. What interests me is the unique movement from the feet to the table top with which it resists gravity; this is what makes each table different from the next. No detail is insignificant: the grain, the shape of the feet, the colour and age of the wood, as well as the scratches or graffiti which show that age.

(1962: 70)

In observing a table, a perceiver attends to every detail in their own right, thereby encouraging a viewer to perceive and make meaning in situ, in the moment, without bias (as much as that is possible). Merleau-Ponty looks at films in a similar way. Beauty in film, according to Merleau-Ponty, lies not in the story that could be in prose or photography, but in the viewing moment:

... in the selection of episodes to be represented and, in each one, the choice of shots that will be featured in the film, the length of time allotted to these elements, the order in which they are to be presented, the sound or words with which they are or are not to be accompanied... Taken together, all these factors contribute to form a particular overall cinematographical rhythm.

(1962: 85)

Experiencing film entails modes taken together such as music accompanying visuals and cinematographical rhythms (Rowsell 2013). Merleau-Ponty's work argues that individuals experience objects in place and perception has an active, subjective dimension. There is something primitive and primordial about the work of Merleau-Ponty that couples well with Gunther Kress' multimodal theorizing. Merleau-Ponty (1962, 2006) concentrates on perceptual experience, embodying objects, images, sounds experienced in the moment of reception. Kress (1997, 2003, 2010) too concentrates on senses *and* the materiality of objects and what signs signal about meaning-makers and contexts of sign-making. Where one interpretation focuses on the object of perception, free from other signs, an object that is a spectacle unto itself, the other concentrates on the interest exhibited within the material object. Both thinkers dwell in senses, fix on materialities and choices, and focus on the role of affect as it relates to our interpretation of the spectacle.

Critical issues and topics

Within literacy research there has been much less attention paid to phenomenological approaches to literacy research. Literacy research tends to emphasize the cognitive activities involved in reading, writing and communicating and seldom do literacy researchers venture into more embodied interpretations of literacy praxis. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) talked about reading as an active, perceptual activity. In her writings, she described how readers bring their memories, emotions, and associations to interpretations of literature. But, within literacy education proper the closest that we come to phenomenological accounts are studies that take socio-cultural perspectives on literacy. There has been significant research and writings on literacy and the everyday and literacy as a social, lived practice (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Heath 1983, 2012; Pahl and Rowsell 2010; Street 1984), but there is much less research on how literacy is experienced perceptually or as an embodied experience. In her review of the field, Cathy Burnett (2009) noted a gap in literature applying phenomenology and the need for more embodied accounts of the impact of digital literacy on literacy research.

There have been *some* notable articles about phenomenology and literacy. Of particular note is Ellen Rose's research on the experience of online or "on-screen reading" (Rose 2011: 516). In appreciation of the steady gravitation away from print-based texts to digital texts in university teaching, Rose set out to investigate the felt experience and perceptions of university students when they read online texts. To conduct her research, Rose collected the lived experiences of ten readers at her university. Rose conducted open-ended interviews asking participants to recall something substantial that they read online. To recreate the reading event, Rose asked her participants to describe the space in which they read, their mood, their posture, their approach to the texts and so forth. Several themes and issues emerged in interview dialogues. One theme considered materiality and how *immaterial* digital reading is. Rose's participants talked about how digital reading as guided by screen logic and the ever-presence of screens. In relation to the essence of the experience, two participants talked about how screens constrain the act of reading by limiting mobility (unless they work on smaller screens). Screen reading invites diversions, so being focused and attentive was an issue for participants. On the whole, Rose's research allowed us to appreciate how phenomenology can contribute to a more attuned understanding of literacy practices, especially in an age of pervasive communicational practices that exist within immaterial spaces.

Another scholar who has applied phenomenology to literacy research is Anne Mangen. Mangen's studies of digital reading are largely taken from a phenomenological perspective. Noting how cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives dominate the field of literacy, she focuses on phenomenological, psychosomatic experience (Mangen 2010) to foreground how our bodies interact with digital artefacts. As she notes, "Digital technologies challenge the user into new physical, ergonomic, perceptual and cognitive positions and actions" (Mangen 2010: 417). What particularly intrigues Mangen, and us, is how much we interact with materialities such as technology through multisensory interactions. Digital technologies call on more bodily interactions than printed analogues did in the last century. Mangen illustrates her point through a series of examples such as computer and console games and augmented reality games where "tangible technologies and perceptual (rather than graphical) user interfaces, it is not implausible that the long-lasting dominance of the audiovisual might soon be seriously challenged by a focus on the sense of *touch*" (Mangen 2010: 419, original emphasis). With the proliferation of tablets and mobile devices, touch will only play more of a role as children interact with material and immaterial texts. She connects her analysis of touch with the perceptual nature of phenomenological research. Mangen talks about how haptics might inevitably replace visuals.

As the research study that we feature below demonstrates, there is a strong sense of embodiment when conducting tablet-based research.

In an article that rereads the pedagogy of multiliteracies, Leander and Boldt (2013) redress this gap in the literature by chronicling a few hours in the life of Lee, a ten-year-old boy who has a passion for Japanese manga and shows his zeal through movements, gestures, embodiment and affect (as well as literacy practices). By analysing in detail a day in the life of an adolescent boy, Leander and Boldt show the complexity and variegated nature of how Lee makes meaning, on his own and with his friend and dad. There has been an over-emphasis on frameworks and grammars and a broader reliance on linguistic or design-based explanations for meaning-making, and Boldt and Leander compel researchers to think about the role of affect, embodiment and perception.

Current contributions and research

Witnessing the participants in the intergenerational programme taught us about the interrelated role of the senses, emotions, memories and associations in meaning-making. To illustrate the type and quality of these relations and to highlight how they were foundational to intergenerational relationship-building which is a powerful enabler of multimodal literacy, we next share examples from the data.

Senses

The programme invited participants to collaboratively create and share multimodal ensembles, and these ensembles provided different sensory opportunities which helped to bring participants together within and through their literacy practices. An example of this is when elder Marg and child participant Mackenna worked on the first project, *Songs In My Head*, a collage of songs that got stuck in their heads. Mackenna was diligently but quietly created her text then Marg tried to get her talking by pointing to an image on her collage and asking, “Could you tell me the finger song? I don’t know the finger song.”

Mackenna softly began to sing the song then queried, “I think?...I don’t know how it goes...”.

“Can you *show* me the finger families?” Marg asked and modelled with bold gestures, “Finger families...”

“UP!” answered Mackenna.

Encouraging Mackenna to match gestures with the song Marg wondered, “Can you show me?”

Mackenna responded by matching gestures with “Finger families up!”

Marg joined in: “Finger families down.”

“Okay, then where?” wondered Marg.

“Dancing...” Mackenna led “...all around the town.”

Together the duo finished, “Dance them on your shoulders, dance them on your head. Dance them on your [lap]. Tuck them into bed.”

“That is perfect!” laughed Marg.

We see in this example a reciprocal relationship between modes and media with song, gesture and collage promoting Mackenna’s facility with oral language (one of the teachers’ goals for the programme). In their practice, the participants connected with each other in joyous ways that engaged the senses. The embodiment of text and the body becoming a text can also

be seen in Figure 30.1 where Marg and Mackenna are gesturing “No crying he makes” from the song *Away in a Manger* during a later session. Marg expressed her perception of this intergenerational multimodal communication, when we asked her what she liked best about the programme: “Well I love art and music, so the singing and the art were great because it was easy to get involved with the child that way. To kind of make it a duet. ...[the children] love [singing and art-making] and it comes easy to them.”

We also saw singing and gesturing, two heavily embodied modes, as interacting with reading and writing. The phenomenon of one mode supporting another through the senses was evident when resource teacher Sarah worked with child Karl and elder Martha.

During the second session the participants made heart-maps: drawings with labels that expressed what the participants loved. Karl wanted to draw his “mom”, “daddy”, himself playing “baseball”, and his friends (see Figure 30.2) but was unsure of how to draw a person. Sarah intervened and provided support by singing the Mat Man¹ song from the kindergarten.



Figure 30.1 Marg and Mackenna.

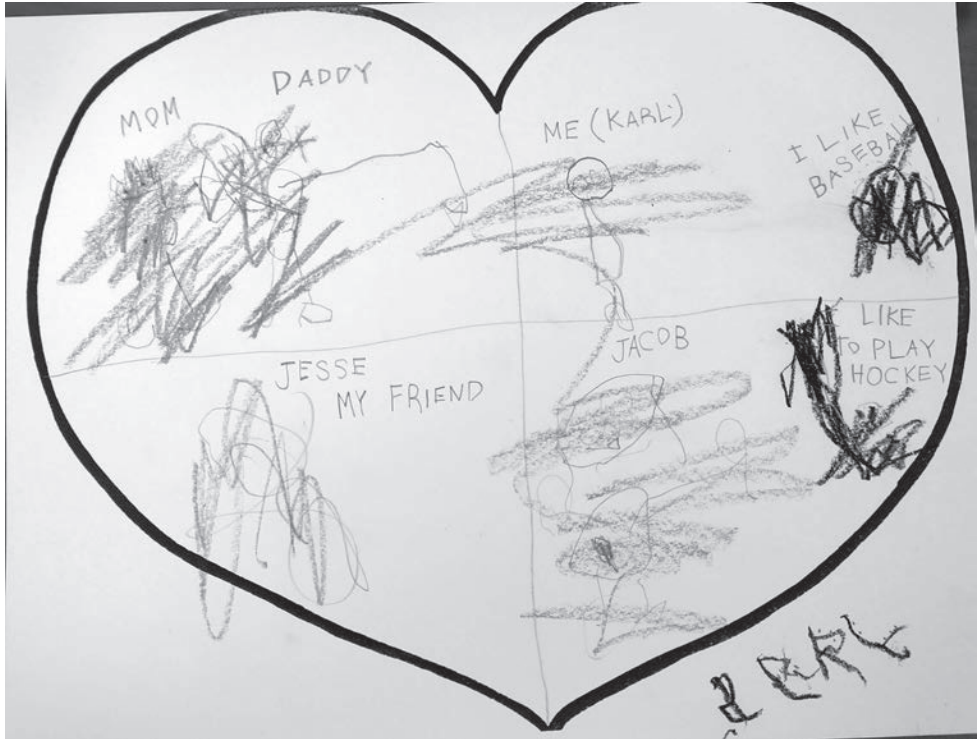


Figure 30.2 Karl's heart-map.



Figure 30.3 Sarah scaffolding Karl's drawing.

Sarah scaffolded Karl's drawing through song and gesture by first kneeling down in front of him while Martha watched on (see Figure 30.3).

Karl immediately tried to pass Sarah his pencil so she could draw for him: "No, you do it," Sarah said, "I'll sing it, you do it."

Karl gripped his pencil and Martha smiled encouragingly then imitated Sarah by mouthing the song.

"One... Mat Man, it's time to build you from your head down to your feet / Mat Man, it's time to build you / We will take it piece by piece / One head [Sarah pointed to head] to hold your brain. Do you have a head?"

Karl nodded and Martha leaned over to the two affirming what was going on with a "Yeah".

Sarah continued to sing and gesture to each body part until she announced, “Oh, no, we forgot, your...”

“Belly-button!” answered Karl, knowing what came next, and with the addition of the belly-button the song closed.

“Good job, dude!” Sarah high-fived Karl.

Beaming, Martha added, “Super!”

Once Karl had the basic figures that he had wanted, he personalized them: “And her ring!” Karl announced about the figure, drawing in a ring on his mother’s finger.

“There it is,” stated Karl with satisfaction, “Daddy needs a ring too.”

“... special wedding rings?” Sarah inquired.

“Yeah,” said Karl and he drew now with confidence.

The data also suggest missed opportunities when the participants could not fully perceive each other. During the first session, elder Gladys was paired with child participant Koleson, who had a quiet voice. Gladys could not hear Koleson which impeded their communication, including their ability to complete the *Songs In My Head* collage together. Figure 30.4 shows Gladys making her collage independently while her child partner is turned away from her and is instead helping two other boys.

Gladys perceived that her inability to hear Koleson had constrained her participation in the programme. When we asked her, “What are some things that make it difficult for seniors to participate in a programme like this? Gladys responded, “hearing”. Realizing the need for the right partnerships, in session two we invited talkative and loud child participant, Daniel, to work with Gladys.

Gladys could hear Daniel which enabled them to collaborate in meaning-making. Figure 30.5 shows Daniel and Gladys physically close and looking into each other’s eyes as they converse. This is a contrast to the intergenerational separation and lack of communication



Figure 30.4 Gladys making her collage.



Figure 30.5 Snack time.

captured in Figure 30.4. We took the Figure 30.5 photo during the programme snack time which was an opportunity for participants to break from their projects and interact around senses that the projects did not engage (e.g. the taste, smell and texture of food). The following field note documents Gladys and Daniel's interaction during their first snack time together:

Today's snack time was a real opportunity for communication. The snack today was vegetables and fruit, and that was a ... big hit for the kids and for the adults. I said to [the principal] [who] brought clementines ... what a wonderful snack to bring ... because ... the initial response from Daniel [was to say] to Gladys, "Can you start this for me?" and [he] gave her the clementine then she [started it] and she passed it back to him. Well, Karl saw that and he passed his to Martha and then Martha started his and so one by one, everybody who had a clementine passed them to the adult.

(Lori McKee, Research Assistant, field note)

As this note suggests, even informal time in the programme was an opportunity for intergenerational communication that was created in and through the senses.

Emotions

We witnessed that literacies are imbued with the weight of relationship (Heydon 2007). The importance of affect in literacy learning and practice has been noted by researchers from Brian Cambourne (2001) to Deborah Hicks (2002) who both articulate that children learn best from those whom they value and love. The programme created spaces for participants to experience emotions and connections with each other, and at times, these connections moved beyond the bounds of the Rest Home, extending to the discovery of lost family members and the (re) uniting of community across domains. Our interview with elders, Ron and Marilyn, suggests some of this.

Spouses, Ron and Marilyn had each been paired with different children during programming. The duo chose to have their last interview conducted together and in it, Ron, a retired school principal, discussed how he was hopeful that his and Marilyn's relationships with the children could continue after the close of the programme:

We were looking forward – hopefully – to having them come back and continuing. And, and as I was saying to, to the principal ... I would be prepared to go to the

school and listen to ... the children read, or do something else with them ... because they were a *very* eager group of children.

Ron also expressed some of his feelings for Zachary and Talon, his child partners, especially in response to their willingness to share with him when making heart-maps:

one of the things that impressed me ... just out of the blue ... there was nothing said [to lead] [Zachary] to say this ... he had drawn something [pause] and he said I love my mommy ... I love my daddy, and I love my sister and brother.

In relaying Zachary's expression of his love for his family, Ron's voice faltered and his eyes welled with tears, then he continued "I thought ... here's a total stranger out of the blue ... you tell me this ... I think there's something in that family—"

"Something good," added Marilyn.

Ron then pointed to Zachary's facility with drawing, explaining that in his heart-map, Zachary: "drew that brick house and the entire house was made of brick, and ... every brick was coloured ... and the people that came by and saw this ... how detailed! And Talon ... the two of us together [looked at the detail]" (see Figure 30.6.) Praising both Zachary and Talon, Ron added, "But they [Zachary and Talon] were *both very* artistic. Both of them. And you know ... I would like to follow along and just see what these kids are capable of."

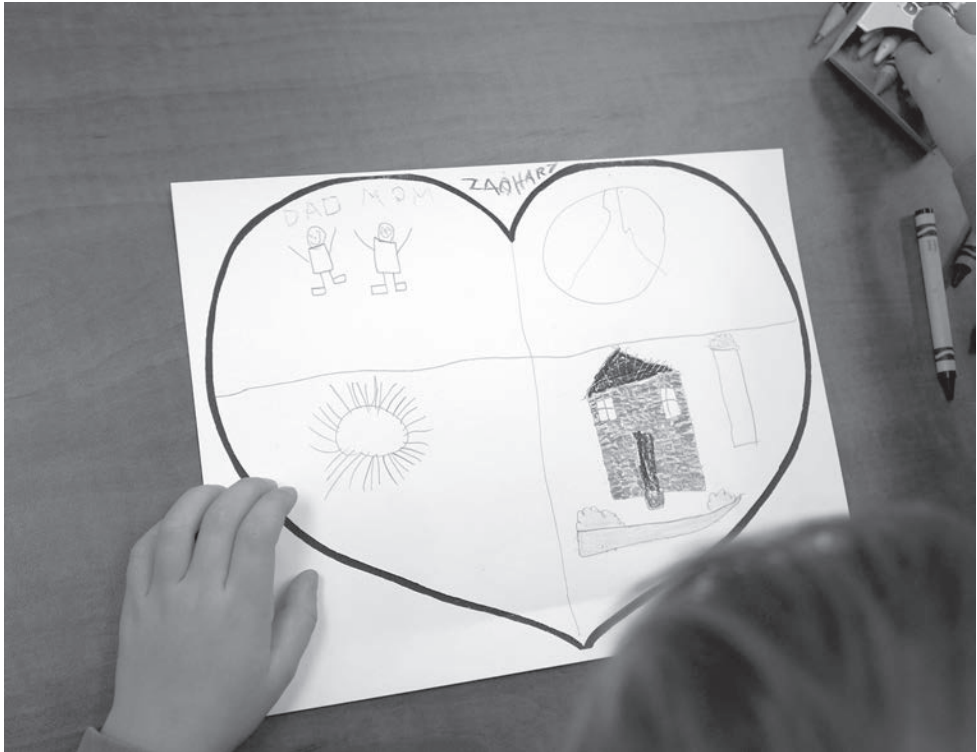


Figure 30.6 Zachary's heart-map.

Our interview with Ron and Marilyn provides some clues about the emotion and relationship-building in and of the programme. It also hints at the role of multimodal literacies – in terms of what was signified and how. Ron and Marilyn were both touched that the children would share what they loved with them. This sharing was, however, not unprompted; the heart-map was its catalyst. Further, Zachary's facility with drawing was an opportunity to connect him with others. His proficiency with the mode attracted Ron, drew attention from other participants, and positioned him as a capable communicator.

The programme produced other emotion-laden opportunities for connection-making. Marilyn, for instance, told a story that suggests that some of the children went from being strangers to neighbours. She explained that through the programme she had discovered that “two of the children ... are our neighbours down the street.” The programme and its texts were helping her to learn about her neighbours. She recounted, “It was funny one day, the teacher, during the art section of the programme ... she said [to Tyson] ‘Aren't you going to draw your new baby coming?’ ... And he said... ‘don't want one!’” Through the construction of the programme texts, Marilyn recognized Tyson as her neighbour and was now eager to communicate with him about issues of import, including his apprehension over a new sibling.

Family connections were also identified through the programme and its texts. One of the projects invited children to take iPads home to photograph their environments. The children shared these images with their elder partners and used the Pictello application to create a digital storybook that included voice-overs and the singing of songs to accompany the images. The project afforded opportunity for the participants to learn about each and for children to share and create texts that were founded in their interests and funds of knowledge. It also allowed Martha the opportunity to learn that her partner, Karl, was her kin. She had not been aware of the connection until almost Christmas:

I never realized [because of Karl's surname] name. But when he brought his pictures of himself and his mom. I looked at his mom and I said, oh, I got to be related to her. I know that girl So I went home and I said. ‘Oh, I'm thinking that she's to call me aunt.’

At the children's Christmas concert where the elders were special guests, Martha's suspicions were confirmed:

So we went to the concert, and Mr B's wife is my niece. And I said to her, ‘that's my little boy’ [from the programme], and she said, ‘Oh, that's Tim's little boy’. So I said ‘he *does* call me great-aunt then!’

At the end of the story we asked Martha, “So being in the class. And then bringing in the iPad. And seeing the little book that he had made with those videos. That helped you to make that connection?” She answered:

Yes, otherwise, I wouldn't have put the connection together. Because his [surname] isn't [the same as mine] you know? ... I liked that part very much. How you can keep in contact? ... You get to know more about you and your own family tree.

In our member check interview Martha additionally expressed that she felt intense emotion when she realized that her child partners perceived her as *their* partner:

- Rachel:** [We wanted to know] If the kinds of projects that you worked on with the children ... helped you form a relationship...
- Martha:** They did. Very much so. That one with the photos [digital storybooks] ... it really, really helped connect us. But, and it's so strange [to] think back [to] little Karl. 'Cause from the beginning [of the programme] ... when he came the second time we met here. I wasn't sitting in my normal place. And those two little guys [Karl and Carter] walked back [to] me. Blew me away. That they walked over to where I was. They recognized that that was my...
- Rachel:** They recognized that that was supposed to be your place and you weren't in your place—
- Martha:** And they'd come over to *me*. And that really. I couldn't get over. And this little Karl said to me ... that second time that we met ... "Would you give me a hug?" ... And then "Would you be my partner the next time?" ... We really ... hitched it off.

The children's interview data corroborate the adults' stories of connection-making and emotion. For instance, Koleson was partners with elder Betty. In the last session before the Christmas break, Koleson made a Christmas centrepiece for her. Betty, however, was unwell and absent. At the beginning of the session, the teacher told everyone they were making centrepieces for their 'partners'. When it came time to give the centrepieces away, Koleson did not interpret his 'partner' as the person who was standing in for Betty. Instead, he went looking for her. Koleson's desire to share the centrepiece with his true partner and her absence was something Koleson mentioned during his interview. Months after the centrepiece session when we asked Koleson about his favourite parts of the programme, he referred to the centrepiece and said, "It was hers [Betty's]". He recalled too that Betty had been absent but said that he thought being in the programme made her "feel good". When we asked him what made her feel good he answered, "working [on the projects]". The multimodal practice, Koleson suggested, made Betty feel good.

Memories

The data suggest that the elders brought to the programme memories of modes that were coloured by emotion; they perceived and experienced the programme, in part, through these memories. The elders reported that their practice of singing, in particular, had changed over time, but the positive emotions associated with their memories of it brought pleasure to their interactions with the children.

All of the elders reported that singing had been an important part of their early lives and though the practice had changed because their voices had aged, they saw singing and art-making as pleasurable to engage in, especially with children. In our exit interview, Gladys, for instance, referenced singing as a mode familiar to her and one that she enjoyed:

I grew up with singing ... in our home, my father was a good singer And in our church, in our Youth Groups ... school ... I still enjoy singing very much. I am not a very good singer but I enjoy it I enjoy being with someone who is.

Gladys reported that singing was harder for her now than in the past, but she reminisced about how her father had influenced her love of singing, and it was this love that was part of the experience of the programme as too was being able to hear others sing. The pleasure of

singing with others, the physical resonance of singing one's self and being surrounded by singers was a palpable phenomenon in the programme.

Marg, too, had strong memories and emotional ties to the art-making and singing. Of these practices she shared, "it's something I love to do ... Some of my kids ... call [it] my life". Marg continued to pursue these practices even though she confessed:

as I get older my voice isn't what it used to be. ... It's harder to sing. And the crafts, I have to be careful with my hands so that I find the things that are appropriate for someone with arthritis. But it can be done.

Sharing multimodal practices with the children was also something Marg thought should be done: "I think it creates an atmosphere where [the children are] free to talk, and they're free to share ideas. And it makes you feel good. And obviously they do [feel good also]."

Elder Sylvia concurred, "the art-making, I thought was very good for interactive play with seniors, myself, and with the children. And singing, I *love* to hear the kids sing."

Ron and Marilyn also sung throughout their lives with both having belonged to church choirs and school glee clubs. They shared:

Marilyn: I believe that singing, well music is a universal language, so I think that you can always get to children through singing and I felt that the little songs they were doing were very age-appropriate. They were enthusiastic—

Ron: —About singing ... We've both been involved in music all of our lives. I've conducted choirs all of my life so when I hear those kids—

Marilyn: We enjoy it!

Ron: —sing the way that they did, it [Ron pauses as he gets teary] warmed my heart. It really did.

In her exit interview, Marilyn beautifully summed up the relationship between memories, modes and participants. When we asked, "Do you have any comments about the relationship between the singing and the art-making and wellbeing?" Marilyn responded immediately:

Sure ... when [the teacher] was using the head and saying, you know, put down the [songs] that you keep in your head that are important to you ... I believe it just creates thought processes, and for us [elders], we have memories that become more and more important as we get older, and we pass those on. The children are beginning to form their memories already, and the same with the heart idea. What's important, that you keep in your heart ... so those are good for family relationships as well.

We understood here that sense-filled meaning-making with others connected the elders with the past and also created new memories and associations for all participants in the here-and-now and for the future.

Associations

The curriculum was designed so that participants' interests and funds of knowledge could be instantiated within the textual processes and products. A corollary of this was the idea that creating and sharing with others was about sense-making which entailed meaning-making as well as physically engaging the senses. The interaction between Martha, Karl and Carter when

they were working on their digital storybooks is a prime example of linking generations through associations from the children's homes and engaging in these associations physically and in the moment. During the event Carter was poised to share his images of home and record a narration of them to complete his book. Martha sat beside Carter and Karl insisted on sitting on top of the table as close to the iPad as possible (see Figure 30.7). Martha pointed to Carter's iPad and asked Karl, "Are you going to listen to his story?"

Carter slid a finger across the screen and an image of a toy dump truck emerged. Martha asked, "Tell me about your toy. What, what's the name of that toy? What do you call that? Is that a bulldozer?"

Afterward Carter slid his finger across the screen and up came an image of two girls. Martha said, "Tell me your sisters' names."

"Hayley and Mallory."

"Hayley and Mallory. That's pretty names." Martha next got Karl in on the dialogue by looking up at him and posing, "Do you know his sisters?"

Karl nodded and Martha offered, "And you like playing with your sisters, that's nice."

After more discussion about his sisters, Carter slid his finger across the screen and the image of a motorcycle came up. Martha stated, "Now you tell me about that."

Carter answered, "I like playing with my toys."

The trio attentively continued sharing this way, moving their bodies to coalesce around the images of what was of importance to Carter and interacting with each other through oral language, body language and the digital texts until they had viewed and responded to all the images. This event takes on significance beyond the immediate enjoyment and interaction of the moment when we recall that it was during this session that Martha began to recognize her familial connection with Karl.

Devoid of the memories that coloured the other modes and media in the programme for the elders, the iPads were novel and poised for the creation of new associations. The elders remarked that it was through the children's willingness to experiment with the medium that they were able to connect with the children and the iPads. Marg, for instance, laughingly answered when we asked her about the iPads:

The iPad is a challenge. But then it was great, because [my child partner] had to explain for me what to do and show me what to do. That was just fine ... it was,



Figure 30.7 Martha, Carter and Karl using the iPad.

actually, my shy one ... Mackenna And she was very, very shy. But she would show me what to do and direct me along the way.

Marg took what Mackenna taught her and extended it, which in turn strengthened ties between them; for example, Marg experimented with the iPad to create collages of pictures from the programme:

I played with the iPad at home and did some collages with the pictures and I could see such great things coming from playing with those things and talking about them [with the children] ... [Mackenna] had her pictures in [the iPad] and I had my pictures in it. So I put them together and made collages that I liked ... Yeah, I thought that was something that [Mackenna and I] can do together when I am here [in the programme].

We asked about another app on the iPads, Pic Collage, and Marg nodded and indicated that she had learned about the programme, “You just take your picture and pop them together and overlap them and do all kinds of fun things.” Marg also asked us questions to determine the affordances of the applications and develop greater facility with them, such as asking, “Can we print from that at all?”

All of the other elders equally reported using the iPads at home which created new opportunities for sense-making. Sylvia, for instance, explained that the iPad was something she was now sharing with her grandchildren and that they were using it for singing and art-making. Gladys, who had vision issues, told us, “I was thinking of maybe getting [an iPad] and getting rid of my computer, because I can have it [iPad] right in front of me and you can make [the images] bigger and smaller.” Gladys also mentioned that she would need more “training” on the iPad, but that the children were “good teachers”.

Methodological issues

When adopting a phenomenological stance to literacy studies or to other fields of inquiry more broadly, it is a challenge to produce generalizable findings. The best a researcher can hope to do through a phenomenological approach to research methodology would be to capture the essence of experiences through single or cross-case examples. Max van Manen (1990), well-known for his work in phenomenology, claims that, as a method, phenomenology offers a researcher careful thoughtfulness. Van Manen provided a methodological approach to phenomenological research that begins with investigating lived experiences, reflecting on themes, describing the phenomenon, maintaining a pedagogical relation to the phenomenon, and balancing context with phenomenon. Through such work, a researcher can gain a meta-perspective on phenomenon. By collecting lived experiences, what James Heap calls “sense making within daily life” (1977: 104), researchers conduct thematic codes for how individuals experience phenomenon. Going back to Merleau-Ponty, researchers observe how individuals experience the essence and perceptual understandings and appreciation of phenomenon.

To conduct phenomenological research entails describing lived experiences – what appears in consciousness as phenomenon. It is a description of everyday life that examines such things as evidence of believing, feeling, judging, evaluating, deciding, and reacting more generally.

Recommendations for practice

The study findings suggest that there are intricate and important links between people's perceptions, senses, emotions, associations, memories, relationships with each other and literacies. These links exist both in- and outside of the period of text-making. The findings also gesture towards the reciprocity between literacy as embodied and literacy as grounded in relationships. These understandings of literacy and our ability to come to them through phenomenology have implications for the practice of literacy research. Below, we communicate these implications through a description of some of the key research strategies we employed.

First, our data collection needed to be consistent, frequent and intense. To glean the fullest appreciation of the lived experience of the literacies practiced in and engendered through the programme, we had to be with the participants *leading up to* their text-making, *during* their text-making and *in reflection on* their text-making. We also had to focus on process and product, asking questions about what was happening in the moment, how semiosis was taking place, and what was being brought to bear within and communicated through the texts. We needed to be sensitive to how people were expressing their perceptions and emotions, how they were engaging their senses, and how they were or were not connecting with each other. These expressions were sometimes subtle and required a vigilant eye. Sensitivity called for us to have (at least) two researchers in the field at the same time as often as possible, collect data from different sources, audio-record so that we could carefully comb through verbatim transcripts, video-record so that we could check interpretations and play and replay with different eyes, and always come back to participants through in-depth member check interviews. In the checks with the children we invited them to engage in multimodal expressions of their understandings to create the fullest opportunities for them to communicate their perceptions. Finally, we continue to attempt to find the most apt signifiers and occasions for expression to communicate the experience of the programme. Narratives, created through a triangulation of data, may afford rich possibilities.

Future directions

Given how hybrid and haptic twenty-first century literacy practices are, when we touch and tap our screens and slide and move across texts with the flick of a finger, phenomenology should be more prevalent as way to account for our movements in material and immaterial spaces (Burnett *et al.* 2014). Phenomenology could help researchers to develop a more comprehensive, thoughtful and relevant definition of literacy. Phenomenology would allow us to understand the structure of reading as a phenomenon for all types and formats of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Note

- 1 Mat Man "is a character used within the Handwriting Without Tears® programme created [with the intention] to teach readiness skills related to 'body awareness, drawing & pre-writing, counting, building, socializing & sharing' (Handwriting Without Tears® 2013)" (McKee 2013: 42).

Related topics

Multimodality, iPads, Ethnography, Intergenerational, Arts.

Further reading

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HERMENEUTICS OF LITERACY PEDAGOGY

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Introduction

In a gallery in Toronto, middle school students view an exhibit of paintings on pages from the memoir, *Night*, by Elie Wiesel (2006), which chronicles his experiences in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps from 1944 until his liberation in 1945 at sixteen years old. The artwork, created by adolescents and teachers who worked with Rob in a research collaborative called the *Teaching to Learn Project* (Simon *et al.* 2014), includes images of triangles, the symbol Nazis used to demarcate undesirable individuals, painted on individual book pages in an array of colors and patterns the artists chose to represent their visions of diversity and solidarity. Smaller images are displayed between large canvases covered in book pages, painted with translucent triangles of orange, purple, and blue, through which Wiesel's text can be read (see Figure 31.1). Students move through the exhibit, pausing in front of paintings, to read dimensions of color, form, texture, line, and text. The exhibition *After Night* and students' responses to it raise questions related to the function of art as a form of literary and historical inquiry. What role might the arts play in helping students make sense of a traumatic moment in human history? What are the dangers of aestheticizing trauma? How might a multimodal and artistic interpretation of a memoir such as *Night* call attention to the representational inadequacy of language? What are possibilities or impossibilities of students connecting with Elie Wiesel's experiences? For example, what role might individuals' own histories – Rob's legacy as a grandson of Holocaust survivors or other participants' family experiences of war or trauma – play in their interpretations of Wiesel's text, or their responses to the horrors he documents?

These questions about teaching and learning in the literacy curriculum, and many others that are unfolding in the course of the students' collaborative inquiry into *Night* through the arts, have important ethical, aesthetic, and political valences to them. They are raised not merely to effectively transmit information about an historical period but also to foster understandings across temporal, cultural, and spatial boundaries and sustain intergenerational memory. These questions are essentially hermeneutical in nature. In this chapter we call for a renewed attention to the role of hermeneutical inquiry in the literacy curriculum, a scholarly and pedagogical project that may have particular importance during an educational policy climate governed by

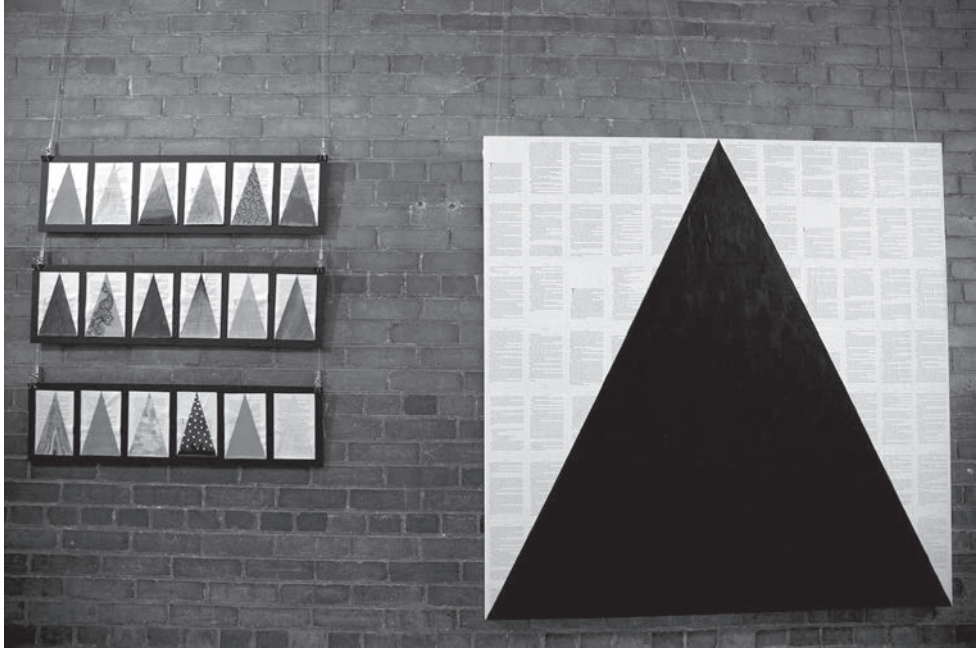


Figure 31.1 Images of triangles from the exhibition *After Night* (2013) (artworks by Rob Simon and the Teaching to Learn Project; photograph © Laura Darcy, reproduced with permission).

a positivistic orientation that often borders on scientism. First we characterize the tradition of hermeneutics by drawing on a useful heuristic articulated by the philosopher of social science, Yvonne Sherratt (2006). We then review research where hermeneutics is explicitly invoked as well as its implicit influence in literacy scholarship and practice. Finally, we suggest practitioner research as a hermeneutical approach that, in the midst of a ‘transnational turn’ (e.g., Lam and Warriner 2012) in the field of literacy, can help create the conditions for the collaborative negotiation of meaning in increasingly diverse contexts of teaching and learning. The example of *After Night*, which we return to in the conclusion, illustrates the generative questions that may arise when students’ and teachers’ inquiries and hermeneutic impulses are not suppressed by a curriculum informed by more static conceptions of knowledge and passive images of learners.

Historical perspectives: hermeneutical inquiry and literacy

Hermeneutics has a long history, yet remains relevant. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, textual interpretation, including early Christian and Talmudic traditions, was primarily directed to biblical exegesis. Reformation-era hermeneuticians countered the widespread belief that a central authority, Church or State, governed meaning. This shift to regarding interpretation as democratic and heterogeneous has had a lasting impact on education. For the first time individuals themselves were understood to be capable of deriving textual meanings, an idea that formed the basis of reader response theories in the twentieth century (e.g., Rosenblatt 1938, 1978). Expanding on the situated nature of textual engagement in the early nineteenth century, Schleiermacher among others argued that literary interpretation was not a technical activity but

rather an inherently creative and interactional linguistic enterprise, one involving a “hermeneutical circle” between text, author, and reader (Smith 1991). These insights, that individuals themselves have the capacity to interpret, and that this involves a recursive process of making meaning – may seem to some degree obvious. Yet some might argue that these centuries-old understandings of how meaning is created may be undermined in contemporary literacy educational policy, for example in the United States in the high stakes assessment paradigm and the Common Core State Standards.

Heidegger (2008 [1962]) emphasized not only the epistemological aspects of hermeneutics but also its fundamental ontology. He regarded interpretation as one of the essential provisions of being-in-the-world (*Dasein*). In other words, interpretation is not merely reserved for the task of reading texts, but is rather a part of our condition as human beings: we are always interpreting. It is therefore certainly part of what it means to teach and learn. Teachers interpret their students, students interpret their teachers, themselves, and one another, and everyone interprets the ‘text of the classroom’ (e.g., Lytle 1995) and the world beyond – a dialogism that is commonly mediated through literacy curricula encompassing canonical literature, popular fiction and nonfiction, youth culture, digital technologies, personal narrative, and the arts.

This image of literacy pedagogy as involving diverse individuals negotiating meanings is related to a central concept in philosophical hermeneutics, what Gadamer (1996 [1975]) describes as “fusing horizons” (p. 306). In the following excerpt from *Truth and Method*, Gadamer expands upon this concept of horizon:

The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this thinking to mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possibility of expansion of horizon, or the opening of new horizons, and so forth A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest him. On the other hand, ‘to have a horizon’ means to not be limited to what is nearby but to be able to see beyond it. A person who has a horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small. Similarly, working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the [interpretive] encounter.

(1996 [1975]: 301–302)

Gadamer employs horizon as a metaphor for the dimensions, limitations, and possibilities of interpretation. All texts and all individuals possess a horizon of understanding, which Gadamer defines as culturally and historically situated vantage points from which meaning is projected or ascertained. Interpretation happens at the union or intersection of horizons. In our gloss, a ‘fusion of horizons’ characterizes the historical and interpersonal connections that are the basis for developing meaning and relationships in the classroom and through the literacy curriculum, a means of mediating cultural, historical, interpersonal, or linguistic difference.

The philosopher Yvonne Sherratt (2006) provides a heuristic for understanding the contributions of hermeneutics to the human sciences. Her most general definition of hermeneutics, “derived from the Greek *hermeneutikos*’ which means to interpret,” is articulated in contradistinction to the “scientifically influenced social sciences” (17–18). We find it useful to understand hermeneutical approaches to literacy research and teaching in relationship to what we perceive as a pervasive scientism in education that has held sway over policies aimed to influence reading instruction, school accountability measures, teacher evaluation, and more recent political efforts to discredit education schools and teacher preparation programs.

Sherratt (2006) identifies several features of an interpretative approach to research which, in our slightly modified and consolidated version, we believe explicitly and implicitly animate the field of literacy studies. First, hermeneutics focuses on understanding rather than merely explaining social phenomena. This emphasis on understanding orients research to discerning locally produced meanings, as opposed to the positivistic ideal of causality whose gold standard is the discovery of law-like generalizations. For example, instead of providing research claims around ‘scientifically proven reading programs’ that are meant to ‘work’ for all students, the hermeneutical dimension of literacy studies draws attention to how all literacy events and practices, including those deemed scientifically proven, are implicated in power dynamics that often serve the function of social reproduction. Schools privilege certain kinds of work and produce certain kinds of students at the expense of other possibilities. An interpretive ethnographic approach to literacy research (e.g., Heath 1983; Street 1995) might also identify the various literate resources and practices by which individuals make meanings of their social worlds.

Second, hermeneutics acknowledges the situated nature of inquiry, what Sherratt describes as an attention to the “internal aspect of experience” (2006: 19) of all involved in interpretive processes, which would include, in schools, students, educators, families, and researchers alike. That is, there is no Archimedean point ‘external’ to the text, classroom, practice, event, or culture being studied; we all bring our identities, histories, and presuppositions into educational and research contexts. These historically situated identities are in fact necessary for inquiry and are potentially epistemically productive. We will suggest that practitioner research in literacy (e.g., Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009; Simon and Campano 2013; Simon *et al.* 2012) is particularly adept at making visible, being reflexive about, and leveraging these identities for interpretive and pedagogical purposes, thereby challenging images of teachers as deskilled technicians (Apple 2001), students as passive recipients of information (Freire 2007 [1970]), and researchers as neutral and disinterested generators of knowledge.

Finally, Sherratt distinguishes between hermeneutics’ appeal to history – for example how texts are read and understood over time – and the premium science places on “future knowledge and progress” (2006: 19). While literacy researchers might be more attentive to previous historical trends in the field, there is certainly a hermeneutical skepticism of overly facile notions of linear educational progress, as exemplified in the suggestion that we have discovered ‘best practices’ in instruction or even the very idea that acquisition of an ‘autonomous’ conception of literacy will invariably provide access to social goods (Street 1995). Inviting students to collaboratively interpret *Night* through the arts, for example, is not a matter of implementing a best practice of multimodal literacy instruction that will lead to better educational gains – although a case can certainly be made on such instrumental grounds. It is rather about using literacy to raise fundamental questions about our understandings of the roles and purposes of education itself and the very values that underwrite it, a humanistic endeavor we imagine Wiesel himself would endorse.

Critical issues in hermeneutics and literacy studies

Teaching is a quintessentially hermeneutic enterprise. In this section, we first call attention to research in which hermeneutics is explicitly addressed (e.g., Henriksson 2013; Jardine and Field 1996). We then outline how hermeneutics has implicitly informed empirical and conceptual work in literacy studies, including the whole language movement’s concern with meaning making (e.g., Edelsky 1999, 2006; Harste 1989), research that employs reader response theory (Lewis 2000; Rosenblatt 1938, 1978; Sipe 2002, 2007) or other literary theories in the classroom

(Appleman 2014), critical literacy (Freire 1983, 2007 [1970]), and recent work that explores transnational and intercontextual dimensions of literacy (e.g., Hull and Stornaiuolo 2010; Lam and Warriner 2012).

Literacy research that is explicitly informed by hermeneutics

Sumara (1996), drawing on the work of Heidegger (2008 [1962]), uses hermeneutical theory as a basis for conceptualizing textual engagement in the classroom. More recently, Westbrook (2013) describes how a hermeneutical approach to instruction encouraged teachers to reposition struggling adolescents as capable readers “with greater opportunities for the widening of their horizons in all senses of the phrase” (p. 48). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty (2002 [1962]), Henriksson (2013) argues that introducing teachers to philosophical hermeneutics invites them to directly address central concerns in their classroom relationships, and can provide a framework for them to interpret the “concrete situatedness” of classroom practice too often not explained by educational research, including questions such as “What do I say to my class at this moment? What can I do for this child?” (p. 7).

Researchers have turned to hermeneutics to understand teachers’ and students’ interpretive processes. Borges Fonseca and Tavares (2010) employ Heideggerian hermeneutics as a basis for making sense of students’ everyday experiences of schooling. Coombs (2012) uses the hermeneutics of Gadamer (1996 [1975]) and Ricoeur (e.g., 1990 [1973]) as a framework for exploring how adolescents “interpret their experiences and make sense of seemingly disconnected elements of life by turning them into stories” (Coombs 2012: 82). In the tradition of Gadamer and the radical hermeneutics of Caputo (1987), Yeo (2007) investigates teachers’ interpretations and conceptualizations of composition, shaped by “ruptures and gaps in literacy beliefs and practices” (p. 7). Alvermann (2006: 69) argues for “critical hermeneutic work” in pre-service teacher education as a means of encouraging new teachers to interrogate the discourse of school reform efforts in literacy education in the US.

Whole language

Understanding how the various cuing systems in language – graphophonic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic – interact is one of the tenets of the whole language movement which, since Kenneth Goodman (1967) developed his research from Chomsky’s theories of language development in the 1960s, has been concerned with reading as a multifaceted process of meaning making rather than a linear acquisition of skills. Extending from this core insight, and recalling our adaption of Sherratt’s (2006) framework, whole language practice has regarded language learning as situated and context specific, symbiotic rather than isomorphic, tied to particular purposes and meanings, open to multiple interpretations, learned through use rather than in isolated parts, and fundamental for active engagement with the world (e.g., Goodman 1989; Harste 1989; Smith 1986).

As Jardine and Field (1996) explain, the central tenets of whole language pedagogy build upon core insights of hermeneutics. They characterize teaching as a practice of ongoing interpretation and reinterpretation, an “unfinishedness, contingency, and difficulty [that] signify that... education is a deeply human enterprise that is not surpassable and encompassable by simply having the right theory or framework or method at hand” (p. 256). The whole language movement’s concern with meaning making rather than technical skills- or phonics-based approaches is related to hermeneutics’ view of the interpretative process as mediating historical horizons, understanding parts of texts in relation to the whole, and valuing the interpretive

agency of readers. For example, in his critique of skills-based approaches to language instruction, Harste (1989) argued that “student concepts of literacy are formed as they create text that is appropriate to the context” (p. 269), and that these processes were “not governed by a sense of what it means to be literate, but how to survive in the contexts in which they find themselves” (p. 270).

Though early proponents of whole language did not always name their work as critical – and their vocal opponents in the ‘reading wars’ were quick to caricature whole language as a ‘whole word’ method – this approach always had an important political dimension that has resonances with critical pedagogy. As Edelsky notes:

Whole language undermined sorting and ranking people through testing and tracking, demanded teacher autonomy for developing their own curricula with students in their own classrooms, decreased reliance on commercial reading programs and commercially prepared assessment systems... and promoted the questioning of authority (through theories that argued for multiple interpretations of texts).

(2006: 156)

In a similar vein, Linda Christensen, who combines a whole language approach with critical pedagogy, teaches students to “read social relationships” as texts, and to view texts as:

what Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman (1983: 7) calls a ‘social blueprint’ about what it means to be men, women, poor, people of color, gay, or straight. And that vision is political – whether it portrays the status quo or argues for a reorganization of society.

(1999: 54)

Critical whole language researchers like Christensen and Edelsky remind us that reading is not a technical activity that can be reduced to skills-based procedures. It is fundamentally interpretive, and involves negotiating meaning within broader social, cultural, and political landscapes. Recalling Gadamer, “No amount of measured technique will save us from the ongoing task of deliberation and decision” (1983: 112).

Reader response pedagogy

A dialogic view of meaning making underlies research and pedagogy informed by reader response and other literary theories in the classroom. The very word response itself suggests a move beyond textual formalism. Countering the New Critical view that texts are self-contained aesthetic objects that exist outside of authorial intent or cultural and historical contexts, Louise Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) theorized meaning as derived through a situated transaction between readers and texts. Rosenblatt’s transactional model of reading presents a variation of a hermeneutical circle, one notably less concerned with historical contexts, prior interpretations, or authorial intent than with viewing interpretation as “an unmediated private exchange between reader and text... [in which] literary history and scholarship are supplemental” (Probst 1987: 7). In her theory of interpretation Rosenblatt focused on the uniqueness of a reader’s transaction with texts:

The special meaning, and more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to him. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of

past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text.

(1938: 30–31)

Rosenblatt's conception that individual readers develop their understandings through the lens of their own beliefs, experiences, and interests has been foundational to classroom research and practice (e.g., Beach 1993). One important insight from reader response research is that what are often interpreted as off-task behaviors in classrooms have been demonstrated to be complex forms of literary engagement (Sipe 2002). As Sumara (1996) notes, reader response theories have been responsible for a movement toward promoting students' more subjective encounters with literature, a pedagogical approach that exists in tension with the use of literature for skills-based instruction or (mono)cultural transmission (p. 184).

Some researchers have critiqued reader response pedagogy on the grounds that it overemphasizes individualistic readings (Damico *et al.* 2008; Pirie 1997), elides critical responses to texts (Lewis 2000), and has perhaps become a new orthodoxy (Marshall 1991) that implicitly informs classroom instruction (Applebee 1993; Appleman 2014). For example, Appleman (2014) argues that teachers should teach literary theories beyond reader response – including post-structuralism, post-colonialism, and feminism – explicitly to adolescents, providing them with multiple conceptual frameworks to inform their interpretations of texts.

Reader response pedagogy has roots in hermeneutics. The idea that educators need to be open to different varieties of interpretation, including honoring the impulses of all students – even young children – to create their own meanings (e.g., Sipe 2002, 2007), hearkens back to the claims of Heidegger and Gadamer that interpretation has an ontological as well as epistemic basis. To return to Sherratt (2006), reader response research privileges situated inquiry and locally produced meanings. Like critical hermeneutics (e.g., Habermas 1990 [1971]), some strands of reader response research (e.g., Enciso 2011; Lewis 2000; McGuire *et al.* 2008) have emphasized the political, social, and power dimensions of textual engagement, presenting persuasive and necessary critiques of positivist and universalist approaches to literary instruction that predominate in schools.

Critical literacy

The hermeneutics of critical literacy pedagogy is perhaps most elegantly expressed in Freire's oft-cited idea of reading the word and the world:

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. As I suggested earlier, this movement from the world to the word and from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way, however, we can go further, and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* it or *re-writing* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process.

(1983: 10)

Inspired by critical theory and liberation theology, Freire outlines a dialectical vision of literacy pedagogy, one that links the individual conscience with the broader world (1998: 25).

The interplay between words and worlds is a process concerned with developing meaning in the service of cultural and political transformation. Freire imagines individuals not merely as interpreters but also as makers of cultural meaning (e.g., Macedo and Freire 1998) and agents of change. In his play on word/world, Freire proposes that literacy involves a cyclical relationship between language and contexts, a recursive dynamic that is essentially hermeneutical in nature. Literacy entails an ongoing reading of the world. We never fully arrive at a definitive interpretation, but are rather continually revising our understandings, a state of perpetual “unfinishedness” that, as Freire (1998: 52) noted, “is essential to our human condition.” Like Gadamer, Freire’s vision of engagement with literacy and with the world is a dialogical, historically rooted process. It is also an ideological one. In this respect Freirean pedagogy has resonance with the critical hermeneutics of Jürgen Habermas (1990 [1971]), a skeptic of hermeneutical claims of universalism, who argued that while language is essential to interpretation it may also be “a medium of domination and social power” (p. 239). Both Freire and Habermas “ground social inquiry in the understandings of agents” (Morrow and Torres 2002: 15). For Freire, as Peters and Lankshear note (1994: 189), “critical consciousness is a critical hermeneutics,” a process of linking critical reflection to social action.

The Freirean (2007 [1970]) notion of problem-posing education positions teachers and students in critical dialogue with complex social histories, issues of equity, and each other. This process, not unlike what Gadamer (1996 [1975]) theorizes as a fusion of horizons, entails negotiating meanings across boundaries. Critical literacy scholars and educators have documented how historically marginalized youth build connections with and critical understandings of the texts and contexts they navigate (e.g., Janks 2010; Kinloch 2012; Luke *et al.* 2011; Morrell 2008; Winn 2011). This work seeks to understand how children use literacy practices such as storytelling (Enciso 2011), writing (Ghiso 2011), or DIY digital media (Jocson 2013) as a means of interrogating complex social issues. Critical literacy thus evokes Paul Ricoeur’s (1970) “hermeneutics of suspicion” (pp. 32–35) in that it regards interpretation as a vehicle for deriving meaning as well as unmasking ideology. For example, Janks and Comber’s (2006) cross-continental study explores how educators in two socially and economically diverse communities, one in Australia and another in South Africa, encouraged children to document social issues in their neighborhoods through the creation of alphabet books. This research presented opportunities for students to encounter and interact with other children in distant communities through sharing these texts, a process that, in Gadamerian terms, facilitated the fusing of geographic and cultural horizons of understanding. Janks and Comber (2006) explore how “critical literacy across continents” facilitated an interpretive community among students and teachers, in relation to different texts and contexts, and formed the basis for “developing transnational communities of networked critical educators” (p. 115).

Reclaiming hermeneutics in current literacy teaching and research

These and other traditions in literacy research have what we regard as an essential indebtedness to hermeneutics. We believe there is reason to name and reclaim hermeneutics in literacy studies, both because of some of its current interests, what has been identified as a ‘transnational turn’ in the field (e.g., Hull and Stornaiuolo 2010; Lam and Warriner 2012; Medina 2010), as well as the empirical phenomena these interests represent. These realities include a new stage of globalization and migration (Appadurai 2006) where many schools and communities are experiencing unprecedented linguistic, cultural, religious, and experiential pluralism. Scholarship in the field that employs concepts such as ‘hybridity’ (Gutiérrez 2008), ‘cosmopolitanism’ (Campano and Ghiso 2011; Hull and Stornaiuolo 2010), ‘superdiversity’ (Blommaert and

Rampton 2011), emergent bilingualism (García and Kleifgen 2010), and ‘coloniality’ (Ghiso and Campano 2013) all imagine literacy teaching and learning beyond assimilationist models, and value the practices, histories, languages, and knowledges of our student populations. Too often, however, research in the field that embraces more expansive conceptions of literacy often finds itself at odds with policy initiatives that tend to homogenize diversity. Reforms geared toward standardization and high stakes testing forward common rather than more pluralistic visions of educational change. The traditions of hermeneutics, by contrast, are about honoring alterity and negotiating meanings across temporal, historical, cultural, and linguistic horizons. Or, to invoke hermeneutics etymological roots in the Greek messenger god Hermes, it is about bringing and translating messages from one world to another.

Practitioner research as a hermeneutical enterprise

One vehicle for engaging in hermeneutical inquiry is practitioner research. Within this methodological approach, teachers generate understandings of literacy from their practice and its inherent material realities (Campano 2009; Simon *et al.* 2012), including broader societal inequities. Practitioner research has a temporal dimension, capturing the unfolding of inquiry over time, as it is embedded within the life world of the classroom (e.g., Carini and Himley 2010). This entails raising and continually returning to questions that arise in the classroom, often from dilemmas or moments of dissonance, an ongoing interpretive process that Marsha Pincus (2001) describes as a circle of inquiry. In the midst of documenting and theorizing their teaching, practitioner researchers negotiate the meaning of their work in light of their relationships with students, colleagues, and community members. For example, Elizabeth Cantafio characterizes the kinds of questions she asks herself when adopting an inquiry stance. She writes:

Questioning my assumptions means I perpetually ask myself: What am I doing here?
What am I doing it for? Who am I to be doing it? What am I paying attention to?
What am I overlooking? What am I ignoring? Why? How? What does it mean?
(in Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009: 357)

As these questions suggest, practitioner inquiry is also hermeneutic in that researchers are self-reflexive about their own identities vis-à-vis others. The literature on practitioner research places a premium on vulnerability and fallibility – rather than certainty – as a strength in the research process. This emphasis encourages practitioner researchers to challenge their own preconceptions and learn from others (Campano *et al.* 2013; Simon 2013), revising their understandings in light of new perspectives. For literacy educators, taking an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009) implies never resting in a definitive understanding or interpretation of events, but asking further questions. The notion of stance reflects the unbounded nature of inquiry and the belief that at times it is productive to linger in uncertainty.

Practitioner researchers often understand dissonance as an opportunity for growth and change. For example in their experiences with a student who has been labeled ‘struggling’ or ‘oppositional,’ they may take a skeptical stance toward bureaucratic labels that locate the problem within the individual (Simon 2012). Instead, practitioner researchers may raise questions about the larger social and political arrangements of schooling that position students negatively, and attempt to enact alternative pedagogies more conducive to their flourishing (Campano 2007). For example, Carini and Himley (2010) document how a philosophical “habit of questioning” one’s practice can offer a renewed sense of children’s capabilities,

including those who do not fit educators' presuppositions or school molds (p. 165). Using phenomenological approaches to analyze student work and learning over time, Carini and Himley (2010) argue for a "vision of education based on paying attention to each child's capacities and continuities, on grounding teaching in the potency of particularized knowledge and careful observation, and on drawing knowledge from the collective inquiry of teachers and parents" (pp. xii–xiii). Research and practice are ineluctably connected, and practitioner researchers are constantly developing understandings that inform their decisions in the classroom, which are in turn continually revised.

Much practitioner research involves collaborations of some sort, such as inquiry communities or peer-to-peer professional development networks (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009). Communities of inquiry regard complexity or diversity not as problems to be addressed scientifically or as empirical phenomena to be explained, but as opportunities for teachers and students to learn from one another in ways that honor the epistemic value of diverse histories, experiences, and perspectives. Communities of inquiry put multiple perspectives into conversation with one another, with the idea that their fusion may lead to a deeper collaborative understanding of the issues being investigated.

Returning to *After Night*

With these insights in mind, we circle back to the vignette that opens this chapter. At the exhibit, middle school students engaged with the artwork created by members of the *Teaching to Learn Project* (Simon *et al.* 2014). This inquiry community developed as an opportunity for teachers in various points of their professional trajectories (pre-service teacher, teacher, doctoral student, and professor) to learn alongside adolescents from a culturally and economically diverse neighborhood in West Toronto. The investigations of *Night* that culminated in this art exhibit took place over the span of a year. Youth and educators authored curricula for and wrote responses to the text, exploring how *Night* could be a platform for literary and historical inquiry as well as a catalyst for social change. Wiesel (2005) himself has noted that the purpose of Holocaust education is not to passively encounter the messages of survivors but rather to encourage readers themselves to become the messengers; or to paraphrase Paul Celan (2001), to act as 'witnesses for the witnesses.' Inspired by this idea, the impetus for using art as a form of interpretation was to carry the message of the text forward: a message shaped by participants' critical and aesthetic readings, their personal histories and cultures, and a shared commitment to social justice. Thirty teachers and adolescents brought multiple perspectives and horizons of experience to bear on their artistic interpretations. In the process, they grappled with the difficult themes and unspeakable horrors Wiesel documents.

Like the artists themselves, middle school students who viewed *After Night* expressed a range of responses to the artwork, from the emotional and personal, to the aesthetic and historical. One of the middle schoolers made a connection to his family history: "While I was walking through the exhibit, I was reminded of my great and great-great grandparents and how they died (in the concentration camps...)." Another student observed, "It was probably humiliating to wear a yellow or pink triangle but at the show it was turned into a symbol of pride." She noted how the multicolored triangles represented solidarity with the victims, and became "more beautiful because [they] show colors together." Similarly, one of her classmates described a triangle with colors swirled together (see Figure 31.2):

I liked this triangle both for its aesthetics (I loved its swirliness) and because to me, this symbolizes acceptance. In my perspective, the varied colors symbolized different types

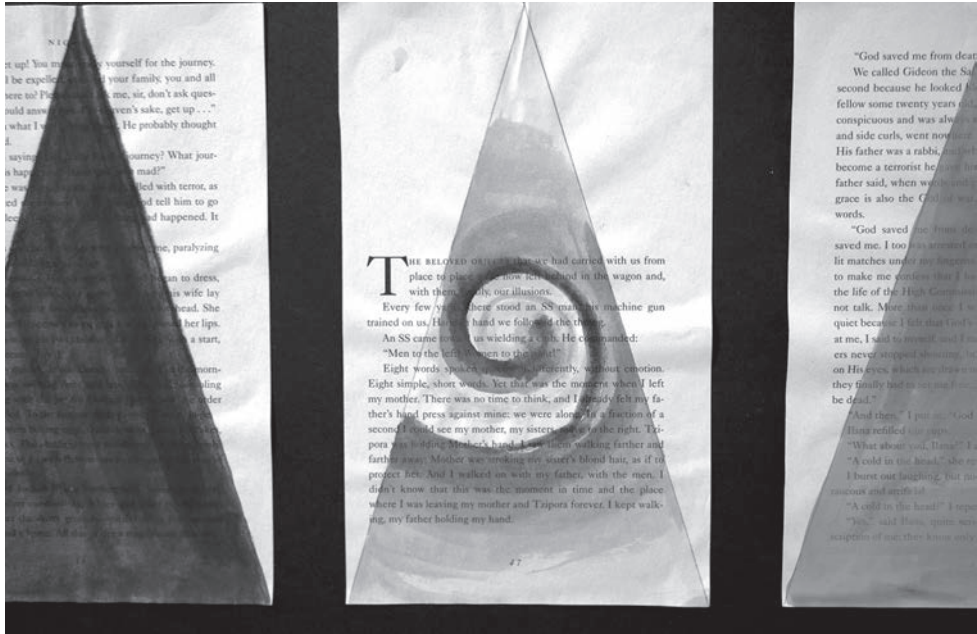


Figure 31.2 Images of triangles painted on pages from *Night* by Elie Wiesel (2006) (artworks from the exhibition *After Night* (2013) by Rob Simon and the Teaching to Learn Project; photograph © Laura Darcy, reproduced with permission).

of people and the big purple swirl in the centre was a new type of people, easily blended with the others.

Noting the “many varieties” of colored triangles created by the artists, another student commented that the exhibit simultaneously “brings life” and “brightens” and “teaches a lesson to those who take the time to view [it].” He described feeling moved by “What the power of many can accomplish.”

Touching on similar themes, one of the adolescent artists shared her insights into the process and the symbolic and representational power of color in the *After Night* exhibit:

After reading *Night* and completing the project, the colours used to paint the triangles are not just colours any more. The triangle that we painted blue was very interesting for me. It showed different levels in intensity in the colour (streaks) that could represent many things. It could mean the good and evil during the Holocaust. I saw it as [symbolizing] many different sides to the Holocaust. The different blotches of colour represent the different people involved, and how each person has their own story, whether it be a victim or the abuser.

Choosing the colours was more something I felt than thought of. I think for people viewing the exhibit it is the same. As there is no description of why we chose that colour or what we think it represents, it is really up to the viewers to determine what the colours mean and one way to do that would be to just feel.

The experience of *After Night* for participants and observers is not easily distillable to a singular reading or meaning. We regard this hermeneutical approach appropriate for a text like *Night*. This collection of reflections from participants and observers of this project suggests how an event like *After Night* can inspire a multiplicity of interpretations and become a catalyst for fusing unique cultural, experiential, and historical horizons of understanding.

Ellsworth (2005), drawing on de Bolla (2001), describes the interpretive power of aesthetic experiences as somatic as well as intellectual. These empathetic, socio-historical, and aesthetic responses arose from the “frisson of the physical encounter” (de Bolla 2001: 2; cited in Ellsworth 2005: 8) with Wiesel’s text and the excruciating experiences it documents, mediated by artists’ own sensations, visual representations, and textual interpretations. As Sherratt (2006) reminds us, texts like *Night* invite new interpretations rather than merely offering explanations of social phenomena, which would most likely be reductive with regards to a topic such as the Holocaust. The adolescents’ visceral and creative encounters with *After Night* were based on historical understandings while also serving as a crucible for their own subjective experiences and interpretations.

Ultimately *After Night* has raised more questions that it has answered. How can aesthetic responses begin to address the ineffability of the Holocaust? To paraphrase Adorno, what is the role of art after Auschwitz? What does this form of historical interpretation concretize (Young 1993)? In what ways might this process, including cutting and painting on pages from *Night*, memorialize or trivialize trauma? How is the urgency of memory in itself hermeneutical? What understandings and insights has this project evoked for participating teachers and students or for viewers? What ways forward will it present? What ultimately are the impacts of this work? As these and many other questions raised by *After Night* suggest, counter to more positivistic approaches to history, the hermeneutical project of remembering, and the always partial process of interpretation that goes along with it, is ongoing and perpetually unfinished. In the spirit of Elie Wiesel, who wrote of his personal obligation to bear witness and the limitations of language to capture the horrors of the Holocaust, it probably should be.

Related topics

Participatory methodologies, Critical literacy, New Literacy Studies, Practitioner research, Hermeneutics.

Further reading

Appleman, D. (2014) *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents*, 3rd edition, New York, NY/ Urbana, IL: Teachers College Press and National Council of Teachers of English.

Addresses challenges and possibilities of teaching literary theory in secondary literacy classrooms, drawing on examples from practice.

Ormiston, G. L. and Schrifft, A. D. (1990) *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Provides an introduction to hermeneutical theory, including readings from central figures in nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophical hermeneutics, including Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas, and Ricoeur.

Sumara, D. (1996) *Private Readings in Public: Schooling the Literary Imagination*, New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Draws on hermeneutical theory to explore the intersections of identity, literary imagination, and curriculum, as a basis for interpreting the social experience of reading, in and out of school contexts.

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PART VII

Making meaning from the everyday

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MATERIALISING LITERACIES

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Introduction

In this chapter we make a case for a material culture approach to literacy with a particular focus on writing. We argue that it is important to recognise how language and literacy practices intersect with the material world. We see this lens as a heuristic for understanding the flow of meaning making that can then lead to insights about how communicative practices are constructed and emerge from everyday settings. We take a cultural materialist approach to meaning-making practices, seeing culture unspooling in material objects to combine with writing, speech and other modes (see also Pahl 2014). We explore how, “literacy’s effects always flow from its social and cultural contexts and vary across those contexts” (Gee, Chapter 2 this volume, p. 43). We consider the word ‘literacy’ to include oral language, writing, inscriptions, small pieces of print embedded in other objects and, crucially, as culturally and socially constituted. Literacy itself cannot be regarded as mono-modal (Maybin 2013) but is embedded within a wide range of semiotic practices. At the same time, a material cultural approach makes sense of literacy practices in a number of different ways. This approach draws on the work of cultural anthropologists such as Daniel Miller (1987, 2001, 2008, 2010) who looks at the ways in which objects and things in everyday contexts create and affect narratives of the self.

We begin by describing the material nature of literacy. This approach sees material culture as both informing literacy and part of the process of semiosis. A wider recognition of the materially situated nature of meaning-making practice opens up recognition of these affordances. A material cultural approach to literacy creates opportunities to recognise non-linguistic forms of knowledge creation and understanding in everyday life. Much like a critical literacy approach (Rogers and O’Daniels, Chapter 4 this volume), such a lens privileges different kinds of knowledge and expertise in school and out-of-school settings. We argue that children and young people bring to educational situations a repertoire of communicative practices and knowledge of the world, but this is not necessarily encoded in linguistic forms, but remains embodied, sensory and thoughtful in ways that are unrecognised. We see this as an equity issue as well as a theoretical perspective. We also note that many theorisations of literacy and language separate these two categories out, but more recently, it has begun to be recognised that this approach can be questioned (Maybin 2013). Understandings of how each category, that is,

language and literacy with other material stuff relate to and in many instances, seep into each other, have become vital for the field (Finnegan 2002). To exemplify this point, we look at examples of data whereby recognition of material culture makes sense of the way the meaning was constructed and how it was constructed. The relational nature of objects, speech and writing is then considered. While we are not providing a comprehensive analysis, we think there is an emergent field that looks more closely at how speech, writing and the material properties of objects interrelate. We are signalling these intersections within literacy studies as a way of recognising the nature of a field that looks at speech, writing and material culture holistically. We then consider the implications of this materially situated approach for literacy studies.

The material world is a space of practice with writing woven through a scattered landscape of encountered, constructed, crafted and discarded artefacts. For example, a street with shops in it is a site of encounter of many scripts, inscribed forms of writing, objects that speak and relational encounters with objects. It is a multi-semiotic space of communicative practices. This perspective has been explored in the work of Scollon and Scollon (2003), Blommaert (2008, 2013) and Poveda (2012). For example, Scollon and Scollon (2003) acknowledge how writing constructs and contributes to understandings of place in their work, while Blommaert traces the way in which language is made artefactual through textual practice as oral language is inscribed into books (2008). Poveda (2012) makes sense of the semiotic landscape of literacy artefacts in relation to the graffiti and vernacular expressive styles of young people. We argue that this semiotic landscape is full of stories, spoken and written, lost and found, and is alive with possibilities for future interactions. To see literacies as material is to see them as tied to space and place, and to a sensory experience. We particularly recognise ways in which a material view of literacy brings into focus how literacy practices reside within, and are linked, to things in the world and their handmade quality (Whitty *et al.* 2008).

In this chapter, we specifically discuss two examples of a material culture approach to literacy:

- 1 Writing as inscription onto material objects (home writing).
- 2 Material objects as facilitating language and literacy practices (Ninja interview).

In both examples, the material context of the writing/language is critical to how things are created and understood. We think there is a dialogical relationship between the material and what is spoken and written in that context. It is this relational and dialogic heuristic lens that makes up a materiality of literacies approach. Context is a live space of practice that is a semiotic resource from which to make meaning (Duranti and Goodwin 1992).

Writing as inscription attends to objects with writing inscribed upon them, such as tablets, laptops, notebooks, textiles, toys, jewellery, knapsacks, purses, miscellaneous objects, that are branded, inscribed, labelled, priced or otherwise given links to print through QR codes or alphabetic inscriptions. Writing as materialised in street signs and notices has this material quality and is embedded in a wider communicational landscape (Scollon and Scollon 2003). By making materiality salient in an analytic frame, the practice of literacy is differently weighted and understood. Oral language can sometimes come to the fore, linked as it is with the material world, using objects sometimes as props to stories. Written language becomes distributed across the world of goods, linked then to economies, and material hierarchies of matter and form (Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979]). By placing writing in a material cultural analytic frame different kinds of qualities become important, such as the touch, feel or smell of an object, the relational nature of the object and story, the way in which language itself has a material potentiality and the history of the object.

In our discussion below, we draw on social anthropology and material cultural studies together with social linguistics, multimodality and New Literacy Studies to bring an understanding from these fields in order to look at everyday life. In turn, methodological lenses to explore writing as material include ethnography, visual and sensory anthropology, narrative analysis, oral history, archaeological excavation, walking tours and interviews. We situate this perspective within a set of longitudinal ethnographic studies of writing,¹ in which we traced the way in which writing was linked to things, materialised into things, and was used within communities to articulate concepts and feelings, to create agency. In these studies, context and materials were dialogic and related to each other in ways that then made objects active in relation to speech and writing. For example, in the Ninja example below, we could see that meaning was created between speech, writing and material objects. These spoke to each other in interaction and all were combined by the young people to co-create meaning-making ensembles that worked together in particular, situated ways.

A material cultural approach to literacy and language can provide analyses of literacy practices, with a particular focus on the everyday and less visible aspects of literacy. By focusing on the ‘humility of things’ (Miller 1987: 85–108) it is also possible to lift up and examine particular instances of literacy that otherwise would remain naturalised, inscribed within particular discourses, practices and objects. This might require a process of shifting the analytic frame and a denaturalisation of particular practices. This equally applies to the understanding of what literacy is. For example, Heath (1983) and Street (1993) recognised that literacy practices could be seen as ideologically situated and constructed. Storybooks, for example, are a literacy practice naturalised by particular discourses and practices, whilst other inscribed forms of literacy remain less visible. A materialising literacies approach is helpful to literacy studies as it enables this process of denaturalisation by placing the analytic gaze elsewhere, on the objects and the material culture surrounding the literacy practice. This lifts the occasionally invisible surroundings of literacy practices into a visible realm and creates a space to ponder and reflect upon the meanings associated with the object. The analytic eye can move from the taken for granted to a process of ‘making the familiar strange’ (Agar 1996). This happens, for example, in classrooms, where naturalised practices inscribed into objects such as the whiteboard marker, if given a material cultural studies approach, suddenly look different (Burnett 2011; Lawn and Grosvenor 2005).

A material cultural approach to literacy also highlights the permeable boundaries between oral, spoken language and writing, and demonstrates the way in which semiotic resources are used in quite complex ways in everyday settings (see for example Snell 2013). By focusing the analytic gaze on the processes and practices of emergent semiotic practices, the boundaries between oral language, written language and material objects begin to break down (Burnett *et al.* 2014). For example, by focusing the range of semiotic practices in the Ninja episode (below) it became harder to create separations between such categories as talk, writing and material objects, as they became entangled in the ongoing process of semiosis. By taking down the analytic boundaries that lie between speech, writing and multimodal semiotic repertoires, it is possible to provide a more accurate and more attuned language of description for everyday communicative practices that also accounts for power and differential access to semiotic resources (Blommaert and Rampton 2011).

Historical perspectives

Bringing literacy studies with material cultural studies together was particularly important in Pahl and Rowsell’s conceptualisation of ‘artefactual literacies’ (2010, 2011). This concept was

used to articulate a theoretical and methodological stance that both acknowledged the 'thing-like' status of literacy, as inscribed into objects and placed in particular relationships to material culture, plus signalled the relational links to the world of objects that literacy activities offer, and their potential for education. The projects Pahl and Rowsell described included instances where objects were salient in calling up unheard stories and enabled young people and families to celebrate funds of knowledge and narratives that could be articulated in relation to the everyday world of things (González *et al.* 2005). This work started with the realisation that literacy was itself nested in a complex multimodal world, and its affordances stretched to the visual and gestural as well as embodied (Kress 1997, 2010; Leander and Boldt 2013). Pahl and Rowsell then considered how this everyday world was constructed through practice, and structured by acquired and enduring dispositions, or the 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1990). They also observed how narratives became sedimented into text making within homes and communities (Rowsell and Pahl 2007). This could then be drawn upon as a resource for meaning making.

Material cultural studies as a field also informed this work. Rachel Hurdley's study of mantelpieces, and the things upon them and the stories people tell about the things, articulated how the process of telling stories with objects was an important site of exploration in relation to the making of home and identities (Hurdley 2006, 2013). Daniel Miller's anthropological studies of objects within cultures (Miller 2001, 2008) was helpful in considering how objects illuminated people's passions, creativities and identities. In museum studies, Pahl and Pollard were able to trace through stories about objects' longitudinal themes in family life, which could then be related as a discipline to museums and heritage studies (Pahl and Pollard 2010).

Artefactual literacies as an approach involved listening to cultural 'stuff' from homes and communities. This then re-aligned the concept of 'expert', based as it was on people's knowledge of their everyday objects and stories. This process of re-positioning was important particularly where communities and young people were placed as 'not' knowing, whether this was in relation to learning English, or being seen as recent migrants, or communities associated with deficit, for example, in high poverty neighbourhoods. The concept of artefactual literacies therefore could be aligned with a critical literacy perspective whereby power was crucially shifted through discursive re-alignments (Pahl and Rowsell 2011; Kinloch, Chapter 9 this volume). By bringing together the disciplines of material cultural studies with critical literacy, objects brought people's stories and identities into a sharp frame. This process made schooling just one of the many sites where literacy took place (Street and Street 1991) and enabled a wider understanding of the processes by which meanings were created in informal settings.

Gunther Kress's work was key in understanding everyday meaning making to be multimodal (Kress 1997, 2010). Multimodality opened up literacy to a wider semiotic landscape of meaning-making practices. This understanding enabled a broader recognition of the multi-semiotic processes of meaning making. It was then possible to combine a material cultural studies approach with the recognition of ways in which the process of meaning making was itself multimodal and multi-semiotic. Julia Snell and others have understood this process as being about the ways in which children and young people draw on a wide range of semiotic repertoires in order to create meaning (Snell 2013; Blommaert and Rampton 2011). These repertoires include the ability to employ particular phrases, make particular gestures, and, most importantly for this chapter, select particular material objects with which to amplify, or enhance meaning making.

Linguistic ethnography has tried to make sense of everyday settings through fine-grained linguistic analysis (Rampton 2007) and to build understanding through studying naturalised discourse. Janet Maybin (2007) has looked at naturalised discourse in school settings and explored how this links to literacy practices. Jan Blommaert (2008) built on fieldwork analysis

of everyday literacies in order to understand writing as a sociolinguistic object, through observations of how oral language became material in the form of semiotic artefacts such as the dictionary. Scollon and Scollon (2003) saw language as both connected to, and producing, space. An artefactual literacies approach built on that perspective but combined it with the work of Gunther Kress on multimodality (1997, 2010) together with a material cultural studies approach from Miller (2008) and Hurdley (2006). This brings material cultural studies in conversation with New Literacy Studies and multimodality drawing on linguistic ethnography as a methodology. Here, we draw on these approaches to exemplify how writing intersects with the material world.

Critical issues and topics

Here, we acknowledge the aspects of the theoretical approach that we see as limited. First, we think that this approach relies on an epistemology that is linked to the everyday and to the ‘humility of things’ (Miller 1987: 85–108). In doing so, it is in danger of romanticising the everyday, which, for many people can be a harsh and difficult space. New migrants often critique the ‘every object tells a story’ methodology by arguing that objects are the last thing they can carry with them – saving their children is a priority – and destitution a real danger (Hurdley 2013). While theories of value are in some senses reversed through this theoretical framework, at the same time, value continues to thread through descriptions of objects, for example, discussions about gold weave in and out of discussions about material wealth and success (Pahl and Pollard 2008). Second, we are also aware of the danger of romanticising the visual and non-linguistic in a world where children’s literacy and language competences still enable them to get jobs and pass exams. We think that Street’s insight into literacy as ideological is important in focusing on power within the world of literacy studies (Street 1993). For educators, this continues to be urgent as testing regimes separate out material and visual understandings to focus on written texts. Third, we think that there are different ways of thinking about the relationship between space, materials and literacy and language that we have not addressed here. For example, Actor Network Theory makes it possible to trace the relationship between people, objects and sites, as used by Nichols and colleagues (2012). An ecological view of literacy makes explicit the connections between literacy, sites, spaces and material objects (see also Nichols, Chapter 7 this volume). By making these connections explicit, more nuanced understandings of power can be developed. While we have not included this perspective in our discussion, we think it can usefully develop an understanding of a materialising literacies approach.

To conclude, our focus is on the intersections between multimodality, material cultural studies, New Literacy Studies and sociolinguistics with a focus on everyday moments of meaning making. This is an emergent field, and one that is still developing. Critically evaluating these perspectives involves a focus on how each of these intersect with one another in relation to the data we outline below.

Methodological explorations

We have identified a number of methodological challenges in a material literacies approach. One is the need to account for how objects and literacies are entwined and to look at the material objects they are inscribed within. The other is the need to recognise how texts are constructed across a multimodal as well as material landscape. The two examples below illustrate these two aspects of material literacies. The first example understands how literacies are material

and how material objects can have messages inscribed upon them. This in turn shifts the meaning and communicative resonance of the writing. Writing is also linked, through oral stories, to the material world. The meshwork of oral language, writing and the material world is unpicked and described below.

The second example shows how an understanding of material objects is vital when doing multimodal visual analysis of videos. By looking at the gestural, visual and oral modes that the young people were employing and not at their use of material spaces and objects disembodies them from the context in which they were operating. By analysing a film made by a group of young people, it was possible to see how the young people acted in the way that they did because they felt free to do so because of the setting they were in and the material resources that they had. The material environment both constructed the space to create the film within, but the young people drew on the material environment to make meaning.

Both examples illustrate some of the complexities of adopting this analytic approach to literacy practices in naturalistic settings. We have selected them on the basis that they provide an illumination of the way in which literacy practices are materially constituted and also how the process of communication involves a dialogic relation to material objects within interactional settings. This is then further discussed in our final section.

Example 1 – A meshwork of lines: literacy and textiles

The first example came from an ethnographic study of literacy in a home, in a project called ‘Writing in the Home and in the Street’ funded by the AHRC’s Connected Communities programme.² I (Kate) was interested in the inherited dispositions, the ‘habitus’ within homes that shaped patterns of meaning making (Pahl 2002). Literacy in a home becomes linked to different kinds of practices that are entangled within material objects. Processes such as weaving, stitching, sewing and knitting involve the gathering of lines into a surface (Ingold 2007). Writing also has a quality of bringing together individual lines into something different, a “meshwork” in Ingold’s word (2007: 80). Everyday practices such as knitting, sewing and weaving, as well as tiling a fireplace and the arranging of stuff became linked to the practice of writing. In homes, I noticed that writing and ideas were often placed in material forms. Here, I draw on an ethnographic study of a British Asian family consisting of mother, father and three daughters, Lucy (then eleven), Tanya (then eight) and Saima (then two). (See also Pahl 2012.) I asked the children to record their home writing practices. Lucy spent one summer recording her writing practices for me on a Flip camera. She produced a video of her purse.

Lucy: Here, I have made a purse
And I can put my money and cards in it
And I have put lots of stickers
And three-D stickers as well on
And I have put all my favourite things on this side
And I have put some things I hate and some things I like on this side
I have got little gems and stars
And little animals and food on
And little signs that say keep out top secret

(film 4 August 2010)

Lucy’s video shows the purse as a text with writing on it, but the purse is also a craft object. She had been doing a craft class with her family over the summer, and the purse was made in

the classes. Lucy's aunt had organised these classes and was passionate about craft. Her aunt wrote to me describing how she valued the everyday practices of textile making in her family:

The textile side of our heritage comes from the women in the family. We have older relatives that do appliqué, crochet, embroidery, sewing and knitting (from the girl's mother's side their grandmothers sister and cousin and from their father's side his two cousins who live close by). My younger sister loves craft type of activities and buys the girls a lot of resources to do sewing and fabric work especially on birthdays, Christmas and Eid.

(Written text from the girls' aunt, email, August 2010)

Lucy does have textual messages inscribed within her purse – she puts stickers on the purse and signs that say “keep out, top secret”. These sticker signs are forms of writing that were material. The signs also signified the importance of privacy for Lucy. Lucy also embroidered, and she made a sewn sampler. This was an example of material stuff as text. Writing and embroidery became one and the same activity in this way. The shape and appearance of this text was reminiscent of samplers written by girls in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain that often had a particular shape and featured the letters of the alphabet and sometimes a prayer or image.

Writing carries different kinds of meanings in different materialities. For example, when writing is linked to textiles, either by being stitched within a sewn piece or placed within a text, the surface changes the material qualities of the text. This process of transformation then alters how writing is perceived. Lucy's younger sister, Tanya, preferred to use glitter as a medium for her inscription practices. Gold and glitter were a passion for Tanya and she often added them into her art work, as here:

Kate: Can you tell me a bit about this please?

Tanya: I did it in my big sister's bedroom called Lucy. I used watercolours and I wrote it in my name and I have done lots of stories. And I used some glitter and I wrote some crystals.

(fieldnotes 4 October 2010)

Lucy's younger sister Tanya made a text which became embellished through glitter, watercolours and crystals. The words 'Super Star' are written in glitter. Like the processes of

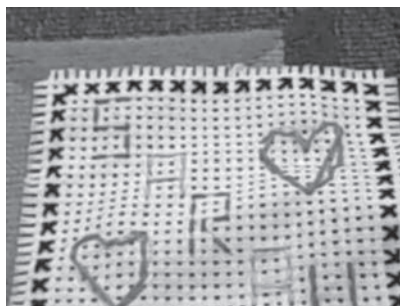


Figure 32.1 Sampler.



Figure 32.2 'Super Star' in glitter.

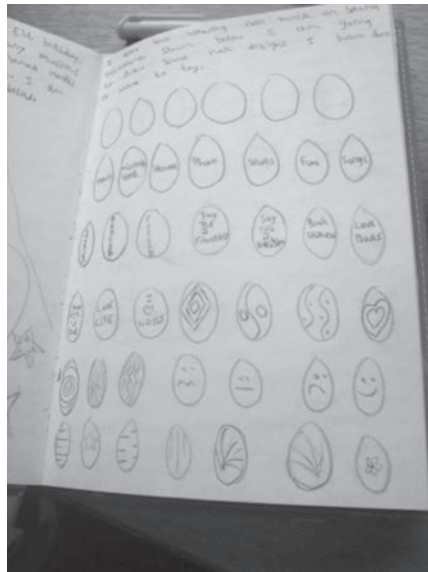


Figure 32.3 Nail art with written inscriptions.

embellishing that medieval monks used to decorate sacred texts, this process of decorating is integral to the process of text making and the concept of 'Super Star' comes alive through glitter.

Nail art is a practice whereby girls decorate their nails with images. Much of the girls' texts included decorative written texts, as well as writing embedded within craft objects such as book marks, pencil cases and masks. These small pieces of writing could have been rendered invisible; however, their meanings were important. Bodily inscriptions also included writing. The girls told me about how they decorated their hands with henna and liked to devise particular designs for painted nails. These designs could be influenced by a number of different categories. For example, in Lucy's notebook, inscribed within a drawing describing different forms of 'nail art' could also be found the small inscription "say no to racism" within an image of a finger nail. The different designs were placed within a scrap book and shown to me one evening in the home.

Different layers of identity could be found sedimented into the nail art, from the emphasis on henna and decoration in Lucy's household to her passionate message, "say no to racism" which reflected a more urgent message coming out of everyday experiences of racism. Here, it is possible to see how identities are laminated into different stratified domains (Leander 2002) which then create new social meanings and objects in turn. Messages inscribed on bodies, within pieces of material or on purses are important, and the forms within which they are inscribed also are significant. These artefactual literacies are both objects and writing; they carry both meanings (Pahl and Rowsell 2010). While writing is a different kind of practice from embroidery, both come together when someone embroiders a word on a piece of material. Both practices, however, construct something meaningful from flowing lines. Placing stickers on something is a different kind of practice. Here the placing of the written text on the material object shifts the meaning of the object. Travelling objects often hold meanings and are inscribed. For example, rucksacks and mobile phone cases sometimes carry letters and decorations on them. Beyond these inscribed texts, oral language flows across and situates these settled inscriptions. Sometimes, there is a dialogue with these inscriptions and they perform a function, such as the 'keep out, top secret' stickers that Lucy employed on her purse. The travelling literacies of the school bag and mobile phone carry messages of identity and belonging, linked to other spaces, discourses and practices outside of school.

In our second example we consider the interrelationship between oral and written texts. We understand them to be embodied, and situated and linked to the material world in an ensemble of meaning-making practices.

Example 2 – What is a text: a methodological exploration

The second example came from a project called 'Language as Talisman' in which a team of artists, ethnographers, literary experts, youth workers and poets worked together to look at the material and talismanic properties of language. I (Hugh) was the researcher on the project (see also Pahl *et al.* 2013). The project team worked in schools, a local park, and in community settings to explore what language meant to them and ways in which it was, or was not, talismanic and special. The project included a focus on dialect and heritage of language as well as contemporary uses of language and literacy.³

The example is a film, called *Ninja Story* about a world where talking was not allowed unless you had a permit. This film was co-created as part of the 'Language as Talisman' project by Steve Pool, an artist, and Hugh Escott (co-author), and its authors are five boys from a year 6 class (ten- to eleven-year-olds). The film was constructed by the young people. Its creation was, however, part of a process that had been directed and facilitated by adults. We subsequently came to recognise that the film could not be properly understood without being analysed using multimodal data analysis (Jewitt 2009). By looking at the gesture, movement and postural intertextuality within the film, we could come to a much more informed understanding of the young people's meanings (Taylor 2006, 2014). This multimodal reading of *Ninja Story* was informed by ethnographic research, in the sense that the reading is done by one of the researchers (Hugh Escott) who asked the young people to create videos. The text was situated in a particular space and place, and was created as part of a particular activity. The making of the film was framed within a discussion of the importance of language as part of a project that wished to investigate the emotional and protective importance of different forms and varieties of language use.

Before making the films the class had discussed what language is and what it means for them. The exercise was designed to get young people thinking about their everyday language use by

exploring their relationship with different modes of communication. They were then asked to answer a research question through the use of Flip cameras to make a film. This question was framed as ‘why is language important?’ The children were asked to create a film of only three to four minutes in length. The young people were given a short tutorial in using the cameras, focusing on sound and picture quality, as well as some tips on creating narrative with film, in terms of cutting on the go and framing shots, before being given a short period of time to create their films. Shortly after filming, the videos were watched by the class as a whole and they were asked to discuss what they liked or found interesting about them. The videos were judged by the class based on three formally identified criteria, with these criteria being explained before filming began; the first being whether the film had ‘answered the research question’, the second being ‘whether the film was well made’ (e.g. did it look like what the children identified a good film to look like and was it easy to understand) and, third, was the film ‘enjoyable’. *Ninja Story* was seen as being the ‘best’ film with regards to all three criteria and entertained the class to the extent that they wanted to watch it multiple times.

We combined a multimodal textual analysis from Taylor (2006, 2014) but added our own layer of analysis that focused on the ways in which the material objects were being used in the film. This was in order to place particular focus on the material spaces and objects that were drawn on to create this text. By considering the material objects used in this video and also the objects themselves, different understandings emerged. We were able to understand through a material analysis how by understanding the ways in which young people have previously used semiotic and material resources brings meaning to how they employ these resources in their text. The film demonstrates traces of out-of-school, playground and classroom literacies whilst also being the product of a particular workshop exercise which was designed to elicit films of a particular type.

After the credits of *Ninja Story* an off-camera narrator explains that “in a world where talking is banned, one ninja will not rest until he has screamed his guts out”. The ninja proceeds to jump around, swing his ‘sword’ and make ‘ninja noises’ before hiding behind a bench. The narrator announces that the police chief and his new rookie “are going to investigate the ninja”. They discover the ninja behind the bench and capture him. The ninja asks why he has been arrested and the police chief explains that “there is a new law, you can’t talk”. The ninja asks “how come you can talk?” and the police chief displays his ‘talking permit’; the ninja escapes and runs riot outside, as a newsreader reports on the situation.

During the confusion the police notice that the newsreader is breaking the talking law and they arrest him, dragging him away kicking and screaming. The police lose both the ninja and the newsreader who then appear and stab them with their swords. The talking permit acts as a



Figure 32.4 Talking permit.

fortunate plot device to overcome the ban on talking for the official and also as a symbol of the abstract system of power that the young people perceive their characters and their own actions to be positioned within as sanctioned times for talk and silence are part of the education system.

The paper 'talking permit' therefore draws on readily available material resources to create a prop which resonates with the boys understanding of authority (Kress 1997). Its textual function is one of narrative coherence and as a device that overcomes the general restrictions on language use that the boys have placed on language in their film. It also supports the film's main answer to the research question; placing restrictions on language use is a restriction of personal freedom and policing language use is impossible. This is summed up with the interviews at the end of the film where the chief of police symbolically tears up his language permit asserting that "I think talking is very important as well" after the previous interviews have emphasised the importance of language in talking to friends and in playing sports. The authority of the police chief is constructed through a multitude of meaningful signs that draw on the boys' relationship with authority and understanding of the police. The chief of police wears a 'talking permit' made from a piece of inscribed paper pinned to his shirt and carries a ruler in a manner reminiscent of a soldier shouldering a rifle. The power of the paper permit is reinforced when the ninja is told that the police chief can talk because he has a permit. The ninja's response, however, is to run away.

In this episode the material objects shift how the interaction happens. For example, the 'policeman' can be seen as an official because of the way that he shouldered the ruler like a rifle and the ruler itself is used as a sword which allows the boy to be a ninja. He then has something to swing around. This episode is relational, in that the ruler becomes used in different ways. The ruler itself does not structure what is happening but it takes part in some key interactional episodes. This makes the ruler relational and part of the dialogic process of meaning making. The ruler takes part in the meaning-making process as it becomes part of the assemblage.

Issues arising from the data

The data above exemplifies how oral language and writing intersect with material cultural practice. When doing analyses of complex data, our question is: how do people interact with writing/language and how does materiality influence this engagement and realisation of language? We think there is a relational aspect to this data that might require a wide lens that includes the material world, the process of semiosis and the role of written language within that process. We argue for a historicised and situated analysis of semiotic practices. For example, by looking at the family history of textiles the modal choice of the young people was connected to a previous experience of textiles. This historical background shifted and contextualised the meaning making. Likewise, the ninja operated in a historically specific cultural space. The film was also constructed within school timescales. The fast-paced interaction when constructing *Ninja Story* echoed the relatively restricted timescales of schooling (Lemke 2000). These historicised practices echoed within current meaning making as it unfolded. The material history of an object has resonances for what it is doing and how it creates new meaning making potentialities within a given situation.

We also think it matters whether we apply a multimodal framework or a material cultural studies framework to this data. In the case of Example 1, Kate applied a material cultural studies approach to re-thinking how textiles, glitter and nail art could create particular relationships to literacy and language practices in the home. In the case of Example 2, Hugh was able to analyse a naturalistic video production using a multimodal transcription framework. However the object and its relational quality needed to be accounted for within that framework. The limits

of multimodal video analysis lay in the nature of the objects within the meaning-making process. Paying attention to objects puts a new light onto data that might otherwise be overlooked. Materiality has its own history, resonances and echoes that need to be traced in an analytic framework. This is what we have articulated in this chapter and illustrated in the data examples.

Recommendations for practice

Looking at literacy in this way has implications for how analytic categories are constructed. A materialising literacies approach creates a different ‘meshwork’ of analytic categories from which to make sense of meaning making (Ingold 2011). Literacy has been described as a social practice (Gee, Chapter 2 this volume). We are positioning literacy as a social practice in relation to other linguistic social practices such as oral language but also in relation to gesture, touch, feel and the sensory qualities of material objects. In the field of literacy and language as social practice, materiality as a category can be important in developing an understanding of emergent forms of meaning making. By seeing how meaning making emerges from the situated, grounded and fluid world of everyday life in relation to material objects, literacy looks different.

This approach has implications for methodology. Bateson (2000 [1972]) advocates a way of thinking which accounts for the mess and muddle of the phenomena under consideration. Material literacy practices can be described as a muddled concept. However, this concept accounts for what happens on the ground. Ethnographic fieldwork is often where a materialising literacies approach emerges, as the field itself dictates and constructs the lens from which to view it. This often involves collaborative or sensory ethnography (Lassiter 2005; Pink 2009). This kind of relational situated understanding of the world creates messy and often ‘emic’ interpretative frameworks (Heath and Street 2008). Messy theory helps to make sense of meaning-making practices (Law 2004, 2007). This way of thinking requires being open to thinking about other modes and the relationship between speakers and material objects and places in order to link spoken language with practices. The field of literacy studies is situated in a material space (Barton *et al.* 2000). Objects, their characteristics, the touch, feel, history and relationship of the object to the speaker, become important in the semiotic space. They can sometimes speak and have a dialogic relationship to speakers. We therefore argue, with Maybin (2013), that it is no longer possible to see language and literacy as mono-modal and future studies of literacy will have to account for this shift in some way.

Future directions

We think there is potential for future work in the field of literacy studies and language analysis through sociolinguistic approaches, together with multimodality and material cultural studies. We argue for the combination of multimodal analysis together with a historically informed understanding of how material objects operate within a space of practice that is ethnographically informed. Our work has shown the importance of recognising the historically situated nature of the material world within literacy studies. This approach could then lead to trans-disciplinary work across the fields of literacy studies, art practice, material cultural studies and studies of emergence and hope. Linking up a study of literacy in the community with wider disciplines enriches and develops ways of knowing across disciplines and can open up literacy studies to possibilities for emergent sites of scholarship that are rooted in the material social world. We would argue that our materialist approach could usefully intersect with theoretical perspectives from, for example, approaches that engage with Somerville’s concept of post-modern emergence

to look at situated, embodied and tacit ways of doing literacy in community contexts (Somerville 2013). In our work, we look back to the literary hermeneutics of Hoggart (1957) and Williams (1961) to engage with contemporary meaning making as it emerges, materialises and offers ways of seeing new kinds of literacy practices. This convergence of approaches re-situates literacy within material culture to acknowledge both historical materialism and lived practice.

Notes

- 1 'Writing in the Home and in the Street', 'Language as Talisman', 'Making Meaning Differently', all AHRC Connected Communities funded.
- 2 'Writing in the Home and the Street' was funded by the AHRC Connected Communities programme. The PI was Richard Steadman-Jones with Zahir Rafiq, Steve Pool, Irna Qureshi and William Gould.
- 3 'Language as Talisman' was an AHRC Connected Communities funded project. The PI was Kate Pahl with Hugh Escott, R.A., Richard Steadman-Jones, Steve Pool, Jane Hodson, Deborah Bullivant, David Hyatt, Cassie Limb and Andrew McMillan. Grant number: AH/J011959/1.

Related topics

Materiality, Literacy, Community, Practice, Multimodality.

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MOVING VOICES

Literacy narratives in a testimonial culture

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Introduction: the everyday and public representations of literacy

We are constantly telling stories which make meaning from the everyday. In this chapter I examine one manifestation of this ubiquitous story-telling – accounts from literacy learners assembled and formalised within a testimonial culture in the context of literacy policy, advocacy and practice. Literacy studies can draw valuable insights from analysing the ways in which these narratives of everyday experience are constructed, sponsored and received; how they move within public discourse and make claims to the authenticity of first-hand knowledge.

The chapter draws on material from my book *Literacy and the Politics of Representation* (Hamilton 2012) in which I discuss the ways that the semiotic resources of metaphor, visual images, number and testimonial narratives are combined to produce powerful imaginaries of literacy that circulate widely in the media, government and popular discourse. These are used to advocate for and justify policy interventions into citizens' lives. At the same time, I argue, they obscure the powerful co-ordinating role of literacy in the organisation of the social which Dorothy Smith has called “the relations of ruling” (Smith 2005). In this chapter, I focus especially on the role of testimonial narratives in imagining what literacy is and might be and who literacy learners are and might become.

My interest in this topic comes from my involvement in the field of adult literacy over three decades in the UK, as a practitioner and researcher. During this time I have experienced and documented the uneven changes in adult literacy from an unstable, fragmented and informal field of practice to an organised system of post-school provision managed by central government through target setting, performance indicators and outcome related funding (Hamilton and Hillier 2006). The examples I use in this chapter are taken from this context.

Historical perspectives

The material changes that have taken place in the field as well as the wider political, cultural and economic landscape can be traced through the discourses that constitute them. Earlier discourses of human rights and the radical cultural politics that adult literacy drew on have been eclipsed by a narrow human resource model of literacy which focuses exclusively on participation in the employment market (see Hamilton and Pitt 2011). This has implications

for how we imagine what literacy is, who learners are, and the purposes of literacy education and policy.

Such imaginings are full of consequence for the meanings we take and make from the everyday practice of literacy, so the dynamics of how they come to be and how they are carried are a significant focus for research. Taylor explains this through the concept of the social imaginary:

the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations The social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.

(Taylor 2007: 23)

Taylor suggests that the social imaginary is carried in images, stories and legends. He sees it as part of the taken-for-granted background assumptions of our lives that often go unexamined and articulated.

Taylor's ideas resonate with the idea of vernacular and institutional literacies put forward within literacy studies (Barton and Hamilton 2012) which point to the different ways in which literacy may be imagined within everyday contexts of home community as well as workplaces, religious or educational domains, in each case privileging certain purposes, meanings and practices (Hamilton 2001).

Current contributions and research

Recent work in literacy studies (see Corbett, Chapter 8 and Gee, Chapter 2, both this volume) has returned to the question of the relationship between local, everyday practices and the wider patterns of culture and social relations that are part of them (see Brandt and Clinton 2000; Bulfin and Koutsogiannis 2012) in order to move beyond what Collin (2013) calls "local cultural determinism". I address this question by focusing on the public discourses of literacy that circulate and carry policy and accompany other changes such as communication technologies. I look at the ways in which these discourses carry the 'faraway' into the 'everyday' asking whose voices or perspectives are heard most strongly within these, what local actors make of them and how they are refracted within everyday practice.

I am interested in who has been able to speak for the field of adult literacy at different points in time and for the purposes of this chapter, I am especially interested in the voices of learners – how widely can these be heard within public domains and where do they occur? In what ways do they contribute to the social imaginary and what work goes into producing them? Who is listening to these voices? In Brandt's (1998) terms: who sponsors them, where are their allies?

Even a short search reveals that 'literacy' and 'literacy learners' get publicly represented in many places including national and international policy, news and popular media such as films and novels (see for example Schlink 1998) and the everyday talk and ephemera that result from these. Research of all kinds also presents profiles and narratives of literacy learners, both through numbers and words (see Elliott 2009; Maynes *et al.* 2012).

The mobilising and marketing power of the personal narrative has been used within policy documents throughout the history of Adult Literacy in the UK. Hamilton and Pitt (2011) compared student profiles included in the original Right to Read manifesto (British Association

of Settlements 1974) with those included in the Skills for Life strategy (Department for Education and Skills 2001). This analysis found consistent deficit discourses across time but also striking variations in the narratives as they are adapted for policy purposes. The ‘facts’ of a person’s life and experiences are selectively crafted and smoothed to ‘speak’ the changing priorities and ideologies of policy initiatives. Armstrong (2005: 141) refers to this strategy as “channelling troublesome voices into safe waters”.

This raises the issue of authenticity in learner narratives as it suggests that stories of everyday experience are strongly affected by how they are framed by purpose and context. Sandlin and Clark (2009) argue that no narrative is innocent and the appearance of authenticity in autobiographical accounts of learners’ everyday experiences makes them as hard to challenge as the statistical arguments with which they are combined in policy discourse.

Scholars of critical narrative research (e.g. Smith and Watson 2010) show how such processes of framing are not unique to the policy domain and in this chapter I discuss how they occur within adult literacy practice and advocacy where practitioners find and make public learners lives as case studies, and learners present themselves on the public stage. I argue that individual accounts of the experience of everyday literacies are inevitably co-constructed by both writers and listeners as they enter the public domain. Therefore working with an understanding of the social relations of literacy production is essential.

This is what I will move onto in the rest of this chapter and while I am aware of the great variety of everyday contexts and the interactions between them, the examples I use will be drawn from a particular context, that of student writing and community publishing in the UK. I focus on this context because it is one where the social relations of production of learner narratives have been deliberately changed to open spaces for more participation and genuine co-construction of meaning.

Critical issues and topics: everyday literacies in a testimonial culture

I have found the notion of ‘testimonial culture’ useful to explain why learner voices are so pervasive in public discourses and for understanding why and how they are listened to.

The use of a number and statistical argument currently dominates policy discourse and is increasingly seen as the way in which ‘real’ evidence and credible research about literacy should be presented. However, while politicians inevitably use figures to justify their cases for policy, they also use personal testimonies to support these figures and to give a human dimension to them. Metaphor and visualisations of various kinds may also be used. The media actively seek out such cases to personalise their coverage of issues (see McNair 2009). Marketing and advertising professionals routinely exploit the testimonials of ‘real people’ (Kennedy 2006) while the widespread popularity of confessional talk shows, reality TV (see Aslama and Pantti 2006; Wood 2009) and online social media (Lundby 2008) also rests on personal stories made public. Astute lobbyists therefore, feed examples of personal stories to politicians and the media, knowing how powerfully these can be taken up. Research into the relative effectiveness of these different forms of evidence suggests that they function differently and are not necessarily competitive. Indeed they may complement and expand meanings, if skilfully used (see Forceville and Uríos-Aparisi 2009; Kress 2009; O’Halloran 2008).

A persuasive aspect of writing as ‘voice’ is that it is seen as a way of making visible the experience of disenfranchised groups (in terms of gender, sexuality, cultural, political, language, disability) or of enabling individuals to come to terms with extreme, oppressive or traumatising experiences. A range of somewhat disparate research and theorising has investigated the ways in which writing may function in this way. For example Singer and

Singer (2007) review medical and neuropsychological evidence about the role of written, as well as oral, expression on physical well-being. From a linguistic perspective, many scholars have pointed out the central link between writing and identity (see for example, Blommaert 2008; Burgess and Ivanič 2010). Ivanič's (1998) theory of writing asserts that authorship is interwoven with the negotiation and expression of personal and group identity. Writing is therefore implicated in self-development.

There is a considerable literature discussing testimony, trauma and self-help culture. Research on mental health self-help groups, such as that of Gubrium and Holstein (1998) and Corrigan *et al.* (2002) suggest that being socialised into telling the right kind of narrative is associated with recovery and strengthened self-esteem. Corrigan *et al.* (2002) describe the "right kind of narrative" as one that is reminiscent of stories of religious conversion, a story which uses the metaphor of a survivor's journey beginning with 'the way down' and then 'the way up'.

There are many other sources which propose and validate the links between literacy and self-development in relation to specific groups of people. Within minority rights movements, including disability rights, the notion of 'voice' has been a central part of the emancipatory cultural and political project. For example, Armstrong (2003) argues that it is only possible to foster education and mental health among children with special educational needs through pedagogical strategies that strengthen their agency as service users and learners. The History Workshop movement and the Mass Observation archive emphasised the importance of documenting working-class histories and folk traditions (Sheridan *et al.* 2000). This resonates with the methods used within the feminist movement to record women's history based on the idea of women as silenced within patriarchal discourse (Houston and Kramarae 1991; Dossa 2008).

Testimonies have a special place in the protected arenas in which peace and reconciliation processes take place in communities recovering from conflict and dispossession such as South Africa, Northern Ireland and Canada (see Hamber 1998; King 2003; Anthonissen 2009). Speaking of the South African context, Anthonissen, explains that:

The aim of the TRC's public hearings was to bring traumatic histories into the public consciousness in a way that would recognise suffering, facilitate healing and bring clarity on concealed or denied aspects of human rights abuses. By confronting earlier discourses that justified state violence, a particular version of the struggle history could be retold in a way that would expose a number of popular myths.

(Anthonissen 2006: 80)

Anthonissen is one of a number of researchers who have begun to analyse "the nature of mediated, reconciliatory discourses where perpetrators of human rights violations and those shattered by such violations meet in a public and officially monitored space" (2006: 80). Beverley (1989) and Yúdice (1991) have identified the *testimonio* as a specific genre of autobiography emerging from Latin America, with its own structure and conventions. In this testimony, the author takes up a special position as a decentred 'I' who speaks on behalf of a collective, not just the individual author. Work with migrant groups, refugees and other displaced populations similarly makes use of individual biographies to build a public narrative of communities and diaspora (see for example Baynham and de Fina 2005; Gabriel 2008). As Dossa (2008: 80) suggests, one aspect of the *testimonio* can be the negotiation or claiming of multiple cultural and social identities (e.g. parent, citizen, worker, Muslim, advocate) alongside or in resistance to the identity of 'literacy learner' or 'refugee woman'. Janesick (Chapter 39, this volume) similarly describes how oral history activities within communities can be a vehicle

for social justice since they document the stories and memories of community members and give voice to many who normally are outsiders or minority members.

The narrativisation of lives through producing biographies is, then, a potent and popular trend across diverse sites, including the popular media and the arenas of educational and social policy. These developments have led scholars like Ahmed and Stacey (2001) to talk about the “testimonial cultures” within which we all live. By this they mean the pervasive self-reflexive, self-revelatory and confessional activities that Giddens (1991) has identified as characterising contemporary Western societies. Rose (1999: 90) discusses these as “therapeutic technologies” that “promulgate new ways of planning life and approaching predicaments, and disseminate new procedures for understanding oneself and acting upon oneself to overcome dissatisfactions, realise one’s potential, gain happiness and achieve autonomy”.

This idea is also linked to what Atkinson and Silverman (1997: 309) have called “the interview society through which accounts of experience and the revelation of a private emotional life are expected of potentially any societal member, and actually expected of anyone accorded the status of celebrity”.

Overall, the notion is now widely held that talking about ourselves and our problems and experiences can somehow be useful and lead to positive action for personal and social change. However, Ahmed and Stacey caution that the role of testimony is dependent on the context and conditions within which it is produced, and we cannot assume that it is straightforwardly aligned with transformative politics. They also point out that testimony is a dialogic form and that the listener is as important to the act of bearing witness as the speaker/writer themselves. Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) have made similar points in their critique of the influence of talking therapies in education.

Testimonial culture has its roots in, and draws on, the religious and legal worlds of witness and testimony (see Willen 1983; Tiersma 2007). From these roots it is a small step to seeing personal testimony as an empowering tool for oppressed and marginalised groups – turning experience into evidence and visible truth and developing languages which ascribe meaning to submerged experiences of the everyday in the collective or public domain.

Main research methods: making meaning from the everyday

How then should we read personal stories of the everyday? Researchers who have looked at testimonial genres, including therapeutic narratives and the decentred author stance of *testimonios* have developed social semiotic tools for exploring such narratives. These focus on particular features of the narratives which reveal how they make meaning through the resources they assemble.

One recent angle on this is offered by the “small stories” research initiated by Bamberg (2005) and developed by de Fina *et al.* (2006) and by Baynham and Georgakopoulou (2006). This contrasts the ways in which narratives and selves are construed in everyday interaction with others, with the ‘big stories’ often told by research and policy documents. ‘Small stories’ is an umbrella term that:

captures a gamut of underrepresented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, and shared (known) events, but it also captures allusions to (previous) tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell ... immediately reworking slices of experience and arising out of a need to share what has just happened or seemingly uninteresting tidbits. They can be about small incidents that may (or may

not) have actually happened, mentioned to back up or elaborate on an argumentative point occurring in an ongoing conversation.

(Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 381–382)

This resonates with Anthonissen's accounts of 'survivor' testimonies from South Africa. She describes how in their raw spoken form, these are often disjointed, losing track of chronology and argumentative coherence, are emotionally charged and repetitive with incomplete sentences and cultural references that are not recognised beyond the local context that generated them (Anthonissen 2006: 87; 2009). These features make such stories difficult to listen to and thus get obliterated or smoothed out of published accounts.

These observations about the translation of everyday accounts into 'big stories' suggest that it is essential to attend to the context of production of personal testimonies and the invisible collaborators who contribute at all stages of producing the published text – in other words, the social relations that produce and assemble the text. These include: the degree and type of formality in the setting; circumstances and procedures; the imagined audience; and their expectations of a more or less 'crystallised' story format.

Narratives may be framed and revoiced in various ways, through selection of content and summaries offered by a third person narrator, but also through embedding the text in wraparound texts, covers and visuals. There are typical plots available and presuppositions that do not have to be explained; for example, the 'plot' identified by Corrigan *et al.* (2002: 295) as part of the genre of self-help narratives: "the way down and the way up". 'Small stories' are turned into 'big stories' through these processes of framing and revoicing (Maybin 2008).

Literacy learners themselves inevitably draw on general cultural narratives of literacy and education in order to communicate and make sense of their experience. Where students are invited to speak in a public oral setting like a conference, or submit their writing to a competition, different kinds of prompting, shaping and self-censorship will take place (Howard 2004). However, these narratives are mitigated by the author's stance and footing including the reflexive comments they make as they adjust their account (e.g. 'You could think about it in this way or this way ...'). These meta-narratives indicate shifting standpoints during story-telling, including distancing and ambivalence. In particular, the use of pronouns to signal individual or collective agency and especially evidence of the *testimonio* genre whereby the authorial 'I' represents a community, not just an individual biography. This links to ideas of agency, activism, advocacy and stance.

Last but not least, it is important to look for resistant or alternative narratives to those that are dominant in policy and educational discourses: the inclusion of contradiction and complexity in the individual detail of the accounts; specialist descriptions of everyday activities; the varieties of language represented in the texts – spoken language forms and local vocabulary; metaphors; and expressions of agency and control, strengths as well as vulnerability, humour as well as pathos.

Speaking out? Examples from a corpus of student writing and community publishing

Writing down personal narratives with the help of a scribe or editor has been common in adult literacy since the 1970s through what became known as student writing and community publishing (see FWWCP 1986; Coles 2001; Woodin 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2008; Moon and Sunderland 2008; Hughes 2010). This idea has been justified both in pragmatic terms (devising a relevant and motivating curriculum) and in terms of democratic cultural politics that assert the

importance of a learner perspective within the field of literacy practice and policy (see Morley and Walpole 1982) and developing what Mace (1995: x) calls “a culture of public literacy on the part of people only previously half-seen”.

When it began, this approach drew on the person-centred language experience and literacy methods being developed in primary schools: see Ashton-Warner (1963); Rosen (in Barnes *et al.* 1969); Kohl (1973); Smith (1973); and Searle (1986). Many of those who moved into the newly developing field of adult literacy had worked or been trained in this setting and had some experience of these methods. A number of people were influenced by ideas of participatory popular education drawn from international development education (Archer and Costello 1990). In particular Paulo Freire’s ideas of literacy as a tool for empowerment was newly published in English in 1972 and used a method of generative themes emerging from discussions with learners as starting points for writing and reading.

The significance of this work is well recorded (see Mace 1979, 1995; O’Rourke 2005; Woodin 2009) and both in terms of the range of material produced and the motivations for producing it, it shares some of the features of the *testimonio* described above.

Much student writing was, and still is, produced in groups, especially in volunteer and community-based programmes. Sometimes individuals work with community publishing organisations or attend residential writing events. Student writing ranges from professionally produced publications supported by outside funding, nationally distributed through community publishing organisations to simple, duplicated booklets put together locally by tutors and students, depending on its purposes. Some pieces are consciously designed as literary and aesthetic productions. Some are primarily to celebrate achievement to act as a souvenir of a group project or as advocacy material for a group or programme. Some are just for internal circulation for information and to encourage group feeling (see O’Rourke and Mace 1992: 36–40).

Much of the writing is straightforwardly autobiographical, describing and commenting on the social, personal and working contexts that people experience in their lives. There are also themed collections of short pieces of writing – a mixture of prose, poetry, graphics, drama, opinion and news items (see Hackney Reading Centre 1980; Craven and Jackson 1986; Harris and Savitzky 1988; Mallows and Duncan 2007). Analysing these learner narratives reveals features which can interrupt dominant narratives. They present accounts of the everyday details of ordinary life lived by those labelled as ‘extra-ordinary’: encounters with official agencies, the minute-by-minute struggles for recognition and respect. There are critical stories of schooling and experiences of bullying from both peers and teachers. They detail the variety of ways of learning and ways of working to produce writing and the relationships that these are embedded in. Strengths and agency are assumed by the authors and issues of control within educational and wider settings come up in many places from many authors who emphasise the importance of feeling free to be yourself, without judgement, and to use literacy to explore experience.

Scribes and sponsors of student writing

Published accounts authored by learners are usually heavily framed and edited by others (teachers, researchers, publishers, policymakers or journalists) who could be regarded as the “sponsors” (see Brandt 1998) of student writing.

As a first step, student narratives generated in the classroom are usually co-produced with a scribe who might also be a teacher. The scribal role varies, as it does in other settings (see Mace 1998; Kalman 1999: 86) on a continuum of scribal and client participation that ranges from copyist to main composer of the text, depending on the task and the demands of the client. The

conversations that surround and produce the writing may be limited by the backgrounds and experiences of all involved, and even the most participatory settings might fall far short of shared decision-making.

Moss (1995), herself an experienced facilitator of student writing, analysed taped discussions between tutors and student writers and identified a range of ways in which students' spoken words are shaped by interventions from the tutor. The tutor/scribe may not be attending to the same features of the conversation as the student. They may interrupt and 'model' the students' language rather than listening carefully. They may revoice students' words to eliminate non-standard features and re-order the telling of events to make the account more conventionally coherent. These shaping processes are inevitable because of the power relations between the scribe/tutor and the student, especially where either of them are unfamiliar with each other or with the scribing process. Moss shows how the final written version is, at best, a co-construction and often a poor translation of the student's original words. The example in Figure 33.1 shows how strikingly different the end product can be. In this case, William's account, re-edited to be closer to his spoken words, was eventually published by Gatehouse Books (1985: 33–36).

In Hamilton (2012) I present a number of further examples of how this editorial/scribing function is dealt with and challenged, and how the actions of editors and publishers also affect how meaning is made and taken from everyday experience. Here, though I discuss just two examples where serious efforts have been made to challenge the typically asymmetrical relations of literacy production.

***When the pimento come,
they employ people
to help reap it
and also the cane
and the coffee.
When it ripe you got to pick it
off the trees and pulp it.
You start reap
on Monday
and you finish Friday.
You cut the coffee
Friday evening.
Saturday morning
you go to the river
and you wash it
and spread it out
in the barbecue
And leave it get sun
And dry.
So you got to have
More than two hands
To help to get it
because sometime,
Coffee always come in rain,
in the rainy season.***

***People of any age
and both male and female
work on plantations
in Jamaica.
The owners of the
plantations
are not large corporations
but small groups
of self employed people***

Figure 33.1 From spoken to written text: William's words and tutor's summary (source: Moss 1995: 145–146).

Opening Time by Gatehouse Books: opening the shaping processes to scrutiny

The Gatehouse Books publishing project, set up in Manchester in 1976, was one of the pioneers of the student writing and publishing approach in adult literacy. It was one of a small number of similar organisations that could offer more professional-style publication, a national distribution and associated tutor resources.

As a publishing project rather than an educational provider, Gatehouse Books stands at one end of a spectrum, offering perhaps the best chance of producing co-constructed narratives. Within the testimonial culture, therefore, Gatehouse Books played a particular sponsoring role (Brandt 1998) enabling the words of new writers and populations to circulate nationally, and even internationally.

It pioneered new formats and publishing methods: the use of plain English, incorporation of photographs and other illustrations, the technique of including frequent line breaks in the text (as in Glynn 1983: 7) and other visual aspects of layout to increase readability. These emerged from production processes crafted to be suitable for working with new writers and with new readers as audiences. New organisational forms developed too, such as reading groups and workshops, residential writing weekends and a roving newspaper collective of tutors and students, Write First Time (Woodin 2008).

It also published resources for teachers and one of these was a tutor pack called *Opening Time*, written by students, for teachers (Frost and Hoy 1985). Translating student writing activities into teacher resources formalised them as an approach to literacy work. An important reserve of expertise came into existence: thoughtful, self-critical and sophisticated practice around working with students to produce autobiographical accounts that could be useful to other learners and to teachers and wider audiences too (Schwab 1994) and which made the processes of editorial work transparent.

Opening Time is a didactic resource at many levels, that embodies a strong set of values and social relationships between teachers and students along with a transparency about process that is of considerable pedagogical, as well as historical value to the field twenty-five years on.

For example, Section 4 of *Opening Time* entitled “School – A Wasted Childhood” develops the theme of “writing to sort out ideas” using the example of John Glynn’s experience of education. The front cover has a close up black and white photograph of a child’s face, his hands supporting his chin and gazing directly and unsmilingly at the reader. Inside is a photograph of John as an adult, standing half-way up a flight of stone steps and looking up at the camera. The text presents the same material, from John’s writing, expanded and organised through different versions over a period of six months. As in other sections of the pack, the process of editing to develop ideas within a group is described in detail, and also how other members of the group used John’s reflections as an impetus to develop their own writing. A set of questions to be used with a group is included at the end of the section. Points are made about the importance of relaxing in order to be able to write, and how “You don’t write best to order on a set topic” – ideas for writing need sometimes to be left “hanging in the air” in order to shape themselves onto the page.

Peckel Well Publications: reshaping the social relations of literacy production

The alternative pedagogical process used in the language experience approach described in *Opening Time* has a knock-on effect to social relationships in the learning situation. It changes how the teachers’ role is perceived and carried out since, as described above, the tutor becomes a mediator and scribe rather than an expert transmitting knowledge of writing.

Once students begin to express their opinions through these activities, new possibilities open up for their participation in the management and decision-making processes involved with teaching, learning and editing. This new way of approaching literacy demystifies the processes of administration and decision-making and, in some literacy programmes, it led to efforts to produce more accessible newsletters and annual reports that could be understood and shared by all.

Pecket Well College, a user-run and managed collective in the north of England, produced not just autobiographical writing but many other documents, including advocacy letters, minutes and management documents. The autobiographical writing started with individual experiences that offered a challenging commentary on established education, both in school, but more unusually in adult education – the structures, the pedagogies and the teachers – and a search for a different kind of education and approach to language and literacy (see Flanagan *et al.* 1994).

For those individuals drawn into Pecket Well, this writing morphed into a more collective project of documenting the experience of Pecket itself, the learning processes that were developed among people there and that went into organising the college itself – management, development, fundraising, publicity and outreach. The physical building acquired by the college took on immense significance in this sense of collectivity. The publications resulting from this strong collective identity resonate with the *testimonio* form (for example, Pecket Well College 1987). This collective touched many lives, and members self-consciously saw themselves as part of a bigger cultural movement of emancipatory literacy. Making the processes of management, decision-making, writing and publication transparent was integral to Pecket Well's inclusive and emancipatory aims which also aspired to produce a solidarity that could make individuals feel part of a bigger group or project.

As a charity, Pecket Well had a management group of directors who included user members of the college. It also had trustees who were key advocates for the organisation, arguing for grant funding and making the college visible in a wider arena. People who started out as students at the college might move on to volunteer and paid roles and took on responsibilities within the management group as well. Staffing and roles were therefore fluid – professional expertise was not closely regulated and the roles of learner, teacher, manager, author and editor were blurred and shared.

Central to Pecket Well's ways of working was the careful attention given to democratic and inclusive ways of working with language and paying detailed attention to wider access issues. The process of decision-making was often slow and contentious and methods of working were refined and meticulously documented throughout the history of the college.

Pecket Well's most recent project has been to create an oral and archive history of the college (see www.pecket.org and Nugent 2013). The aim is to document the processes of learning, organising courses, raising funds and managing the college, based on accounts from people involved and the artefacts that survive. These include a collectively made fabric wall-hanging, texts documenting processes of learning and organising the college activities such as audio and video tapes of meetings and other college events, photographic collages, letters to funders, minutes of meetings, annual reports, evaluation reports of courses, publicity and press releases as well as autobiographical texts and stories of the participants.

The participatory ideals of the organisation suffuse the history-making process. Pecketwellians have taken part in training workshops in order to participate in making video material for the website and carrying out oral history interviews.

'The Pecket Way' is an alternative social imaginary where people with disabilities have undisputed rights to contribute to the collective and to be included within it, where education

adapts to people rather than the other way round and where the experiences and social relations of learning are seen as modelling a wider citizenship.

The steering group consists of the directors of the college, all of whom are also users or Pecketwellians; college trustees; and three paid workers, one co-ordinating the project, one carrying out the oral history interviews and one helping to create the website containing the documentary and oral history archive.

Long discussions have focused around who should be interviewed for the oral history and what documents should be archived; the categories that should be used to organise and retrieve the archive material; how to make the website accessible through designing multiple modes of navigating it; and, how to construct the oral history account, through sequencing the sections, emphasis on particular events and people, names, metaphors and symbols. Place-based references are included to recognise and preserve the connection with everyday experiences: for example, an image of a familiar artefact, the 'journey stick' is used to create a time line, while pictures of features of the Pecket Well building such as 'the green door' are used as an entrance to the online site. The formats and requirements of the online technology sometimes support, sometimes subvert these aims.

The oral history and archive are both souvenirs/records and obstinate markers of a set of values that were not compromised and need to be carried forward along with the practical processes crafted over twenty years of intense collaboration.

Conclusions and recommendations for practice

Within the testimonial cultures so prevalent in Western influenced contexts, personal narratives that make meaning from everyday experience are mobilised as part of user engagement strategies in a whole range of advocacy areas. The value placed on personal experience in the testimonial culture is exploited by policy and media to promote dominant cultural meanings of literacy. Practitioners and advocates in turn make use of such opportunities to justify their efforts. The testimonial form therefore is not specific to the field of literacy education, though it is especially appropriate to it since writing is a key focus for literacy learners. Research reviewed in this chapter suggests that the transformative effects of writing down everyday experience work at a number of levels, but most powerfully when this experience is located in a wider context and among multiple perspectives (Gutiérrez 2008; Anthonissen 2009).

The student writing and community publishing activities that developed in the UK adult literacy field claimed a new public space for working-class voices and emerging adult writers. It works with a different imaginary of literacy that challenges cultural elitism and assumptions about who can create 'literature'. The power of these voices is constrained by the ability to circulate them since they are strongly tied to localities. Making them visible, sharing practice and making links within and across wider contexts is difficult. Written accounts are valuable artefacts with the potential to travel where people cannot.

However, voices are also framed and organised as they move through the processes of solidification onto the written page or screen, publication and distribution to audiences. Making meaning from the everyday always involves aligning experience with publicly circulating discourses of literacy. Accounts are assembled using resources offered by these discourses and they are read in relation to them. Audience is integral to being heard.

In this chapter I have argued that these inevitable processes of framing and constructing learner accounts can be harnessed to interrupt dominant policy and popular media narratives when they are generated in a skilfully organised participative environment which enables

greater diversity of expression and different perspectives on the experience of literacy learning to emerge.

The examples I have discussed illustrate two important ways in which these interruptions are realised. First, by making transparent the processes of shaping and editing and documenting the innovations that participatory student writing demands in terms of language, multimodal expression and so on. Second, involving participants in the decisions that frame accounts of their experience reshapes the social relations of literacy production towards a democratic educational process that results in the collective production of meaning from life experience. This extends beyond the immediate learning interactions to the management of the learning context and the different pieces that go into building such an education.

In other words, such participatively produced learner narratives have the potential to interrupt dominant discourses not just in terms of their content but their shape and intent and the challenges they pose to traditional pedagogies, forms of delivery and our notions of authorship.

Gutiérrez (2008) describes this emancipatory form of writing as “syncretic testimonio” through which new imaginaries are developed through a deliberately created third space within classrooms, making meaning between the teachers’ and the students’ knowledges and everyday experiences and connecting the here and now with the faraway, in terms of both history, futures and geographical distances. Gutiérrez has worked with Mexican-heritage students and their peers in the Migrant Student Leadership Institute in California to co-produce a type of text she describes as “a hybrid form of critical autobiography and testimonio ... situated in the subjective particularity and global and historical reality in which people co-construct their understanding of the social world and of themselves” (p. 149). She draws attention to the invisible collaborations and shaping work that goes into producing such texts and through which students are encouraged “to locate and relocate their personal experience in political and cultural-historical contexts ... This orients students to the past but also, crucially to future possibilities for change.” The interactional process of the classroom “facilitates a collective social imagination ... a process of becoming conscious historical actors ... who invoke the past in order to re-mediate it so that it becomes a resource for current and future action” (p. 154).

Student voice is not just about speaking or writing and finding audience to be heard. Meaning is made from the everyday through publicly shared processes of making and organising knowledge, not just in writing down people’s words. Freire understood this and so have all other participatory educators right up to the present day. The challenge of transporting local voices into public arenas and sustaining their impact there is a major one. Creating the conditions whereby student agency can develop and voices can be heard is ‘slow’ education. This does not sit easily with ‘fast’ policy.

The social relations within educational programmes address students as citizens, as well as learners. They model citizenship and the expectations and procedures for sharing the power to author your own life. Facilitating students to make their own meanings from everyday experience is therefore also about who participates in the management and decision-making practices within educational programmes and the activities of editing and publishing – that is, it is about process as well as product.

Related topics

Oral history, Participatory literacy methods, Scribes, Sponsors of writing, Public narratives of literacy.

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34

(IM)MATERIALISING LITERACIES

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Introduction

In investigating children and young people's interactions with digital media, literacy researchers have highlighted the importance of seeing such interactions as embedded in everyday lives. Rather than focusing on the distinctiveness of activity online or onscreen, *relationships between* online and offline activity have been seen as central to the way people make meaning from digital media and to what digital media mean to their lives (Miller and Slater 2000). This chapter argues that, in analysing meaning-making around digital texts, one of the things we need to do is to focus on the complex relationships between materialities and immaterialities. 'Materialities', as defined here, relate to the stuff which is physically present as we make meanings, such as bodies, screens, artefacts and texts. 'Immaterialities' are those things that are materially absent or intangible but central to meaning-making: associations, memories, feelings and imaginings as well as all the events and processes that have led up to the production of the things that are physically present. In this chapter, I suggest that we need to pay attention to relationships between materialities and immaterialities when researching literacies and that this can help us see meaning-making as complex and multiple. Following work with colleagues (Burnett *et al.* 2014), I use the term '(im)materialities' to capture the way that the material and immaterial are always enmeshed with each other.

It is worth noting that this chapter is not a synthesis of an existing body of work but rather an argument for a way of examining meaning-making. The chapter reviews work which speaks to the relationship between the material and immaterial from different perspectives, including studies of the spatial, the material, the embodied and the affective. These different studies are used to highlight how threads of different time-spaces may interweave as we make meaning. The implications of this for researching literacies are explored and it is suggested that we can add to our study of literacies by investigating the 'encounters', through which different timespaces, all of which are fluid and hybrid, coalesce and disperse. This in turn can help us examine how feelings, materialities, activities and purposes from different time-spaces may merge or disrupt one another as we make meaning. This lens highlights how institutional, economic, social and cultural factors come together with the personal and emotional and implies that we need to recognise multiplicities as we seek to understand meaning-making. Whilst this work arose from an interest in literacy practices surrounding digital media, an

(im)materialities lens also has implications for how we describe literacy more generally, specifically in relation to ideas about literacy as situated and the literacy event as a unit of analysis.

Historical perspectives: movements in research on digital media

It is misleading to trace historical movements in research in digital media. Different strands have evolved in this new field and continue to develop. However, we can perhaps see a shift in emphasis. Early research into digital environments tended to position online activities as separate from those offline. Cyberspace was seen as a place for researchers to visit, in which worlds were created and people behaved differently from how they did in their physically grounded ‘real’ lives. The fascination with the digital was in its separateness, and what people did *inside* new digital environments. We can see this most starkly in studies of virtual worlds and alternate reality gaming but also in research into people’s use of the internet, social networking sites and other communicative fora (Turkle 1997; Boellstorff 2008). Amongst language and literacy researchers, there was considerable interest in what was happening as interactions – previously oral – migrated online: how did people perform the functions of face-to-face communication when interacting onscreen? How did they use the affordances of digital media? And which new possibilities and practices emerged? The texts produced – email exchanges, SMS text messages, blogs, chatlogs and so on – were the main sites of analysis as people sought to understand the genres and practices emerging in this evolving communicative landscape (e.g. Crystal 2001; Snyder 2002). This loose body of research into digital environments has provided compelling examples of the changing nature of texts and associated practices, highlighted new manifestations of participation, agency and identity performance, and explored how new communicative landscapes open up sites for learning (Davies and Merchant 2009; Lankshear and Knobel 2011).

As technologies and associated research have developed, it has become increasingly difficult to disentangle what happens onscreen from what happens in physical environments, or to identify where onscreen/online activity ends and offscreen/offline begins. Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) use the term “networked localities” to capture how online activities overlay physical surroundings. They explore how our increased use of mobile technologies and cloud computing means that the web surrounds us, patched onto and extending out from and into many of our everyday activities. The idea of ‘going online’ is becoming anachronistic as we operate increasingly across hybrid offline/online spaces. As a consequence, researching ‘digital practices’ as separate from the physical no longer seems to make sense in terms of how we live our lives. Indeed many would argue that such distinctions have never existed (Barton and Lee 2013); we have always accessed online environments from physical locations and what happens online has always been embedded in what we do offline. Powerful examples of this include use of social networking to organise civic action (Mansour 2012). We also know that for many young children, experiences of digital environments at home map onto their interpretations of literacies in school (Wohlwend 2009), and that children may physically play out what they do onscreen (Giddings 2007). These overlappings and permeabilities have generated interest in looking at online practices *in relation* to what happens offline. It seems increasingly important to use research methodologies, such as ‘connective ethnographies’ (Hine 2000; Leander and McKim 2003), that look across on- and offline activity in order to better understand the role of digital media in everyday lives.

Critical issues: problematising situatedness

The process of articulating what happens as online and offline activity merges prompts us to re-visit some established ways of researching literacy practices. Influential work in the field of New Literacy Studies has emphasised the social situatedness of literacies (Heath 1983; Street 1984; Barton 1997), exploring literacies as social practices. As Baynham (1995: 39) writes, “Investigating literacy as practice is investigating literacy as ‘concrete human activity’ involving not just what people do with literacy but also what they make of what they do, how they construct its value, the ideologies that surround it.” This work has helped us see how different discourses play out in the literacies of individuals and groups and how people forge new ways of being around and through texts. Analysis of literacy practices has traditionally begun with an analysis of literacy events, with events being “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the participants’ interactions and interpretative process” (Heath 1983: 93). By focusing on events, researchers have been able to examine literacies within specific times and locations and explore how individual, social, economic, institutional and cultural movements play through them.

Once we consider relationships *between* online and offline activity, however, the idea of focusing on events becomes problematic. Much of the popularity and pervasiveness of digital media is linked to the ability to overcome temporal and spatial boundaries and it is difficult to see a literacy event in terms of a particular time and location if literacies straddle what we do onscreen/online and offscreen/offline. We need ways of investigating and understanding literacies as operating across more fluid, hybrid spaces. An (im)materialities perspective is one attempt to do this. This does not mean rejecting notions of situatedness or of literacy events and practices; these ways of understanding literacies continue to provide a powerful counterbalance to the reductivist models of literacy that dominate the literacy policy context in many countries. Nor does an (im)materialities perspective replace other re-workings of situatedness, such as Kell’s focus on the “traffic of texts” across sites (Kell 2011), and Brandt and Clinton’s theory of literacy-in-action which highlights how localised literacy practices are networked with global forces (Brandt and Clinton 2002). An *(im)materialities* lens complements such perspectives with a more disorganised notion of literacies that rests on the idea of multiplicities. If Kell’s work prompts us to look at literacy in terms of linear trajectories, and Brandt and Clinton lead us to see literacy within networks, then the process of (im)materialising literacy – by examining relationships between the material and immaterial – encourages us to see literacy in terms of an entanglement or coalescence of multiple relationships. These multiple relationships may play out in different time-spaces but come together in the subjective moment of meaning-making in different ways for individuals. I argue that this perspective helps capture the complexity of on/offline literacies but also offers a lens to apply more generally in literacy research.

Research informing an (im)materialities lens

Unsettling the situatedness of literacy through a focus on space and materiality

In exploring research informing this (im)materialities lens, I consider first how theories of space have been used to “unsettle” (Sheehy and Leander 2004) perspectives on literacy practices and destabilise assumptions about how literacies are researched and conceptualised, particularly in relation to on/offline practices. The spatial turn in literacy built on an understanding of space as an ongoing construction and an interest in the reflexive relationship between literacies and space, where literacies play a part in the production of spaces as well as being framed by them

(Burnett 2011a, 2011b). In generating theories of space that accommodate what happens both online and offline, Leander and McKim (2003) explore the processes through which people ‘site’ or locate themselves around on- and offline environments. They argue that we need to look across on/offline activity at the processes of space-making rather than seeking to fix literacies in particular locations. The focus should be on flow not stasis. Drawing on actor network theory, they suggest we need to see time and space in terms of interactions between things rather than as defined and bounded:

the study of literacy practices could pull back from a fixation on isolated texts, authors, and isolated textual practices to consider how such texts are related to actual readers, desks and workspaces, writing technologies, classroom rules, clothing, school lunches, calendars, and a whole host of material, symbolic, and human actants that are active in the construction of social space.

(Leander and McKim 2003: 227)

What I want to highlight here is the way Leander and McKim anchor their argument for fluidity in *things*. This de-centres literacy research from a focus on texts and encourages us to see literacies in relation to people and stuff. From this point of view, it is not possible to look at online meaning-making without looking at materiality. However, by referring to people and things, Leander and McKim also encourage us to look out from the bounded and situated and see literacies in relation to diverse relationships between *those* people and things and *other* people and things. A focus on the material, then, does not root literacy research within a particular setting but paradoxically sends out runners to other times and locations, and prompts us to consider: how these other times and locations are significant to how we make meaning in the here-and-now; and how the here-and-now is related to what happens and happened elsewhere. From this perspective, space is fluid and hybrid.

A focus on the fluidity and hybridity of space raises questions about what happens to relationships between the material and immaterial as spaces dissolve, overlay or merge and how relationships between the material and immaterial are significant to how this happens. How is the physical environment relevant to how we navigate online texts, for example? And how do the connections we make online matter to how we experience the immediate physical environment? And ultimately, how do these relationships come together as we make meanings? It is this mattedness that is at the heart of an (im)materialities perspective (Burnett 2011a, 2011b). Below I draw on extant research to illustrate five ways that the material and immaterial may inflect each other in ways that are significant for meaning-making. In order to highlight the point that relationships between the material and immaterial are mutually shaping, or reflexive, I refer to these as *(im)material* relationships. Given that my own work focuses on literacies in classrooms, I draw heavily from studies of everyday school literacies. I suggest however that an (im)materialities lens is equally relevant to everyday meaning-making in other locations.

The five kinds of (im)material relationships described below are intended as examples rather than a definitive set of such relationships; as I hope will become clear, there are many possible (im)material relationships that work at different scales, some spanning large distances in time and location and others more immediate and intimate. As well as illustrating a range of (im)material relationships, however, I attempt to achieve a particular effect by placing them together. I hope they will work for the reader as a “gathering” or “bundling” (Law 2004) of things, roles and practices that speak to each other in different ways. Law describes a “gathering” as connoting “the process of bringing together, relating, picking, meeting, building up, and flowing together”

(Law 2004: 160). By bundling together these relationships I want to emphasise the importance of considering multiplicities. Each prompts us to turn to view the act of meaning-making from a different point of view – zooming in to look at the detail of an individual’s emotions for example, or out to see global flows. I intend this gathering to highlight the complexity of meaning-making and prompt the reader to consider what happens in the subjective moment of meaning-making as different (im)materialities become entangled.

(Im)material relationships

The first (im)material relationship I want to explore is that *between the material things we encounter and the immaterial aims and intentions that have shaped their design*. As Leonardi (2012) explores, materialities have been produced in response to imagined ideas about what could and should be. Specifically the production of digital objects depends on a series of imaginings which generate a “layered architecture” (Yoo 2012: 140) designed at levels including the device, the network and the program. These imaginings reflect economic, political, institutional and cultural exigencies and preferences. One way of seeing the significance of materiality therefore has been to focus on how the material situates us, evoking ways of being that relate to others’ immaterial aims and intentions. Lawn (2005) for example explores how small tools such as pencils operate as technologies to uphold schooling in certain ways and, we might infer, uphold schooled literacy too. New (im)material relationships may be associated with shifts in literacy technologies. When texts are mediated by a laptop for example they become more public and different kinds of interactions may occur.

In digital environments, it is not only the fixed architecture of technology that crosses sites. People’s uses of digital environments in one location can have implications for people’s experience of the same environments in other locations. Prinsloo and Walton (2008) for example, describe the experience of young South African children using the internet noting what happens when users in “socially marginal settings make use of resources designed in the centre” (p. 107). Google’s search algorithm, ostensibly designed to generate search results which reflect users’ most common interests and preferences, in practice reflects searching trends in countries with high computer usage. Consequently, the South African children observed were unlikely to access sites created by local people or relevant to their immediate concerns. This brings us to a second (im)material relationship: *the material conditions of life in one location can persist immaterially in another location*.

Of course the significance of literacy objects to meaning-making is not just shaped in terms of the intentions that shaped their production, but recruited to individuals’ own purposes. Prinsloo and Walton recognise children’s agency in making digital resources work for them, perhaps in unanticipated ways, and urge us to conceptualise literacies, and digital practices in particular, as “placed resources” (Prinsloo 2005) seen in terms of local material conditions. This leads to a third (im)material relationship, *between materialities and the immaterial purposes and priorities of users*. Things only come into use as people improvise with them in particular contexts – materiality is social (Orlikowski 2007). Wohlwend’s analysis of primary children’s use of the virtual environment Webkinz during an after-school club demonstrates how improvisations occur off- and onscreen (Wohlwend *et al.* 2011). We could see their actions in the world as inflected by a coming together of the material present and immaterial imaginings about what they wanted to do and their experience of using Webkinz elsewhere. Wohlwend and colleagues note how children’s responses to club rules about use of sound and sharing a screen, and their desire to connect online with friends physically nearby, were all significant to how they engaged with Webkinz in this very specific location.

The significance of literacy objects however is not just in their institutional meanings or in how they are re-worked in the moment. Other (im)material relationships are shaped by individuals' personal experiences from different times and places. Things can be holders of personal meaning. This highlights a fourth (im)material relationship: *between material things and immaterial memories and feelings*. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) explore how artefacts, as remnants, souvenirs or representations of significant experiences or affiliations, can evoke other times and places. They are traces of our experiences and ways of being in the world. Pahl notes particularly how media carry cultural meanings. For the families she studied, texts produced through weaving, embroidering or sewing were infused with the associations and significance of the media themselves (Pahl 2012). When considering meaning-making around texts – digital or not – we need to recognise the significance of felt associations, prior experience and emotion. These are evoked multimodally as we handle as well as view and create texts. Rowsell (2011) draws on theories of multimodality to highlight the significance of our phenomenological responses to the modal affordances of things, places and texts: to colour, texture, smell and so on. So, materialities are not only significant to how we arrange ourselves in the material world – and the kinds of relationships and meanings that are significant as we do so – but also in the way they evoke felt – or immaterial – connections to other meanings and associations wrought in other times and places.

Mackey (2010, 2011) also considers what happens as literacies cross sites, exploring her childhood readings of novels, picture books and television programmes produced far away from Newfoundland where she lived. (Im)material relationships foregrounded by her work include a fifth relationship *between embodied interactions with the material environment and immaterial imaginings generated by texts*. Whilst inevitably filtered through memory, Mackey carefully locates her childhood literacies in relation to the social, cultural and economic context but also describes the exuberance with which she re-worked television shows and stories when playing outside with her siblings and neighbours. Her accounts of these re-workings, or re-playings, capture the significance of personal relationships, embodiment and affect to interactions with texts. Her focus on the emotional resonance of place encourages us to look at literacies in terms of the personal threads of experience that weave through our interactions with texts. This highlights how our experience of things may not map neatly onto the institutional meanings associated with dominant discourses.

In the examples provided here, we see how interactions between the material and immaterial – between bodies and things and intentions, purposes and imaginings – are significant to meaning-making. Some of these (im)material relationships represent global flows linked to the prior imaginings of unknown others. Others arise from improvisations in the moment generated through current imaginings of what could be, and others from individual trajectories building on personal or shared experiences. In each case texts, whether digital or not, sit in a range of (im)material relationships associated with screens, objects, furniture and so on, all of which could be seen as mediating different flows of meaning. An (im)materialities lens highlights how meaning-making will be inflected by all these (im)material relationships, and many others too, such as those linked to how individuals' immaterial imaginings and relationships frame what they create on screen or on paper, how arrangements of bodies reflect and reinforce different kinds of relationships, and how users come to believe in the immaterial worlds mediated by material screens (much as they come to believe in immaterial worlds mediated by the pages of a book).

In examining meaning-making then we might zoom in to consider the physical relationship between individuals and equipment – how devices are held and bodies arranged – as well as other stuff (objects, furniture, bodies). We might also zoom out to think about how all these

things and texts are connected to people's activities and intentions in other times and places through chains of events – including the 'traffic of texts' (Kell 2011) – each generated through specific economic, social and political conditions. We might focus on people's relationships with the screen itself and the texts displayed, zooming right in to try and understand sensory dimensions of meaning-making – the smooth touch as finger glosses iPad, for example, the bright flashes of colour and bursts of sound as images are clicked or moved, as well as affect generated as texts are encountered or produced – the fascination, irritation or hilarity for example – evoked through doing, seeing and hearing all of this. And of course this may take us out again to other times and places conjured by individuals and groups as they make sense of the text in light of their experiences or seek to achieve something through the texts they produce – maybe to amuse or please themselves or others. This to-ing and fro-ing takes us from material to immaterial and back again. It oscillates between: the specific and the general; the now, then and next; the local and the global; the discursive and the felt. Importantly, though, each perspective gains something from a probing of the relationship between the material and the immaterial. Each perspective allows us to look at relationships between material and immaterial slightly differently, but together they suggest the multiple and fluid ways in which these relationships may be significant.

Recognising multiplicities through (im)materialities

As stated earlier my intention was to use this 'gathering' of studies to prompt the reader to keep shifting his/her attention to focus on many different ways in which the material may inflect the immaterial and vice versa but also to see what happens as these relationships entangle with each other. If we accept this (im)material perspective, then the process of meaning-making becomes highly complex and multilayered. It suggests we need to take into account multiple ways that the material – bodies, artefacts, screens as well as texts – frame how we make meanings but at the same time see the material itself as inflected by all sorts of imaginings, feelings and processes. It prompts us to see literacies in terms of a mess of people, artefacts, tools and relationships, and recognise multiplicities, as "different realities overlap and interfere with each other" (Law 2004: 61).

Importantly this perspective highlights the significance of both structure and affect. It relies on what we might call a *fluid materiality* in which the significance of the material is multiple, allowing us to see how very personal dimensions of meaning-making inflect and are inflected by broader social, cultural, economic and institutional movements as different time-spaces interact. Objects, texts, architecture and bodies can all be seen both in terms of institutional, political and economic flows (as in Prinsloo's and Lawn's work) and in terms of emotionally laden memories and associations (as in Mackey's, Pahl's and Rowsell's work). Of course, as Wetherall (2012) reminds us, the affective *is* discursive; our responses reflect certain identity positions and ways of understanding and structuring the world. However, I suggest that this oscillation between structure and affect reminds us to keep locating literacy not just in terms of the workings of power in relation to economic, institutional and political concerns, but in terms of felt experiences of texts and the people, places and things that surround them. It suggests we need to see literacies in terms of what Pink (2009: 23) calls, "both the politics of space and the phenomenology of place."

As I suggested in the opening to this chapter, a focus on (im)materialising literacies prompts us to look differently at our understandings of the literacy event and of literacy as situated. From this perspective, as soon as we identify a literacy event it dissolves before our eyes, connected in multiple ways to other materialities and imaginings. An (im)materialities perspective suggests

that every player in a literacy ‘event’ (text, technology, other equipment, people, places) needs to be seen in terms of both its materiality and its immateriality. Each is there but each also evokes things, people, places, texts and experiences that are not there. Guy Merchant and I (2014) have drawn on the work of Law (2004) to articulate this contradictory idea in terms of ‘fractals’, meaning things that sit in more than one world but less than two. Everything is always at once material and immaterial and there are multiple ways in which these materialities and immaterialities spark each other. This means that we need to see literacies as rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), sitting within complex interconnecting and interweaving relationships with other times and places. In addition to considering the situatedness of literacies, it may therefore be helpful to think in terms of *coalescence* and *dispersal*. By coalescence, I mean what happens as different sources of meaning deriving from different time-spaces, and the associations and possibilities they enable, come together in any moment. By dispersal, I mean the varied ways in which runners reach out in multiple ways to other times and spaces. It may be appropriate to think of the literacy event in terms of an *encounter* to highlight how different practices cut across and intersect in any moment. Rather than (or in addition to) focusing on the continuities evident through analyses of practices, we might focus on the complexity of meaning-making as multiplicities intersect.

Researching from an (im)materialities perspective

Through examining reflexive relationships between the material and immaterial and seeing these in terms of both structure and affect, this messy (im)materialities perspective prompts us to seek out complexities, contradictions and multiple perspectives. As such it remains inevitably aspirational. How can we ever capture individuals’ felt experience or arrive at a definitive map of all the multiplicities that circulate and traverse any instance of meaning-making? However certain methodological approaches allow us to edge towards an (im)materialities perspective.

First we need to “look down” (Kwa 2002) to focus on the details of what people do and see, how broader local, global factors play out in their experience, combining a consideration of the affective with an analysis of the discursive. Pink’s work on “sensory ethnography” offers rich opportunities to do this (Pink 2009). A researcher engaged in sensory ethnography tries to occupy a similar place to research participants, gaining an embodied perspective of their experience. Pink (2009: 79) argues that methods such as “walking with” participants and “location specific interviews” can help the researcher interpret sensory experiences in a similar way to those being researched, whilst remaining reflexively aware of how her/his own sensory responses have been shaped culturally and experientially. Building on this work, Pahl and Rowsell (2010) combine ethnography and multimodality in their literacies research, seeing the relevance of, for example, “the feel of the page, the sound of the voice talking” to meaning-making (Pahl and Rowsell 2010: 5).

Second, we need to disrupt the boundaries of literacies and see them from different points of view. Masny and Cole (2012) explore how the process of “mapping multiple literacies” can challenge linear or unitary ideas about literacy practices. They draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s work to suggest we develop *cartographies* as a way of recognising the multiple literacies of individuals and groups. This involves mapping different kinds of connections, associations and felt experiences associated with meaning-making and exploring possible “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) that seem to offer other ways of conceptualising or engaging in literacies. We see such approaches at work in Leander and Rowe’s rhizomatic analysis of student presentations through which they unsettle taken-for-granted ideas about what is happening when students formally share work with peers in class. They argue that, “Rhizoanalysis

transforms our focus on the interaction as a stable ‘text’ to be ‘read’ and interprets it as a constantly moving configuration that is ripe with potential for divergent movements” (Leander and Rowe 2006: 435).

In a similar attempt to trouble unitary descriptions of literacies, Guy Merchant and I (2014) have suggested using ‘stacking stories’ to interrogate the multiplicities of meaning-making around a seemingly shared experience. This process involves generating stories from different points of view, which represent “walks” (Law 2004) through what happened. As these stories are placed – or stacked – together we see how different perspectives intersect and diverge and how the threads of each story play out (or not) in others. Rather than helping to construct holistic or even ecological insights, this process aims to enable multiple ways of conceptualising what is happening during any instance of meaning-making.

Recommendations for practice

The idea of digital as ‘other’ still permeates the way we talk about online practices. In everyday life we ‘go’ online and ‘visit’ websites. This is particularly the case within schools where opportunities to use digital media are often still a departure from the norm. The (im)materialities lens helps us see new technologies within broader networks, pegged to the physical and often very everyday stuff that mediates and surrounds meaning-making, but also entangled with multiple experiences, thoughts, processes and feelings. In my own work, I have begun to explore the implications of this by considering school technology use in terms of a ‘classroom-ness’ that both recognises how new technology gets configured when ‘placed’ in classrooms, but also sees classrooms themselves as fluid and hybrid. The physical environment is significant but classroom spaces are slippery, multiple and have permeable boundaries; spaces shift and the subjective matters (Burnett 2011b, 2014a). Looking at the ‘classroom-ness’ of new technology use can help us look differently at what children are doing when they use digital media, and at their embodied interactions with material resources available. This highlights how the meanings they make are inflected by social and cultural movements – understandings of school and what constitutes school and schooled literacy – but also by individual experiences and feelings which in turn may be framed by culturally specific meanings.

This has implications for literacy education more generally. At the time of writing, literacy policies in many countries rely on models of literacy which assume linear progression in the acquisition of literacy skills. Literacy is assessed in terms of pre-specified measures of attainment, used to evaluate the effectiveness of schools and teachers. An (im)materialities perspective suggests that such policies over-simplify what children are doing and what matters to them as they make meaning. It highlights the significance of a whole range of things, people, places, stuff, feelings and so on. It alerts us to the different resources children draw on as they create meanings in classrooms and the things that get in the way. In doing so, it can help identify possibilities to recognise the very personal ways in which texts – and the practices and artefacts associated with them – may be significant to children. Developing children’s use of all texts, including new media, is not just about how we structure lessons, teach skills and provide access to resources, but careful attention to how meaning-making sits within multiple networks of people and things, and considering the affective as well as the discursive.

Future directions

An (im)materialities lens brings together perspectives which conceptualise relationships between the material and immaterial in different ways. Bringing this to the study of digital media practices

helps us conceptualise how on/offline and on/offscreen are “co-constructed, hybridised and embedded within one another” (Leander and McKim 2003: 213). It de-centres the study of digital practices from the study of what is happening onscreen and prompts us to see them in terms of multiple (im)material relationships. There is more work to be done to explore *how* materialities and immaterialities intersect and diverge and how this plays out for meaning-making by individuals and groups. For example, do notions of gender, class, ethnicity and (dis)ability map onto (im)material relations, the kinds of meanings that are made, and the kinds of meanings that are recognised? If so, how? And what are the means through which literacy *comes to appear* singular and fixed in educational practice, curricula and policy? If the (im)materialities lens prompts us to see meaning-making in terms of a mess of multiplicities, then we need to consider how and why certain meanings become foregrounded and backgrounded for individuals, and which kinds of meanings are recognised and privileged (Burnett 2014b). This is important if we are to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about what literacy is or might be. An (im)materialities lens can help us see how coalescences and dispersals sometimes work to reinforce dominant power relations but also sometimes to generate new possibilities. While I have used this approach to look at school-based examples, an (im)materialities lens has much to offer the study of literacies and everyday meaning-making across other sites.

To conclude, an (im)materialities perspective is a messy one, but one that I propose does have implications for how we conceive, research and support literacies. Whilst the idea of (im)materialising literacy began as a way of analysing meaning-making on/offline and on/offscreen, this process of looking at the everyday entanglement of the material and immaterial has implications for how we think about literacies more generally. Rather than focusing on specific practices and events, it prompts us to look at the complex mess or mat of relationships between the imagined and the apparent, and to see these relationships in terms of the local and the global, the now, then and next. It unsettles and disrupts over-simplistic and bounded notions of what counts in literacy and encourages us to see this mess of movements in time and space in terms of a fluid materiality inflected by both structure and affect.

Related topics

New Literacy Studies, Space-focused approaches, Post-modern approaches, Virtual spaces, Artefactual literacies.

Further reading

Burnett, C., Merchant, G., Pahl, K. and Rowsell, J. (2014) The (im)materiality of literacy: The significance of subjectivity to new literacies research, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 35(1): 90–103.

Explores theoretical perspectives informing (im)materialities perspective with reference to single vignette.

Law, J. and Mol, A. (eds) (2002) *Complexities: Social Studies of Knowledge Practices*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

An edited collection of chapters which study complexity within a variety of contexts.

Leander, K. and McKim, K. (2003) Tracing the everyday ‘sittings’ of adolescents on the internet: A strategic adaptation of ethnography across online and offline spaces, *Education, Communication and Information*, 3(2): 211–240.

Presents a series of theoretical tools for examining ‘siting’ across on/offline contexts.

Masny, D. and Cole, D. (2012) *Mapping Multiple Literacies: An Introduction to Deleuzian Literacy Studies*, London: Continuum.

Useful introduction to application of Deleuzian ideas to study of literacy with implications for practice.

Pink, S. (2009) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, London: Sage.

Outlines theoretical, methodological and practical considerations for using sensory ethnography.

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS, PARTICIPATORY ETHNOGRAPHY AND EMBODIED KNOWING WITHIN LITERACY STUDIES

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Even though there is a well-established literature on participatory practice, how theories of participatory research are implemented in practice, and how ‘participatory’ these actually are nevertheless remains a contentious area.

(Franks 2009: 16)

Introduction

School-based participatory ethnography informed by poststructural feminist methodology challenges traditional, positivist ways of doing research and requires that as researchers we work collaboratively, alongside the youth and their teachers in their daily activities both in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Drawing on multimodal data (audiotaped individual and focus group interviews, fieldnotes, video of practice and performance, and artefacts), this chapter introduces a participatory ethnography that explores the language and literacy experiences of English language learners (ELLs) in urban high school drama classrooms.

The study took place in three high school drama classrooms. One was a drama classroom designed specifically for adult English language learners completing their Ontario secondary school diplomas. The second was a grade 10/11 drama classroom in a highly multicultural, multilingual inner city technical school, where 56 per cent of students had a primary language other than English. The third was in a short (quad-based) nine-week semestered high school programme for ‘at risk’ youth.

This chapter focuses on the two main aspects of this study. The first is a methodological focus, discussing the significance of *participatory ethnography* that allowed the researcher not just to enter into the drama classroom activities alongside the student participants, but also, through “deep hanging out” (as termed by Geertz 1998) and transparency, with the resulting co-

construction of knowledge, to explore their everyday experiences and language and literacy learning in these contexts. The second is drawing attention to the *embodied* experiences of these students, theoretically informed by the scholarship on phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1962 [1945]), as well as the intersections of literacies and multimodality (Jewitt 2008; Jewitt and Kress 2003; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; New London Group 1996; Pahl 2003, 2007; Pahl and Rowsell 2011 [2005], 2006, 2010; Rowsell 2013; Rowsell and Pahl 2007; Street *et al.* 2009) that takes account of what Gee termed as *discourses* (language in use) and *Discourses* (language plus other “forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes” (Gee 1996 [1990]: 127).

Historical perspectives: from ethnography to participatory ethnography

Given what is increasingly being revealed about the crucial importance of relationships in learning, ethnographic approaches are uniquely positioned to examine the nature of connections and social relationships both within and across school-community contexts.

(Smyth 2006: 34)

Educational researchers have argued for the potential of ethnographic research to examine the educative relationships among young people, their teachers and school cultures (Fine 1994; Gallagher 2007; Heath 1983; Sloan 2007; Smyth 2006). Ethnographic research aims to intensively describe the rich complexities of the everyday lives of a social group. Gallagher (2007: 175) writes: “As ethnographers, we have the privilege, unlike most teachers, of entering the classroom and freely admitting that we have no particular plan or expectation of how it will all turn out”. Gallagher argues for a “problem-posing ethnography” (*ibid.*), a “porous methodology” (2008: 72) often driven by the needs and necessities in the field. In my research sites my relationships to the classrooms, field, teachers and students were multifaceted and formed in response to the needs and power dynamics in the classroom. Chaudhry discusses this shifting multiple subject positioning of the researcher drawing from poststructural and postcolonial frameworks stating that:

theories that fall under the rubric of poststructuralism as well as postcolonialism generally stress the fluid nature of identity and are built around the notion of self as multiple and contingent on the working of power relations informing a particular context.

(2000: 110)

From the perspective of the teacher, in addition to the role of the participant observer, my background as an educator of both ESL and drama at times positioned me as a co-teacher, assisting the students, supporting the learning that was happening in the classroom, and sometimes as a colleague with whom they could reflect on the day’s teaching and co-conceive pedagogical possibilities for subsequent days. From the perspective of the students, my own experiences as both an English language educator and English language learner provided opportunities for them to discuss their language learning with me. The formal and informal conversations we had inside and outside the classroom and during focus groups and individual interviews provided a context in which students sometimes regarded me as a peer, sometimes as a teacher, and sometimes as a researcher who was interested in co-constructing knowledge of their learning experiences in these contexts. Of course, this co-construction of knowledge, despite the participatory nature of this research that aims to be democratic and non-hierarchical, was not completely devoid of the power differential inherent in these roles.

Brown asserts that ethnography:

instead of discovering the limits of the human, can study the processes by which the human is defined in local practice, how belonging and identity is constructed, how alterity and exclusion are produced, and how these shift in on-going practice.

(2003: 74)

Contemporary ethnographic research seeks an ‘emic’/insider’s perspective that provides “thick descriptions”, conveying the subjective reality of the interior world of participants (Geertz 1973). Through this ethnographic research, the goals were to present a comprehensive, contextual and thick description of the drama classroom culture(s) in these schools (Geertz 1973; Pole and Morrison 2003) and to examine how teaching practices in these three classrooms where drama pedagogy was used impacted the learning and literacy and social performances of ELL students.

This ethnography looked at the relationship of drama pedagogy to both the literacy and social performances of ELLs, viewing language, culture(s), identity(ies) and other social positionings such as race, class and gender as interconnected. Norton and Toohey (2004: 1) state that “language is not just a means of expression or communication; rather, it is a practice that constructs and is constructed by the way language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, their possibilities for the future”. This view of language and literacy is also supported by New Literacy Studies scholars, who define literacy as a social practice that “entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power” (Street 2003: 77). In order to fully understand the language and literacy experiences of the ELLs in this study, the goal was not to focus our attention to specific linguistic components of literacy learning, such as vocabulary and syntax, but to take into account a broader range of their everyday experience that historically and socially situates these learners and pays attention to their identities, knowledges, beliefs, goals and future dreams, which all inform their literacy learning and performance.

This study was not traditional, positivist ethnographic research; rather, it had a critical theoretical approach informed by poststructural feminist methodology. Ethnography refers to the methodology beyond tools used for data collection (methods), encompassing “theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the research” (Pole and Morrison 2003: 5). The theoretical framework for this research is informed by critical theories and poststructural feminism that look at the power and empowerment issues in school settings, reflective of the same issues in society at large (Banks 1991; Britzman 2000; Cummins 2001; Ellsworth 1997; Fine 1994; Freire 2006 [1970]; Giroux 1992; hooks 1994; Lather 2000, 2001, 2008; Mirza 2009; St. Pierre and Pillow 2000).

Ethnographic research forces researchers to situate data in their sociocultural, historical and political contexts. Ethnographic research that has a critical theoretical approach treats culture as heterogeneous, fluid, negotiated and interpretive. While trying to answer my research questions, I made concerted efforts to address how social and cultural capital factor into relationships between the teachers and ELLs. Here I draw on Dance’s (2002: 72) definitions. Dance defines social capital as “resources that result from social relationships among individuals, families, communal groups, social networks, and the like” and cultural capital as “the linguistic and cultural competencies of the dominant group in society”. Critical researchers in education have often written about how (intentionally or unintentionally) educational policies, schools and teachers reproduce relations of power and inequality that exist in the society (Cummins 2001; Janks 2000; Muspratt *et al.* 2002). Giroux (2002: 43)

suggests that we need to address the question of “how power works through discourses and social relations, particularly as they affect youth who are marginalised economically, racially, [linguistically (my insertion)] and politically”. The students whose experiences I describe in this chapter allude to how being in the linguistic minority creates a sense of marginalisation that affects all aspects of their school lives and their sense of self as learners in general, and as language and literacy learners in particular. Questions of power and representation are vital questions especially when working with marginalised populations. Britzman writes: “For poststructuralists, representation is always in crisis, knowledge is constitutive of power, and agency is the constitutive effect, and not the originator, of situated practices and histories” (2000: 30). She explains that poststructuralism challenges the ethnographer’s confidence in “knowing” and explains that “for the poststructuralists, ‘being there’ does not guarantee access to truth” (p. 32). Poststructural feminist ethnography is concerned with the problems of crisis of representation and “accountability to stories that belong to others” (Lather 2000: 285). In response to this concern of the potential of Othering and crisis of representation, participatory ethnography offers a chance to co-construct knowledge with the participants in order to interrupt master narratives. It is important, however, to note here that total participation in research “is in all probability a false goal” (Franks 2009: 18). Based on Franks’ argument, “the way forward is to aim at pockets of participation”. Franks suggests to make the research process “more transparent and intentional, built into the research design” (ibid.).

Critical issues: ethical considerations and the importance of transparency in researcher–participant relationships

In this section I discuss participatory ethnography especially highlighting the significance of (1) the day-to-dayness of participatory ethnography; and (2) researcher transparency and reimagining participant–researcher relationships through a focus on deep hanging out beyond the classroom. I would like to begin this section with one lengthy fieldnote about an experience that had a major impact in forming my thoughts about methodology, and on my practices in the field throughout this research:

I had a wonderful conversation with the drama/ESL teacher at Middleview yesterday. I was introduced to this teacher the previous semester by one of the teachers who works in the same ESL programme. After I gave details about my research, she expressed how happy and excited she was to hear that somebody is researching the language and literacy learning experiences of ELLs in drama classrooms. Since the new semester was just beginning, we talked about her teaching, what she had done previously with these students, what her plans were for this semester. She showed me some artefacts of her previous students’ work. She also told me that she is a teacher familiar with research. She said that unfortunately her previous experience was not a pleasant one because she felt like she was betrayed by the researcher and she could not get out of the project despite her discomfort, because of power relations between this teacher and the person who convinced her to take part in the research. At the end of this previous research she felt like she was taken advantage of. I could see how she was affected by that experience in her face and in her shaky hands. I felt very sorry that she had gone through this very unprofessional and oppressive research process. I clarified that my research project was very different. I explained to her the details of this participatory ethnography and that my goal is to engage in co-construction of knowledge with my teacher and student participants and to constantly be in an open

dialogue about my observations, analysis and writing. I also showed her my consent forms and explained that, as a participant, she could withdraw from my research any time during the process. She looked comforted after these explanations. Then the conversation started to have the same cheerful and exciting tone that it had at the beginning. We talked about the details of the research. We scheduled the best days for me to come and observe. Since her students are all beginner level students (half of them are under 18), we planned that when we send the consent forms to parents, it would be a good idea to translate them into their own language. We decided that it would be a good idea for me to come every day that week. We parted, agreeing that I would come the next day (today).

When I came back today, the teacher said that she needed to talk to me. She explained that she could not sleep all night because just the idea of being involved in another research project brought back all the memories of the previous research that she tried hard to put behind her many years ago. The research project she was involved with was extremely bad for her mental and physical health. She explained that when she shared the news about participating in another research project with her family members, they strongly opposed the idea, because they feared that it would be very bad for her health. She explained that she is terrified of starting more research, even though she thinks that my study is valuable and she believes that it is very different from the previous one. I was of course disappointed that I wasn't going to be able to work with this wonderful teacher and her students, but at the same time I completely understood and respected her decision...

When I left the school that day, I found myself thinking and reading about research and 'the researcher-participant' relationships all day. I found the writings of Tom Newkirk and Gesa E. Kirsch especially helpful. In his article titled "Seductions and betrayal in qualitative research" in the edited book *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy*, Newkirk (1996) writes that researchers can put participants in vulnerable positions despite their best intentions. He provides examples from different studies where researchers first gained trust – which he calls "seduced" – but then the same researchers were critical of participants' attitudes, assumptions and teaching practices in their final report in print. Newkirk explains that researchers usually don't share their criticisms until they complete the writing of their research. For example, when researchers observe teaching practices that seem ineffective, instead of trying to avoid the negative – which he calls the "bad news" (p. 12) – and screening it from the research report, like many researchers do, and which ends up making the research dishonest and "research as advocacy" – the researchers have an ethical responsibility to communicate and bring up these issues or questions with the teachers (their participants) and "should grant the teacher (and when relevant her students) the opportunity to respond to interpretations of problematical situations. When those being studied have access to the researcher's emerging questions and interpretations, there is an opportunity to offer counter-interpretations or provide mitigating information." He continues to write that "ideally those exchanges should be part of the data gathering and not be postponed for the time when a full manuscript has been prepared. My experience is that, at that point, research 'subjects' may be reluctant to amend a report that seems final." (p. 13)

(Researcher's fieldnote, Middleview, 10 October 2008)

An important goal for this research project was to have a participatory and collaborative methodology. As researchers we are constantly developing our relationship with our participants. Even after we gain official permission and have our participants sign the consent form, they have the option to refuse to take part and can decide to stop participating any time. Ongoing negotiation, transparency and developing a trusting relationship are especially important for longitudinal qualitative research for which the participant(s)'s commitment is needed for an extended amount of time. Since as researchers we are asking participants to share a part of their life with us, it is important to be able to establish a healthy relationship that involves trust and ongoing communication, negotiation and co-construction of knowledge.

This study was a school-based, multi-sited ethnographic research. Genzuk writes about the ethnographic research process as inductive, discovery-based and unstructured:

in the sense that it does not involve following through a detailed plan up at the beginning; nor are the categories used for interpreting what people say and do pre-given or fixed. This does not mean that the research is unsystematic; simply that initially the data are collected in as raw a form, and on as wide a front, as feasible.

(2003: 4)

Here, he is speaking of the day-to-dayness of ethnographic research. At the heart of fieldwork lies human relationships and “deep hanging out” which refers to visiting the sites often and on a regular basis, hanging out with the teachers and students, and engaging in ongoing co-analysis (Emerson *et al.* 1995; Geertz 1973).

To offer an example of the day-to-dayness of ethnographic research, it was not possible to go into the drama-ESL classroom in this high school, although this had been my plan at the outset. It was these early collaborations that allowed me to better acknowledge participant-researcher relationships. What resulted was not what I had initially hoped for, because I was not given access to the Middleview drama-ESL classroom for beginner learners (ESL A-level). I knew that this was the only drama-ESL class offered at Middleview. But through conversations with teachers in the other site (Braeburn), I was informed about another drama-ESL course – not one for regular high school students, as I had planned to visit originally, but a drama-ESL course designed for adult high school students at Braeburn within the programme of daytime Canadian high schools for adults (students over twenty-one), which grant Ontario secondary school diplomas. With the addition of this class to my research sites, I found myself with the opportunity to see the continuum of high school experiences, right from adolescence to adulthood.

Current contributions: exploring literacy and embodied knowing through participatory ethnography

When I speak English, I feel different, and difficult... but when I dance I feel the same and I feel confident, like a language.

(Kitty, student interview, Middleview, 2 April 2009)

I devoted the first school semester to preliminary classroom visits and pre-observation time to familiarise myself with the two school sites and to build a profile of each site. In the second school semester, I spent a minimum of two hours each week, for four months, in each teacher's classroom. For ethnographic research, it is important to devote time for long-term observations to obtain rich data. These long-term, deep sessions of ‘hanging out’ are also important since

over time, those in the setting become habituated to the presence of the researcher. I agree with Esterberg (2002: 72) that: "If you spend enough time in the field, it is likely that people will eventually come to behave as they ordinarily would, or at least approximately so". In this study, elements of transparency were added to this process of 'deep hanging out' by positioning participants as co-researchers and co-constructing knowledge with these co-researchers.

By following the messiness of the day-to-day, I found by chance the informants who became an important part of this study and took my research into directions that I would not have anticipated. For example, I not only observed classes but I also 'hung out' with students during their lunch breaks and special events, such as the culture fest and job fair events. These informal conversations during these events outside the classroom walls helped me to get to know the students on a more personal level. For example, during the job fair, some students from the drama-ESL class from Braeburn were too intimidated to go and ask questions on their own and they wanted me to go with them. I helped them verbalise their questions and fill out forms about possible careers that they were interested in. Scholars have written about the significance of space and place in participatory and sensory ethnography (Christensen 2003; Pahl 2012; Pahl and Allan 2011; Pink 2009). Pahl and Allan argue that "an understanding of place is critical to recognise the way in which children inhabit and use the spaces of literacy practices" (2011: 190). Similarly, Pink (2009) stresses the significance of sensory emplaced learning in research. She explains that "such forms of ethnographic learning are characteristic of 'participant sensing', where the ethnographer simultaneously undergoes a series of unplanned everyday life experiences" (p. 67). She adds that such forms of participation involve different forms of movement and mobility that our research participants are also involved in such as walking, eating etc. She argues that this kind of "participation through 'being there' in a shared physical environment" (ibid.) and the multisensory experience of movements such as walking together as a rich participatory methodology. She explains that this kind of multisensory emplaced learning challenges some of the traditional researcher-participant power dynamics that exist, for example, during a formal structured interview where the researcher asks questions, the participant answers. Pink argues that the idea that mobility, such as moving, walking, eating with others "creates an affinity, empathy, sense of belonging with them" (p. 76).

When I went to the culture fest on the invitation of an ESL teacher at Middleview whom I had just interviewed, she introduced me to an ELL student, Kitty, who had previously taken her drama-ESL class. I had a chance to interview Kitty a couple of days later. Kitty was an ELL student who had arrived in Canada from China twenty-nine months before, when she was eighteen. She did not speak English at the time. In the interview, she discussed the heartbreaking language, economic, psychological and social difficulties she had experienced in Canada. At the time of the interview she was twenty and still needed to complete her grade 10, 11 and 12 English, language and maths classes to be able to start thinking about college or university. She pointed to how she felt completely isolated and voiceless in her life because she felt incompetent with her English: "They always 'pardon me'. When I speak, they always say 'Pardon'. And some people are not so nice. They say 'AHHH, never mind!'" In contrast, Kitty explained how much the physical language of 'body-knowing' and dance in her life made her feel capable and powerful. I certainly was not expecting my research, the goal of which was to understand students' experiences of learning language and literacies, to challenge me to make connections between language, literacy and dance. Kitty elaborated that through dance, she felt that for the first time she could express herself in a sophisticated way, in a language that everybody else could understand. She said whenever she opened her mouth in English, she felt she was judged, "When I speak in English, I can't help others and I can't even help myself." She felt completely worthless as a human being when she spoke in English. But when she danced, she found that

she could not only express herself and feel confident about this, but she could also help others through her dancing. Kitty explained that she volunteered to dance for the Canadian Cancer Society at Sick Kids Hospital. She said she wanted to help these kids and make them feel better through her dancing. She wanted “more people to know that we should care about them.” Only after this body-knowing and this new-found language through her dance could she begin to entertain the feeling that “there is hope for me”:

For me like when I speak English, I feel different, and difficult, because I am the kid from another country. I feel like not the same. But when I dance I feel the same and I feel confident, like a language. I can feel confident. I can turn my skill to help other people. Because I always need help, so I know to help other people is so important. So when I help other people I feel happy too.

(Kitty, student interview, Middleview, 2 April 2009)

By including the teacher-participants into the research space by being open and transparent about the research questions, aspirations and inviting them into the co-thinking process in research, I was able to co-construct knowledge with my engaged teacher informants. Including these elements of ‘deep hanging out’, participating in ‘multisensory emplaced learning’ inside and outside the classroom, and being transparent about the research positions participants as willing co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge.

After this interview with Kitty, where we talked about language, drama and embodied expression, she invited me to her drama-dance class. One of the drama teachers involved in my research also invited me to see the performances of two other ESL students in this drama-dance class, which she was co-teaching:

Hi Burcu,

I just wanted to tell you that 2 of the girls in the dance group performed solo pieces that they had created based on a sound that triggered a memory for them. For one girl, the memory was based on the sound of applause which reminded her of her last night in Iran when friends threw a party for her. She used Turkish music and danced this incredible dance that had Persian dance influences.

The second girl danced a piece inspired by the sound of thunder when her plane to Canada when she was moving from Greece got delayed and there was a lot of anxiety related to family members. She created a dance with Greek influences and music.

Both dances were incredible and exactly illustrate your concept of how personal narrative can be released through the body and expressed in ways that are non-linguistic and yet enhance the learning of English.

Maybe you can come in and video-tape them and ask the girls to talk about their experience doing it.

I think it will blow your mind!

Just thought I'd let you know...

(Ms S, 13 April 2009)

Methodologically, the dance-group invitation incident is significant for multiple reasons. One is that it illustrates the day-to-dayness of ethnographic research. Second, it illustrates the importance of ‘deep hanging out’. And more importantly, it points to the significance of transparency with our participants and the co-construction of knowledge. In the message, the teacher wrote: “Both dances ... exactly illustrate your concept of how personal narrative can be released through the body and expressed in ways that are non-linguistic and yet enhance the learning of English”, since she knew of my particular interest in multiliteracies and multiple modes of meaning making, especially the embodied. Both Kitty and the drama teacher invited me to this other class because of the transparency of my conversations about the research, which meant that they had both been invited to participate in co-constructing knowledge. And unexpectedly I was in yet another class that would prove to be instructive to my research. But without these multiple layers of unplanned encounters, the study would have been less significant. In her book, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, Pink writes about the importance of these unplanned sensory moments of learning and explains that:

often moments of sensory learning are not necessarily planned processes through which a particular research question is pursued in a structured way as it might be in the context of a survey or even a semi-structured interview. Rather, these are often unplanned instances whereby the researcher arrives at an understanding of other people’s memories and meanings through their own embodied experiences and/or attending to other people’s practices, subjectivities and explanations.

(2009: 65)

The teacher and Kitty were right. I was deeply impacted by the embodied narratives through dance that took place in this class and their intertextual and multimodal nature. As the drama teacher predicted, the two ELL students’ dance narratives did blow my mind. I later conducted a focus group with these two students and the teacher who was responsible for the dance choreography for the dance-drama course, about embodied learning and “body-knowing”. Merleau-Ponty offers the term “body-knowing” to describe the interconnectedness between body, action, space and consciousness that is neither metaphysical nor only dependent on the mind/the intellect, challenging dualistic notions of body and mind. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962 [1945]) provided an exploration and analysis of movement and space, and explained that the body is the origin of expressive movement and is the source through which we perceive the world. Merleau-Ponty challenged the simplistic notions of space and body, stressing that the body is the author of space and that:

with regard to our own body, what is true of all perceived things: that the perception of space and the perception of the thing, the spatiality of the thing and its being as a third are not two distinct problems.... Intellectualism clearly sees that the ‘motive of the thing’ and ‘the motive of space’ are interwoven, but reduces the former to the latter.

(1962 [1945]: 148)

The dances of the two ELLs (Steph and Shahla) illustrated that the material world and the perceived world in fact coexist through the embodied experience that Merleau-Ponty wrote about. The dances also made us aware of the ‘leakage’ between space and time, and the “passage of the one into the other” (Grosz 2001: 110). Steph’s dance in the present inhabited space and contained lived experiences of past inhabited spaces, illustrating Rogoff’s notion of multi-

inhabitation (2000) of multiple co-existing spaces. In the interview, Steph described her inspiration for the dance as “her memory of thunder” the night she left her country to come to Canada with her mother:

When I was in Greece. I have stepdad. He raised me basically. After 10 years we had to go to Canada because my mom felt like my education is going to grow better in Canada than in Greece. So my sound memory was thunder, because the night that I left there was thunder so we had a delay. So we couldn't leave that day. And my stepdad didn't say bye to me and he just let me and my mom go so that was my whole dance. And the noise was thunder.

(Steph, focus interview with Steph, Shahla and Ms A, Middleview, 16 April 2009)

Merleau-Ponty explains that the relationship of the subject to his or her world is embodied in the corporeality of this subject and this is the essence of body-knowing. Steph's dance was not only informed by her memory of thunder, but by all the other sensory experiences that she embodied at that time in a form of intertextuality. The noise of the thunder, an auditory sensation, was connected to a synaesthesia of memory – the memory of the physical space of the airport that signified separation; the memory of time delay; the melancholy of departure from a loved land; the heartbreak of the stepfather being left; the heartbreak of Steph and her mother that he did not say goodbye; and maybe somewhere deep down the mixed feelings of fear, worry and hope about life in a new country. The Zeibekiko dance, with patches of modern dance and the fluid, nostalgic music with lyrics in Greek, was interrupted by the brave and audacious periodic repetition of the rhythmic pattern, accompanied by her sharp rhythmic movement, bent over, pounding on the floor with head down, hair touching the floor, representing the thunder that was the through-line, the repeated pattern in her dancing. Both Steph's description and Shahla's description of their dances included the 'physical space', the 'mental space' and the 'social space' all at the same time (Soja 1989). Shahla explained that her dance was created based on the sound of applause, which reminded her of her last night in Iran right before leaving for Canada (a year ago), when their family and friends threw a party for her:

Before I came to Canada, our friends and family had this huge party for us. It was like a surprise party to say goodbye. Because when you are going to leave the ones you love, you usually cry, right? So they wanted to make like a good memory so like we laughed. That night this music was playing and me and my uncle dancing together. It just brings back memories. I was 15.

(Shahla, focus interview with Steph, Shahla and Ms A, Middleview, 16 April 2009)

The sound of applause was connected to a synaesthesia of memory – she chose to dance to the exact song, a Turkish song, she danced to at that party; the social space that defined her social space in the past was reflected in the present space along with the physical as well as the mental space of feeling joy because of this party and feeling melancholic because of the soon to be realised departure from these loved ones.

Both Shahla and Steph said that they failed the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) last year and took it again this year, but they were not sure how they did this time. Like Kitty, they both discussed their struggles with expressing themselves eloquently in English. In a way dance gave these ELLs another language, a mode in which they could express themselves with dignity, where they felt powerful in expressing their feelings and who they are and what they are capable of. Even though I was aware of the importance of an embodied

pedagogy that pays attention to the physical body as well as the affordances of an open space, it was my participation in their dance performance and their later reflections about their dances in the interviews that allowed my awareness to reach a much deeper level with this unanticipated data about dance from the students.

I provide these stories to describe the participatory nature of the project. In ethnographic research not everything is set in advance. Many of the relationships with my participants were shaped after I had been in the field for extended periods of time, as I became someone people recognised in this relational social space. I found this kind of extended participant observation, transparency and co-construction of knowledge with the participants to be the most valuable ways of generating data in educational contexts.

Challenges and affordances of participatory ethnography

As explained above, ongoing co-construction of knowledge with the participants was an important aspect of this study. Although not strictly participatory action research (PAR), this research was deeply informed by elements of participatory processes and created “pockets of participation” (Franks 2009) such as making interview and focus group questions and analysis visible to teachers and students, asking them for their ideas about other possible questions that they thought were important to raise, being transparent about the research and sharing preliminary and ongoing analyses with the teacher and some student participants, with an interest in the ‘co-creation of knowledge’ with the participants as ‘co-researchers’ (Gallagher 2008), rather than performing the traditional ‘member check’ that is done to verify the researcher’s own interpretations.

Participatory co-production of knowledge was not always possible to achieve, however. For example, when I wanted to convene an after-school chat with the teachers about their own pedagogical questions in the drama classrooms, and offered the following invitation, the three drama teachers I worked with at Middleview were able to participate in this after-school chat. But at Braeburn, despite the teachers’ and my efforts, it wasn’t possible to bring the drama teachers together for an after-school chat because their schedules were very different. Some worked part-time, others had commitments right after school. Instead I was able to meet the teachers individually and discuss some of their responses to these questions and thoughts during one-on-one interviews.

An after-school chat with pizza treat:

I am not the researcher who knows all the answers. I want to have a conversation about teachers’ everyday pedagogical questions and decisions. This invites you into the headspace of a researcher. I am interested in the questions you would ask other teachers, questions that you hope will help you to get answers and support from other teachers collectively through conversation. I believe the best questions will be asked by you. Think about your experiences in relation to English Language Learners, however big/little experience you have with them, and from these experiences devise one or two questions. Come to the table with one or two of your most pressing questions about the challenges and benefits of someone who is ELL encountering drama.

(Email to teachers, Middleview and Braeburn, 7 June 2009)

On another occasion, I thought that using ‘the mantle of the expert’ drama strategy as a research tool, for which I would work with groups of students to come up with three questions they might want to ask other students about their experience in this class, would be very fruitful. My plan was to collectively decide on three questions, and then I was going to ask them to find two other ELLs and ask these questions and come back to me with their answers, in the role of co-researchers. But I soon realised that, for these adult high school students who had many other commitments, this was too much to ask both in terms of time and of effort. Since this idea did not turn out to be fruitful, the teacher and I decided to change strategies, and instead ask the students to write a journal entry as if they were a researcher observing this drama-ESL class. We asked them what they would write about if they were going to write a book about the experiences of students in the drama-ESL class. Both the teacher and I were delighted with and sometimes surprised by the many ideas and experiences they described in these entries.

‘What counts as legitimate research?’ recommendations for practice

There is a ... problem that we face in the field of literacy studies – the increasingly limiting definitions of what counts as legitimate literacy research. In the 2000 National Reading Panel Report, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*, the authors only drew upon experimental and quasi-experimental research that included control groups to inform their findings. Along similar lines, in the National Research Council’s 2005 report *Advancing Scientific Research in Education*, the only methodological recommendation pertained to randomized field trials. While the report does not necessarily rule out the use of other methodologies, the focus is clearly placed on the randomized experiment.

(Morrell 2006: 2)

In the *55th Annual Yearbook of the National Reading Conference*, Morrell (2006) stresses the problem of increasingly limiting definitions of what counts as legitimate literacy research because of the recent move towards the evaluation of educational practices based on evidence-based research. This move has resulted in a favouring of research that involves randomized controlled trials and measureable data (testing) but Morrell argues that it misses what we can learn about education through more participatory methodologies, especially when trying to better understand the experiences of minority students and better support their learning, to address the “persistent and prevalent academic literacy achievement gap” (p. 1).

It is important for literacy researchers to explore methodologies that are participatory and aim to capture the plural perspectives and epistemologies that are inherent in the everyday lives of inner city students in our increasingly multilingual, multicultural inner city schools. In this chapter, I investigate one such methodology, participatory ethnography, and its ability to better examine the experiences of ELLs and to theorise the significance of embodied knowledge in language and literacy education.

This study explored the potential of participatory ethnography to better understand the embodied language and literacy experiences of English language learners in urban high schools, with the caution that even a participatory intention cannot escape power relations. By contextualising the day-to-dayness of participatory ethnography, the study illustrated the messiness of this kind of methodology, as discussed by poststructuralist ethnographers (Britzman 2000; Lather 2000; St. Pierre and Pillow 2000). In addition, it showed how in fact this kind of

messiness can actually lead to fruitful knowledge production whose parameters are not pre-determined (as it is in experimental research with stated hypotheses, control groups and replicable, defined procedures) but one that allows room for co-construction of knowledge by being open to detours and shifts in focus, responding to what the research participants bring as linguistically, racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse individuals. This kind of methodology decentres the dominant culture of knowledge transmission and the traditional roles of researcher and participant-researcher, making room for other ways of knowing to emerge. In my study it allowed me to reach participants and classroom contexts that I had not imaged at the outset. It has also taken me, both theoretically and pedagogically, in the direction of embodied knowledge for learning in general and language/literacy learning in particular.

Future directions

Future research that looks at either participatory ethnography, or other critical participatory methodologies such as participatory action research is urgently needed to respond to the call of feminist, poststructural and critical scholars for a more participatory, collaborative or dialogic relationship in which participants contribute to data collection, analysis and writing (Eisenhart 2001). As other scholars (Franks 2009; Gallagher 2008; Morell 2006; Pahl and Allan 2011) also argued, the use of participatory methodologies becomes even more vital when working with vulnerable populations such as ethnic or linguistic minority students since it “fundamentally challenges the hierarchy of knowledge production and changes the relationship of knowledge producers to knowledge consumers” (Morrell 2006: 3).

Related topics

Poststructural feminist participatory ethnography, Embodied language and literacy learning, Multimodality and multiliteracies, Sensory ethnography, Phenomenology.

Further reading

Lassiter, E. L. (2005) *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Defines and historically maps the methodology of collaborative ethnography.

St. Pierre, E. A. and Pillow, W. S. (eds) *Working the Ruins: Feminist Poststructural Theory and Methods in Education*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Discusses how education scholars use poststructural theory and poststructural ethnography as a methodology in their research and practice.

Morrell, E. (2006) Critical participatory action research and the literacy achievement of ethnic minority youth, in J. V. Hoffman (ed.), *55th Annual Yearbook of the National Reading Conference*, Oak Creek, WI: National Reading Conference, available at: www.ernestmorrell.com/images/13_Morrell_v2.pdf.

Describes the relationship between Critical Participatory Action Research and literacy education.

Franks, M. (2009) Pockets of participation: Revisiting child-centered participation research, *Children and Society*, 25(1): 15–25.

Discusses issues of participation in child-centred research in a cross-cultural context.

Pahl, K. and Allan, C. (2011) I don't know what literacy is: Uncovering hidden literacies in a community library using ecological and participatory methodologies with children, *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 11(2): 190–123.

Explores the use of ecological and participatory research methods with young children to examine their literacy practices in a community library setting.

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MAKING, REMAKING, AND REIMAGINING THE EVERYDAY

Play, creativity, and popular media

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Introduction

This chapter challenges commonplace conceptions of children's play as innocent amusement, creativity as talent, and popular media as harmful and inappropriate for children. Following the multimodal turn (Siegel 2006) in New Literacy Studies (Street 1995; Gee 1996), play and creativity are redefined:

- Play is redefined as a literacy of possibilities, that is, as a set of imaginative practices that change the meanings of ordinary artifacts and alter opportunities for social participation.
- Creativity is redefined as collective social imagination that enables new possibilities by interrogating the unremarkable and reimagining multiple alternatives to expected cultural practices.

Through these redefinitions, popular media take on new significance as well. Media flows into every aspect of children's daily lives through franchises of commercial products, or *transmedia*, that include clothing, household goods, school supplies, films, video games, and toys (Jenkins *et al.* 2006; Herr-Stephenson *et al.* 2013). These immersive flows of transmedia circulate a range of identity-shaping messages through characters and film narratives, but also through product advertising, brand affiliation, and peer likes and dislikes (Pugh 2009). In this way, we are born into 'regimes of consumption' (Cook 2008) where it is impossible to opt out into a commercial-free existence or to insulate children from media influences. However, these goals could be misguided. Transmedia texts provide "big worlds" with rich literary resources such as engrossing narratives and memorable characters for "thick play", that is, repeated intensive and extensive playing and replaying that develops deeper literary understanding (Mackey 2009). Further, thick play can enable critique. As children play with popular toys and games, they can not only animate but also challenge and remake stereotypes as they improvise and revise their favorite princesses, superheroes, monsters, and so on.

Through play, children regularly make new meanings as they invent characters and actions ('Pretend I'm Superman and I can fly') or remake meanings of objects by substituting new uses

(‘This [fork] is a wrench. I’m fixing the sink’). Additionally, play is more than a childhood pastime or developmentally appropriate teaching tool but a powerful social practice that shapes players’ immediate worlds. Children at play pretend in order to participate within imagined communities, “communities to which they hope to belong” (Kendrick 2005: 9). Play performances of popular media characters allow children to try on pretend identities and mediate imagined worlds but it is important to recognize that such pretense has real effects on friendships and participation in peer cultures.

The notion of productive consumption (de Certeau 1984) recognizes the spontaneous creativity in children’s remakings and playful twists of commercial media. Consumers exercise creativity when they take up products but improvise their own strategic uses and timely combinations in everyday remakings of the most ordinary household goods. In this way, creativity is made up of small situated acts of improvised consumption of commonplace products in homes, schools, and communities – but that are simultaneously part of global mediascapes (Appadurai 1996). For example, children playfully invent new meanings for a Batman beach towel to transform it to a superhero’s cape and then to mermaid’s hair in a matter of moments – a shift that also transforms the collective play scenario from a battle against villains to a shipwreck rescue. Critical sociocultural perspectives on literacy (Lewis *et al.* 2007) interpret creativity not as a personality trait that is out of the ordinary and found in gifted individuals, but as collaborative cultural production (see Sefton-Green 2000). We produce culture when we imagine with others, as we create and agree upon shared ideas of what it means to be and belong in a particular location or to a particular group. Cultures are sustained by shared, automatic, embodied routines we carry out every day, what Bourdieu (1977) described as *habitus*, a self-perpetuating and engrained set of dispositions and practices that tends to reproduce hierarchical relationships of class, gender, and ethnicity.

Three characteristics of play are considered here in examining its potential for creative cultural production:

- 1 Play narratives are embodied and enacted rather than read, written, or fixed in print. The embodied nature of play supports children by providing multiple modes for quickly and clearly expressing their co-constructed stories to one another through their movements, props, voices, and sound effects.
- 2 Player roles and actions are continually negotiated and improvised collaboratively among players to maintain the pretense (Sawyer 2003). Players also negotiate as they collaborate within a shared imaginary text. Maintaining play while trying on alternate identities or changing the meanings of everyday artifacts often requires children to stop and explain what they mean, prompting them to switch roles, add characters or props, or twist the storyline as they try to come to agreement. Collaborative interpretation of play scripts produces the need to work out and make visible who can play tacitly expected roles and how familiar elements can be changed.
- 3 Contexts – such as play scenarios – are relocated into an immediate space (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Through shared pretense, players agree to bring in a new imaginary context, a *collaborative cultural imaginary* (Medina and Wohlwend 2014). Through relocation, children must ‘make do’ within the constraints of the classroom and reimagine together what seems possible as they come up with pretend alternatives and imagined worlds that better fit their purposes.

Creativity is the result of imagining otherwise, that is, expanding the embodied cultural practices of here-and-now worlds, by improvising to ‘make do’ with the available resources, by

negotiating to reimagine constraints into possibilities, and by remaking to transform immediate contexts into alternatives. Play is a tactic that manipulates the limits in here-and-now places to enact alternate identities while remaining in the same physical place. When a scene or character or line of dialogue from a popular *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, or Disney Princess film is appropriated in children's play scripts, it signals a set of roles, rules, and relationships for children to take up in shared pretense. In short, they must agree how to pretend that their classroom is a spaceship, a school for wizards, or a fairy-tale castle, or another imaginary place as reality is recontextualized into a collectively maintained fantasy world. Recontextualization opens an opportunity for critique by making the backgrounded assumptions ('only girls can be princesses'; 'only boys can be superheroes') visible and available for renegotiation among all players.

Historical perspectives

Early perspectives on play from developmental and constructivist perspectives emphasized its facility for helping young children develop perspective-taking as a means to further cognitive development or social skills. Play provides a unique opportunity to free the child from the constraints of concrete perception but also operates as a meaning-making practice (Vygotsky 1978 [1935]). Imaginary play allows children to detach the 'real' meanings from objects and actions and allow a "piece of wood to become a doll" (p. 97). Vygotsky viewed pretense that reassigns meanings to bodies, actions, and objects as an important developmental precursor of literacies that manipulate print symbols to stand for speech.

Linguistic anthropological perspectives more fully explain the transformative power of play and its central role in the creative cultural production of pretend worlds. Bateson (1972 [1955]) looked beyond materials and actors to consider the double meanings of play language and action that creates and maintains a pretend space. That is, play language communicates an unfolding script of what happens next and who does what but also establishes and maintains a context – a pretend space wherein all the players' actions and language are read as make-believe and 'not real.' In this vein, classroom studies of preschool play discourse have shown that young children easily navigate this complexity as they weave in and out of pretense to cooperate (Corsaro 2003) and improvise (Sawyer 1997) and successfully maintain a storyline and a context in order to keep the play going.

Anthropological studies of the collaborative nature of pretend play offer a way of understanding cultural aspects of children's vividly imagined play worlds. Holland and colleagues (1998) theorized that people collectively imagine play worlds into being. Such play worlds are distilled from reality, producing a simplified place and characters and a set of agreed-upon conditions that players agree to enact 'as if' the pretense were real. In children's 'as if' play worlds, pretense is openly negotiated, anchored by toys and artifacts that act as pivots between the here-and-now context and the pretend context. Popular media toys come 'pre-loaded' with well-known narratives and characters in fantasy worlds that many children recognize; thus they provide particularly potent meaning anchors for collaborative play. It is important to recognize that playing in these make-believe worlds can have real impact on children's social participation and identities in local cultures. "People have the propensity to be drawn to, recruited for, and formed in these worlds, and to become active in and passionate about them. People's identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically in these 'as if' worlds" (p. 49).

Finally, an expansive and critical orientation in New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Gee 1996; Street 1995) enables redefinition of play as a literacy and a tactic (Wohlwend 2011) and redefinition of creativity as cultural production (Sefton-Green 2000). NLS research recognizes a range of semiotic and social practice as literacies for remaking the meanings of ordinary

surroundings as well as a view of creativity as diverse ways of ‘doing and being’ (Gee 1996) that imagine and uphold cultural worlds (Pahl 2007; Sefton-Green 2000). Research from this perspective situates play, creativity, and media in a dense tangle of discourses of gender, consumerism, and childhood, evident in studies of media and gender: children’s gender play (Blaise 2005; Thorne 1993), toys as material culture (Goldstein *et al.* 2005; Jenkins 1998; Seiter 1993), and children’s media (Buckingham 1996; Hilton 1996; Marsh 2005; Tobin 2000).

Critical issues and topics

Play offers a productive opportunity for critical engagement, an embodied form of critical literacy (Docktor *et al.* 2010; Wohlwend and Lewis 2010), by switching the context. Recontextualization replaces a limiting context with restrictive practices and power relations with a context with desired identities and actions. Children’s play is increasingly situated in commercial spheres designed to support profit motives rather than educational goals. In addition to popular media, new ways for children to play together are emerging through online video games, apps, and virtual worlds. This is not to say that children have no opportunity for agency; children also play and consume products to further their own goals in childhood cultures (Saltmarsh 2009). However, Cook (2008) makes a distinction between two consumer choices offered to children: transitive and intransitive. Transitive choices allow children to alter the designs or uses of products in ways that move beyond the boundaries of the play space. Intransitive choices offer the appearance of choice, such as selecting among pre-set conversational phrases or choosing among a range of arcade games to earn tokens within an online game (Wohlwend and Kargin 2013). Such choices are surface level selections that have little impact on children’s social worlds.

In modern childhoods, it might seem that children’s selections are limited to choosing a franchise to decorate their toothbrushes, yogurt, sneakers, cell phones, and video games. However, these products ground an extensive web of consumer and play practices that connect children’s daily living practices to a cohesive narrative that invites children to live in-character:

Users of toys, new media, and digital texts want a storyline, ideally one that they recognize and appreciate; they need ways to communicate with people; and, they need to have multiple technologies converged into one object (e.g., a phone that is also an mp3 player and a camera). Consumer learning begins from what people do with things.

(Rowse 2011: 249)

In this way, popular media go beyond merely entertaining children or decorating everyday objects. Instead, media play is a key site of identification that links children to markets through powerful emotional and social bonds (Pugh 2009; Seiter 1993; Marsh 2005). These bonds are fostered by the marketing strategies of global corporations in order to build demand and strengthen consumer loyalty.

When children identify with media characters, they also take up this intertwined set of identity expectations, power relations, familiar storylines, and marketing messages (Wohlwend 2012). During play, character identity texts suggest particular actions in relation to other players’ identities (Holland *et al.* 1998) and imply supporting or oppositional positions for other children (e.g., actor/audience, hero/villain, victim/rescuer). As children play with – and live in – commercial franchises, they also consume the stereotypical identities associated with their favorite characters, in video games, toys, and media, whether princesses or superheroes (Marshall and Sensory 2011).

Beyond problematic stereotypes and restrictive roles, popular media and digital games are sometimes viewed as overly confining with little room for creativity, suggesting that children merely imitate the pre-existing storylines and parrot familiar dialog rather than inventing original stories. By contrast, research on children's writing (Dyson 2003; Willett 2001) and digital literacies in participatory cultures (Jenkins *et al.* 2006) suggests that elaboration and remixing occurs through shared play:

Another area of concern for many educators and parents is that popular culture texts restrict children's creativity, as children are perceived to take on popular culture roles and act out the roles and dialogue that they are given. While knowing that basic elements of popular culture characters and plot can limit children's play to the use of prescribed characters, stereotypes of 'good' and 'bad', and set plots, it can also promote creativity. A shared frame of reference has been found to enable children to be creative, add contextual details and elaborate on plots (Sefton-Green and Parker 2000).

(Jenkins et al. 2006: 302–303)

How might repetitive play of familiar media narratives inspire critique as well as creativity? Rather than stunting storytelling, some literacy researchers argue that repetitive playing of media narratives builds children's collective knowledge and shared literacy resources, thickening into cumulative stories and enabling critical revision over multiple replays (Mackey 2009; Wohlwend 2009). Pennycook (2007) argues that such repetition actually constitutes production, a post-structuralist take on creativity that is based on the subtle transformations in recycling and remixing texts and relocalizing contexts.

Current contributions and research

Literacy studies from critical sociocultural perspectives recognize that play can prompt problematic consumption as well as creative cultural production. The studies in this section document how play in immersive everyday interactions with popular media can help children collaborate to embody, negotiate, and improvise their favorite media in ways that reshape the surrounding childhood cultures.

Making sense and making selves

Recent literacy studies focus on play as embodied ways of producing and wielding texts. In this view, play is a set of social practices through which children use their bodies, toys, props, and drawings to enact, represent, and participate in cultural practices (Ghisso 2011; Siegel *et al.* 2008; Wohlwend 2008). Embodiment in play blurs sense-making and self-making, allowing children to imagine themselves in fantasy worlds scaled to child-sized life experiences, feelings, and wishes. Boldt (2009) analyzed how a six-year-old's playful writing explored feelings and fears within the emotional safety of play, using pretense to tame the basilisk, a giant serpent in a *Harry Potter* film: "The ability to playfully and creatively use objects to shape the outcome of their play gives children confidence in their ability to shape their emotional experiences with the world and the outcomes of their actions in the world" (Boldt 2009: 12).

Children's play involves emotional investments (Jones and Shackelford 2013) and attachments to characters that children enact with franchised products from breakfast to bedtime, supported by parents (Marsh 2005). Barbie, Bratz, or American Girl exemplify a

‘market child’ that invites children to identify with and embody characters by using branded merchandise (Sekeres 2009).

In digital spaces, embodied play with popular media spans here-and-now computer handling, on-screen actions, and interactions with faraway co-players across global networks. Creative cultural production occurs as children make and remake digital selves for these layered spaces where physical bodies are replaced by child-designed avatars in online games such as *Mario Brothers* and virtual worlds such as *Club Penguin* (Black and Reich 2012; Marsh 2011). Digital literacies include ways of coordinating bodies and avatars through moving, talking, reading, and being as they navigate and point to digital selves on-screen, ‘Do you see me? I’m right there!’ in the layered spaces of online gaming (Wohlwend *et al.* 2011). Husbye (2013) found that children working together as digital filmmakers skillfully combined elements of transmedia narratives with modal qualities of media production to achieve an intended cinematic effect and meaning.

Remaking places and replaying texts

Pahl (2007) provides a way to interpret creativity as an assemblage of “socially situated traces of practice, that is, as evidence of what kinds of practices informed that text” (p. 86). Every play event blurs the lines between imagined and real contexts and draws in multiple social, cultural, and material histories associated with the imagined place. The blurring of real and imagined places enables creative remixing of histories with possibilities so that a play theme gathers meanings across these spaces. Further, this recontextualization thickens play over time when children pretend the same narrative through repeated replays. For example, Collier (2013) analyzed a young boy’s enactment of his favorite professional wrestler, showing how his pretend play and invented props constituted a creative relocalization that brought the world of professional wrestling into the child’s home and how his repetitive enactments produced a creative remixing.

From a structuralist–humanist perspective, mimicry or copying is denigrated and creativity is seen as original and the result of individual production. Pennycook (2010) uses the term relocalization to describe a creative process that acknowledges repetition as production. Texts and textmaking practices are transformed as they are reused and relocalized. I posit that this recycling or relocalization is a form of creativity or play.

(Collier 2013: 483)

These relocations involved enacting and narrating pretend wrestling matches with miniature wrestlers and Pokémon action figures, video-editing a wrestling movie from videotaped research sessions, and playing a video game, *Wrestlemania*. Through repeated enactments of his favorite professional wrestler, he “relocalized wrestler” using play to tactically move media texts from television to video to video games that offered opportunities to gain more control and display his expertise in performances at home and school, to deflect serious topics, and to make schoolwork more enjoyable.

Reimagining play worlds

Mackey’s (2009) notion of “big worlds” examines the creative potential of layered media contexts where commercial books, games, and television build narratives over time through series or sequels and across space through transmediation (Siegel 1995) from films or video

games into websites, toys, collectibles, and consumer goods. The big worlds in children's media are expanded even further through "thick play" that encourages "repeating, extending, and embellishing contact with that imaginative world" (Mackey 2009: 93). Similarly, research on participatory literacies show how meanings are creatively remixed and collaboratively produced through play in digital cultures. In fanfiction, memes, and online video games, "participation is a creative act where signs are not merely consumed but rather reworked, recontextualized, and then redistributed" (Steinkuehler *et al.* 2005: 99). Improvisation is at the heart of playful remixing and repurposing of media, as children negotiate their individual interpretations of the narratives they all know and incorporate their favorite bits as 'textual toys' to recruit other players or make play scenarios more credible or appealing to peers (Dyson 2003). Collaborative improvisations result in creative cultural production when children agree to challenge normative expectations by changing the characters or conditions of pretense in order to include friends, to allow more equitable distribution of play materials, or to enable actions that disrupt unspoken and unexamined ways of doing things. In my research on Disney Princess play, boys improvised to convince peers to allow them to take up princess roles as Snow White, Jasmine, or Ariel the Little Mermaid (Wohlwend 2012). In Medina's dramatic inquiry with elementary students in Puerto Rico, young students' performances of familiar *telenovelas* improvised and ruptured the popular Latino soap operas as children drew upon their lived experiences to work through their ideas about gender and domestic violence (Medina and Wohlwend 2014).

Main research methods for studying play

To analyze children's play and creativity as social practices and cultural production, it is necessary to use ethnographic research approaches which are designed for cultural study. To consider all the aspects that affect children's meaning-making and participation, activity theory (Leont'ev 1977; Vygotsky 1978 [1935]) focuses ethnographic methods of observing and recording play to attend to the relationships among artifacts, tools, rules, and roles within a cultural context. Whatever the cultural context – at home, in classrooms, or online – children's practices for playing and collaborating make up commonplace and taken-for-granted ways of doing childhood. This means that researchers must carefully examine the discursive assumptions behind everyday play activity in order to find its cultural value and ideological effects. In critical sociocultural literacy research (Lewis *et al.* 2007), several methods of discourse analysis combine ethnographic methods, critical analysis, and activity theory framing.

Mediated discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis are described here:

- Mediated discourse analysis (Scollon 2001) examines play as an embodied way of making texts with other players in real and imagined contexts, drawing on activity theory and sociological practice theory. Through play, children learn not only how to express embodied meanings, but also how to enact the valued practices of the surrounding culture through informal apprenticeships in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). A goal of mediated discourse analysis of children's play is to discover how play actions enact and produce valued ways of belonging in the community. These social practices become tacitly recognized as the accepted ways of doing things in the habitus (Bourdieu 1977) of a particular community. Another goal of mediated discourse analysis is to locate those social practices such as play with potential to change the collective histories of a group.
- Critical discourse analysis (Gee 1999) uncovers the discourses that circulate gendered identity texts and disparate power relations in children's commercialized play worlds and imaginary scenarios. Critical discourse analysis examines language in children's play patterns

and interactions for links to global discourses which justify the dominant, tacitly agreed-upon ways of 'doing gender' and childhood during everyday play. Discourses overlap and conflict as each constructs and explains a particular vision of childhood, legitimating some identities over others.

Recommendations for practice

Given problematic aspects of thick play in big worlds (Mackey 2009), children need opportunities to explore how narratives connect across films, toys, and other media forms and to critically examine the deep layers in these narratives, what Jenkins (2009) calls the spreadability and drillability of transmedia storytelling. The U.S. Department of Education recently recognized the learning potential of transmedia, identifying the following benefits to early childhood education:

- It presents children with multiple entry points to learning. Children can start learning via any one of the individual media, but when these media are interconnected, children will be motivated to explore even more;
- It enables educators to use individual media for the functions for which they are best suited. For example, games are particularly good problem-solving environments that encourage children to try difficult things without fear of failure; they are not as good as video, however, at presenting more linear and orderly information; and
- The rich, fictional worlds of transmedia tend to create a greater level of social interaction that can inspire children to create their own stories and media products and to share them with each other.

(U.S. Department of Education website 2011)

Children's interactions with transmedia are neither simple nor innocent, situated in dense webs of toys, play narratives, peer groups, and social relationships. As children play a story together and imagine play worlds, they also include and exclude friends in their social circles (Dyson 1997, 2003; Marsh 1999; Wohlwend 2011). The studies presented here demonstrate that children also use pretense to collectively reproduce, challenge, disrupt, or reimagine the prevailing ways of doing things.

Performance pedagogies such as dramatic inquiry (Edmiston 2008; Medina and Costa 2010; Medina and Perry 2013) show promise for critically engaging the social issues in transmedia, importantly, in ways that matter to children. Literacy playshop (Wohlwend *et al.* 2013), a play-based approach to critical engagement, focuses on facilitating children's productive consumption of transmedia narratives by supporting children in four domains – play, storying, collaboration, and media production. Through literacy playshops, teachers design guided engagements and opportunities for exploration to encourage young children to play and story together with favorite popular media toys, digital cameras, child-made props, and invented sets as they create their own films. Teachers engage these productions as facilitators who provision the environment or as co-players who help open new roles or directions for the emerging play narrative, key in fostering inclusive play practices as well as critical improvisations that rupture normative stereotypes. Clearly literacy education must expand to include media education in ways that recognize and incorporate children's abilities to navigate sophisticated media texts that are mobile, accessible, replayable, resourceful, and social (Herr-Stephenson *et al.* 2013).

Future directions for literacy studies

The extensive reach of popular transmedia and the meteoric rise in children's use of apps and mobile devices around the world (Burnett 2010; Hill 2010; Shuler 2007, 2009; Yamada-Rice 2010) requires urgent attention to and robust research on played texts in these immersive commercial environments. Mackey and Shane (2013) argue the need for critical multimodal literacies pointing out that "many children learn their most potent lessons about interpretation in the branded fiction space" (p. 22). Furthermore, these lessons occur in complex transmedia franchises that blur consumption and production, global and local, and agency and structure, and home, school, and communities (Pahl and Burnett 2013). The global reach of flows of transmedia suggests the need for international perspectives on children's play around the world as well as a need for nuanced research approaches equipped to track the interactions of people, goods, and texts across vast networks. For example, Nichols and Rainbird (2013) trouble the notion of a dominant binary between home and school spaces, instead studying children's play in converged spaces of engagement such as malls, libraries, and churches, using geosemiotics (Scollon and Scollon 2003) to understand how materials and meanings aggregate as spaces. This direction provides ways to look at transmedia as spatializing and spaces themselves as always/already relocalizing with rich potential for creative critical cultural production. The focus on materiality in this post-structural work provides a generative lens for examining play and creativity in the neither-here-nor-there-but-everywhere aspects globalized children's cultures around the world, as in studies of children's improvisational remakings and remixings of media during play in Australia (Carrington and Dowdall 2013), Finland (Rautio and Winston 2013), Hong Kong (Tam 2013), or Taiwan (Hadley and Nenga 2004).

The repositioning of play and creativity as active and critical cultural production poses a number of challenges and questions: how can we involve children and youth effectively in critically engaging their favorite media texts that are so immersive and embodied? What literacy learning happens when children collaborate to produce played texts with these everyday texts? What creative cultural production happens when children imagine and play together in physical and digital spaces? What inequities arise from children's disparate access to collaborative play and cutting-edge technologies in their homes, schools, and communities? In commercial or institutional contexts, who is allowed to imagine otherwise through opportunities to play together and who is blocked by price constraints, mandated schedules, or protectionist firewalls? How can critical approaches help children problematize stereotypes or resist consumerist messages while respecting children's emotional attachments and valuing children's diverse literacy resources? These questions suggest the rich possibilities and immediate need for nuanced literacy studies that look beyond critical deconstruction of problematic media content to examine the potential and hazards of everyday play as a social practice and creativity as cultural production.

Related topics

Children's media and popular culture, Drama and filmmaking, Digital storytelling, Children's peer culture, Consumer culture.

Further reading

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LITERACY AS WORLDMAKING

Multimodality, creativity and cosmopolitanism

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Introduction

In their article about how disability functions more as a property of culture than of individuals, McDermott and Varenne (1995) use a powerful metaphor to describe how we engage with one another across difference. They argue that culture is a process of “hammering a world,” with “people hammering each other into shape with the well structured tools already available” (McDermott and Varenne 1995: 326). Their metaphor is particularly useful when considering the ways in which the cultural tools we have accessible to us – especially the multiple representational forms now available via digital technologies – function as formidable resources for writing and rewriting our world, “transforming it through conscious, practical work” (Freire 1987: 35). The process of transforming the world through “symbolic work” (Willis 1990) is not an uncomplicated one, fraught with the difficulties of communicating and understanding across vast differences in ideologies, languages, geographies, and cultures as we hammer one another into shape using the multimodal symbolic tools at our disposal. Yet this effort to create meaning together across differences also affords profound pleasure in the creativity of everyday living (Rymes 2013; Willis 1990) and represents “a fundamental human capacity for living in a global world” (Hull and Stornaiuolo 2014: 16). In this chapter, I explore how people’s literate activities in the context of globalization are practices of worldmaking (cf. Goodman 1978; Holland *et al.* 1998), a process of constructing shared worlds through symbolic practices that intertwine the creative, ethical, and intellectual in the act of making meaning from the multiple and dynamic cultural resources at hand.

I begin this chapter by considering the ways that scholars in the field of literacy studies have taken up interrelated issues of multimodality, aesthetics, and cosmopolitanism to address the complexities of making meaning now, particularly the challenges of communicating across the semiotic and cultural diversities that characterize our global world. Next, I suggest that while these three interwoven strands are key to understanding the literate arts of worldmaking, critical issues in the field include taking better theoretical account of the role of improvisation and emotion, particularly the ways meaning emerges from ongoing activity and involves people’s bodies and emotions. I then consider how a worldmaking framework can help to address these issues, and I illustrate this framework in relationship to recent research with a teacher who wove cosmopolitanism, creativity, and multimodality into his pedagogical practice. In the rest of the

chapter, I consider the methodological and practical implications of worldmaking for literacy studies, particularly the opportunities for agentive repositioning of self, other, and world within asymmetrical power relations and pervasive systemic inequities.

Historical perspectives

In light of the rapid changes in the communicative landscape in the decades preceding and following the turn of the twenty-first century, it is perhaps no surprise that literacy scholars have embraced theories of multimodality, arguing for an expanded view of literacy that situates written communication within a broader semiotic landscape (e.g., Bezemer and Kress 2008; Jewitt 2008; Siegel and Panofsky 2009; Vasudevan *et al.* 2010). Written language is understood to be intimately intertwined with other communicative modes (e.g., audio and image), and though certain modes might be more culturally articulated and valued (e.g., print) and serve different functions in different contexts, modes can be combined to powerful effect, creating qualitatively new meanings by their braiding (Hull and Nelson 2005). At the same time that literacy scholars have explored the ways in which meaning making is inherently multimodal and situated within particular social contexts of use (Dyson 2001; Stein 2008; Street *et al.* 2009), mediated communication has opened new avenues for materials and people to circulate as well as provided new opportunities for textual production, dissemination, and distribution (Kress 2010; Lankshear and Knobel 2011; Pahl and Rowsell 2006; Rowsell 2013). These rapid changes in the communicational landscape were the conceptual impetus for the New London Group's (1996) multiliteracies framework, an educational agenda that put the semiotic, cultural, and linguistic diversities of our global world at the center of a reimagined literacy pedagogy. By focusing on the concept of design, the New London Group brought attention to the intentional and designful work of young people who could use (i.e., engage in a process of designing) and transform (i.e., redesign) existing multimodal resources (i.e., available designs) as they navigated diversity and difference.

A number of scholars in literacy studies have focused on the ways that people engage in these designful practices artfully – by weaving together, hybridizing, remixing, and transforming multimodal texts (e.g., Dyson 2001; Hull and Katz 2006; Lam 2006; Lankshear and Knobel 2007; Rymes 2013). These creative, artful practices represent one means of designing a self, as young people regularly use widely circulating popular culture and digital media as resources for self-imagining. Literacy researchers have turned to aesthetic theories to help them understand these creative practices as part of a fundamentally human process of sense making that involves many ways of knowing (Albers *et al.* 2012; Dewey 1934; Eisner 2002; Finnegan 2002; Willis 1990). Symbolizing, these theories hold, is a central part of human activity (Goodman 1976), what Willis (1990) calls the “symbolic work” embedded in everyday practice. Willis explores how people engage in symbolic creativity, using the materials at their disposal to remake the world and the self through their aesthetic engagements. Building on Willis' work, Hull and Nelson (2009) call for an aesthetic grounding for literacy studies, arguing that an arts focus foregrounds awareness and imagination and links the pleasures of meaning making with the pleasures of making and enacting a self (cf. Albers and Harste 2007). This intertwining of aesthetics and literacy, Hull and Nelson suggest, fosters the imaginative agility needed to engage in empathetic communicative practices and imagine oneself in relation to others.

To theorize how people imagine themselves not just in relation to others but to the world more broadly, scholars in literacy studies have turned toward theories of cosmopolitanism (Campano and Ghiso 2010; Harper *et al.* 2010; Hull *et al.* 2010; Stornaiuolo *et al.* 2011). An ancient set of philosophies about how we can learn with and from others who are not “of kith

and kind” (Appiah 2006), cosmopolitanism is “primarily about viewing oneself as part of a world, a circle of belonging that transcends the limited ties of kinship and country to embrace the whole of humanity” (Cheah 2008: 26). In this sense, Cheah reminds us, “the cosmopolitan optic is not one of perceptual experience but of the imagination” (ibid.), as people must imagine themselves in relation to the world as they balance local and global commitments with a stance of openness toward the unfamiliar (Hansen 2011). While cosmopolitanism’s focus on mutual understanding and tolerance has been critiqued for an overly normative, Western, and elitist bias, scholars are reimagining cosmopolitanism as a rooted, experiential phenomenon (Appiah 2006; Moore 2012; cf. Vasudevan 2014) that is at once creative and moral, a way of being in the world tied to the art of living (Hansen 2014). Literacy researchers have begun exploring how cosmopolitan theories offer a fresh approach to understanding difference in a world characterized by accelerated transnational flows of people and materials, one that takes account of how the global and the local interpenetrate our meaning-making practices. For example, Glynda Hull and I have explored cosmopolitanism ‘on the ground’ in an educational social networking project that connected youth around the world, and we have theorized young people’s interlaced global/local literate practices as cosmopolitan literacies: “the cognitive, emotional, ethical, and aesthetic meaning-making capacities and practices of authors and audiences as they take differently situated others into account” (Hull and Stornaiuolo 2014: 17; cf. Campano *et al.* 2013; Hull *et al.* 2013). The notion of cosmopolitan literacies highlights the ethical dimensions of textual and semiotic practice, or how we might read, write, and communicate with diverse others in powerful, responsible, and hospitable ways. I suggest later in this chapter that these cosmopolitan literacies can function as key building blocks in worldmaking, intertwining the multimodal and the creative with the ethical as people imagine themselves in relation to others and the world.

Critical issues: emergence and embodiment

While theories of multimodality and design have broadened our understandings of textuality and meaning making, one persistent critique has been that multimodal approaches to meaning making remain too text-centric (Anderson 2013; Bazalgette and Buckingham 2013; Lankshear and Knobel 2011; Leander and Boldt 2013; Siegel and Panofsky 2009). What are we missing, literacy scholars ask, when we attend primarily to the ways in which meaning is designed? How does meaning emerge from interaction in unforeseen ways that cannot be textually explained and that take into account improvisation? How is meaning on the move and how is it socially, historically, and culturally rooted in processes of production? Leander and Boldt (2013) pose such questions as they theorize emergence as a central yet overlooked dimension of literate practice, specifically asking how meaning unfolds as a spontaneous and improvisational process, not necessarily a designed one (cf. Pahl 2009). They encourage researchers to engage in nonrepresentational readings of interaction, thinking less about people’s representational or symbolic practices and more about the quality of the movement unfolding across space-time. Similarly, Bazalgette and Buckingham (2013) critique the ways that theories of multimodality look less at the processes and more at the product of meaning making, in effect rendering a dynamic process flat and partial and attributing too much agency to the modes themselves rather than the actors and the social contexts in which activities unfold. Siegel and Panofsky (2009) caution that such a limited focus on the individual designer or text, in addition to being utopian, obscures the social, historical, and political forces at play in meaning making. They advocate for a critical, social view of multimodality that takes into account interlocking systems of oppression and is situated within contemporary conversations about literacies, diversities, and

power. Instead of focusing on the semiotic ensemble or a designer's future goals, these scholars suggest, we should attend more closely to the interplay and movement of actors, contexts, and artifacts in the present moment in order to understand how meaning making always unfolds in time and space in relation to political, economic, ideological, and cultural exigencies.

A number of scholars interested in questions of emergence are calling for more complexity in theorizing how people's bodies and emotions are intimately intertwined with meaning making (e.g., Albers *et al.* 2012; Leander and Boldt 2013; Lewis and Tierney 2013). A focus on textuality, in addition to abstracting meaning making from its processes of production, creates binaries between textual production and people's emotions and embodied engagement with material realities (cf. Finnegan 2002; Stein 2008). Recent work to theorize materiality in relation to literacy studies has highlighted these practices as part of assemblages that include the body as well as material artifacts (Burnett *et al.* 2014; Pahl and Rowsell 2010). In the following section, I consider the ways that a worldmaking perspective incorporates improvisation and emotion by shifting the focus from textuality to the construction and creation of shared worlds, a broader way of imagining literate practices within social, cultural, and historical contexts emergent from activity.

Current contributions and research: worldmaking

Worldmaking is not a new idea, but it is one that seems particularly apt for describing the participatory, productive practices that have come to characterize literacy activities in the digitally mediated, globally connected twenty-first century. Never before have people been content creators and collaborators on the scale and scope available in our contemporary participatory culture, as people connect, consume, and produce with and for others as part of their everyday lives (Jenkins *et al.* 2006). People regularly connect to friends and strangers online, tweeting, posting, reading, and uploading content via mobile devices in ways that make it increasingly difficult to theorize online/offline as separate realms. People build and construct worlds with others across virtual and physical spaces, whether via a game world like *World of Warcraft*, a virtual reality like *Second Life*, a news community like *Reddit*, or a social network like *Instagram*. People's participation in these virtual/material worlds powerfully illustrates the ways we are always engaged in a variety of "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) as we build the realities we live in.

In his book *Ways of Worldmaking*, Nelson Goodman (1978) describes how we construct multiple worlds through social interaction, with no one objective real world waiting to be discovered apart from our frames of interpretation. Goodman's task, as he saw it, was to theorize the ways we create shared worlds from what is already available: "Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking" (p. 6). Worldmaking is thus a kind of remixing on a broad scale, a way of creating new orders of reality by remaking worlds from other worlds. Goodman suggests five ways we do so – composition/decomposition, weighting/emphasis, ordering, deletion/supplementation, and deformation – as a jumping point for imagining how such a process works. What is important here for understanding the literate arts of worldmaking is Goodman's emphasis on the processes of building worlds from other worlds – sometimes by taking them apart and reassembling them and other times by ordering or deleting elements. The question of emergence is at the center of any inquiry into process, and such a focus shifts emphasis from outcomes and intentions to the activity of building connections between worlds. This shift in focus to activity helps us see that the relationships among worlds, especially how those get created through our symbolizing practices, should be a primary concern.

Holland and colleagues (1998) theorize how we construct and connect these recognized frames of social life – these ‘figured worlds’ – through our historically and culturally rooted interactions, looking in one example at the world of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Just like in figured worlds of romance or academia, the world of AA is historically situated, and people enter (or are recruited) into these socially organized realms while also helping to shape such worlds. In the figured world of AA, poker chips become symbols of sobriety and personal stories become shaped, honed, and publicly shared to serve as emblematic narratives helping participants not drink. People in AA undergo a transformation of how they see themselves, no longer as drinking non-alcoholics but as non-drinking alcoholics, a shift that requires a new frame of understanding and new ways of interpreting one’s actions. In figured worlds, Holland and colleagues argue, people always construct identities within and through their participation, engaging in ‘social play’ that is agentive and dynamic. Identity as a process, tied to what people do, links the construction of a self with the construction of a world: “Like all other aspects of worldmaking, self-making (or ‘life-making’) depends heavily upon the symbolic system in which it is conducted – its opportunities and constraints” (Bruner 1991: 77). In Bruner’s words, self-making is one aspect of worldmaking, a means of creating a life out of many possibilities, as we construct ourselves in the context of, and through, our symbolic practices and systems.

Indeed, Holland *et al.* (1998) describe symbolization as one of the primary forms of agency within figured worlds. The human ability to play with symbols allows us to do work in the world (e.g., using reformulated narratives in AA to help oneself not drink) and provides the central means of imagining new possibilities (especially through forms of ‘social play’ like art and ritual). A second form of agency, one intertwined with our capacity to represent meanings through symbols, is improvisation, part of a back and forth engagement that exploits the possibilities for action even within power asymmetries (e.g., a woman climbing a balcony to avoid entering the kitchen of a higher caste family in a figured world in which caste plays a central organizing role). The intertwining of symbolization and improvisation highlights the agentive role people take up within the flow of everyday interaction as they work with others to imagine, construct, create, and transform the material and semiotic dimensions of human activity.

My recent work with teachers using social networking in education illustrates how a worldmaking lens offers a generative framework for understanding globalized literacy practices that intertwine issues of multimodality, cosmopolitanism, and creativity, particularly the intersections of literacies, diversities, and power (Siegel and Panofsky 2009). A worldmaking framework provides a valuable means of understanding how one New York City teacher, artist Jake Casey, created a powerful classroom space that helped adolescents who had experienced systematic oppression and schooling challenges reframe themselves as activist-artists. As part of a two-year multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), I conducted a case study of Jake’s afterschool class that combined media arts with social networking. Young people in the program created media projects that they shared with other teens on a private, international social network (Space2Cre8)¹ as part of their twice-weekly work with Jake.

As a practicing artist focused on social justice and new media composition, Jake was deeply interested in the ways that artistic practice could help young people make sense of their lives, and he positioned students as fellow artists at every turn, saying: “We’re all, like, artists in the room.” The idea that art permeated every aspect of young people’s lives, that their symbolic engagements were artistic practices, informed every aspect of the program: “I really want them to think artistically about how they’re constructing themselves and constructing their environment, and I’m always going to try to instill in them an aesthetic sensibility to documenting things.” This focus on the *art of the everyday* – how young people constructed themselves and

their environments on a moment-by-moment basis and documented this work – infused the activity system of the program (as Luisa explained, “everything [we do] like has art in it”), helping them ‘figure’ themselves and their worlds through ongoing activity.

One of the most important dimensions of this literate worldmaking was naming their worlds and their identities within them, especially as young people from nondominant communities who often found themselves marginalized and silenced. By naming their worlds, giving voice to their stories and their experiences, participants were engaged in the remaking process, forming and reforming worlds from existing worlds and making spaces for new stories and ways of being. Emilio described how this naming and renaming process occurred through their artistic endeavors, as they told others about “all the problems that we face growing up in New York... about poverty, gang relations, ... domestic problems” and then engaged in artistic interpretation of those issues to “make people think outside the box.” Youth participants looked critically at their worlds, especially the ways that their experiences and cultures have been historically subordinated, and helped others do so too through their artistic work (i.e., helping people “think outside the box” through art). This (re)naming of their worlds, particularly in relation to the injustices they faced as young people of color whose voices were rarely heard, was not possible in school because, as Emilio explained, “at school, we have to listen to other people, what they say is right”; in the program, on the other hand, Emilio said, “We could do anything... I could put my ideas out there. And it would be heard.” The group, as Emilio explained, could do anything they imagined in the space of the afterschool program, and people would listen to them as artist-activists who were documenting their experiences of injustice. As one young filmmaker, Vince, described, their collaborative symbolic work was key in agentively repositioning themselves as people who deserved to be listened to and heard: “We’re just like the kids from whatever hood we’re from who have something to say. And we find it in this program. We can say it. And we might be able to be heard because of this program.”

As Holland and colleagues (1998) argue, people always construct identities within and through their participation in figured worlds, and youth in the New York arts program came to see themselves as artists who had something to say and a means to share it. Vince, for example, saw the power of the group tied to their capacity to imagine new possibilities as artists and use that identity to make a difference:

[We’re] definitely a group that dreams. Dreams of a better community. Dreams that we want to be heard or seen. We want – we have something to say. We have something to say and we want the public to hear it. That’s what we are.

In this interview excerpt, Vince described how he was engaged in the twin processes of self-making and worldmaking as he imagined himself and his fellow classmates as activist-artists who collaboratively worked toward change within the global community. Luisa narrated how this artistic identity became important to her in the world more broadly, as people on the street stopped her to ask about the group’s work: “I like to explain [our artistic work] because they look at us like inspiration, and inspiration with – they look at us like, like we’re like the future. So they’re like, ‘Oh my God, I wanna do what they’re doing!’” For Luisa, it was deeply motivating to be seen as inspirational artists and activists (“the future”) by people on the street, rather than as ‘troublemakers’ or ‘bad students’ or other identities ascribed to the young people in other contexts.

An important dimension of worldmaking in this classroom space was its emergent and improvisational nature. Jake called the process “organic” and tried to create an environment in which youth could engage in creative practices that emerged from their interests, their resources,

and one another. Emilio described the power of such an organic environment for helping to create space for figuring or imagining worlds:

In our program, we can always change the flow, you know what I mean? It doesn't always have to go by – we can have an idea for one thing, and then as we're doing it, we'll think about other ideas and incorporate that into the original idea.

Emilio highlighted the importance of “flow” for generating new ideas, which then became remixed and incorporated – *remade* – as the collaboration unfolded over time. This collaborative process of creating art together was a central part of the worldmaking of Jake's classroom and fundamentally tied to the kinds of cosmopolitan literacies we saw develop over time. That is, the participants in this program had to find ways to work together in a sensitive and responsive manner, not just with people in their classroom but with others in the global Space2Cre8 community (see Hull and Stornaiuolo 2014). These ethical entailments of global communication were tightly bound up with youth's creative symbolic practices and their sense of self. As Vince described of the program, “We learn life things. How to be a better human. How to be a better you, I guess. How to use your imagination.” In this classroom, Vince and his colleagues worked with Jake to figure a world in which young people had something new to say and a means to say it, but most importantly, how to become better humans as they imagined new futures.

Recommendations for practice

Thinking about literacy from a worldmaking perspective highlights two critical aspects of contemporary meaning making: the role of the *global* (the ‘world’ part) and the *productive* dimensions of literate practice (the ‘making’ part). By introducing the global into the self–other equation, a worldmaking lens foregrounds diversity, emphasizing how people can live together in the world and communicate across differences. It accentuates the cultural and historical dimensions of imagining such a world, compelling us not to shy away from conflict but to embrace it as a generative process helping us attend to the power dynamics and asymmetries embedded in making meaning. As Kress (2010) and Street *et al.* (2009) emphasize, the modal resources we engage with in making meaning are always shaped by cultures over time, becoming saturated with ideological meanings and values instantiated in situated literacy practices. These artifacts can act as ‘pivots’ in worldmaking, functioning as mediating devices facilitating the move between and across worlds by shifting the “perceptual, cognitive, affective, and practical frame of activity” (Holland *et al.* 1998: 63; cf. Vygotsky 1978). In this way, we never inhabit one ‘true’ world that can be objectively discovered but rather create multiple worlds by collaboratively visioning and re-visioning ourselves always in dynamic and shifting relationships with others and artifacts within sociohistoric time and place. Central to this worldmaking activity is the role of the imagination, the creative capacity to envision new possibilities and connections, to create coherence out of dissonance, to “conceive other realities and the realities of others” (Hull and Nelson 2009: 220; cf. Cheah 2008). Imagination is necessary for the critical work of communicating across difference, especially for developing the empathy, openness, and ethical and aesthetic sensitivities (i.e., cosmopolitan literacies) required for twenty-first century literate practice.

A second implication of a worldmaking lens is the renewed focus on the dynamic and active process of meaning making, especially its emergent, agentive, and participatory dimensions. Less directly focused on texts or textual production, a worldmaking perspective alerts us to the multiple dimensions of activity and people's agentive role in producing, constructing, and creating meaning

in collaboration with people and things over time (Wertsch 1998). This broader perspective on human activity and the connections between modalities, bodies, emotions, and artifacts can help make room for considering the emergent dimensions of meaning making within situated practice. These everyday practices in the art of living are always intertwined with people's identity processes and alert us to the agentive dimensions of literate practice that might otherwise be unnoticed. We can look more carefully at the ways in which people engage in participatory cultures (Jenkins *et al.* 2006) – what they do and not just what they make.

Future directions: hammering worlds

This chapter has focused on bringing together theories of multimodality, creativity, and cosmopolitanism within literacy studies to consider the literate arts of worldmaking, a process of building multiple, shared interpretive realms out of an array of cultural resources in the service of communicating across differences. Worldmaking, by intertwining issues of diversity and identity with questions of process and becoming, helps shift focus to activity and agentive, collaborative work. It keeps questions of difference at the forefront – worldmaking indeed involves hammering one another with our cultural tools, though this process, rather than being problematic, can serve as a generative creative force. The potentially conflictual and contradictory dimensions of communicating across differences highlight the importance of theorizing the ethical dimensions of literate practice: How can people communicate sensitively, thoughtfully, responsively, and creatively across differences in language, culture, beliefs, and histories? How can people learn to work together to “become better humans,” as Vince suggested? Some of my recent work with colleagues on cosmopolitan literacies suggests that people can employ a variety of strategies for empathetic and hospitable communication (Hull and Stornaiuolo 2014; Hull *et al.* 2013), and that these everyday creative practices can function as key resources in worldmaking. These practices of creating worlds, especially remaking worlds in order to incorporate new voices, stories, and perspectives – ones that are often silenced or marginalized – are fundamental to developing our capacities as human beings and imagining new futures: “Human life is inexplicable without our abilities to figure worlds, play at them, act them out, and then make them socially, culturally, and thus materially consequential” (Holland *et al.* 1998: 280).

One of the most important dimensions of worldmaking is the capacity to imagine. Creativity is at the heart of the semiotic and social work involved in imagining social worlds, and imagination forms the cornerstone of our capacity to agentively shape meaning, especially within asymmetries of power. The question of how we might foster and facilitate the imaginative agility needed for communicating in a global world remains one of the most salient facing scholars of literacy now. Moje (2013) suggests that the metaphor of navigation offers a focus on the ways that people make meaning within and across spaces, and in so doing “confront the in-between, the discourse that is neither their own nor the other's, the practice that they both take up and change” (p. 366). The literate arts of worldmaking include the navigational practices of tacking between multiple discourses, languages, practices, and activities that constitute our lived worlds, offering us new ways to imagine the relationships between and among worlds that we might create, inhabit, and transform.

Note

- 1 More information about this project, directed by Glynda Hull and funded by the Spencer Foundation, can be found at www.space2cre8.com.

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Related topics

New Literacy Studies, Social semiotics, Popular culture and digital worlds, Aesthetics, Play and creativity.

Further reading

Campano, G. and Ghiso, M. P. (2010) Immigrant students as cosmopolitan intellectuals, in S. A. Wolf, K. Coats, P. Enciso, and C. A. Jenkins (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 164–176.

This chapter argues that educators should cultivate a cosmopolitan stance, positioning students as cosmopolitan intellectuals who bring a diversity of experiences and knowledges to bear on learning.

Finnegan, R. (2013) *Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Interconnection*, 2nd edition, Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

The new edition of this book highlights that even within a digitally mediated culture it is important to understand the multisensory, creative qualities of human communication and interaction, particularly in light of Western cultures' emphasis on rationality and referentiality that does not consider the embodied and material dimensions of communication.

Hansen, D. T. (2011) *The Teacher and the World: A Study of Cosmopolitanism as Education*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

This book is a powerful introduction to the idea of cosmopolitanism for educators, providing them a lens through which to view the challenges and opportunities of teaching in a globalized world and ideas for responding creatively.

Hull, G. and Stornaiuolo, A. (2014) Cosmopolitan literacies, social networks, and 'proper distance': Striving to understand in a global world, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 44(1): 15–44.

This article theorizes cosmopolitan literacies and explores what engaged cosmopolitanism looks like in empirical, interactional detail.

Stein, P. (2008) *Multimodal Pedagogies in Diverse Classrooms: Representation, Rights, and Resources*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Linking issues of multimodality with pedagogy and social justice, Stein examines how classrooms can become transformative spaces, not just in the South African classrooms she discusses in the book but in all classrooms that address diversity, multilingualism, and multiculturalism.

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PART VIII

Co-constructing literacies with communities

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LITERACY STUDIES AND SITUATED METHODS

Exploring the social organization of household activity and family media use

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Introduction

There are various approaches to studying the new media practices of youth. Research on new media and learning has often examined online or in-world interactions and the influence of peer and popular culture on youths' new media repertoires (Black 2008; boyd 2008; Ito *et al.* 2008). Less research has focused on families' everyday practices and the ways families organize and leverage their resources to create environments for game play. In this chapter, we examine how children's interest-based, collaborative, and new media practices emerge from the social organization of the household. We draw on a theory of *connected learning* (Ito *et al.* 2013) – a process that places practices that are socially connected, interest-driven, and oriented toward educational and economic opportunity as the object of learning – to examine the everyday lives and new media practices of Latino and low-income families. Specifically, in this study we were interested in documenting how the social organization of households helps to shape families' media use. In this chapter, we focus on the ways mothers' smart phones and home practices influence children's game play. Following Takeuchi and Stevens (2011), we focus on 'joint media engagement' or the in-room practices of youth using digital media and the roles that parents play in shaping youths' media practices; practices, we argue, that have important implications for developing children's new literacies in multiple contexts.

In this work, we aim to inform approaches to “connected learning” that work to expand students' repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez and Rogoff 2003) by situating their digital media use in everyday activity and leveraging these practices for new learning. This situated understanding of how families use mobile tools for learning in the home also affords opportunities to contribute to the evolving norms for media use in schools. Of significance, a situated approach to understanding families' new media practices pushes researchers to develop textured and more detailed perspectives

on lived cultural practices. For example, observations of the distributed nature of technology tool use in homes are aligned in important ways to forms of joint media engagement that help to create relevant and productive forms of learning. It is noteworthy that the social organization of family game-play in our work, as well as studies of joint media activity (Takeuchi and Stevens 2011), stand in contrast to the prevalent one-to-one computing paradigm in academic spaces.

This particular study grows out of the “Leveraging Horizontal Expertise” project organized around views of learning in which everyday and scientific or school-based learning grow into one another (Vygotsky 1986).¹ From this perspective, everyday literacy practices have transformative potential and serve an important role in helping to reconstruct the relationship of cognitive structures to experience (Roschelle 1992). Although there was a range of practices documented across families’ quotidian activity, we focus on several salient practices that, we argue, were instrumental to the structuring of new media practices in homes.

First, we present the use of mothers’ cell phones and how children and families incorporate mothers’ cell phones as a hub for access to the Internet and social media. We then present a case of one family’s practices to illustrate how the parents’ uses of new media intersect with their household rules, beliefs, interests, and necessities and how this activity shapes children’s practices in the home and at *El Pueblo Mágico*, a design experiment approach we will elaborate shortly. With the example of the Ramírez² family, we map how youths’ participation trajectories shape and are shaped through access, gendered practices and interests across participants in the home and in a designed learning space.

Current issues and topics

Within our approach, we acknowledge some persistent contradictions related to new media and learning. New media tools are often saddled with the promise of connecting to youth interests and providing contexts for collaboration; however, in order to leverage their affordances for learning, more attention should be paid to the social practices surrounding technology use. We know from seminal research in digital media and learning that only a minority of youth participate with new media through what Ito *et al.* (2008) refer to as “geeking out” or as “core” players (Kafai *et al.* 2012). These youth are able to construct their own learning through regular, intensive, and strategic participation with digital media that connects learning across social, academic, and interest-driven practices. Most youth, however, are more casual and social, and less engaged with new media. We argue that there is a need to understand better the everyday media practices of a larger number of youth, including youth from non-dominant communities, to design new opportunities that recruit youth as core participants into new practices with new forms of participation and tool use – practices that also recruit new identities. Further, we argue that there is a need to look more closely at how ordinary, everyday practices with digital media situated in people’s lives shape participation trajectories. By focusing on “joint media engagement” (Takeuchi and Stevens 2011) and families’ repertoires of new media practice (Gutiérrez and Rogoff 2003), we also can better understand the roles that parents play in shaping youth media practices.

Further, our situated approach maps connections among people and practices that are part of everyday life in order to engage possibilities for expanding practice. As Gee (2010: 1) discusses, “situated understanding involves being able to associate images, experiences, actions, and dialogue with words and other symbols.” We focus on how parents influence and organize children’s engagement with digital tools in order to understand how children’s situated understandings of new media develop within the context of their lives at home and at *El Pueblo Mágico*. We place our observations of parents’ digital literacy repertoires within the context of

long-standing research that has indicated that parents and, in particular, mothers' level of schooling is an important indicator of children's academic performance (Dearing *et al.* 2006; Gonzalez *et al.* 2010; Kogut 2004; Lynch 2009; Melhuish *et al.* 2008; Torr 2008; US Department of Education 1999). Researchers have also focused on mother and child interaction to examine familial and community learning and socialization patterns and learning outcomes (Casper *et al.* 2007; Hasan 2002; Rogoff *et al.* 2003). Many of these studies have noted differences, and too often disparities, in youth learning outcomes along the lines of the mother's class and race. While providing important understandings of the role of mothers, such analyses can miss the importance of family routines and how mothers leverage resources in shaping new practices and opportunities (Gutiérrez *et al.* 2010; Weisner 1984).

Following our interest in parents' digital literacy practices, our discussion will also draw upon literature that demonstrates the importance of gender and how gender is indexed in children's use of new media. Researchers note differences with a range of explanations about children's use of digital media across the variables of gender, race, and age (Kafai *et al.* 2008), with gender standing out as an important factor in shaping participation in digital games. Research in this area has refuted inherent differences in the desires of game players based on gender, but noted persistent structural constraints, related to normative gender roles such as greater surveillance of girls and female avatars embodying stereotypical human forms that shape participation (Lin 2008; Yee 2008). Within the broader context of girls and games, we find it instructive to look at mothers' and fathers' new literacies and uses of digital media and how their practices intersect with familial activity as important factors for shaping their children's learning in the home, academic arenas, and beyond.

Main research methods

Our study, part of the Connected Learning Research Network (CLRN), follows children from non-dominant communities who come from Latino, immigrant, and working-class backgrounds, across settings. We document the home activity of children who are in the second through fifth grades, as well as their game play within the *El Pueblo Mágico* afterschool designed space. This designed intervention was modeled on the *Las Redes* 5th Dimension/*La Clase Mágica* experiments that focus on intergenerational learning, and the introduction of new tools and arrangements to create new forms of learning for university students/novice elementary school teachers and children (Cole *et al.* 2006; Gutiérrez *et al.* 2011; Vasquez 2002). We term this approach to design interventions, social design experiments (Gutiérrez 2008; Gutiérrez and Vossoughi 2010) that design for learning toward transformative ends. A focus on understanding students' repertoires of practice rather than pursuing deficit perspectives of youths' learning and potential, moves us away from studying 'digital divides' or students' lack of access or resources and toward new possibilities. Following McDermott and Raley (2011), we are interested in the value of everyday life and the ingenuity inherent in human activity (Gutiérrez 2013) – ingenuity we call *inventos* (Jacobs-Fantauzzi 2003; Schwartz and Gutiérrez 2013). We note that while there are new opportunities afforded by commodified digital and new media spaces, we have argued that the ingenuity observed in the families' practices is neither new nor unfamiliar to households from non-dominant communities. Instead, inventing, making, tinkering, designing, are indigenous practices, that is, practices that originate and occur naturally in particular ecologies (Gutiérrez 2013).

We take an activity theoretical perspective to examine the social organization of the household (Cole and Engeström 1993; Engeström 1987). We view the interaction of rules, tools, subjects, and objects (e.g., objectives) in constituting activity as fundamental to understanding how interests, affiliations, and digital media use are both shaped and shape

activity through interaction. Through the examination of the activity systems of digital media use in the homes of families and at *El Pueblo Mágico*, we are interested in what types of shared practices develop in interaction, how mutual or contested objects of activity form in everyday life, and how interests are organized by household rules, roles, and tools.

Our data on family mobile tool use and the social organization of the household is drawn from a rich qualitative dataset that is augmented by survey data of youths' new media practices (n = 65 at the elementary school research site and n = 464 at local middle school) that supports the contextualization of our observations. While our study is interested in the new media practices of children and families, our approach necessitates viewing these practices as situated in everyday lives and in light of the constraints and resources of the families' ecology.³ To understand families' practices, we documented participants' daily routines (Gutiérrez *et al.* 2010; Weisner 2003), their social media practices and social networks, and interviewed them about their practices and beliefs related to education, health, and energy. We combined these interviews with extensive participant observation in the homes, of children at work with undergraduates at *El Pueblo Mágico*, and the cognitive ethnographies written by undergraduates who work with children at *El Pueblo*. In two years, we have conducted a total of 196 interviews, coupled with participant observation in families' homes (n = 14). We observed fifty-two family members, including twenty-two focal children, fourteen mothers, seven fathers and nine siblings. We interviewed these parents, twenty-one of the focal children and five of the siblings. We have over 200 hours of videotaped observations in the home and another large corpus of video from *El Pueblo Mágico*. In addition, families used Flip cameras to videotape morning routines, a home media tour, and other activity in the home completing a total of eighty-eight videos. See Table 38.1 for a summary of data sites and sources.

Data that inform the discussion in this chapter were analyzed for routine practices, tool use, and forms of joint activity; we logged and coded video and audio at ten and two minute intervals. At ten-minute intervals we applied meta-data codes on the main activity, tools, participants, language use, participant ensembles, and location in order to quantify observed family activity. Derived from these data, Figures 38.2 and 38.3 show the distribution of the main activities we taped when we followed children in the household of the Ramirez family, the focal case for this discussion. Representative and salient segments for further analysis and transcription were selected from field notes and activity logs to represent key events of typical household activity and youth practices. The transcriptions presented here follow a modified transcription format (Jefferson 2004).

Table 38.1 Data sites and sources

Homes	<i>El Pueblo Mágico</i>	Local schools	CU Boulder education courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 196 interviews • over 200 hours videotaped participant observation • 88 videos taken by families 	~50 hours of video	Survey data from local elementary that houses <i>El Pueblo</i> n = 65 and local middle school n = 464	~600 cognitive ethnographies of CU Boulder students

Moms, kids, and smart phones

Consistent with Pew research (Livingstone 2011; Smith 2011) reporting the prevalence of mobile tool use and mobile Internet access for Latinos, we found that ten of the families with which we worked accessed the Internet primarily through smart phones. In year one, only one of the households in the study that identified as Latino (seven out of nine families) had a computer, and none of the families had an online computer in the home. Though this changed in year two and despite the greater availability of computers, our observations and interviews indicate that mobile access remained significant across families.

Across two years of study, in eight of the fourteen families in our study, mothers with smart phones served as hubs for cell phone use and access to the Internet and social media. Even when children had Internet access via a computer or tablet, they enjoyed the use of their mother’s cell phone for social media, gaming, viewing videos, and looking up information. In only one of the families we followed did the focal children (primarily fourth and fifth graders) have their own cell phones. We found that youth in these families used their mother’s phones, and even when computer access was available in year two, children still preferred their mother’s cell phone or enjoyed using it for their own purposes. For example, Rosa, a focal student in the second grade, used her mother’s cell phone to play games and access Facebook; a desktop computer the school had given the family had not yet been set up because it was considered too big. Across our families, it was reported and observed that children used their mothers’ cell phones to play games, and for access to Facebook or other social media, especially for girls.

Statistics from surveys of new media uses and interests of elementary school children were congruent with our observations of children’s use of their mothers’ cell phones, signaling the potential importance of mothers’ new media practices in promoting joint activity with their children, especially their daughters. Our survey data reveal that 42 percent of girls and 43 percent of boys in the fourth and fifth grades used their own cell phone, while 63 percent of girls and 32 percent of boys in those grades used their mothers’ cell phone. Children’s use of cell phones at Flores Elementary School, the school that houses *El Pueblo Mágico*, and at the middle school it feeds into shows that girls’ use of their mothers’ cell phone drops in half from fourth and fifth grade to sixth grade, from 63 percent to 32 percent, with 95 percent of girls using their own cell phone by eighth grade, as compared to 43 percent in fourth and fifth grade. Elementary school aged boys used their mothers’ cell phones to a lesser degree and also adopt the use of their own phones less than their female peers. See Table 38.2 for a breakdown of cell phone use by gender and grade.

Table 38.2 Use of cell phones by grade and gender

	<i>Uses own cell phone %</i>	<i>Uses mother’s cell phone %</i>
Girls		
Grade 4/5	43	63
Grade 6	78	27
Grade 7	83	28
Grade 8	95	19
Boys		
Grade 4/5	42	32
Grade 6	78	25
Grade 7	86	15
Grade 8	83	19

We found across families that mothers' cell phones played a prominent role in family members' new media repertoires: specifically, we found that: (1) in four of the families, the mother's cell phone provided Internet access instead of computer-based Internet access in the home; (2) family members utilized the mother's cell phone for multiple purposes; and (3) despite distributed use of the cell phone, the mother served as the source and key access point for the tool. We documented that mothers' practices with smart phones mediated their children's activities, from socializing the children into using the phone for communication and commerce to using it to play digital games. Children used mothers' cell phones to look up information for homework, watch videos or TV, play games, and access Facebook (FB), often taking over their mother's account as their own.

Interactions with mobile phones were enmeshed in mother-child relationships, involving everyday tasks and the negotiation of access to coveted tools. For example, one evening a daughter in fourth grade discussed with her mother that she should use the cell phone to look up the word "range" for her math homework. When her mom was reluctant to relinquish the phone, the daughter explained to her mom that this strategy had worked the last time, and puffed out her lower lip to playfully and visibly express her need. We documented connections between literacy and media use. One daughter shared that when she was old enough to read, her mom introduced her to FB and playing games on her phone. In another family, the fifth-grade daughter's constant use of her mother's cell phone for accessing FB prompted the mother to exclaim jokingly, "Me voy a sacar el Facebook!" ("I am going to get rid of Facebook!"). Within a few minutes of this statement, she also asked her daughter what kind of cell phone she owned ("un blackberry"). In the Ramirez family, about whom we will learn more about shortly, Pati, a fifth grader, exclaimed that she did not have her own phone but "I use my mommy's; I know how to work it." This angered her younger sister who was not allotted similar access. In the following section, we examine family cell phone use more closely to help us better understand how practices with the cell phone and other media tools arise from the social organization of the household and inform children's interests, as well as the learning of media and literacy practices.

How interests and collaborative activity emerge, get organized, and travel

We present the case of the Ramirez family, with whom we worked over the course of academic year 2011–2012, to take a closer look at the use of the mother's cell phone in the family's everyday life. The Ramirez family is comprised of Mom, Dad, son Dan, an eighth grader, and daughters Jazi (a fourth grader) and Pati (a fifth grader), as well as an adult 'son' the family had informally adopted. Although both parents worked in landscaping and in food services, they constantly struggled with money and considered themselves poor. Dad was a fluent bilingual and Mom spoke Spanish to a lesser degree. English was the primary language spoken in the home. In the first interview with the family about their social media practices, all of the family members sat together in the living room to discuss their use of technology with us. The family did not have a computer because they shared that they could not afford one, and only Mom had a smart phone (HTC Evo) that she received for her anniversary. Together, the family eagerly constructed Mom as the tech-savvy cell phone user of the household, in contrast with Dad's practices. Daughter Pati yelled out "she texts like a teenager" and Dan followed up with "my dad text-es like an eighty-year-old." After Mom shared that she accessed FB several times a day from her phone, Dad jumped in:

Dad: she does everything on her phone,
[she does everything ↑ deposits checks, deposits check through the phone, uhhhh
she pays bills through it, oh my goodness that phone does everything

- Mom:** [navigation],
Jazi: [it's a smart phone]
Mom: [google
Jazi: >it's smart] phone!<
Mom: I do, I do my work things
Dad: a smart phone for dumb people, heheheh
Dan: people do dumb things with smart phones
(discussion of 'smart' and 'dumb' phones ensues)
Mom: you know sometimes it spells out words and I'm like that's not how you spell it, so it's really not that smart
Jazi: she does her multiplication problems on there
Dad: PlayStation 2 is all I do. That's the only thing I do on the Internet is play online
(Social media and network interview, November 9, 2011)

The family had a clear sense of Mom as an expert user of the smart phone, and a master of the tool and its use for finding information on the Internet. In contrast, Dad shared that multiplayer games were the only thing he did online. While Mom and Dad shared in their beliefs about how to raise their children, and shared goals that traveled across traditional gender roles, their digital media use fell into more normative gendered categories and practices.

In addition to the uses discussed in the family's conversation, Mom used the information garnered through her smart phone to protect, provide for, and guide her family both in the physical and digital world, in the present as well as for the future. The example below illustrates Mom's ingenuity in using her smart phone as a resource to protect her children. It happens that the neighborhood in which they live, despite being a suburban area sandwiched between several schools, is home to a surprisingly high number of registered sex offenders. We learn how the Ramirez Mom navigates the Internet to construct productive family routines to ensure the safety and well-being of her children:

- Dad:** Not when it's cold,
[when it's ALL year long she is a little too overprotective]
Jazi: [when it's raining, (2) like one day when it was raining] the little
Mom: I am a mom
Dad: Yes but I tell her you know he's growing up he needs to=
Mom: =You wanna see the sex offender site?
Dad: nooh my god ↓
Dan: Every time I wanna go, every time
Liz:⁴ every time right here, (laughter)
Dan: Every time I go wanna go
Dad: Yeah she shows me that all the time, the sex offenders
Mom: Wherever we are, do you see this, nope can't go there, nope can't go there (2)
[so this year they are going to hog tie me and lock me in the closet for Halloween so they could actually (laughing)]
Dan: [when I want to walk home from school] when I want to walk to the school to play basketball, no don't go by that house, that's the bad house, that's aa no no house, remember don't cross that street because there are lots of sex offenders right there, so go this way
Dad: She has that sex offender website she gets on it right away. She is like oh my god there is like 6 (snaps) 6 sex offenders=

Mom: yeah 20 just right in this area [just within 4 block range
Pati: 20!

With the knowledge gained from the sex offender site that she kept loaded onto her phone, Mom bounded the geographical space her children could travel. As she related, she is not overprotective; she “is a Mom,” and the smart phone is a tool that supports her mothering. Unlike several other mothers in our study who owned smart phones, she also prohibited her daughters’ use of social media sites and virtually monitored her son’s use of Facebook. Mom also kept passwords to the Internet in the home, determined which type of digital games the children could play, and restricted their game play to one hour a day. As we will elaborate below, this surveillance forced Jazi into subversive game play and into a space dominated by her brother and father. In this case, we observed how Mom’s cultural model of child-rearing oriented her to organize daily routines for her children’s safety, as well as to monitor the amount and kind of game play she believes is allowable and productive. As in all cultural artifacts, we observe the enabling and constraining dimensions of such models – models that serve as both resources and constraints for family life.

Sweet Genius

In addition to protecting her children’s safety, Mom used her cell phone to find information to provide for the economic well-being of her family. For example, on one cold Saturday morning Dad became frustrated trying to fix Mom’s car with relatives and friends. Inside, Mom sat in the living room poring over her phone for several hours in order to help identify the problem with her car, and to find the part she thought was needed to fix it. During the “Education and health” interview we conducted with Mom, Dad stayed in the discussion and again offered his commentary on Mom’s practices. Here the discussion centered on Mom’s use of the Internet with her phone to find home remedies:

Mom: I like to do my little home [remedies
Dad: from] the Internet!!
Mom: you type in home remedies, for like cold or runny nose and it pulls up different websites you can get on
Mom: I like to see different things if it works it work if it don’t
Ultimately it’s OTC and home remedies
Dad: Quit trying to make home remedies! Reading her phone trying to make it!
Monique you are gonna drop the phone inside your home remedy!
Mom: I have the girls trying somewhat similar type things, “Mom, let’s look this up”?
Mom: We watch a lot of food network. They were making play dough cupcakes.
Well today you have a blueberry filled cupcake with chocolate springs on top. Play dough. They are doing “Sweet Genius⁵” too.

(Education and health interview, November 14, 2012)

Mom discussed that she gets the girls to look up “similar type things” related to the practice of home remedy making with her on the phone. She associated this activity with another media engagement, watching cooking shows. We were able to make the connection between these two media practices and the girls’ imaginary play in the home and at *El Pueblo Mágico*. As Mom shared, the girls play “Sweet Genius,” a reality cooking competition show, and make play food in the home. In a home video created by the girls, they film themselves acting out a cooking

show with the Famous Chef Jazi, personal chef to President Obama. Their brother served as cameraman, and they produced ‘special effects’ with a light stick that glowed in different colors.

At *El Pueblo Mágico* that semester, the girls participated in a project called “World Maker” where they created an imaginary world and the foods that would go in it, including marshmallows and, as Jazi shared, the protein they would need to survive. In both the home and *El Pueblo*, they use their knowledge of food, and the practice of imaginative play to construct their world. They made “pretend” food at *El Pueblo Mágico* and at home in play with their siblings and peers. These practices have roots in their mother’s interest and practice of watching cooking shows and researching information about food and home remedies online. Figure 38.1 maps activity from Mom’s interests and media practices to the girls’ imaginary play at home to their “World Maker” activity at *El Pueblo Mágico*. The move from Mom’s interests and practices with media to children’s practices shared below highlights the kind of joint media engagement and imaginative play that predominated in the household.

Structuring ‘the how’

Play activities in the Ramirez home are better understood when situated within the rules and beliefs shared by Mom and Dad about their children’s participation in household chores, homework, and play. Through discussion in interviews and activity taped in the home, we saw that household rules, roles, and tools, and the forms of assistance given to their children for homework, chores, and play activity, closely aligned to the parents’ shared beliefs about child-rearing and family life. The parents structured household activity in ways they believed

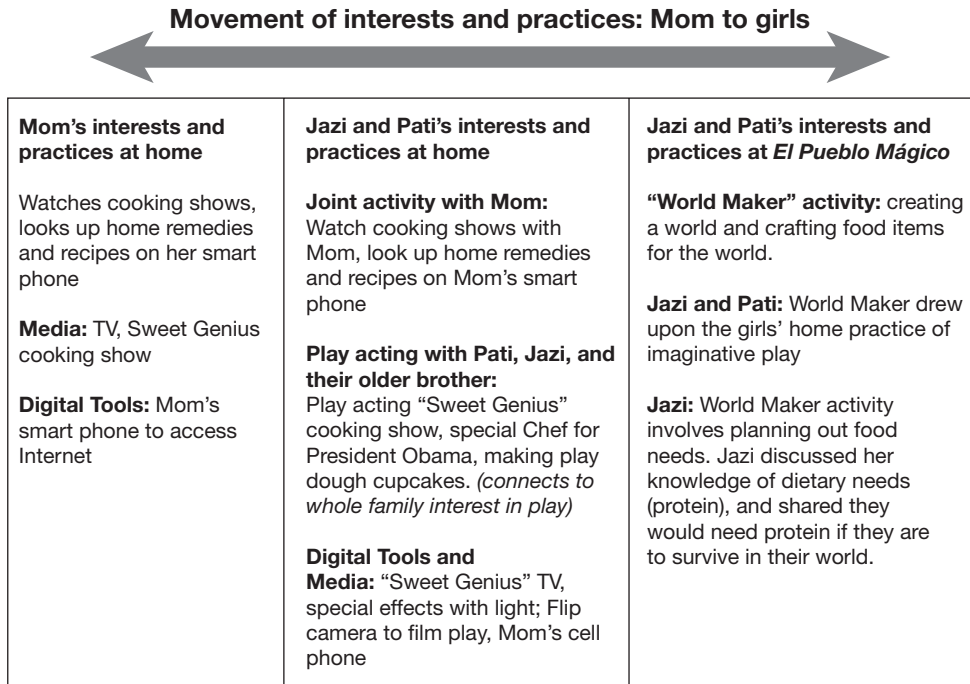


Figure 38.1 Movement of Mom’s practices and interests with her cell phone and media to her daughters, at home and at *El Pueblo Mágico*.

supported their goal of building independence in their children – a trait they believed would support the development of a career trajectory and, thus, a more productive life than their parents. In creating structures for the children to achieve that independence, Mom helped the children set goals; and she used her smart phone to inform what she talked about as the ‘How’ of achieving goals, such as attending college and becoming an astronaut. In the conversation below, Mom explains how she used the Internet to support her children (the names Lisa and Liz denote the researchers). In the course of the education and health interview we conducted, Mom discusses a question about her children’s futures and shares the following,

Mom: What do you do to help them set goals? Well he sets them and I try to help them understand how. This is what HAS to be done; this is how much it costs; this is what needs to be done in order to get to that school. This is the GPA they want you to have.

Lisa: so you go through and

Liz: where do you get that info

Mom: Internet ((says in bashful tone))

Dad: she gets on the Internet and!

Lisa: is it easy to find

Mom: is it what

Lisa: is it easy to find?

Mom: oh yeah oh yeah

Mom: This is HOW you are going to accomplish this. Don’t crush her dreams.

You let her if she really wants to she can regardless. No matter what. How impossible it may seem you can do it. This is how you can do it.

(Education and health interview, November 14, 2012)

Mom felt strongly that an important part of the ‘How’ is creating routines in the children’s home life that will support their future independence. The parents were committed to their children’s education through jointly structuring homework activity. Additionally, they jointly assigned chores to the siblings, such as feeding the dogs and cleaning the bathroom. Everyone in the house, Mom and Dad and the girls and boys, cooked and cleaned, a practice captured many times on tape.

Of interest, these findings align with what Gutiérrez and colleagues observed in a seven-year interdisciplinary study of the everyday lives of middle-class families. As found in the larger study, we find that parents, like the Ramirez family, take tremendous care in identifying and arranging the developmental tasks that scaffold their children’s development, and do so toward an adult-defined image of the future (Gutiérrez *et al.* 2010; Gutiérrez 2011):

families draw on their own past trajectories to negotiate everyday life and socialize their children through the practices and family routines they arranged; the accomplishment of children’s well-being and their futures is a fundamental part of the cultural project of development of families.

(Gutiérrez 2011: 12)

The Ramirez parents also valued imagination and play as important to their children’s development. Figures 38.2 and 38.3 show the main activities filmed by both the researchers and the family themselves; in both, play takes precedence, followed by activity with media, household chores, and school-related work. Mom and Dad wanted their children to aim for big

dreams and obtain higher education. They offered opportunities for the children to apprentice with them to learn how to do work and to take on tasks that the children wanted to learn, e.g., laundry, cooking, or the use of Mom’s smart phone, especially with Pati, the eldest daughter.

Negotiating influence: Zombie cheerleader, half Broncos/half raiders

Mom and Dad related digital game play was the children’s favorite thing to do with technology; Jazi shared playing video games was her favorite thing to do when she could not go outside to play. Yet, during our visits to the home, we did not see the girls play digital games, likely because Mom scheduled our visits on days she did not work her long hours as a manager at a fast food chain restaurant. Children’s home life was structured for them to be productive members of the household, and household chores and imaginative play were officially sanctioned as taking

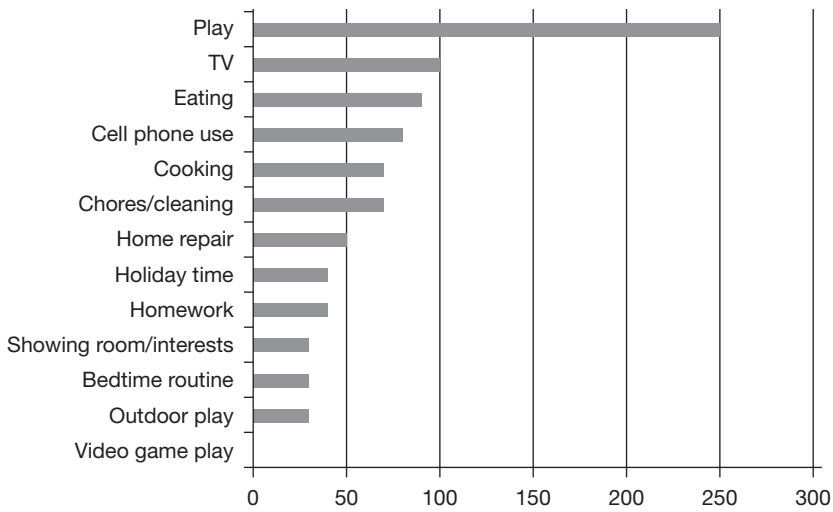


Figure 38.2 Ramirez family: number of minutes devoted to activities (a total of 16.5 hours of videotaped participant observations data).

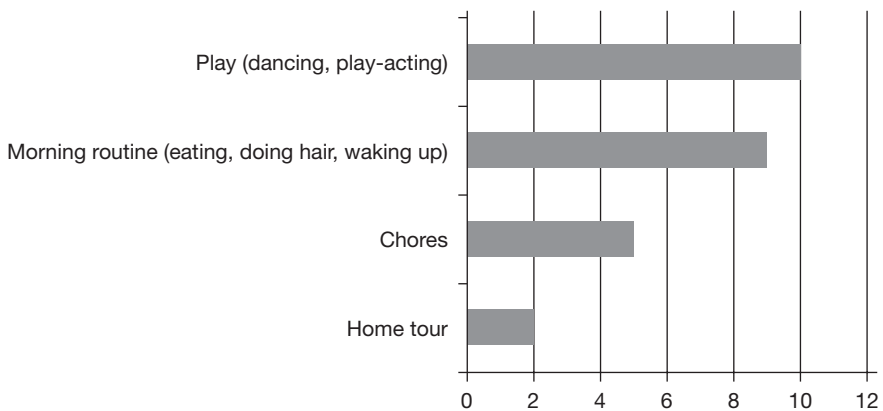


Figure 38.3 Ramirez family: main content of videos taken by family with Flip camera.

precedence over the use of digital media. Figure 38.4 shows how the parents' shared interest in and valuation of play traveled across participants in the home and into *El Pueblo*.

Mom and Dad also spoke proudly of their children's imaginative play and drawing. As with many children (Black 2008; Schwartz 2014), role-playing and character-based participation was an interest and practice that influenced digital game and imaginary play at home for both sisters. In video taken both by the family and the researchers, we documented the sisters acting out the story of Hansel and Gretel (see Figure 38.5) and creating cooking shows and other dramas. (Mom and Dad, who were off-camera, served as the children's audience for their plays and play.) Jazi discussed her fight with her brother over who would play the character of Wolverine in the *X-Men* video game. She reported that she liked to play video games because she and her siblings could work together, take risks, and start again if they failed, or in her words, "'Cause it's fun and we get to play together and we don't get mad, like, if we mess up 'cause if we mess up we die and when we die we get to be a person again and we just have to start over." Jazi's description of the possibility to make mistakes and take risks in digital games, and for collaborative, joint activity with her siblings situates her digital game play in the broader context of her family life, and the potential of this sensibility for learning.

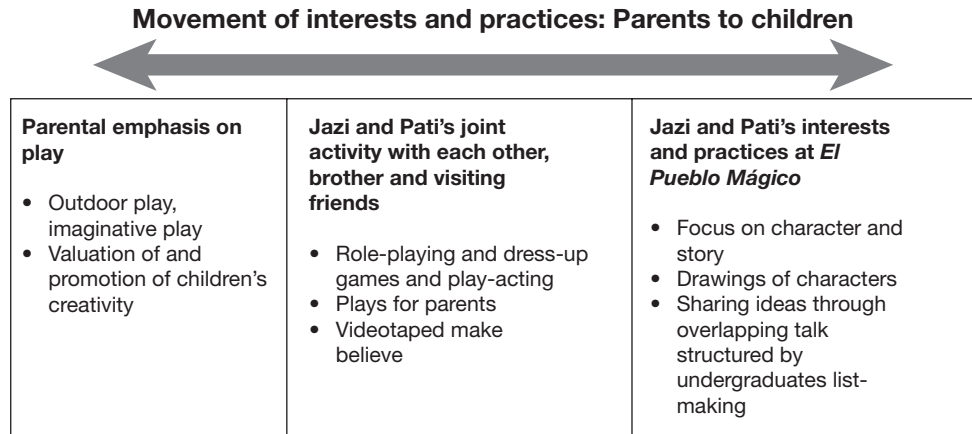


Figure 38.4 Movement of interests and practices, both parents to the children.



Figure 38.5 Play-acting 'Hansel and Gretel' Pati, Jazi, and a neighbor put on a show for Mom and Dad (photograph © Kris D. Gutiérrez).

Unsurprisingly, with Mom at home, homework, household chores, and imaginative and outdoor play predominated during our visits (see Figures 38.2 and 38.3); during our observations, we never documented any family members playing digital games. However, both from the children's final interviews and their game play at *El Pueblo Mágico*, we gained a sense of how their gaming practices and imaginative play in the home shaped their participation in creating a digital game at *El Pueblo Mágico*. At *El Pueblo Mágico*, the sisters' construction of their own game reflected their interest in character-based narratives, joint participation, and play. In addition, we learned from our analysis of the undergraduates' cognitive ethnographies and researcher field notes that the children's strong presence with yet encouraging orientation toward their peers at *El Pueblo*, mirrored the types of collaborative participation that their parents structured in the home:

Melanie asked what is the goal of the game? They said I don't know. So I said let's start with characters first. (OC: it seemed better to start with characters...as this generated more buzz. a lot of it!) Everyone was shouting out characters at the same time (undergrads and girls).

(Field notes, Schwartz, September 26, 2011)

The girls' overlapping and excited talk while planning their digital game at *El Pueblo* was similar to the structure of discourse in the home, as was their emphasis on the character Jazi brought to her game play with her brother and in the girls' imaginary play-acting.

Jazi had a more robust gaming practice than her sister Pati. In Jazi's final interview she described her brother as the person who introduced her to digital games by purchasing her a Nintendo DS (handheld game player) and a game, and showed her commercials about games on TV. Utilizing knowledge of the context of her home practices, we conducted an interview away from her home, asking her specific questions about her game play. Jazi explained that she played a variety of games that her mother disallowed and that were, she explained, "not appropriate for school." Her dad and brother helped her to get on the Internet to play massive multiplayer online games (MMOs). She liked to play *Grand Theft Auto* and *Black Ops Call of Duty* with "kids from school." She explained that she played *X-Men* with her brother in his basement bedroom and that her Dad also played games with them when he was not busy with his own game play. She related she did not like "girl games" although several of her friends preferred to play dress-up or "girl games." The gendered aspect of Jazi's participation with digital games, as sanctioned by the male members of the family, stands in contrast to her sister who aligned more with the practices related to her mother's cell phone practices (e.g., social media and information seeking). Figure 38.6 shows how practices and interests in the household generated by the male members became part of Jazi and Pati's activity.

At *El Pueblo Mágico*, sister Pati designed a "zombie cheerleader" character in her digital game as "half broncos, half raiders." This designation aptly captured the girls' split attention to their mother and father's similar yet divergent interests. At *El Pueblo Mágico* in the fall of 2011, Jazi and Pati were in an ensemble of participants that also included several other girls, undergraduates, and a researcher working together on creating a digital game with a programming application called *AgentSheets*. During their initial game play at *El Pueblo*, we observed that the girls were highly engaged in sharing ideas and working together primarily through planning and drawing characters; the support of adults in the group helped to structure a progression of tasks in which the girls were able to coordinate their game-playing activity. Unfortunately, as the task became more difficult and out of the range of expertise of the youth and female adults, none who were gamers, the task became less collaborative and less character-based. Finally, the girls lost interest.

Movement of interests and practices: Dad and brother to girls



<p>Dad and brother's interests and practices at home</p> <p>Digital Game Play: Black Ops Zombie game X-Men Sports MMO games</p> <p>Digital Tools and Media: PS3, Internet, TV ads advertising games, game magazines</p> <p>Dad: "PlayStation 2 is all I do. That's the only thing I do on the Internet is play online"</p>	<p>Jazi's interests and practices at home</p> <p>Joint activity with brother: Plays X-Men with brother who she fights with to play the character of Wolverine, Zombie game, <i>Grand Theft Auto</i></p> <p>Access through Dad: Login for online game play facilitated by Dad (Black Ops)</p> <p>Digital Tools and Media: PS3, Internet (use of brother and fathers' logins and access)</p> <p>Jazi: does not like "girl games"; likes to play games "not allowed by Mom" and games that are "not appropriate for school"</p>	<p>Jazi and Pati's interests and practices at <i>El Pueblo Mágico</i></p> <p>Digital Game Play with undergraduates at <i>El Pueblo Mágico</i>: Jazi and Pati work on "Spooky Buddies" Halloween-themed game. They focus on character development (connects to whole family interest in play)</p> <p>Digital Tools and Media: <i>AgentSheets</i> digital game creation tool, hand-drawn characters, brainstorming</p> <p>Pati: her "zombie cheerleader" character in her digital game is "half broncos and half raiders" representing her mixed allegiance via Mom and Dad's football teams</p>
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Figure 38.6 Movement of Dad and brother's media and digital game play practices to the girls at home and at *El Pueblo Mágico*.

We note here the importance of designing more robust onramps that would provide the girls the opportunity to level up their game play and to connect their home game-playing practices and interests to the activity at *El Pueblo*.

Recommendations for practice

Shared rules, gendered participation, mother's practices

In the Ramirez household, we saw that despite the distributed nature of responsibility and mutual objects across male and female members of the homes, gender shaped participation in digital game play. While there was an ethos of whole house participation in chores with shared rules regarding daily routines in the Ramirez family, normative gender divisions and roles on the part of the adults still largely shaped children's practices with digital media. In the Ramirez family, the Dad and brother provided supportive but also subversive scaffolding of participation in digital game play because this play ran counter to Mom's rules and ideologies of 'mothering.' However, we see Mom demonstrating great expertise with the smart phone and sharing her expertise with other family members in order to support their learning, and to protect and care for them. By viewing how both Mom and Dad served as rule-makers and gatekeepers, we learned how access formed children's interests, and how rules for participation helped and hindered learning. Of significance, we can bring these understandings into

conversation when we work to support children's digital practices and literacies in other contexts.

Mothers as important figures for children's new literacies development

At a time when twenty-first-century skills and new literacies are considered important components of schooling and digital tools are increasingly recognized for supporting and expanding learning, our findings point to the importance of attending to the following: (1) the ways mothers' roles as literacy brokers is evolving with the introduction of digital tools; and (2) the everyday social practices associated with tool use. Consider how Mom in the Ramirez family protected her children and supported their learning and development through finding information with the help of her smart phone – information that structured their participation and movement in everyday life and supported their imaginative play. Tools, of course, are both enabling and constraining. Mom's rules both bounded her children's use of digital media, as well as structured their collaborative practice and use of their own imagination and multiple resources. When asked about the importance of technology in the social media interview, Pati responded, "technology isn't always that important, you could use a book you know. We learned that from our Mom." Mom's beliefs about technology were indexed in the family's everyday practices. As we previously mentioned, Mom in the Ramirez family believed that the parents' role as educators was to support the 'how' of achieving and modeling goals.

Moreover, we learn from our analyses that children's interest-based, collaborative new media practices emerge from the social organization of the household. We observed parents' and siblings' and cousins' rules, beliefs, and activities take shape through household activity and surface to engender activity at *El Pueblo Mágico*. The flow of practices from parents and other family members' interests and rules to young family members provides the opportunity to see what supports and constrains participation. These important understandings serve to inform new design principles that can re-mediate (Gutiérrez *et al.* 2009) participation trajectories, without divorcing activity from the social practices of the home – practices that can be important resources for appropriating digital literacies in other contexts.

Future directions

The family practices we have discussed illustrate how joint mediated activity creates a context for robust learning through the negotiation of shared tools. In the home, access to mobile tools and the absence of computers provides openings that generate co-participation across multiple members of the household; expertise and tool use are distributed. As our data indicate, strategies for access to and socialization of the use of mobile tools involved the development of shared goals for imaginative and digital game play; in the case of the cooking shows, joint media consumption connected to multiple sources of interests and contexts. These participation structures run counter to normative school practices that are organized around one-to-one use of digital tools, even though poor schools have difficulty providing this type of access. As mobile tools become increasingly ubiquitous in classrooms, understanding how these tools are situated, valued, and employed in families' everyday lives provides an important resource for the design of new learning environments and for the social organization of learning in the classroom.

Finally, with the rhetoric of twenty-first-century skills, schools look to incorporate features of collaborative and interest-based activity that occurs outside of schools, often in conjunction

with new media, digital games, and other forms of play, into classroom ecologies. Yet, too often digital tools are employed in schools for non-dominant youth in reductive, “worksheet”-like activities. Too often digital tools are considered to be a “magic box” (Warshauer 2006) that can extend learning, without attention to the social context surrounding their use. To generate the kind of “media mix” (Ito *et al.* 2008) and “convergence culture” (Jenkins 2008) that develops synergies between practices, interests, and tools across contexts, educators need to have a greater understanding of how non-dominant youth are using the resources that circulate in their everyday lives, including the organization of their family lives. We look to the work of Glynda Hull and colleagues (Hull and Schultz 2002; Hull and Stornaiuolo 2014), as exemplars of studying the possibility and ingenuity of new media with youth from non-dominant communities across the globe, across settings, and along trajectories. In this work, we learn the possibilities of youth leveraging tools, identities, and new forms of communication across difference; a kind of Cosmopolitanism in which the imagination and the imagined selves are central. While our work focused on the everyday routines of families and their potential to inform practices across settings, Hull’s body of work helps us understand how digital media can mediate youths’ sense of self and relationships to the world more broadly.

Notes

- 1 The Leveraging Horizontal Expertise study, funded by the MacArthur Foundation, is part of the suite of studies of the Connected Learning Research Network of which Gutiérrez is a Co-PI and project PI.
- 2 Pseudonyms are used for participants’ names.
- 3 The methods employed in this study were informed by the methods employed in a 7 year study of the CELF Everyday Lives of Working Middle Class Families (UCLA), of which Gutierrez was a was a CO-PI, Elinor Ochs, PI.
- 4 Elizabeth Mendoza is a researcher who was co-conducting the interview with one of the authors (Schwartz).
- 5 *Sweet Genius* is a US reality-based cooking television series on the Food Network.

Related topics

Connected learning, Horizontal expertise, Youth and family new media practices, New media literacies, Repertoires of practice, Non-dominant communities.

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ORAL HISTORY AS A COMMUNITY LITERACY PROJECT

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We create stories to define our existence.

If we do not create the stories, we probably go mad.

(Shekhar Kapur, TED Talks, We Are the Stories We Tell Ourselves 2009)

Introduction

Oral history offers communities a route to a type of community literacy in that the stories and memories of community members may be documented. In addition, oral history may serve to illuminate literacy studies in any of its forms. In any given community as researchers and community members examine literacy practices, oral history interviews may add a new set of lenses to view community literacy practices. Furthermore, as a person who conducts oral histories, it is always my hope that methodologically, new insight may be gained through conducting oral history projects. To move the interview beyond the transcript is a goal of many oral historians. Moreover, oral history may be construed as part of a larger project for literacy researchers to research their own literacy practices as a type of self-study process. Finally, of those projects that capture the voices of marginalized persons and groups, oral history may be thought of as a social justice undertaking.

You may be asking what is oral history? It is defined in various ways but I use this definition for our era. “Oral history is the collection of stories and reminiscences of a person or persons who have firsthand knowledge of any number of experiences” (Janesick 2010: 2). Oral history is multifaceted in that it gives voice to many who normally are outsiders or minority members and in addition it gives voice to any individual member of a given community. As such it is a vehicle for social justice for it is inclusive by design. Furthermore, in our current digital era, the use of digital technologies to conduct interviews, transcribe interviews, and sort information are often free and available through the World Wide Web 2.0. The use of smart phones, hand-held tablets, and most definitely the iPad has made it possible to conduct oral history interviews and learn from them. In this chapter, I wish to address the power and value of oral history by examining briefly how oral history may advance literacy in a given community. The beauty of oral history is that storytelling is at the heart of oral history and almost everyone loves a good story.

Historical perspectives

You may be wondering about why we should even consider oral history as a vehicle for community literacy. After all, when conducting oral history you as a researcher will have to sit down and listen to someone describe their lived experience, tape the interviews, transcribe them, etc. Then you will interpret that story in terms of some wider context as we make meaning of a person's lived history. Following that, it makes sense to disseminate the oral history project either in written form or for placement in an archive or oral history collection. In this hectic fast-paced Instant Message, texting-centered society, phones-attached-to-the-ear world, how are we to interest prospective oral historians in the act of doing oral history? The answer to that question is as skillfully as possible. Oral history as an approach to history is solid, dependable and has a documented trajectory in the humanities and social sciences. If we look to Greek mythology and the story of Clio, the Muse of History, we find that how we decide to tell a person's story is of critical importance. Likewise, who is telling the story also becomes pivotal. Doing oral history may be of interest to this generation for they in fact are involved in storytelling through YouTube, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and in numerous other outlets. The prospective oral historian is also assisted by being media and technology savvy all perfectly suited to oral history.

In this digital era, oral history is one of the genres where multiple forms of media are useful such as digital storytelling, Skype interviewing, videotaping interviews, journal writing as electronic journal, and audio recording stories. Historically, there are a number of textbooks for referral in terms of the how, who, what, and where of oral history (Ellis 1992; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2008; Janesick 2007, 2010, 2011; Leavy 2011; Ritchie 2003; Yow 1994). In addition, numerous websites, electronic journals, and list serves are available to the oral historian and these sites are user friendly. In short, the electronic era is alive and well for oral historians. Furthermore, oral history is of interest to many scholars in a variety of fields such as education, health, gerontology, medicine, business, and the social sciences and the arts. Most recently, policy researchers can be added to this list as they are creating ways to think about policy through those persons on the front line of the policy. Policy researchers are looking at individual life histories and oral histories for understanding any given social context. As a result, oral history is a useful vehicle for many researchers. It is amazing in many ways how oral history as a field has adapted to the digital context given its roots which began with telling stories, then documenting them on audio tape, then video tape, then digital techniques for capturing stories and now entire collections of documentaries available in many cases free and on the World Wide Web 2.0. Our history has spanned centuries because storytelling is important in any society.

You might be thinking about storytelling and what aspects of the stories told as oral history might offer the reader. The characteristics of oral history allow for interviewing or document analysis and review in a way that is user friendly to individuals. Some characteristics of oral history include:

- 1 Oral history is holistic in nature and in general uses everyday language to communicate the oral history project.
- 2 Oral history is a form of storytelling that looks at relationships.
- 3 Oral history acknowledges ethical issues.
- 4 Oral history tells a story without reference to prediction, control, testing, or generalizability.
- 5 Oral history values the unique quality of each person's individual disclosure.
- 6 Oral history respects the importance of informed consent.

- 7 Oral historians use all sorts of data. Interviews are the mainstay of oral history but demographic information, any relevant documents and so on are often incorporated in an oral history study to understand the social context of the story.
- 8 In general, oral historians add to the knowledge base of the human condition in any given discipline.
- 9 Most often, oral historians today use the technology of this digital era to help document an individual's lived experience. In many cases, social media may assist in this and widely used formats such as YouTube or assorted software is in play.
- 10 Often oral history methods are employed following disasters such as the Haitian earthquake, Hurricane Katrina, or the events immediately following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. At the same time, ordinary people and their lived experiences have also been documented.

What we can see from this is the wide range of attributes and properties of oral history. Not only does this make oral history accessible to researchers but to other practitioners as well. It is user friendly and adaptable. It can be used in a wide variety of circumstances and anyone can be interviewed as a witness to tragedy or daily life. At any level of expertise one may be an interviewer or an interviewee. As a result, community literacy can surely be advanced through oral history.

Broadly speaking I think of oral history as developing through three different periods. The first period is the *era of the traditional*, the second era is that of an *era of reconceptualization* of oral history, and the current era is that of the *postmodern technological era*. Traditionally, stories were told with the tools at one's disposal, such as cave paintings and carvings, or simply handing down stories from one generation to the next. In traditional times we concentrated on the stories of the elite. After the invention of the printing press and through the industrial revolution however, we began to take down stories in writing, then photographs and film, and we concentrated on the individuals at the heart of the experience. This began an *era of reconceptualization* of oral history and interviews were conducted with frontline grassroots individuals. For example, the documentation of the Holocaust survivors from their view or the stories told upon return by all family members from the two world wars, or the slave diaries. Third, this, the *postmodern technological era*, is a time of using all types of media to tell stories from the members of underrepresented groups such as female labor leaders, protesters against war, feminist leaders, union members, or firefighters, or parents on parenthood. Currently we have widened and opened the possibilities for the content spaces of oral history as well as the process of oral history itself. In terms of content, *the inclusion of race, class, and gender* issues into the discourses, the analysis and interpretation of oral history projects, and the focus on *social justice*, only adds to our understanding of the social world and the individual's place in it. Furthermore in terms of processes, in this postmodern technological era, we have at our disposal more historical information through digital access to the World Wide Web 2.0. Likewise, software, hardware, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and whatever else is invented by the time this chapter goes to press, have assisted all researchers but certainly those of us who do oral history. It is through the media available that we are able to identify critical issues and topics for our time.

Critical issues and topics

I would like to describe three critical issues of our time for oral historians and by extension these are also critical issues for community literacy. The issues are:

- 1 The importance of testimony in oral history.
- 2 Oral history as a social justice project.
- 3 Oral history in the digital era and use of social media, blogs, and other digital tools.

First let us turn to the importance of testimony thereby gaining some understanding of how oral history may be a vehicle for capturing stories previously untold.

Testimony as oral history

A very useful prototype for oral history is that of testimony. Most often, testimony is used to document abuses of repressive governments or their perpetrators. This testimony is then regularly used for restitution in official courts. The most striking example is that of South Africa and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC captured the stories of victims who were brutally treated. The unique quality of the TRC was that victims had to face their abusers, recount the monstrous deeds and the perpetrators had to ask for forgiveness. Desmond Tutu (1999) wrote of this extensively and in his book we get a firsthand look at the lived experience of Apartheid. Tutu catalogues four types of truth and claims that one cannot come to forgiveness without at least factual truth. His four types include:

- 1 *Factual and forensic truth*, that is the actual evidence which exists. In this case the evidence of beatings, murders, and other violent crimes with the names of the victims and perpetrators.
- 2 *Personal or narrative truth*, that is the person's actual taped testimony or the narrative of what and how the events occurred.
- 3 *Social or cultural truth*, which is basically the social, cultural, political, and psychological context within which the events described took place.
- 4 *Healing or restorative truth*, which is what is needed to heal and restore communications and trust. In the case of South Africa and the TRC, the abusers had to admit to what they had done, ask for forgiveness, and then could apply for amnesty. This was the first truth commission of its kind to actually grant amnesty.

Again, here we see the power of testimony and people telling their stories through description of their lived experience. For community literacy, the implications are substantial. If any given community is facing serious problems such as the environmental toxins associated with fracking (the fracturing of rock to find natural gas), the social problems in two neighborhoods of Chicago with drive-by shootings, or the aftermath of a hurricane, oral historians are often able to record and archive the descriptions of the lived experiences involved. From these archives, the next generations have a record of what occurred and the reactions to these complications. In addition, in war zones the testimony of individuals who are victims and those who are perpetrators of the damage may also offer insight into the architecture of war. All in all, testimony is a vehicle for facilitating oral history.

Oral history as a social justice project

Similarly, oral history is a perfect instrument for acknowledging the written or spoken record of the lived experience of minority members in general and any individual or group outside of the mainstream. Thus a social justice dimension of oral history comes into play. Also, oral history gives us thick descriptions, analyses, and interpretation of people's lives and adds to the

historical record on the treatment of minorities at various levels of any given society. Originally oral history was centered on elites such as generals returning from war or the head of a bank or the president of an organization, and codified as such. Eventually historians and other researchers realized that while these voices are valuable, we also need a more complete picture of events. To interview only generals is a lopsided story. To interview only the leader of an organization leaves out a great deal of the grassroots mechanics of an organization. Thus a combination of interviewing ordinary participants and minority participants added a richer and more nuanced portrait of events. Throughout the various wars of the United States for example, military members returning from battle are interviewed and these tales of recounting the events in wartime are kept as a persistent military record. The documentation of attitudes on race, class, and gender are more readily given by minorities in society or in an organization and *from their point of view*. This is the social justice component of oral history. In other words if we only looked at the general's story we would be missing all the other stories of individuals experiencing the same event. The beauty of oral history as a social justice project is that it is inclusive of all stories. Furthermore, oral history, when viewed as a social justice project, involves a deep interpretation of events and their subsequent implications.

Oral history in the digital era

If there ever was a perfect time to do oral history, surely it is this postmodern moment complete with the various digital technologies and assistive devices for dynamic and authentic stories captured in film, video, written text, and visual representation. In addition, many researchers find that the use of Skype or FaceTime as a medium for interviewing has facilitated the interview process admirably. Use of these and other digital techniques can actually make the process less cumbersome. The digital interviewing process is one that includes many options for interviewing, transcribing, editing, and analyzing the information at hand. Digital interviewing might include the following digital devices:

- 1 Interviewing itself may take place on Skype, Gmail, FaceTime, iTalk, or iSpeak;
- 2 Recording the digital online interview may use Call Graph or CamStudio or IMCapture;
- 3 Editing may be facilitated through GarageBand on the Mac, Audacity, Express Scribe, and Dragon Naturally Speaking on any computer;
- 4 Other digital tools to facilitate analysis may include Penzu.com where a writer may keep a researcher reflective journal in digital format with complete privacy. For today's learner already digitally savvy this may be a way to encourage reflective thinking and writing.

Thus, oral historians have at their disposal today tools that facilitate in a timely manner all aspects of the interviewing process, the reflective journal writing process and eventually even the software to assist in data management and analysis. Software systems are so numerous that I wish to refer here to only two examples of major sites that will lead you to the software fit for your project.

First, there is an abundance of software available for organizing data that is useful to researchers. It is easy to go to a site which recounts the dozens of possibilities in the market place. A good place to start is www.audience dialogue.net/soft-qual.html for the extensive options for the oral historian or any qualitative researcher. Here you will find lists of specific software, data-entering techniques from your transcripts for example, software for content analysis and concept mapping, and multimedia presentation options. Most importantly, a link is provided titled, "4. Links to other websites" which makes it effortless to find a fit for you and

your project. Many of these tools are free but some do charge a one-time fee or a monthly fee so let the reader be aware. Usually if there is a fee there is often a thirty-day period for free to see if the software suits your purposes.

Second, the website, www.dedoose.com offers a service for a monthly fee for research software for the World Wide Web 2.0. It offers features that are not available elsewhere. For example, documents, excerpts from documents and any project codes are available in real time. There is a visual component in the software that allows for composing a presentation in an artistic visual format by clustering themes and categories. It is transparent, intuitive, and collaborative. Any number of researchers may access the files and the complete project. In other words, tools like these help to organize your data, make the process of recounting the lived experience of your participants easier, and the eventual final story a more cohesive, authentic enterprise.

Main research methods

The main research methods of the oral historian are the interview, site documents that help to inform the context of the study, the researcher reflective journal, any demographic information pertinent to the story and the use of photography, film, or video for the project. There are numerous books on oral history for detailed information on technique (see the following for example, Berg 2006; Janesick 2010; Perks and Thomson 2006; Reinhartz 1992; Ritchie 2003; Yow 1994). There are established professional organizations such as The Oral History Association, and there are journals devoted to oral history listed later in this chapter. The resources are abundant. Oral historians, originally in the last century for example, most often did a taped interview and then most often stored it in a library or archive. Today, the oral historian goes a bit beyond this with integration of many digital tools to collect data, analyze it, and tell the final story of the person's lived experience. In addition, many new archives are going entirely digital following the example of the era. Likewise, individuals are telling their own stories on YouTube and through social media networks, most often on Facebook. Thus dissemination of the oral history project has become more fluid, less constricted and offers us a wide variety of individual stories. Just to list a few examples on YouTube, see the variety at: www.youtube.com/user/oralhistoryvideo. Here you will see examples of oral histories of every-day citizens talking about how they survived a divorce, how they live with disabilities, and other key life changing events. However, if you search YouTube for 'oral histories' thousands of examples pop up. You will have to select out those you wish to learn about. Further, as you search the World Wide Web 2.0 in general with the term *oral history*, or the term for a specific oral history, such as 'oral histories of the first responders to September 11, 2001,' you will find so many examples, that again, sifting through and researching your area becomes critical. As I am writing this, I searched with the terms 'oral history hurricane Katrina' and came up with 152,000 entries. To experience this go to the Harvard Medical School oral history archive at: <http://hurricanearchive.org/collections/show/103>. There you will see community oral histories. Or alternatively see the US Coast Guard Site: www.uscg.mil/history/katrina/katrinaorallhistoryindex.asp for stories of rescue swimmers, pilots, and those who are rescued. Overall, the wide repertoire of oral histories in every corner of society indicates to me that oral history is alive and well and contributing to community literacy.

Similarly, when searching with the tag 'oral history 9/11 first responders,' more than 23,000 sites are identified. This does not include the archived collections that may be available. The first site at: www.911memorial.org/oral-histories-0 is the official memorial site and includes the audio spoken word oral histories of family members, residents, first responders, and survivors.

To listen and hear each voice tell these powerful stories again reiterates the power of oral history for community literacy. In each section alone especially the first responders section, there are hundreds of testimonials. All this is to say that the digital resources are there for the taking. Still further, there are well over 100 'how to oral history' sites on the World Wide Web 2.0. Many lessons about a community and how community members come together at times of crisis, disasters, and achievements are available for all.

Recommendations for practice and future directions

My main recommendation for future practice is simple. Educate yourself in terms of technology. Find out what the digital era tools can do for you and your oral history project. Many might say why bother? Others see that what worked in the last century in terms of literacy is not sufficient for this time. Being digitally literate is now more than any other time required, especially for understanding the full spectrum of literacy. Today's youth are obsessed with technology but now we need to move to understanding technology critically. For the oral history researcher the tools briefly outlined earlier in this piece will only serve to illuminate more fully any given person's lived experience. Practice is paramount. Refining the techniques and practicing interviewing, transcribing interviews, analyzing relevant documents all will help in developing good habits of mind. To become more reflective is also of importance. By keeping a researcher reflective journal to record and check what you yourself are experiencing in the oral history project is valuable. I like to think of the reflective journal as a tool for refining your understanding of the participant's responses and firsthand accounts of an event as well as refining your beliefs and values in terms of the study. Journal writing is a type of connoisseurship by which the journal writer records the history of ideas related to the project. Currently many find the site www.penzu.com a dependable and helpful space to record and keep a journal online. Here it is possible to practice online proficiency as well as reflective writing skills. Digital literacy is one future direction for examination in the area of oral history and community literacy.

Another direction for consideration is that of developing good ethical habits of mind. Oral historians and prospective oral historians protect their participants by obtaining informed consent, consent and releases for photography and videos, and by working according to the standards set by local Institutional Review Boards as required. In the wider ethical arena, issues of social justice will most likely be a central focus for oral historians.

Social justice is on the minds of the current generation of scholars in most fields. See any journal in your own field and find the topic alive and well. Oral historians have always sought out stories from the disenfranchised. Now, and key to the future of oral history, is the time to make meaning of race, class, and gender issues under the rubric of social justice. Still further, many oral historians, as many qualitative researchers in general, see oral history as an opportunity for advocacy. While advocacy for participants is a controversial item in the research community, recently researchers continue to argue that we go beyond what was accepted in the last century. Historically we have the opportunity to use the stories we document for social change and for moving toward a socially just society.

A small body of determined spirits
Fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission
Can alter the course of history.

Mohandas Gandhi

Related topics

Cultural literacy, Popular culture and digital worlds, Virtual spaces, Participatory and collaborative methodologies, Research for social action.

Further reading and Web resources

You may be surprised to know about the following sites rich with information and model digital stories. This list is not meant to cover everything on the Web which is concerned with digital storytelling and history. It is a good start and most likely will put you on a road to discovery. In a recent search on Google and on YouTube for 'oral history' and/or 'oral history collections,' there appeared over 100,000 entries. Thus the reader will have to take the plunge and search in one's field of study for the countless entries of relevance. Here are some starting points. I have written more fully about these and other sites (Janesick 2010), however to feel the texture and nuance of what is available in terms of resources, these sites are an exquisite starting point.

Oral History Association (OHA)

www.oralhistory.org

The Oral History Association, established in 1966, seeks to bring together all persons interested in oral history as a way of collecting human memories. With an international membership, the OHA serves a broad and diverse audience. The OHA encourages standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, dissemination and uses of oral testimony. The OHA has established a set of goals, guidelines, and evaluation standards for oral history interviews. The association also recognizes outstanding achievement in oral history through an awards program. This site is packed with information and resources. It is a good first place to start learning about oral history.

H-OralHist

www.h-net.org/~oralhist/

H-OralHist is a member of the H-Net, Humanities and Social Sciences Online initiative. H-OralHist is a network for scholars and professionals active in studies related to oral history. It is affiliated with the Oral History Association. It is a wealth of information. It contains updated lists of the many thousands of individual oral histories on file in hard text, tape, video, or multimedia, and the centers where they reside.

HistoricalVoices.org

www.historicalvoices.org

The purpose of Historical Voices is to create a significant, fully searchable online database of spoken word collections spanning the twentieth century – the first large-scale repository of its kind. Historical Voices will both provide storage for these digital holdings and display public galleries that cover a variety of interests and topics. Check out this site if you wish to store your digital tales.

American Historical Association

www.historians.org

The American Historical Association (AHA) is a nonprofit membership organization founded in 1884 and incorporated by Congress in 1889 for the promotion of historical studies, the collection and preservation of historical documents and artifacts, and the dissemination of historical research. As the largest historical society in the United States, the AHA provides leadership and advocacy for the profession, fights to ensure academic freedom, monitors professional standards, spearheads essential research in the field, and provides resources and services to help its members succeed. The AHA serves more than 14,000 history professionals, representing every historical period and geographical area. AHA members include K–12 teachers, academics at two- and four-year colleges and universities, graduate students, historians in museums, historical organizations, libraries and archives, government and business, as well as independent historians.

DigiTales

www.digitales.us

This site introduces the viewer to digital storytelling in multiple formats and catalogues many such stories. By inclusion of voices there is a social justice component to many of the life histories, oral histories, and biographies.

Center for Digital Storytelling

www.storycenter.org

This center is dedicated to the art of personal storytelling. The Center offers workshops, programs, and ad services all focused on capturing personal voice and facilitating teaching methods. Their motto is: “Listen deeply, tell stories.”

Stories for Change

www.storiesforchange.net

This site is an online meeting place for community digital storytelling and advocates for social change. It is a wealth of information and offers many models of exemplary storytelling. Multiple recorded stories are available. Recently the stories included a meeting of two granduncles who teach a young Vietnamese American about war and family and also the story of a woman who became a teacher in Boston due to the injustice she observed in schools. Social justice themes of race, class, and gender issues are part of the stories here. They offer resources and a curriculum and to use this site you need to open an account to upload your digital stories.

Center for Studies in Oral Tradition

www.oraltradition.org

Founded in 1986 with the approval of the University of Missouri Board of Curators, the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition stands as a national and international focus for interdisciplinary research and scholarship on the world’s oral traditions. Its long-term mission is to facilitate communication across disciplinary boundaries by creating linkages among specialists in different fields. Through its various activities, the Center tries to foster conversations and exchanges

about oral tradition that would not otherwise take place. It has established a series of paper and Web publications aimed at serving a broad academic constituency. It sponsors a number of events, offers bibliographic information, and resources for someone wanting to get started in oral history and life history work.

Effective Storytelling

www.eldrbarry.net

This site is a resource for digital storytellers with suggestions for writing a good story and examples of good stories. Multiple resources are listed and posted on a regular basis.

Best of History Websites

www.besthistorysites.net

This is an award-winning site and covers all areas of history from prehistory to postmodern times. It has a lengthy section of sites on oral history as well. This is an excellent site for starting to use the Web as a digital storytelling technique for your work as an oral historian and qualitative researcher. This site lists over 1,000 websites. In addition, there is the Library of Congress and, of course, the British Library.

Historical Thinking Matters

<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org>

While this website is focused on key topics in U.S. history, it may help teachers in other disciplines as well, for example teaching about a time period, say the 1770s, one may adapt some of the critical thinking activities to many interdisciplinary questions. What was business and industry like then? Who were the writers of the time? What kind of art work was being done at the time? There are resources here for instructors and a wealth of information on getting young people to think historically. This is a favorite site of mine for the careful use of language and the sheer passion and love for history.

These are only a handful of the sites for learning about digital storytelling and which display examples of various stories from students, mental health workers, veterans, nurses, bankers, construction workers, teachers, farmworkers, and many more community members. The clinical fields such as medicine, nursing, and hospice care also have availed themselves of oral history on the Web. For example, in the area of gerontology, there are many oral histories of people retelling their life story just before death. Various agencies and professions in fact have created digital stories on the Web for easy access and to learn from the story. They refer to these stories as teaching tools. Other digital media include videos posted on YouTube. For example, you will find thousands of oral histories posted on YouTube from veterans' stories to the first responders to 9/11. Well-known artists, choreographers, and performers also have oral histories posted on the World Wide Web 2.0. Many writers, such as Stephen King, have posted descriptions of their writing processes.

Key books for further understanding

Literally, there are thousands of journal articles and books on oral history. I have selected a few of these texts for their content, originality, and depth of understanding. Also, many of the authors have a lifetime of doing this type of research.

Oral history as a community project

Denzin, N. K. (1989) *Interpretive Biography*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This text is one of the best in terms of learning about biographical research. Denzin manages to lay out an argument for interpretive biography as a key technique of the postmodern era. He also describes and defines the assumptions involved in studying personal life documents, stories, memories, accounts, and narratives. This connects to oral history, for the oral historian is also in many respects a biographer.

Clandinin, D. J. and Connelly, F. M. (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This book takes narrative work to a new level and is user friendly. It argues for thinking narratively and is a guide through the processes of life history work and all narrative approaches. Topics covered include composing research texts and persistent concerns such as ethics and anonymity.

Cole, A. L. and Knowles, J. G. (2001) *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research*, New York, NY: Alta Mira Press.

The authors of this text are well known for a lifetime of defining the importance of arts-based approaches to research and narrative inquiry. They explore the method of writing life history research and deconstruct the relationships of researcher and researched. The inclusion of sections on imagery, ethics, care, respect, and capturing lived experience make this a must-read book for all potential life history, oral history, or biographical researchers.

Abrams, L. (2010) *Oral History Theory*, New York, NY: Routledge.

The writer introduces the reader to the theories underlying various oral history projects. Her sections on narrative, memory, and empowerment are empowering.

Hesse-Biber, S. N. and Leavy, P. (eds.) (2008) *Handbook of Emergent Methods*, New York, NY: Guilford Press.

This extensive handbook is a crucial resource for those looking to push the methodological boundaries of the tired and not yet passé post-positivist approaches used in the last century to little effect. The authors have constructed a solid group of scholars dealing with emergent methods since the world is changing at warp speed due but not limited to the Internet, globalization, social networks, and other societal facts of life. Individual scholars here describe ways to *push beyond the previous century and argue for getting to the heart of lived experience*. Arts-based and performance-based research, found data poetry, photography, metaphor analysis, Internet inquiry, blogging, and much more are part of this work.

Perks, R. and Thomson, A. (2006) *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd edition, New York, NY: Routledge.

This power-packed textbook features some of the best thinking in the field of oral history. The textbook is divided into sections which include: Critical developments, Interviewing, Interpreting memories, Making histories, and Advocacy and empowerment. Key authors span many disciplines such as medicine, social science, art, political science, and education. It is a valuable tool for understanding the breadth and scope of possibilities in the field.

Sommer, B. W. and Quinlan, M. K. (2009) *The Oral History Manual*, 2nd edition, Lanham MD: Alta Mira Press.

The author introduces the reader to oral history, planning and budgeting, legal and ethical issues, recording oral history and all that entails, and making meaning of the data. It is a reliable textbook for all levels of practice.

MacKay, N., Quinlan, M. K., and Sommer, B. W. (2013) *The Community Oral History Toolkit*, Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Contains six volumes related to oral history by various authors and which cover a wide range of topics through the lens of medicine, cultural studies, archeology, indigenous studies, museum and community studies, and the actual practice of oral history. This is a valuable resource and starting point for beginning oral historians.

Oral history journals

We are fortunate that oral history as a discipline has a long history of keeping track of itself and its practices, ethical standards, techniques, reporting, and dissemination. Key journals for referring to completed oral histories and lessons learned from them include but are not limited to this list:

Oral History Review

This journal is the official journal of the Oral History Association (OHA) since 1973. It is filled with resources, reflections, completed oral histories, bibliographies, and film and book reviews. In addition, it uses a wide spectrum of interviews, film, songs, and photography. See more information on the OHA website, above.

American History Review

This journal is published online and is the official publication of the American Historical Association (AHA) since 1895. It is multi- and interdisciplinary and is housed at Indiana University.

Narrative Inquiry

This journal publishes all genres of narrative inquiry including oral history.

TQR, The Qualitative Report

Beginning in 1990, TQR has been a leading online journal in all genres of qualitative research including oral history. It has thousands of links to its website and has nearly 7,000 subscribers. See the website for additional information: www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/.

New Media & Society

This journal has a wealth of information for oral historians who use digital tools for conducting a study. In addition, articles on the ethics of doing Internet research, using blogs with participants, social media, and other online platforms are interrogated and analyzed. The journal is a leader in touching upon subjects referring to digital literacy.

Oral history brings the human side of the research act to the forefront. We can learn a great deal about society through these approaches to research and say with ease that we see research as a tool for making a better world regardless of our individual disciplines of study. Oral history is an elegant approach to documenting the lived experience of persons in any given community. In this approach, we have an avenue to discover more about community literacy.

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PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES AND LITERACY STUDIES

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Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to describe the use of participatory methodologies in literacy studies. Participatory social research is more than a method, it is an epistemology and an ethic wherein what is known is intricately related to how it is known. Doing research *with* rather than *on* individuals and communities, participatory research supports the creation of social movements and identities that are capable of speaking to, against and through power for social action and change (Sandoval 2000). Literacy has often been seen as central to these purposes, supporting the development of people's ability to understand and evaluate the structures and discourses that regulate their lives. Over the past fifteen years, many literacy researchers have used participatory methodologies to integrate education, social action and research inquiry. These approaches have made significant contributions to documenting literacy practices across a range of contexts, involving the cooperation and collaboration of community stakeholders. These stakeholders share similar objectives to promote literacy achievement, improve educational opportunities and develop literacies that support people to "read the word and the world" (Freire and Macedo 1987).

Mapping the genesis of participatory research across interdisciplinary domains, the first section of this chapter articulates the historical and philosophical underpinnings of participatory research. Across these fields of inquiry, different approaches to and vocabularies of participatory research have developed. However, these approaches are parallel in their efforts to promote social change and to challenge traditional conceptualizations of research inquiry. The second section of the chapter articulates critical issues in participatory and collaborative methodologies, focusing in particular on ethical issues and the dynamics of community relationships. Elaborating on recent examples from the field, the final section of the chapter illustrates how participatory approaches have contributed to disrupting dominant notions of literacy and its social effects, joining theory and method toward an oppositional consciousness in the field of literacy studies.

Defining participatory methodologies

Participatory research offers a possibility for knowing grounded in the everyday experiences of people and communities. Historically, these perspectives have been absent from social research.

Mobilizing local and indigenous knowledge within communities of place, identity, or interest (Banks *et al.* 2013: 264), university-based researchers engage community members as equal partners in the research process. This approach to inquiry involves collaborating to identify, investigate, analyse and act upon issues and challenges that are relevant to the community. Community members are viewed as the experts of their own experience, and university-based researchers work not as objective, outside observers, but as co-participants in the process of inquiry. This collaboration challenges the divide between those with or without the power to define what counts as knowledge. Notwithstanding methodological rigor, understandings of the social world have not always contributed to material change in people's lives. The connection between knowledge and power underlies the epistemological ground of participatory research, which sees power as constituted by social relationships and action rather than something that is exerted by one social group over another. Participatory methodologies uphold commitments to communities by surfacing democratic and inclusive forms of knowledge production, and by pursuing inquiry as public action for change (Gaventa and Cornwall 2006; Streck 2009). Focusing on political, social and ideological concerns, participatory methodologies therefore comprise more than a technical domain.

The way research is conceived and pursued, and the way relationships among researchers and participants are constructed, has both philosophical and political implications. Central to participatory methodologies is a focus on social justice, and the struggle for equity for people from marginalized social backgrounds. Participatory research has traditionally taken place with underserved community groups, including communities experiencing social discrimination, poverty, underemployment and other forms of disadvantage, often at the hands of more powerful social groups. Much research that has been conducted on marginalized communities has involved inquiry practices that inscribe normative and colonizing forms of research gaze, undermining transformative possibilities (Sandlin *et al.* 2010). By contrast, engaging people in understanding the causes and effects of their social circumstances, participatory methodologies enable participants to articulate their own narrative of what matters and what is at stake in their communities. These understandings amplify interpretations that originate in lived realities. Akin to what Cherrie Moraga has called 'theory in the flesh' (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981), these understandings are born of embodied subjectivities and everyday experiences of inequity, articulated in an effort to bridge contradictory experiences and create possibilities for change. The opportunity to have a voice and to have a say in the production of knowledge about oneself is an enduring concern and basic human right. Claiming the right to speak for oneself is a means through which people become agents of their own experience, capable of speaking back to the powers that seem to govern their lives.

Participatory methodologies can be characterized by several approaches that differ somewhat in their orientation. Empowering people and working toward social transformation is central to methodologies that have been called 'participatory action research' (PAR) (Carr and Kemmis 2003 [1986]; Kemmis 1980). Research that engages with a specific group of people who share a common experience or identity has recently been called 'community based participatory research' (CBPR) (Banks *et al.* 2013). PAR and CBPR are nearly interchangeable terms, and these approaches differ from 'action research', which tends to focus on professional learning and organizational change rather than social change (i.e. Carson and Sumara 1997; Lewin 1948). The concern with power and oppression characterizes participatory research that has been called 'Southern PAR', which is an ideological rather than a geographical distinction that symbolizes solidarity with marginalized or oppressed groups no matter where they are located (Greenwood and Levin 2007). Finally, YPAR refers to participatory action research conducted by youth (Camarrota and Fine 2008; Morrell 2006).

Not all studies that take up participatory approaches can be called PAR, particularly when research questions are developed according to university-based researchers, or when studies do not involve direct action for social change. Rather, studies might draw on key dimensions, practicing some, but not all, aspects of PAR. This distinction can be reflected by looking at participatory research along a continuum, ranged according to degrees of community participation (Durham Community Research Team 2011). For instance, depending on the research context and/or circumstances, it may not be feasible to involve community members in every stage of the research process, or university-based researchers may be unable to contribute to direct social action emerging from the research. Nonetheless, these studies can be characterized as employing participatory methodologies.

Historical perspectives on participatory research

The tradition of engaging communities in inquiry has existed across a range of applied research contexts and domains of inquiry, including indigenous studies, community development, public health, education and environmental studies. A common thread running through these perspectives is the connection between knowledge and power, and the epistemological shifts that participatory methodologies have provoked. For instance, Fals Borda (2006) reflected that early participatory research studies involved “scientific deconstruction and emancipatory reconstruction” (p. 29), as researchers looked for new concepts and theories to guide their fieldwork. Orienting knowledge production away from academic researchers toward communities, Rahman wrote the aim of participatory approaches was to:

return to the people the legitimacy of the knowledge they are capable of producing through their own verification systems, as fully scientific, and the right to use this knowledge – including any other knowledge, but not dictated by it – as a guide in their own action.

(Fals Borda and Rahman 1991: 15)

This turn toward alternate discourses of understanding marked the beginnings of a break with traditional science for some academic researchers doing community-based work.

Participatory approaches to literacy research can be traced to Paulo Freire’s (1998, 2006; Freire and Macedo 1987) work with marginalized communities in Brazil. Freire assisted people to question and engage structures of power concerning their working conditions and community health. Dialogue was essential to this process, arising from collaboration with communities rather than the imposition of outside interpretations and solutions. Such dialogue involved solidarity with people, working at their side to transform objective reality, because, as Freire (2006: 54) wrote, “no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed”. Freire’s work emphasized the pedagogical purposes of literacy research, and the need for communities to develop skills to identify and address social injustice. This pedagogical aim remains central to participatory methodologies today.

Orlando Fals Borda (1987, 2006; Fals Borda and Rahman 1991) was a sociologist who worked with labourers in Mexico, Nicaragua and Colombia to address exploitive labour practices and improve standards of living in these communities. Encompassing adult education, sociopolitical action and research, the purpose of this work was to generate knowledge upon which to construct power for communities. The strategies involved in this “revolutionary science” (1987: 330) entailed collective research processes, the critical recovery of people’s histories, and the use of folk culture such as art, music, drama and storytelling to produce and

disseminate alternative discourses of understanding. Participatory research was also carried out with indigenous communities in several settings, such as Mohammad Anisur Rahman's (2004; Fals Borda and Rahman 1991) work with the Bhoomi Sena land movement in India. Central to Rahman's approach was the need for subject–subject relations between external researchers and community members. Emphasizing people's self-reliance, Rahman argued that university-based researchers should not dominate the research process with their interpretations, but encourage people to seek answers within the conditions of their own lives. Rahman judged the effectiveness of participatory work by whether the research process was meeting the challenge of promoting self-reliance among community participants. He supported this idea of social verification in that, "ordinary people with their own collectively agreed verification procedures have as much claim to an objective and, for that matter, scientific character of their inquiries as professional inquiries following verification standards of one or other recognized 'school of inquiry'" (Rahman 2004: 18).

Growing out of awareness and efforts to address inequalities and struggle for social justice, these studies developed independently across different global locations. Intersections among the participatory research practices that these studies entailed occurred later as a result of several international gatherings and publications.¹ Taken together, these historical examples illustrate the fusion of participatory research and popular education, which marked the beginnings of a method for knowing reality that comprised both pedagogic and investigative purposes.

Critical issues in participatory methodologies

The transformative effects of social action arising from participatory research have corresponded not only to material change in communities, but also to the development of an alternate, critical approach to generating knowledge. Moving toward a 'moral' science, participatory methodologies integrate social responsibility as a key dimension of knowledge production. For instance, feminist scholar Patti Lather writes that in participatory research, "what is at stake is not so much the nature of science as its effects" (2007: 2). Arising from this aim, participatory researchers have reinvigorated traditional evaluation criteria such as objectivity, validity and generalizability to address issues concerning research ethics, collaboration and reciprocity. Theorizing these dimensions of participatory research have deepened methodological rigor, underscoring the idea that community participation is more than just a technical endeavour.

Evaluation criteria

Participatory methodologies extend and enrich traditional notions of validity and objectivity in research practice by grounding evaluation criteria in local understandings. Concerned with how accurately an account represents participants' realities, and whether inferences made from the account are credible to participants, community members themselves are seen as being in the best position to say whether or not research findings are meaningful and legitimate. People who have historically been marginalized and subjugated "carry substantial knowledge about the architecture of injustice" (Cammarota and Fine 2008: 223) that participatory research aims to develop. Moreover, connecting participants' expertise with academic researchers' knowledge and experience through the process of dialogue can generate new understandings throughout the research process.

Objectivity is not irrelevant to participatory research; rather it has been reconceptualized in light of the collaboration between university- and community-based co-researchers. Responding to this multiplicity of perspectives, objectivity is seen as valuing diverse perspectives and

understanding their particularity. Objectivity can be thought of as a social practice (Cammarota and Fine 2008) that can be exercised when researchers work through their positionalities, biases and values in order to *not* be guided by their predispositions. This critical and reflective stance requires researchers to evaluate their own experiences at a distance, accounting for assumptions that underlie their reasoning. Although this ‘working through’ brings researchers closer to deep and nuanced understanding of the objects of inquiry, it is impossible to assume coherent understandings of research objects. Working through difference in this way also brings to light how participants’ perspectives are shaped by their social context and conditions, and potentially provides an opportunity to shift understandings in new directions.

Research ethics

Generally, the ethical practice of research is prescribed by university-based research ethics boards, which outline codes of ethics and require institutional review for human-subject research. Institutional reviews typically demand that the research questions, processes and instruments be determined before researchers enter the field. However, participatory research necessarily requires community stakeholders to be involved in determining these parameters. Further, these processes are subject to ongoing negotiation and realignment as the research progresses. Ethical practice is therefore a daily commitment, embedded within research relationships and situated in changing conditions and circumstances. The emphasis on research relationships means that researchers must possess both an ethics of care and responsibility (Banks *et al.* 2013: 266). For instance, drawing on the experience of a university-community engagement project, academic researchers at Durham University, UK, described several dimensions of ethical practice, articulating the significance of mutual respect, equality and inclusion, democratic participation, active learning, making a difference, collective action and personal integrity. Coming to agreement on these principles, in practice, involves university- and community-based researchers addressing not only the aims and objectives of the research, but also agreeing upon how to work together and treat one another. Moreover, because university-based researchers are traditionally perceived as holding positions of authority and privilege, it can be argued that they hold greater responsibility for safeguarding community interests and concerns.

Within participatory methodologies, relationships take on particular significance. Research relationships blur as community stakeholders take on research roles, and academic researchers become involved in community life (Durham Community Research Team 2012: 4). Co-researchers may have a hard time drawing the line between being a friend or a collaborator, and interpersonal relationships will figure into planning and negotiating control over the research. For instance, conflict can arise concerning the ownership and dissemination of research data and findings, and confidentiality or anonymity of participants’ identities might be hard to protect (Banks *et al.* 2013). These issues require revisiting initial commitments several times throughout the research process to adjust or modify plans as required. The dynamic and complex nature of these issues requires a certain degree of pragmatism (Lau and Stille 2014), wherein personal, community and institutional considerations and priorities may shape the division of research roles and responsibilities. For instance, academic researchers are expected to publish findings in peer-reviewed journals, an activity which may or may not be appealing or possible for community-based collaborators. Community-based researchers may be more interested in other ways to disseminate findings and demonstrate research impact. Therefore, parity in research relationships might recognize that academic researchers and community participants each bring different skills and interests to the inquiry process. Within these circumstances,

collaboration might entail the generation of new knowledge and experience among all stakeholders; however, as Kemmis (2006: 95) warns, “others cannot do the enlightening for participants; in the end, they are or are not enlightened on their own terms”.

Collaboration

Participatory methodologies follow the same activities as traditional research, with the difference being that participants are involved in every stage of the research process. Not only does participatory research benefit community members, it benefits academic researchers who can develop a more complete picture of research issues by gathering the community’s input on data collection, analysis and research outcomes. The participation, collaboration, and the perspective of multiple stakeholders therefore enrich research inquiry. These benefits point to the need for careful attention to creating settings that support effective participation, often involving the co-creation of collaborative spaces for researchers and community participants (McIntyre 2008). Most importantly, communities need to be able to understand the purposes of the research, and require transparency concerning planning, organization and decision-making processes. Transparency is critical to this effort to establish trustworthiness; articulating and addressing the struggles for and toward partnership is a meaningful part of developing and sustaining credible research relationships. Furthermore, identifying and discussing the challenges involved in a collaborative process can deepen understanding of research partnerships and the means necessary to sustain them.

Within the practice of participatory methodologies, “participation is not an innocent category” (Ozanira da Silva e Silva, cited by Streck 2009). Shifting the way that academic researchers work with communities is accompanied by new commitments and challenges. For instance, Torres and Reyes (2010) articulated some of the challenges that arose during their work with community agencies and families on a children’s literacy project. The researchers had a hard time finding the best way to facilitate community participation. The power dynamics of social agencies working in the community, as well as negative past experiences with academic researchers led to mistrust and gate-keeping. Community agencies were sceptical about engaging in the collaborative dialogue needed to co-design the research; they preferred quick solutions rather than dialogue, making it a challenge to implement a participatory research paradigm.

Reciprocity

Despite the moral and strategic argument for strong university-community engagement, meaningful and inclusive relationships between universities and communities can be difficult to achieve. The assumption that university-based researchers might understand communities and how to support their participation should not presuppose the homogeneity of the community. For instance, Ferreira and Gendron (2011) describe the heterogeneity of indigenous communities in Latin America, and the need to understand these differences when developing community partnerships. Community engagement needs to be fostered throughout every stage of the research process, it needs to be voluntary, and it requires mutual benefit. In particular, participation needs to be organized such that one set of dominant voices is not replaced by another. Similarly, Tuck (2009), a scholar who connects indigenous epistemologies and participatory methodologies has called for an end to ‘damage-centred research’, or “research that operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation” (p. 413).

Developing understanding and reciprocity among university- and community-based collaborators can be nurtured in unexpected places – not only in meetings and discussions but also in informal and nonformal settings, such as community events or daily conversations. Hart and Wolff (2006) draw on the idea of communities of practice (COP) as a way to illustrate how collaborative research partnerships might be cultivated. Through sustained pursuit of shared goals, university-based researchers might add value to community relationships by bringing expertise, resources and influence to community projects. This form of support often entails shifting academic research priorities to align with the goals of the community. Nonetheless, this shift is productive, in that “communities of practice are said to be at their most effective when their core and boundaries evolve in complementary ways”, creating expertise at the core, and renewal at the boundary (Hart and Wolff 2006: 134).

Current contributions in participatory approaches to literacy research

The field of literacy studies has long been associated with critical work, situating literacy within the dynamics of the social world to reveal its contested and ideological dimensions. Research in the field has emphasized the sociocultural context of literacy learning rather than individual ability or performance, conceiving of literacy not as a neutral skill but a practice that must be understood in relation to social conditions and power relations. This paradigm opens space to consider how and why some literacy practices are more privileged and powerful than others. Most importantly, the use of participatory methodologies has generated knowledge about literacy that is grounded in the lived, embodied experiences of people in particular communities. The section that follows presents illustrative examples from recent projects that highlight the affordances of participatory methodologies in literacy studies.

Articulating situated, place-based literacy practices

Research conducted in collaboration with communities has contributed to articulating situated, place-based understandings of literacy and literacy practices. Exploring literacy within everyday particular social contexts and cultural and institutional locations, these studies have offered explanatory principles about the conditions, discourses and policies that affect people’s lives and their literacy practices. Participatory methodologies support participants in intervening in these contexts, assisting in the creation of empowering learning spaces. For example, Kinloch (2009) and youth participants documented stories of change and engaged in critique of the gentrification they saw taking hold in their Harlem neighbourhood in New York City, USA. Demonstrating a literacy engagement grounded in activism and social change, the youth conducted interviews and surveys with peers and community residents, and created journals, narrative writing, community maps, digital photographs, and video ‘walks’ through the neighbourhood. Noting how the project unfolded at the intersection of race, place, literacies and community activism, Kinloch broadened the definition of literacy in the study to encompass acts of, practices in, and activities around reading, writing and speaking, as well as multimodalities and performances that assist people in acquiring critical agency.

Study of local practices has been important to develop and support community knowledge and identity-building (Comber 2011). For instance, exploring literacies in a local community library in the north of England, UK, Pahl and Allan (2011) engaged children as co-researchers to document their perceptions and experiences of literacy. This approach generated a situated and informed understanding of the uses of literacy within the library, by making visible how children were using the library, not just for literacy, but also for social and emotional purposes.

Incorporating a variety of methods, including community walks and photovoice activities, the academic researchers were able to understand the library and its ecology from the children's perspective, and provide information to support the development of a community literacy approach. Similarly, examining the language and literacy practices in families of urban Inuit in a large Canadian city, Patrick and colleagues (2013) collaborated with community centres to open a space for understanding Indigenous-defined language and literacy learning. Supporting intergenerational sharing of stories, songs and cultural memories, the project documented grassroots literacy initiatives within the community. The research found that families were a driving force in not only the maintenance of home languages but also in connecting urban and Arctic Inuit families and homelands. Moreover, the findings suggested that 'bottom-up' literacy practices, rather than 'top-down' educational and institutional policies, might be more effective in efforts toward Inuit language revitalization.

Articulating counternarratives

Participatory methodologies have been useful in challenging limiting definitions of what counts as literacy research. Opening space for populations often regarded as objects of research to act as subjects and empowered participants, participatory research "fundamentally questions who has the right to engage in research by positioning students, community members, and literacy teachers as legitimate and integral participants in the research process" (Morrell 2006: 3). Moreover, engaging in the research process can support people in developing powerful narratives, self-awareness and critical consciousness. Morrell (2008) worked with youth from ethnic minority backgrounds in Los Angeles, USA, facilitating summer seminars on critical research over a period of five years. The seminars educated youth about research methods, assisting them to design and carry out inquiry projects on issues of concern to their school and communities. The students reported their findings to stakeholders, and presented their work at regional and national conferences on education research. The seminars promoted critical and academic literacy skills, and supported young people in seeing themselves as intellectuals and activists. The project contributed new insights about the value of school-based literacy activities that build on urban students' lived experiences; encompass their cultural understandings and values; and develop their self-awareness and critical consciousness.

Mahiri (2004) conducted a school-university research collaboration involving students and teachers in San Francisco, USA, exploring ways to draw on African American youth culture as a means to support writing development. Writing about crime and violence in their community, the youth articulated perspectives that were absent from dominant discourses in politics and the media. They became concerned with 'changing the script' that seemed to be inscribed on their lives, using their voices to project alternative subjectivities and possibilities. Comparable to this project, Wright and Mahiri (2012) documented processes involved in participatory inquiry projects embedded within a youth development programme. Working alongside adults, these projects involved young people in conducting research activities, such as writing interview questions, leading focus groups and creating reports. The activities engaged youth in literacy activities that connected with real-world purposes, teaching academic literacy skills while promoting active community participation. Wright and Mahiri suggested that youth can benefit from curricular and pedagogical approaches that differ from those found in schools, particularly when inherent discontinuities exist between young people's life experiences and their experience of life in school.

Similarly, Fox (2012) led a multigenerational research project involving young people and adults in New York City, USA to explore youth experiences with education, public health and

criminal justice. The project was designed to engage with public policy from the perspective of youth, developing a critical literacy of young people's experiences. Using both text-based and embodied methods to analyse and disseminate research findings about the negative experiences of youth, the research supported change to policing practices in New York City, and reconstructed images of young people of colour as "agentic, intelligent, scholarly citizens with important ideas to contribute" (p. 345).

Documenting changing literacy practices

Participatory literacy research has helped to broaden definitions of literacy beyond traditional conceptualizations of reading and writing. In particular, literacy researchers have collaborated with community-based groups to facilitate the use and study of digital technology tools. Working collaboratively to create narratives and conduct research using a range of digital media, such as digital photography, video and storytelling tools, academic researchers and community participants have documented the literacy practices involved in these activities. This research has contributed to describing the emergence of new spaces for communication and social interaction, and the literacy engagement practices within these contexts. Taken together, the research highlights the need to shift literacy education to build upon and extend students' diverse literacy practices, and support connections between in- and out-of-school literacies (Moje *et al.* 2000; Vasudevan and Campano 2009). For example, Chavez and Soep (2005; Soep and Chavez 2010) collaborated with Youth Radio International, an organization based in Oakland, California, USA, that assists youth in creating, producing and disseminating media content. The content is comprised of news stories and narratives of experience written from the perspective of young people, a process through which they "rewrite the stories that are told about them, against them, or supposedly on their behalf" (2005: 410). Chavez and Soep participated on an ongoing basis with Youth Radio, supporting their curriculum development and documenting and analysing the programme's work. Reconceiving traditional relationships between young people and adults, the work promoted intergenerational collaboration on digital media and youth-led social inquiry projects. Moreover, the collaboration disrupted predictable narratives about urban youth, demonstrating their contributions to social research.

In a similar approach, Hull and Nelson (2005) helped to found, fund and operate a community technology centre in an urban neighbourhood in California, USA. Called Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth (DUSTY), the centre facilitated a university and community partnership with children and youth to study and create multimedia narratives and digital texts. Documenting teaching activities, workshops and community events, the researchers found that digital stories entailed a different system of signification and meaning production, offering a counterclaim to the argument that digital media simply facilitate the multimodal composing that exists apart from digital technologies. Hull and Nelson wrote that digital production was a unique form of composing, and suggested widening the definition of writing to include multimodal composing as a newly available means of communication. Vasudevan (2010) collaborated with a group of fifth grade boys to engage in digital storytelling activities, and found that the affordances of Web 2.0 digitally mediated representation and communication inspired the students' aesthetic creativity. The boys used these spaces to present themselves in ways that were different from how they presented themselves in school, where their modes of participation were often limited and predetermined. The implications of this broadened and reimagined understanding of participation and the performance of self might inform a renewed approach to curriculum and pedagogy, predicated on the value of multimodal and multiliteracies work in education.

In a transnational project, Hull and Stornaiuolo (2010) facilitated a collaborative project called Space2Cre8, which involved students from South Africa, India, the United States and Norway in using digital social media to collaborate with local and international peers. Students assisted in developing the network, and they created and shared digital stories, music, videos, animations and artwork. They also engaged in dialogue about issues of concern in their lives, ranging from school pressures to poverty and discrimination. The project documented key processes involved in online social networking, including self-representation and the development of cross-cultural relationships. Based on this work, Hull and Stornaiuolo articulated possibilities and entry points for connecting in- and out-of-school social media practices, and for threading these practices throughout school curriculum.

Participatory research methods

As the studies reviewed above illustrate, the processes involved in using participatory methodologies for literacy research are context-dependent, developed according to communities' needs and interests, and the resources available for research. There is no road-map or how-to manual of participatory research, rather the research encompasses a bricolage of interpretive methods and strategies. Most importantly, this process begins with developing relationships with community stakeholders and leaders. These relationships should not be tokenistic. Rather, initiating participatory research should open a "communicative space" (Wicks and Reason 2009) to set the stage for ongoing dialogue, participation and engagement. When a relationship of trust and interest has been established, university-based researchers assist participants to identify their concerns and formulate initial research questions. These questions become entry points for collaboration, and lead to selection of a research topic and approaches to gathering data. The research evolves in an iterative fashion, progressing to new stages as relationships and understandings expand and deepen.

Such a process, however, is not linear, but dialogic and recursive. Lewin (1948) called this the 'cycle' of action research. For instance, initial questions might evolve, prompting additional questions or new plans of action. Dialogue can be thought of as not only spoken communication, but collaborative work and action; a performance in which understanding is initiated through "working hands and embodied performance" (Snoeren *et al.* 2012: 200). Within this dialogic process, differences are welcome over consensus and coherence, which can be helpful to recognize multiple perspectives, values and beliefs. Furthermore, this 'messiness' of participatory research need not be polished into smooth or flawless stories but can acknowledge the wrestling, struggling and striving involved in the democratic process of coming to understanding within participatory methodologies.

Recommendations and conclusion

The use of participatory methodologies in literacy research contributes to an approach to inquiry that is based on co-developing research programmes *with* rather than *for* participatory approaches. Disrupting the locus of control in scientific methods, participatory research foregrounds collective participation and joint explorations of social issues. Increasing support for approaches to research underscores the idea that contemporary social science should be a practical activity, focused on addressing social problems and possibilities. In literacy research, these problems include the need to understand the shifting, dynamic, social and technological context of literacy, and how this context matters to literacy in education. Despite being a recent focus of education reform, literacy achievement gaps remain for some students from marginalized

economic and social backgrounds. Top-down change in literacy curricula have failed to eliminate these gaps, and a 'back to basics' approach has separated literacy from its vital connection to developing critical understanding of the social world. Participatory approaches to literacy research reconnect literacy with these primary purposes, supporting people and communities in engaging in research that matters to their lives.

In summary, this chapter has articulated participatory methodologies as a critical approach to literacy research, elaborating the historical and theoretical basis for this alternative. Participatory methodologies can be useful for several strands of literacy research. Arising from research designs that are rooted in the voices and lived experiences of people and communities, this research can be useful to:

- 1 reimagine the talents and capabilities of marginalized people and communities;
- 2 understand students' diverse literacies in out-of-school contexts;
- 3 connect literacy policy and curricula with social needs and circumstances;
- 4 generate place-based, situated understandings of changing social and technological circumstances; and
- 5 engage social inequities connected to the need for critical and academic literacy skills.

Taking up a collaborative approach in these domains, literacy researchers need also ask how they can participate in communities in a respectful and reciprocal manner, how they can document and sustain participatory work, and how they can contribute to action for social change. Literacy research can only be enriched by praxis, and this work is fundamental to assist people in addressing social inequities and working toward change in their communities.

Note

- 1 For instance, the World Symposium of Action Research which met in 1977 in Cartagena, Colombia; the 1981 National Seminar on Action Research in Melbourne, Australia; and the network of participatory researchers organized by Budd Hall from Toronto, New Delhi, Dar-es-Salaam and Santiago (Fals Borda 2006: 30).

Related topics

New Literacy Studies, Postcolonial approaches, Urban literacies, Research for social activism.

Further reading

Cammarota, J. and Fine, M. (eds) (2008) *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*, New York, NY: Routledge.

This edited volume presents examples of YPAR in education research, demonstrating how youth can engage in investigating social problems that affect their schools and communities.

Durham Community Research Team (2012) *Community-Based Participatory Research: A Guide to Ethical Principles and Practice*, Durham, UK: Durham University, Centre for Social Justice and Community Action.

Developed as a resource for supporting public engagement in research, this guide articulates principles for ethical research practice in collaborative university-community work.

Hull, G. and Stornaiuolo, A. (2010) Literate arts in a global world: Reframing social networking as cosmopolitan practice, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 54(2): 85–97.

This article describes a collaborative project involving students from four countries in using online social networking tools, articulating why twenty-first century literacy practices should be integrated in school curriculum.

Kinloch, V. (2009) *Harlem On Our Minds*, New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

This text investigates the literate identities and practices of urban youth in New York City's Harlem neighbourhood, using participatory research to examine the connections between race, place, and literacy for social change.

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THE AFFORDANCES AND CHALLENGES OF VISUAL METHODOLOGIES IN LITERACY STUDIES

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Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that the increasingly complex nature of literacy in the twenty-first century requires rethinking current literacy research methodologies. I make a case for using visual methodologies to gain access to the accretive layers of literacy practices in the everyday worlds of individuals, families and communities. I use visual examples taken from collaborative literacy as social practice research that brings together ethnographic methods with multimodality in a series of studies I have conducted in Uganda since 2003. Taken together, the vignettes demonstrate the potential of visual methodologies for accessing the emic in literacy studies in a range of contexts. The vignettes unravel some of the different constructs, issues and emerging questions associated with studying literacy in diverse community settings, opening broader dialogues on literacy that move beyond more traditional methods of data collection and analysis.

Historical perspectives

There is a considerable body of interdisciplinary research investigating the nature of literacy, yet with little agreement on the topic. My collaborative research draws broadly from the fields of linguistics, anthropology, ethnographies of communication, and sociology, with a focus on the increasing recognition that literacy is not only a skill to be learned, but a practice that is socially constructed and locally negotiated (see e.g. Baynham 1995; Fairclough 1992; Heath 1983; New London Group 1996). The research studies described in this chapter use a New Literacy Studies (NLS) framework, which considers literacy as multiple and varied according to time and place but also contested in relations of power (Street 1984). Baynham (1995) argues that investigating literacy from this perspective involves documenting not only the visible aspects of what people do with literacy, but also the *invisible* aspects of literacy: what people associate with what they do, how they construct the value of literacy, and the ideologies that surround literacy in a particular community. He also stresses the need to address how relationships of unequal power shape uses of literacy (e.g. who is included and

who is excluded in particular literacy practices). Carrington likewise argues for a critical view whereby literacy is conceptualized as providing skills and knowledge to mediate self in relation to one's social and cultural context. She emphasizes, "literacy is about who you are allowed to become in a given society" (2003: 96).

The different ways we use, value and think about literacy and its material and cultural resources constitute the accretive layers that researchers and educators seek to uncover and make sense of in literacy studies. These differences place emphasis on the situatedness of literacy, what Street (1984) refers to as an ideological model (as opposed to an autonomous one). Literacy researchers working within an NLS tradition have documented and theorized literacy's cultural and communicative resources in a variety of ways including multiple modes (Kress 2000; Pahl 2003), syncretic literacies (Gregory 1998, 2001), "funds of knowledge" (Moll *et al.* 2005 [1992]), "local literacies" (Barton and Hamilton 1998), cultural and mediational tools (Hull and Katz 2006), and "linguistic resources" (de la Piedra 2006). These diverse resources are grounded in the material and social conditions in which individuals live and work, their modes of learning and participating in social, spiritual and cultural events, their health and healing practices, and their child-rearing practices (Smythe and Toohey 2009).

The research I report on focuses on the visual as a communicative/cultural resource within the context of Uganda. The work blends multimodality and ethnography with other theories and methods to gain access to the invisible aspects of literacy practices in diverse communities. Although the use of visual data has a long history in disciplines such as visual anthropology (see e.g. Banks and Morphy 1997), such data has received far less attention in other disciplines, including literacy studies (Hamilton 2000). Some exceptions include Hamilton (2000), Heath (see e.g. Heath and Wollach 2007), Hodge and Jones (1996), and Mannion and Ivanič (2007).

Critical issues and topics

Literacy research has recently seen a more widespread engagement with the diversity of modes used in meaning-making (e.g. visual, auditory, embodied). Dicks *et al.* (2011) speculate this increasing engagement has been spurred on by "the new forms of communication that have emerged in a digitally negotiated world, and by the ready accessibility of visual methods for documenting social interaction"; the trend "points both to the study of meaning (semiotics) and of social context (ethnography)" (p. 229). According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), social semiotics seeks to explain and understand how signs are used to produce and communicate meanings across social settings. Signs such as visual images are instances of social context and represent the various resources available to individuals within their specific settings (Kress 1997; Vygotsky 1978). The meanings encoded in these visual representations are also a reflection of the sign-maker's reality as they imagine it and as influenced by what they believe and value. This multimodal/social semiotic perspective has recently been merged with ethnography in literacy studies, the vast majority of which have taken place in North America, Western Europe and Australia. There is currently a dearth of similar research on literacy practices in economically under-resourced contexts such as sub-Saharan Africa.

My own literacy research in East Africa is one exception (see e.g. Kendrick and Jones 2008; Kendrick and Mutonyi 2007; Kendrick *et al.* 2013; Kendrick *et al.* 2006). The three 'telling' examples that I include in this chapter focus exclusively on the visual, a mode that has been foregrounded in much of the theorizing in multimodality (e.g. Kress's seminal work in particular). Over the past decade, my experience as a literacy researcher working with visual images produced in Uganda in particular has raised two key issues associated with multimodal/visual ethnographic research: the limitations of methods available for critically analysing images

produced in non-Western communities; and the need to more fully consider context, particularly the relationships between maker, image and user.

First, current methods for analysing visual images in literacy and communication studies, what have widely become known as ‘toolkits’ for visual analysis (see e.g. Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996; also Baldry and Thibault 2005), are based on a history of images produced in Western contexts. Visual analysis in global literacy research needs to account for more diverse audiences, which means a broader and more situated range of meaning potentials than is currently available in visual analysis ‘toolkits’. As Lister and Wells emphasize, “in practice, it is seldom, if ever, possible to separate the cultures of everyday life from practices of representation, visual or otherwise” (2001: 61). Related, because both the production and viewing of images may represent sites of “resistance and recalcitrance”, (Rose 2001: 134), a critical approach to analysis is required, one that takes seriously the agency of the image, the social practices/activities and effects around viewing, and the specific nature of viewing by various audiences, including the researcher as a very unique kind of audience (Rose 2001). In an attempt to resolve these ongoing issues in my literacy research in Uganda, I blend multimodal ethnography with visual anthropology (see e.g. Banks and Morphy 1997) and cultural geography (see Rose 1996, 2001).

Visual anthropologists contend, “much that is observable, much that can be learned about a culture can be recorded most effectively and comprehensively through film, photography or by drawing” (Morphy and Banks 1997: 14). Their position does not require that visual methods be used in all contexts but, rather, used where appropriate with the caveat that appropriateness may not be obvious from the outset of the study. What visual anthropology adds to a multimodal ethnographic perspective is enhanced opportunities for collaborative and creative data collection and analysis. Traditionally, in visual anthropology researchers rather than research participants have used visual modes for recording culture. Although not initially part of the research design, I began to view my research ‘participants’ as co-investigators and put visual tools such as drawing implements and digital cameras in their hands with the invitation to participate in documenting their everyday lives in general, but their literacy practices in particular. As co-investigators, the participants also provided oral or written accounts of their images, which were integral in our interpretation. The words and images in tandem opened new understandings of the participants’ lives and literacy practices, which I discuss in more detail within the vignettes.

In the past few decades, there has also been an increasing interest among cultural geographers in the role of the visual in knowledge construction (e.g. in photographs, maps, diagrams, graphs and tables) (Rose 1996). They have much to offer literacy researchers who take a multimodal ethnographic approach, particularly in understanding the maker–image–user relationship. I have found Rose’s (1996, 2001) conceptualization of meaning production in cultural geography especially helpful in literacy research. She takes a critical approach, emphasizing that geographers never take visual representations “as straightforward mirrors of reality”, rather, “the meanings of an image are understood as constructed through a range of complex and thoroughly social processes and sites of signification” (1996: 284). As she points out, the focus on the complexity of “social processes and sites of signification” is both material and cultural:

forming a network of producers, transmitters, technologies, audiences, exhibitors, media, curators, sites, consumers and critics – to name just some of the actants in this network – all of which make sense of any particular image through complicated, multiple and possibly contradictory codes of signification.

(Rose 1996: 284)

Rose moves from this broad conceptualization of meaning production towards an interpretation of particular images by focusing on what several geographers (e.g. Aitken 1994; Burgess 1990) argue are the most important actants within this network: producers, texts and audiences. Producers are the people and equipment involved in making the image; text refers to the image itself; and audience constitutes all those who look at the image. Visual analysis requires understanding how meaning is produced at each of these three sites and in relation to three interconnected registers: the social, the aesthetic and the technological (Rose 2001). The social is the organization of social institutions, social difference and social subjectivities; the aesthetic refers to visual codes and conventions; and the technological is the equipment involved in the image. Of critical importance here is the need to acknowledge the researcher as one kind of audience for the text they are interpreting. Rose carefully considers the intersections and relationships across three modalities (technological, compositional and social) and three sites of meaning-making (production, image and audiencing/viewing) in relation to the uses and meanings of images. The three sites of meaning-making progress from understanding the particular circumstances under which an image is produced (Site 1), to focusing on the image itself as a bounded unit (Site 2), to thinking about how an image is looked at by various audiences in relation to the ways of seeing and the kinds of knowledge they bring to the viewing (Site 3).

Many of the theoretical disagreements about visual analysis across disciplines relate to disputes over which sites of meaning-making are most important and why. I have found it most productive in literacy research to understand meaning-making across production, image and audience as inextricably linked and recursively relational to each other. In the next section, I describe three vignettes that bring together visual anthropology and Rose's visual methodology in multimodal ethnographic research in three Ugandan communities. Taken together, the visual examples demonstrate the potential of visual methodologies for accessing the emic in literacy studies in a range of contexts.

Current contributions and research

The context of my research is Uganda, a landlocked country in East Africa sharing borders with Kenya to the west, Democratic Republic of the Congo to the east, Sudan to the north, and Rwanda and Tanzania to the south. Its population is almost 35 million (UNDP Uganda, n.d.). The nation is governed by President Museveni, who came to power in 1986 after decades of civil war and unrest. Although there has been violent conflict in Northern Uganda since Museveni's presidency began, the rest of the country has been at peace and significant progress has been made in many areas such as education, economic growth, accountable government and civil service reform, and commitments to poverty reduction and gender equality (UNDP 2014). Despite its gains, however, Uganda is one of the world's most under-resourced countries. Approximately twenty-five per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, and the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$490 US (UNDP Uganda, n.d.).

My work in Uganda began in 2003 with an invitation from a rural grassroots literacy organization to document the progress of the adult learners in their programme. Since 2003, I have continued to work with various organizations and individuals on a range of longitudinal, qualitative multi-site studies, all broadly focused on the literacy ecology of communities. The objective of this body of research was to address the complex relationship between literacy and development. The work was consciously and explicitly collaborative and reciprocal (Lassiter 2005), contributing in various ways to local capacity building, procurement of resources, and problem-solving in both formal and informal education sectors. My theoretical and

methodological foundations in New Literacy Studies, ethnography, multimodality and visual analysis were integrated with the educational, research and contextual expertise of East African colleagues. Collaboration began with identifying research questions and continued through research design, data collection, analysis and publication. The reliability and validity of the research was entirely dependent on these integrated and collaborative relationships (Brock-Utne 1996).

In bringing together an NLS perspective with multimodal/visual ethnography, I view the visual as social and cultural artefacts, as the “frozen remains of collective action” (Becker 2007: 15). Siegel and Panofsky (2009) stress that interpreting visual texts as artefacts of a particular place and space requires drawing on a range of theoretical frameworks, in other words, a hybrid approach – “a blend or ‘mash-up’ of theories” (p. 99). In each of the vignettes in this section, I use Rose’s core methodology as a constructive space for the integration of other visual methodologies to allow for the creation of hybrid or mixed methods of analysis. These hybrid methods allowed me to “explore more fully the range of meanings invested in an image at its different sites” (Rose 2001: 202). Further details of the specific visual methodologies used are discussed in relation to each vignette: (1) a rural schoolgirl’s drawing of literacy; (2) an HIV/AIDS cartoon message created by a secondary school girl; and (3) ecomaps produced by two children in a child-headed family. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Vignette 1: a rural schoolgirl’s drawing of literacy

This first vignette details how the use of literacy drawings has the potential to reveal how primary school girls in Uganda understand their community’s literacy practices in relation to their own lives and experiences. The study was conducted in Kyato Primary School in Masaka District in the southern part of Uganda (for further details of the study see Kendrick and Jones 2008). Participants included twenty-nine girls in Primary 6 (Grade 6). The girls lived a rural lifestyle and prior to the start of the school day, were responsible for a number of chores related to food production (digging, planting, harvesting) and home care (fetching water and firewood, preparing food, maintaining their homes and compounds, washing clothes, caring for siblings). Malaria and other illnesses were common in this area. During leisure time at school, they also learned dancing and singing, and enjoyed skipping, talking and reading together in clusters around the schoolyard.

The use of drawing as a visual method is premised on research that consistently demonstrates children are able to communicate powerful and imaginative ideas and problems through a variety of symbol systems (Kendrick and McKay 2002, 2004; Kendrick *et al.* 2010; Kress 1997; Weber and Mitchell 1995; Wetton and McWhirter 1998). The girls met with a researcher and community-based research assistant to discuss and draw pencil crayon pictures of their ideas and experiences of literacy across the broad contexts of their lives (e.g. in and out of school, in the future). Who or what should be included in the drawings or where they might take place was not specified; rather, the girls were asked to draw pictures of reading and/or writing based on their own ideas and experiences. Because our goal was to solicit the students’ own images and ideas, we simply used lead-off questions to open up a topic domain (e.g. what kinds of reading/writing do you do in school/outside of school? How do you think you will use reading/writing in the future?) (see Carspecken 1996).

In this study, Rose’s three sites of meaning-making were integrated with an adaptation of Dyer’s (1982) checklist for interpreting what the drawings as signs might mean within this particular sociocultural context. With the assistance of Harriet Mutonyi (at the time of the study, a Ugandan PhD student), the images were coded according to the following categories:

representations of bodies (age, male/female, race, hair, body, size, looks); representations of manner (expression, eye contact, pose); representations of activity (touch, body movement, positional communication); and representations of props and setting. Working back and forth across sites of meaning-making, we concentrated first on creating a description of the visual image as a bounded unit (site of the image); this included written or oral information that the students provided about their images. We then worked to establish a narrative thread that wove together observational and interview data collected as part of the site of production (site of production) and in relation to our own positioning as viewers of the image (site of audiencing). Critical to this process was a negotiated interpretation of the images, filtered through our own preconceived understandings and subjectivities as researchers. I present one example (Hannah's drawing) that is representative of the predominant literacy practices featured in the collection as a whole.

Hannah's drawing

Hannah's drawing is a self-portrait (see Figure 41.1). Though she is not in her school uniform, she is dressed formally in a dress and shoes that would be typical of secondary school girls in this area who travel home from boarding school on weekends or during holidays. Her depiction of herself in 'high fashion' clothing, particularly the shoes, may also be reflective of a desired future lifestyle that affords her material goods that she does not currently possess.

The image of the bench under the tree is a common one in rural areas, particularly on school grounds. It is a typical reading or study environment; students sit under trees, sheltered from the sun, to read school or leisure materials or to prepare for examinations at the end of term. Hannah's solitary positioning here may be indicative of her need to claim a private space away from other distractions. Studying in private signals that schoolwork is taken seriously, which is reinforced by Hannah's concentrated facial expression and upright posture. She clearly labels her reading material *Young Talk*, which is a monthly national newspaper for youth that communicates information about HIV/AIDS and other sexual health issues. *Young Talk*, a



Figure 41.1 Hannah's drawing.

common reading resource in Hannah's school, requires a high level of English language ability, which may reflect her desire to become part of the English literacy community because of the increased life opportunities it will afford her. As she explained in writing, she is reading *Young Talk* "to know about the [English] words".

We see the narrative Hannah composed in the drawing as representative of her imagined "freedoms" (Sen 1999) in relation to economics, education and status in her society. She portrays herself as a well-dressed young woman who is literate in English. English is the medium of instruction from Primary 4 (Grade 4) onwards. Students have many challenges learning English: they have limited opportunities to use and maintain the language, and infrequent access to English reading materials. From a global perspective, literacy in Uganda is strongly linked to the hegemony of English and there is status associated with using the language. Hannah also portrays herself as someone knowledgeable about issues such as HIV/AIDS and early sexual activity; there is power associated with this knowledge because these are two possible barriers to Hannah in attaining an education and a comfortable lifestyle. What this example illustrates is the potential of the visual to make visible both real and imagined 'literate' identities in ways that language alone cannot.

Vignette 2: an HIV/AIDS cartoon created by a secondary school girl

This second example is taken from a study also conducted in collaboration with Harriet Mutonyi (see Mutonyi and Kendrick 2010, 2011 for further study details). The larger study focused on the health literacy knowledge of Senior 3 (Grade 11) biology students, specifically in relation to HIV/AIDS (see Mutonyi 2005). Senior 3 classes were selected because this age group is considered high risk for contracting HIV/AIDS (UAC 2004), and the topic is also part of the Senior 3 biology curriculum. As part of a questionnaire on HIV/AIDS, students were asked to take on the role of public educators and propose a new public service message about HIV/AIDS. The specific question was: 'What would be your own slogan for HIV/AIDS? Illustrate in cartoon form the message your slogan would convey about HIV/AIDS. Explain the message your cartoon is conveying.' Cartoons rather than drawings were selected because the students indicated they associated the word drawing with 'artistic' drawing and they were not 'talented' in that way. In contrast, cartooning (what they called 'stick images') allowed them to draw without attending to aesthetic positioning and spatial relationships. For these students, cartooning was a familiar mode of communication used extensively in public education campaigns that target youth. As such, the students did not have preconceived notions of school-sanctioned standards for how cartoons should look or function.

The analysis in this vignette brings together Rose's methodology with Warburton's (1998) analytic framework for interpreting cartoons as mediated public messages. Warburton uses four stages of analysis beginning with an initial description of the image itself, followed by immediate connotation, systemic connotation and establishment of narrative threads. Our collaborative interpretation of the images traverses Rose's (2001) sites of production, image and audience in relation to Warburton's four stages of description. The students' own voices, evident in their written text (i.e. the inclusion of cartoon titles or captions), were critical to our interpretive process. Our initial description focused on identifying the visual and textual material contained in the cartoon, and who and what are represented (site of image). Immediate connotation addressed what the cartoon might mean to the general public, what the image might signify publicly (site of audiencing). Systemic connotation moved towards identifying the place and status of the cartoon with respect to the communication system or systems it is part of (site of production in terms of the wider society). Finally, we sought to establish narrative threads by synthesizing across sites of meaning-making to identify what or whom the cartoon was intended

for and the relationship between the cartoon and broader discourses on HIV/AIDS. Meanings at each stage were negotiated and co-constructed by both researchers.

Janice's cartoon

We use Janice's image as an illustrative example. Her cartoon depicts the relationship between sexual violence and HIV/AIDS in graphic simplicity (see Figure 41.2). What immediately captures the viewer's attention is her explicit depiction of the rape of a young girl. She includes a plus sign (+) beside the man's body, indicating that he is HIV positive, and the disturbing statement: 'I want to rape you fast come here', to which the girl responds: 'What! Uh Oh, my Lord Jesus'. Rape of young people has been reported as one of the major vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS infection (MoH 2006). The image draws attention to a commonly held belief in some African countries, which is that having sex with a virgin will cure HIV/AIDS. Such myths have led to many infected persons raping young people under their care in the hope of an immediate cure (MoES/PIASCY 2005). Janice captures the brutality of this practice in visual form. Open discussion of rape in Uganda is very uncommon and many occurrences go unreported. This cartoon highlights the issue through the power of the visual, a more socially and culturally acceptable mode than language for communicating difficult knowledge. The example points to the need to carefully consider alternative and preferred modes of communication for research study participants/co-investigators in literacy studies, and to challenge assumptions about the privileging of language in data collection methods.



Figure 41.2 Janice's cartoon.

Vignette 3: ecomaps produced by two children in a child-headed family

In a third study (conducted in collaboration with Doris Kakuru, a Ugandan sociologist), I focus on the funds of knowledge of children living in child-headed families in the Rakai District. Child-headed families are children under the age of seventeen who are living on their own due to the death of their parents, inability of their parents to care for them (e.g. due to physical or mental illness, additions etc.), or abandonment. The objective in this study was to understand the children's ability to navigate survival both in and out of school, including learning new knowledge (for full study details see Kendrick and Kakuru 2012). We use Hartman's (1995) ecomapping to make visible children's everyday funds of knowledge and networks of support, which we argue are foundational to their literacy learning. Ecomaps are diagrams that consist of an inner circle/centre (in this case, the individual child), surrounded by other circles representing the elements in their social network. Lines connecting the inner circle and each individual circle depict the strength of the relationship between the individuals and the flow of resources (e.g. a thick line or multiple lines depicts a strong relationship, whereas a thin or broken line depicts a less prominent relationship). The word ecomap is derived from the word ecology, and the tool developed by Hartman uses the human elements of ecology to represent the social relationships and social systems that people create to enable effective interactions with the physical and social environment in which they live and work.

Ecomaps have been used in a wide variety of family research, from clinical to ethnographic studies (see e.g. Rempel *et al.* 2007; Ray and Street 2005), although their predominant application has been in family therapy and clinical family nursing studies. The ecomaps as a visual reveal critical information about the social networks of an individual or family and the nature of the bonds within these networks (see e.g. Hartman 1995); in our case, it makes visible the children's knowledge sources and potential literacy supporters.

The illustrative example included here features one family of five children: Ibra (age twelve), Winnie (age ten), Manny (age six), Paul (age four) and David (age three). Their father died in 2004, followed by their mother two years later. Because the parents died at home, without any medical care, their cause of death was not documented. Prior to the parents' deaths, the family had relocated from another district to the Rakai District. We speculate that the relocation was most likely a result of the stigma of living with HIV/AIDS in their home community, and that further stigma associated with the death of their parents made it impossible for the children to return to the area where their extended family lived. The children were therefore quite isolated both from extended family and within their new community. To better understand their systems of social support and means of learning new knowledge, we provided markers and paper and asked the two older children, Winnie and Ibra, to construct an ecomap. The purpose of the activity was to reveal hidden networks of support that may not have been evident in our interviews and observations. At the centre of the map, Winnie and Ibra wrote their names then drew lines connected to rectangular boxes. In each rectangular box, they were asked to write the names of people who support them in any way.

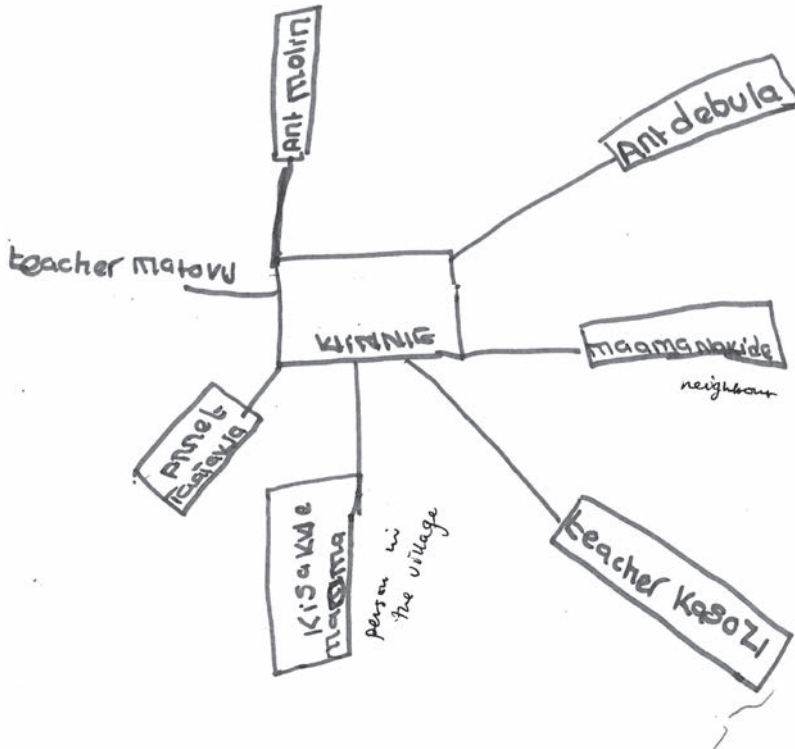


Figure 41.3 Winnie's ecomap.

Winnie's and Ibra's ecomaps

Winnie created two maps. The first identified four individuals, one whose name she struggled to recall. She asked for a second paper to make a new map, which was similar to her first, but with the addition of both my research assistant's name ('Ant Debbie') and mine ('Ant Morin [Maureen]') (see Figure 41.3). Winnie also identified two teachers (but only one name is in a box), the father of her friend Annet (whose name she could not recall on her first map), and their nearest neighbour. Ibra's ecomap (see Figure 41.4) includes the same neighbour his sister identified, the same two 'Aunts' (Debbie and Maureen), as well as the name of a person he knew in the village.

If we focus on these ecomaps as visual products alone (site of the image), there appears to be a small network of supporters for the children. Yet, if we simultaneously consider the site of production in relation to the image, a more nuanced story emerges. What is most telling is that production took considerable time because neither Ibra nor Winnie could think of any people or organizations that supported them. The first name listed by Winnie was a neighbour who on limited occasions had cared for David, the youngest member of the family. Following this, she paused for several minutes and finally decided to list the names of two of her teachers. When we followed this up with brief interviews at the school, the teachers had little awareness of the children's home situation. It may be that the school's permission for Winnie and her brothers to attend school without paying school fees earned the two teachers a place on her ecomap. The fourth person Winnie listed, the father of her friend Annet, is a man who had on one occasion helped the children repair the leaky roof in their house. My name and Debbie's, the research assistant, were added at the end, after Winnie asked if it was okay to include us. My name is connected with a heavier line, most likely because of advocacy that provided some essential resources. Debbie provided ongoing support with teaching the children a range of skills including how to grow and prepare food. For almost the full duration of the session (twenty minutes), Ibra's ecomap remained largely blank with the exception of his own name and the neighbour's. Also telling was that Winnie took the lead in this activity, even though she was younger.



Figure 41.4 Ibra's ecomap.

What becomes visible in looking across the site of production, the image itself, and the site of viewing is the back-story; that is, the story of the children's isolation in their daily lives. Our analysis raises questions about the children's limited networks of support for new knowledge construction and the challenge they face in navigating both school and community expectations.

Recommendations for practice

The field of literacy studies has changed significantly since 2003. It has taken a semiotic turn, which requires that researchers rethink traditional research methodologies to “bring knowing to the surface of consciousness” to help participants “transform what they know, remember, sense, feel, and believe into a paragraph of writing, a lively dialogue, or a scrapbook of images” (Stein 2000: 333) in new, creative and multimodal ways. Siegel and Panofsky argue:

the unsettled status of the field appears to be a productive moment of experimentation, invention, and problem-posing as researchers design analytic approaches that draw on a range of theoretical frameworks relevant to their research interests, purposes, and questions ... Analysing multimodality requires a hybrid approach – a blend or ‘mash-up’ of theories.

(Siegel and Panofsky 2009: 99)

Inherent in the design of analytic approaches to my collaborative literacy research is a complex interplay between research/pedagogical questions, theoretical frameworks and methods of interpreting visual images, integral to which is meaningful collaboration with co-investigators/participants who contribute to understanding the relationship between the maker/producer and user/viewer of visual images in a given society.

In the research reported in the three vignettes in this chapter, negotiated emic/etic meanings between researchers and co-investigators/participants help make visible “the plural, messy, contested, and even creative nature of our discourse with the visual and with images, and the manner in which this is a site of struggle over what something means” (Lister and Wells 2001: 73). Each visual example offers a “sideways glance at literacy” (Kendrick 2005) that reveals new understandings. Vignette 1 illustrates how the visual has the potential to complement other modes of data collection in literacy studies. In Hannah's image of literacy we simultaneously glimpse the here and now of her social world in relation to her imaginings of the future. Vignette 2 demonstrates the importance of the visual in studies that tap into culturally and socially difficult knowledge. In the context in our example, difficult knowledge associated with HIV/AIDS (e.g. violence, disease, stigma and sexual practices) is more easily communicated through drawings than through talk. The cartoon images about HIV/AIDS are unique cultural artefacts that both synthesize and amplify cultural and personal knowledge (Warburton and Saunders 1996). They allow for the expression of a much fuller range of human emotion and experience than spoken or written communication alone (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996) and simultaneously integrate and transcend taboo ways of discussing sexuality. Vignette 3 emphasizes the critical need to not privilege any one of the three sites of meaning-making in the interpretation of an image. If, as Collier argues, images “give birth to stories” (2001: 46), then we need to discover the whole story by tracing it from producer to audience.

I argue that the interpretation of visual images as data in literacy research requires a collaborative and hybrid approach to more fully consider the unique sociocultural context of a study and to uncover nuances of practices that were not visible through linguistic modes alone. The analyses help raise questions about the possible meanings of an image in relation to broader

theories and discourses on literacy and identity. The visual examples also provide evidence that in all cultural contexts the visual, like literacy, is a situated communicative practice.

Future directions

Thirty years ago, Harste and colleagues urged literacy researchers to abandon “a ‘verbocentric’ [Eco 1976] view of literacy and to adopt a semiotic one, in which the orchestration of all signifying structures from all available communication systems in the event have a part” (1984: 208). New relationships between word, image and sound in twenty-first century literacy practices mean that literacy studies are now dependent on understanding relationships between and across communicative modes. Literacy studies have become *multimodal studies*, and written language can no longer be privileged. A key requirement for researchers engaged in multimodal studies is to experiment with modes as part of data collection, to carefully consider across culture, place and space the situated ways in which what can be expressed in language might be more aptly expressed through the visual, the auditory or the kinaesthetic. In other words, a culture’s range of semiotic modes needs to be both theoretically *and* methodologically considered from a social practices perspective. This consideration involves understanding more fully how modalities such as the visual take different forms and functions depending on the user and context. If the goal of literacy as social practice research is to reveal rather than disguise the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin modes of communication across cultures, then theory and method need to be more closely aligned. The use of visual methodologies in literacy/multimodal studies provides one such example.

Related topics

Visual methodologies, Literacy and development, Multimodality and ethnography, Collaborative research.

Further reading

Kendrick, M. and Jones, S. (2008) Girls’ visual representations of literacy in a rural Ugandan community, *Canadian Journal of Education*, 31(2): 371–402.

This Ugandan-based study examined how visual modes of communication provide insights into girls’ perceptions of literacy, and open broader dialogues on literacy, women and development.

Kendrick, M. and Kakuru, D. (2012) Funds of knowledge in child-headed households: A Ugandan case study, *Childhood: A Journal of Global Child Research*, 19(3): 397–413.

As part of a study on children’s funds of knowledge in child-headed families in Uganda’s Rakai District, visual mapping is used to understand the children’s ability to navigate survival both in and out of school, including learning new knowledge.

Mutonyi, H. and Kendrick, M. (2011) Cartoon drawing as a means of accessing what students know about HIV/AIDS: An alternative method, *Visual Communication Journal*, 10(2): 231–249.

This interpretive case study examines the use of cartoon drawing as a unique tool for understanding Ugandan secondary students’ conceptions of HIV/AIDS, particularly concepts that are not directly discussed culturally.

Rose, G. (2001) *Visual Methodologies*, London: Sage.

This seminal book offers a critical introduction to the interpretation of visual images produced in a wide range of contexts and for a wide range of audiences.

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LITERACY WITH MOBILES IN PRINT-POOR COMMUNITIES

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Introduction

The increased use of mobile devices in schools has produced a corresponding increase in research to theorise and understand the usefulness of these devices to promote learning. As in most new fields the nomenclature varies but the increasingly common term mEducation is used to denote how mobile devices are used to promote education (Masters 2005; Singh 2010). In this chapter we will focus on the sub-area we refer to as mLiteracy, which focuses on literacy practices made possible by hand-held technological devices such as smart phones and iPods, iPads and other tablets, which move with their users, and it considers the broad implications for education. According to Gee:

The emerging area of digital media and learning is not just the study of digital tools and new forms of convergent media, production and participation: as well as powerful forms of social organisation and complexity in popular culture, it can teach us how to enhance learning in and out of school and how to transform society and the global world as well.

(2010: 14)

While mEducation includes the use of all mobile devices, the focus in poor countries is on the use of mobile phones because of their ubiquity even in poor communities. In South Africa, for example, there is over 100 per cent saturation of mobile phones, that is, there are more phones than households, which stands in contrast to the low number of households owning a home computer (Stats SA 2011 estimates this to be 21 per cent). Sambira cites a UNICEF report that estimates that 72 per cent of fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds in South Africa have a mobile phone of their own and the percentage is high across major metropolitan areas, large towns and cities, small towns and rural settlements (Sambira 2013). This affords schools the opportunity to build on existing community knowledge of technology and the common literacy practice of texting.

Gee uses the term “Digital Media and Learning” (DMAL) and stresses “the ways in which digital tools have transformed the human mind and human society and will do so further in the future” (Gee 2010: 6) and he argues that DMAL must be tied to learning and not just digital media studies as a branch of cultural studies (Gee 2010).

An important distinction between some of the research referred to as eLearning (learning which takes place through the use of all electronic media) and mLearning (learning which takes place with the aid of mobile devices), is that the adjective *mobile* refers not only to the device, but to the learner as well. Both the devices and the people are mobile in physical as well as virtual space (Kuluska-Hulme 2010; Sharples *et al.* 2007).

While technical innovations are being widely incorporated into the social and learning practices of the developed world there are still many unanswered questions and unproven assumptions about the effectiveness of digital media in learning. The field of mEducation is multisectoral as epitomised by conferences which bring together aid agencies, such as UNESCO, the Ford Foundation and USAID, non-governmental organisations and service providers, educational researchers, technology manufacturers and applications developers. These invitational conferences emphasise the use of technology in under-resourced and technology-poor contexts, creating a focus on cellphones rather than tablets. This chapter focuses on the research relevant to mLiteracy in under-resourced schools in the political South, with a particular emphasis on South Africa, the context in which we work.

Our own research in the Mobile Literacies Project (Janks and Stiles 2012) seeks to ascertain whether the availability and use of mobile technology such as the iPod Touch device can positively influence the way in which young children in a poor community and under-resourced school approach their learning. The UNESCO report of mobile learning in the Africa–Middle East region (Isaacs 2012) refers to South Africa’s so-called “mobile-rich, book poor” environment in which 51 per cent of households own no leisure books and only 7 per cent of public schools have functional libraries. These communities are not only book-poor; they are historically print-poor places where written communication is limited mostly to official settings.

Historical perspectives

Education in South Africa during the Apartheid regime was characterised by racially divided schools with resources predominantly allocated to schools for White children, while the resources for Indian, Coloured and Black African schools received successively fewer resources of all kinds. These structural inequalities continue to affect schooling in South Africa twenty years after the advent of the new democratic government. The vast majority of government schools, estimates run as high as 70 per cent according to Bloch (2009), are still characterised as dysfunctional and the least resourced schools continue to enrol poor Black children from township and rural areas who have to acquire literacy in both an African language and English. By Grade 4 most schools in South Africa use English as the formal medium of instruction but, in practice, teaching happens through the continued use of the mother tongue, though the children are assessed in English. The fact that literacy levels are unacceptably low and inadequate as a medium for learning is undisputed (Jansen 2011; Moloï and Chetty 2011; Spaul 2011). Results of the Annual National Assessment (DBE 2012), which tested six million school children in the foundation and intermediate phases, show average achievement of 43 per cent in Home Language at Grade 6 level, and 36 per cent in First-Additional Language. What these average figures mask is the profound bimodal distribution of all education statistics with a high distribution for those schools which under Apartheid catered to White students (independent and so-called former model-C schools) and a strikingly low distribution for those schools which had enrolled Black, Indian and Coloured students (Fleisch 2004).

Current and past approaches to teaching literacy in schools are skills based, including both phonic and phonemic approaches, with limited access to class readers or other print literature in the majority of schools, in either home language or English. African learners are taught

literacy in their home language and switch to English in Grade 4, often before they are literate in their home language (Dornbrack 2009). In reality many children are enliterated in the African language offered in their school, which may, or may not, be their home language. A great deal of focus is on handwriting and spelling (Dixon 2011). This focus on print literacy is what schools emphasise even though books and printed material are not widespread in South African poor communities. Using socio-cultural theory, researchers in poor contexts are exploring teaching literacy with the use of mobile phone technology, building on the literacy practices that they enable that are widely used in poor communities.

Relevant learning theories

One of the important questions in literature is whether mastery of digital literacies requires different skills of learners than traditional learning processes do. If so, should teaching methods and pedagogies be changing along with the available technology? The framing theories of literacy have been covered fully in other chapters of this handbook (Gee, Chapter 2; Rogers and O'Daniels, Chapter 4; Steadman-Jones and Pahl, Chapter 27). The focus of this chapter will be on those which have relevance to mLearning: literacy as a social practice, situated learning, communities of practice, affinity groups and spaces, as well as the theories of multimodality. There is some overlap between these theories, as they feed into one another.

The subtitle of Taylor's provocative paper poses the question, "Can our theories of learning help us understand what people are doing when they learn through interaction with networked, integrated, interactive digital technologies?" (Taylor 2005: 1). In her study of how the brain adapts itself in order to learn the non-natural processes of reading and writing, cognitive neuroscientist Wolf (2007) observes that the skills required to read a book are not the same as those used to skim and assimilate large quantities of information from the internet. She argues that research is needed to understand how reading and learning are changing with the growing phenomena of eLearning and mLearning.

The theory of literacy as a social practice is crucial to our understanding of what occurs in mLearning situations. Street's work questions dominant views of literacy with research that shows how literacy practices vary in different communities, in different domains and with different technologies (Street 1984, 1993). This is supported by the work of Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Barton *et al.* (2000). Barton (1994) makes the point that learning does not occur in isolation, but includes the situation, the activity and the participants in it. Learning is active, not passive and social interaction is the basis for cognitive growth. These views are linked to the wider field of socio-cultural learning pioneered by Vygotsky's (1978) theorisation of the *zone of proximal development* and his conception of mediation as well as Bruner's (1975) notion of scaffolding.

These theories of social practices were amplified by the concepts of situated learning and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) which stress the importance of social learning. At their simplest, situated learning is learning that takes place in the same context in which it is applied and communities of practice are groups of people involved in the same or related activities in which their learning is authentic and interactive. When instruction is situated in authentic contexts, it can provide realistic experiences to enrich learning processes. "[S]ituated cognition studies, in some guise, is liable to remain the crucial learning theory behind digital media and learning as (or if) it develops into an ever-more-integrated and coherent area of studies" (Gee 2010: 29).

Gee's (2003) concept and theory of Affinity Groups can be described as self-selected communities of practice in which members are attracted to those who have similar interests and with whom they can engage and from whom they can learn. The keys to this type of learning

are the individual's active participation as well as some type of informal mentorship whereby more experienced participants pass along their knowledge to the novice. These concepts apply to digital learning in spaces such as forums and other networking sites where people interact, absorbing the language, skills and discourses of the group. Knowledge is distributed by networking within the group. It is the shared practice that gives the members their identity, as evidenced in the practices of video gaming.

Dowdall's study of children's production of online texts (Dowdall 2009) shows how they were able to participate in social networking sites to learn from others and then themselves become insiders of the group. They were then able to share skills with newer members of the group. These children were moving between the classroom, playground and home, using digital means to engage in a wide variety of textual practices.

Finally, the mobile phone affords the possibilities of linking word texts with sound and visual texts, interactivity, creative text-making, photography, digital filming and sound recording which are all characteristics of the concepts of Multimodality and Multiliteracies. Kress writes of the importance and value of forms of representation and text design, of which language is only one, bringing all modes of meaning-making together under one theoretical roof:

It would be an unforgivable dereliction of the responsibilities of intellectuals if the potentials of representation and communication – of literacy in a very broad and metaphoric sense – offered by current developments were not fully explored, and a concerted attempt made to shape their direction to bring about at least some of the much talked about utopian vision of communication in the electronic age.

(Kress 2010: 148)

These learning theories are helpful to our understanding of the kinds of learning behaviour that New Millennium Learners exhibit (Taylor 2005), and whether they do in fact differ in any significant way from those of previous generations of learners. Is the human brain adapting itself as Wolf (2007) suggests as we learn a new way of reading from interactive digital screens and small mobile devices instead of books and classroom blackboards?

Prensky (2001) coined the terms "Digital Native" and "Digital Immigrant", proposing that these groups learn in fundamentally different ways. He suggests that Digital Immigrants should discard all their notions of teaching and learning in favour of teaching through digital means such as video games. He believes that today's learners would be motivated to learn through their passion for technology, making them more likely to enjoy the process. Prensky's detractors include VanSlyke (2003) who suggests that Prensky's ideas of the generation gap are extreme and generalised. VanSlyke asserts that the widely held conception that all young people are technologically adept is false. While seeing that education needs to adapt and evolve with the times, and that educators need to understand the learning styles of their students, VanSlyke proposes that these changes should be achieved through a mutual process of adaptation. While mobile penetration is extensive in countries such as South Africa, VanSlyke and others caution us to consider the deeper social practices behind not just mobile use, but also learning, literacy and curiosity that are not necessarily the same across youth contexts.

Critical issues and topics

There are two arguments that technology enthusiasts make as to why new technologies will revolutionise schooling. One is that the world is changing and we will need to adapt schooling to prepare students for the changing world they are entering. The other is that technology gives

us enhanced capabilities for educating learners, and that schools should embrace these capabilities to reshape education (Collins and Halverson 2009). In what ways can schooling be adapted in order to prepare children for a new world? What enhanced capabilities can mobile technology provide? These are questions being pursued in numerous projects across the Global South.

As in other developing countries covered by UNESCO's research, South African consumers have appropriated mobile phones for a variety of individual personalised uses, each of which requires some form of literacy learning. Literacy practices such as instant messaging, taking photographs and mixing of media are already commonplace in this community and can be built upon if used creatively to promote learning in schools. The variety of ways that people in South African poor communities are constructing multimodal texts reinforces the call by Kress and others for the increased use of mobile phones in schools given their possibilities to increase learning in schools (Kress 2011).

But the cost of devices needed for mobile learning initiatives in schools is prohibitive except for those schools in affluent communities. Set-up and maintenance costs as well as the constant need to update the technology raise the question of equity: will mLearning be affordable and available to only the privileged? School and public libraries are underfunded and sparsely spread in the areas of highest need. The reality is that children and young adults are not acquiring knowledge and literacy through the reading of books. Vosloo's Yoza Project says, "If cellphones are what's in the hands of young people then that is what we have to work with ... a cellphone is a viable complement and sometime alternative to a printed book" (Vosloo 2010).

The Yoza Project, piloted on Mxit¹ in 2009, set out to discover whether teens would be interested in reading stories on their mobile phones, as well as writing their own stories on these devices. *Kontax*, an m-novel, encouraged readers to comment, vote and suggest ideas for the sequel. Research revealed that both m-novels were read more than 34,000 times on mobile phones. There were more than 4,000 competition entries and comments left by readers on individual chapters. In addition to enabling literacy development, Mxit is being used to effect social change in the areas of health and childcare. By acting as a gateway to functions not otherwise available on feature phones, Mxit affordably bridges the gap between feature and smart phones.

The FunDza Literacy Trust (www.fundza.co.za) focuses on popularising reading through producing relevant content for young people to read and comment upon using the Mxit platform and their mobile phones. Short stories are available in seven chapters, starting on a Friday. Serialisation creates the habit of reading and leaves time for readers to comment on and evaluate the stories, and cliffhangers create enough suspense for them to return to find out what happens. The completed stories are then available in the online FunDza library. The half-million young readers in this network are also writing and submitting their own stories and poetry on the FunDza website and the best of these are mentored to become commissioned writers. A selection of its best books and short stories has also been published in book form for use in the teaching of English as a second language in schools. Books for younger readers, produced by other organisations are also available in the FunDza online library (Hardie 2013).

Many of these projects focus on middle grades and high school. There is to date little research yet available on the benefits of using mobile devices with younger children, which contrasts with the great deal of software available to support early learning for children as young as two years old. Many useful applications, often introduced in the form of games, are designed to assist learning and many of them can be downloaded free of charge onto iPods, tablets and mobile phones. Once a child is functionally literate the games may include writing exercises as part of their learning. These applications cover a wide range of subjects (including literacy, science, history, maths) and topics (social awareness, poetry, art, sport, dinosaurs and familiar

cartoon characters). These fun, fast-moving activities enable children to learn while playing. In many middle class and affluent homes in South Africa, children have access to this kind of learning support from a young age, in the same way as they have access to books in their own homes. Once again, the inequity of learning opportunities in both literacy and numeracy is a factor, for it is only within the government schooling system that these inequities can be more widely addressed to benefit children living in poor communities.

In Asia, projects to address this digital class-divide focus on the delivery of cost-effective and quality education, using mobile phones to improve educational outcomes. While the number of projects seeking to explore the potential of mobile phone-facilitated mLearning is steadily growing, there has been a lack of analysis that brings together the findings of these projects, due to a dearth of documentation to allow such analysis (Valk *et al.* 2010).

Three projects conducted in the Philippines, Mongolia and Bangladesh concentrated on the use of mobile phones to improve the learning outcomes of distance learning initiatives and to compare their effectiveness with face-to-face learning. Students in these projects reported that learning via mobiles was enjoyable and exciting, and that they appreciated instant feedback via SMS and opportunities to revisit errors that the mobile devices afforded (Ramos and Trinona 2009). Islam *et al.*'s (2005) research compared the learning outcomes for a group of students who access content via a mobile phone and pose questions via SMS with a control group of students in a face-to-face setting. The findings indicated that mobile-based learning in this context was equally as effective as traditional face-to-face methods.

As digital access has increased in the Global North, devices and their applications have developed, taking advantage of relatively cheap, fast broadband access. In the developing South where digital access remains relatively expensive with limited bandwidth available to most of the populace, availing oneself of the memory and bandwidth-dependent new apps presents an additional barrier (Buckner and Kim 2013; Donner *et al.* 2011; Ramos and Trinona 2009). Walton and Donner (2012) conducted an in-depth qualitative study of the digital practices of four young people in the Cape Town area. It was apparent that these young people had developed literacy practices that helped to minimise costs and maximise convenience in reaching their goals. They used public access venues (libraries and internet cafes) to support the development of digital literacies associated with accessing hyperlinked media and large-format documents, printing and saving information onto memory sticks, while traditional cellular access was used to support everyday social literacies and messaging.

Donner *et al.* (2011) documented that along with the technical constraints noted above, the eight women in their Cape Town-based study faced additional barriers including theft of handsets, and gender-related pressure from some of their partners which discouraged their growing digital awareness. While all of the women owned data-enabled handsets prior to the study, they had had no prior experience of a personal computer or the internet. The participants received training on enhanced use of their handsets for various practical uses, such as job searches. While portability and personal control may be advantages in resource-constrained communities, internet-enabled handsets and services have been designed to be used by technically literate users from developed countries where mobiles are complements to personal computers, not stand-alone modes. As mobile access becomes the data norm and websites are optimised for the mobile screen, some of these barriers will lessen.

Beyond the barriers of technical access or cultural constraints, literacy work in most African countries faces an additional barrier and that is the lack of suitable stories in African languages to facilitate early reading. Many of these African language groups have very limited text-based communication and next to no written stories for children. Projects such as the African Storybook Project, Seeds of Empowerment's 1001 Stories Project, Worldreader and the Lubuto

Library (SAIDE 2013; USAID 2013 [2012]) are attempting to generate material. The lack of appropriate story books and picture books in familiar languages is seen as a major contributing factor to low levels of literacy. Because of the vast number of languages in African countries, traditional print-based approaches may never be cost-effective and accurate translation and versioning remains a mammoth task. Some of these projects are making use of web-based editing functions to generate and/or customise these stories in local languages.

While technology projects are demonstrating how to augment traditional literacy approaches, many factors prevent the development of the full potential of mobile devices. Governments and private organisations in developing countries need to collaborate to a greater extent in funding both research into and practice of mLearning if literacy levels are to improve (Valk *et al.* 2010).

Issues for practice

The debates about the use of technology in the classroom are as old as the first introduction of the calculator: and differences abound between “technology enthusiasts and technology skeptics” (Collins and Halverson 2009: 9). An important aspect of this discussion is the way in which new technologies affect the pedagogical approaches of the teachers. Countless reports have noted how expensive technology has been bought or donated without the required training for teachers on how to use it (Mtshali 2013). It is clear that without effective teacher-training on the use of new technology enhancement to learning will not occur. This is particularly true in settings where the teacher is always alone in her/his classroom and has limited teaching materials such as books. Teachers in these settings are accustomed to being the sole authority for learning and the potentially destabilising effect of these new technologies to the teacher’s own self-image is important to consider. “We believe that new teachers must be prepared to teach in schools that are embedded in a world where technologies, particularly portable digital technologies, are changing the ways in which we make meanings and engage with each other” (Carrington 2009: 3). Collins expresses his opinion even more emphatically:

Computer tools greatly extend the power of the ordinary mind in the same way that the power tools of the Industrial Revolution extended the power of the ordinary body. No one will be able to solve complex problems or think effectively in the coming world without using digital technologies.

(Collins and Halverson 2009: 11)

Equally true is the need for learners in these settings to ‘unlearn’ their own mode of ‘doing school’. In a small study undertaken in a boys’ senior school in Johannesburg (Muller 2012) it was noted that when encouraged to use their cellphones in class, Grade 9 learners were competent researchers, able to source information quickly and connect to the internet for other modes of information such as sound and visual material. However, they showed little skill in being able to analyse and use this information in meaningful ways as they were not accustomed to using the devices as a tool to aid learning in the classroom. The attitude of both learners and teachers in that particular context indicated that cellphones are still regarded as a distraction rather than a useful resource. It seems that by restricting these devices to the pockets of the children, school authorities are denying them the opportunity to apply their already developed digital and mobile literacy practices to enrich their in-school learning experiences (Buckner and Kim 2013).

Even in more affluent communities where young people are very familiar with mobile technology, children need to be taught to use their mobile phones in constructive ways to aid

learning. A mobile phone is an instructional tool – not in itself an instructor. Its success depends on to what extent it supports the activities of the educators and learners in learning. If the educators are unable to utilise the tool in this way, the technology will remain outside of the learning realm and its full affordances unrealised.

McQuillan (2006) reported on the value of iPod technology in teaching second languages to both children and adults. The combination of audio, visual and text modes increased the comprehension of new language and its acquisition in ways that traditional methods do not. But as with any assessment of learning, we must pay attention to what the instructor is doing with the new tools at his or her disposal. The tools require educators who can exploit their learning potential.

The SMILE initiative in Tanzania (Buckner and Kim 2013) demonstrated this fact in its use of mobile phones to promote and facilitate inquiry-based learning in under-resourced high schools. Findings from this project confirm that while mobile phone applications can be implemented in a wide variety of educational settings with relatively quick learning curves, it is important to have committed and creative teachers to serve as ‘technology experts’ in the schools. These teachers need adequate training and follow-up mentoring to gain full advantage for their learners.

The Digital Education Enhancement Project (Leach *et al.* 2005) investigated ways in which new technologies can improve teaching and learning in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. Teachers in the project were carrying out classroom-focused professional development activities, using a range of new technologies, including hand-held computers and pocket cameras. This project reports on the varied uses made of the hand-held devices by teachers and pupils over a four-year period, including two case studies by teachers working in remote, rural settings. The findings of the study indicate that use of the hand-held computers varied, particularly with respect to the following contextual factors: teacher access to adjacent technologies, geographical location, local educational and cultural practices, home language. In their study on the introduction of hand-held computers in a rural school in the Eastern Cape, researchers from this project observed and reported on the positive changes in teachers’ approach to their teaching because of the affordances of this new technology: “Hand-held technologies may have a significant role to play in transforming the opportunities for teacher education in developing contexts” (Leach *et al.* 2005: 11).

In a resource-disadvantaged community this small project revealed that, despite a lack of a reliable electricity supply, teachers showed evidence of developing new habits in their teaching, such as in their preparation, presentation, organisation and storage of resources. They were also collaborating with peers and other professionals using their hand-held devices. Teachers reported a renewed interest in learning from the children as well as in their own approach to teaching. Teachers enjoyed the facility of ‘anywhere, anytime learning’, where the computer is able to move with the teacher or the learner to serve various pedagogical purposes and does not require special set-ups or locations. Professional affirmation of the teachers and the school as a result of this project extended to the parent body as well, with parents exhibiting more interest and pride in the achievements of their children and the school. Similarly, a teacher-training project in Bangladesh demonstrated the benefits of mLearning that stem from the facilitation of contextualised, situated, constructive and collaborative learning, using hand-held devices and SMS. Teachers valued the ability to immediately apply lessons learned and to discuss results of newly applied techniques with trainers and other trainees (Valk *et al.* 2010).

A project currently running in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa is the Cofimvaba project (Van Rensburg 2012) being undertaken by SchoolNet SA in partnership with several

government departments. The schools in this project are situated in poor, rural communities. An important factor in the apparent success of this project appears to be an incentive scheme whereby teachers earn badges for their individual progress which can lead to bigger rewards, such as accessories for their tablets. Whole staff achievements are rewarded with items for the school, such as data projectors:

One could be forgiven for assuming that teachers at this school might not be familiar with technology and might not readily adapt to an intervention that requires them to use android tablets in their classrooms. How wrong that assumption would be. On the contrary, the achievements of these teachers at Zamuxolo Junior Secondary have surpassed all expectations.

(CSIR ICT4RED 2013: 1)

Teachers demonstrated that they were able to match criteria for these rewards by such activities as producing video material, making digital mind maps of learning topics, emailing, taking photographs of learners' work and producing posters for their classrooms. Grade 12 learners in this project have been working with tablets in school and at home, with a roll-out to other senior grades also achieved this year.

It is evident however that not all teachers feel comfortable with these new educational practices. In some cases new technology may even be seen as threatening to teachers:

There are deep incompatibilities between the demands of the new technologies and the traditional school. Technology makes life more difficult for teachers. It requires new skills that teachers often have not learned in their professional development ... teachers can feel that the endless amount of information available on the web undermines their classroom expertise.

(Collins and Halverson 2009: 6)

These threats to the teacher's authority and sense of control must be handled carefully as technology comes into the classroom.

Beyond content or skill-based learning, technology can also influence other goals for learning. Archer (2012) proposes that the incorporation of new technologies into traditional learning situations has the potential for making classrooms more democratic. She argues that it breaks the norm of the teacher as source of all information and thus the source of power. Incorporation of technology in learning situations acknowledges that learners can contribute to their own growing knowledge and experience, without replacing or diminishing the role of the teacher. In emerging democracies like South Africa, framing your intervention in the service of the nation has the potential to help some teachers overcome their fears of lack of control. Another project in this vein is the SMILE project (Stanford Mobile Inquiry-based Learning Environment) designed by Kim to spur student questioning, thereby changing teacher-student dynamics in the classroom. Using mobile phones, students in different countries and communities are encouraged to learn by formulating questions of their own creation about a subject they are studying, sharing those questions and answers. The ubiquitous presence of mobile phones and the ability of the SMILE plug to work across platforms allowed for their use to create student-centred learning (Buckner and Kim 2013). Even in deprived communities, students were able to learn to use the mobile phones quite quickly and were then able to work in highly collaborative small groups. The authors did report that this was more difficult to implement in areas where rote memorisation pedagogies are typical.

While some educators may also still see mobile devices as being potentially disruptive to teaching and learning in the classroom, new modes of learning are becoming apparent with the increasing practices of mLearning. Traditional classroom practices are gradually changing as educators realise the affordances of the technologies and the ability of these devices to allow self-directed learning that is what we as educators talk about as our desired goal (Sharples *et al.* 2007). It seems, however, that this change in educational practices may be very gradual in developing nations such as South Africa for reasons both inside the classroom and outside of the school's direct control.

Walton (2010), in her research into the mobile literacy habits of teens in low socio-economic suburbs of Cape Town, found that their mobile internet practices were focused on Google searches, social networking and downloading, saving and sharing media. There were few reports of teens doing school research on their phones on a regular basis. She suggests that this would indicate that schools and teachers have been slow to make use of this new platform for reading, writing and research. Even learners themselves appear to be ambivalent. Half of the learners (50.4 per cent) in this study indicated that they did not believe that phones should be allowed to be used at school (Walton 2010).

One of the interesting questions to arise out of mLearning research studies is whether video gaming, a popular application of the hand-held device, has educational value. Gee (2003) is a strong proponent of the benefits of gaming in learning environments. He saw that in playing these games players/learners enjoyed the struggle to learn something complex and difficult. This seemed to conflict with the general attitude of learners to traditional learning in school. His study of the way good games are devised convinced him that they demonstrate sound learning principles, which at the same time add motivation and enjoyment to learning. Some of the principles he identifies are: problem-solving, production, risk-taking, lateral thinking and strategising. The networking aspect of video gaming draws players/learners into affinity groups where they learn from more experienced members with deeper knowledge. These collaborative learning and enquiry-based learning opportunities are also evident in out-of-school practices made possible by mobile technology.

In a project designed for children from low-income families in rural India (Kam *et al.* 2009), a curriculum of cellphone games was devised to complement formal schooling. The aim was to expand the reach of English language learning to out-of-school settings. Children with basic numeracy and English literacy were given games that targeted listening comprehension, word recognition, sentence construction and spelling, on various levels. Findings seemed to indicate that stronger and older students benefitted from the self-paced, machine-based approach to English learning, whereas weaker students gained more from teacher-directed pedagogical intervention. This suggests that more attention and resources should go into designing mLearning software that can provide support for children who have had less academic preparation.

According to Gee (2012), one advantage of the mobile environment is that testing knowledge happens automatically in gaming – it is built in to the design of the game. He proposes that the traditional forms of assessment drives the education system, but restricts deeper and immersive learning.

While there is important evidence in the developing world that mobile phones impact educational outcomes by facilitating increased access to learning, much less evidence exists as to how mobile devices are able to promote new learning. It is also clear that the state of mobile infrastructure in these developing countries directly affects the success of mLearning interventions.

Current contribution to research

Janks and Styles' Mobile Literacy Project uses a social practice approach to literacy, building on the extensive use of SMS messaging in poor South African communities. It aims to give students

access to appropriate texts of their own choosing available on the internet and to give them control over what they write. The project's conception is multimodal, multilingual text production as the entry point to literacy, supported by language acquisition input from the texts the children are reading. Literacy is constructed as a meaning-making practice that does not initially require children to divide their linguistic repertoires into separate language boxes and their semiotic resources into distinct modes. The student's interest in multimodal literacies is stimulated by the use of a wide range of applications, or apps, such as *Weird Facts*, *Ancient Egypt* or the *Endless Alphabet* series.

Two groups of Grade 5 learners in different schools are monitored in their use of the iPod Touch, with a specific focus on the development of their writing and text-making. By allowing the children to experiment with the different modes and applications afforded by these devices we test to see if they will develop positive attitudes to literacy in general, and that as a result both reading and writing skills will improve. Because of their familiarity with the cellphone technology, parents may feel more able and confident to support and encourage their children's learning.

The device chosen for this project was the iPod Touch, a device that has several advantages. As a device, it is as user-friendly for children as it is robust. It is also visually appealing and the touch technology is helpful for children who struggle with handwriting. The device is also more cost-effective than a tablet or laptop computer. In a research study comparing e-books on different touch device platforms (Touch-Screen computer, iPad and iPod), Roskos *et al.* (2014) found that pre-school children had a greater affinity for the iPod device than the other devices. Their findings "indicate that moving, gesturing, and looking behaviors are affected by device type in favor of" the iPod (p. 5).

To build upon the idea of a social practice of literacy, student pairs are assigned to a single device, forcing students to negotiate their practices on the device with their partners. This allows the researchers to monitor how devices are shared, allows the opportunities for knowledge to be transferred between pairs of students at different levels of literacy practice and creates opportunities that require students to negotiate the creation of shared texts. A custom application was created that enables pairs of students to save their writing to a server. These posts are then available for other pairs of students, the teacher and the researchers to select, read and comment on.

Working in two schools allows us to create a community of practice for teachers. These inter-school communities of practice are important to create in South Africa where traditions of separating communities and schools has such a long history.

The impact of disrupting the traditional patterns of call-and-response, rote learning and substituting a multimodal, textually rich app that is connected to the particular content being studied in a lesson cannot be over-estimated. The educator cannot know what screen all twenty pairs of learners are on at any particular moment. The learners can have space to explore the app in any number of ways. The teacher must then create alternative ways of assessing the engagement of the students with their learning.

The exclusive use of cellular pay-as-you-go access comes with a set of practical problems in the South African context, for example: frequent unplanned interruptions of electricity supply, charging multiple phones with not enough plug points available, unreliable WiFi routers, synchronising phones is difficult, downloading apps and children's work is problematic. The limited size of the iPod screen may affect the amount of text the author feels makes for a 'complete' piece of text.

Finally children who have grown up in print-poor communities with limited social practices of literacy often learn that literacy is mainly useful for 'getting a good grade at school'. Through

interactions with the teacher, other students and the research staff, we will be experimenting with a variety of lessons that provide students with new reasons for literacy.

Future directions

It is both hard to synthesise the different projects described and to predict what the future will bring. The field of mEducation is relatively new and research has not yet established a clear set of directions or even understandings of how best to use mobile devices to enhance learning. The fact that mobile phones are banned in many schools, shows how unprepared teachers and institutions are to make use of them for educational purposes. There is no clear agreement as to the right age to introduce children to screen technologies, how much time they should spend using them, or what they should be using them for.

Much depends on where one is situated in relation to the digital divide. Elite communities, sure of their children's privileged access to resources, can afford to debate some of the issues. In poor communities, parents have no doubt that access to, and the ability to use, digital technologies will better prepare their children for a technological future. They value the role of schools, researchers and projects in providing their children with opportunities to learn how to use them productively.

In print-poor communities, mobile technology has the power to make text available provided there is electricity, a cellular network and enough bandwidth. In the long run, online texts will prove cheaper and more ubiquitous than printed texts. A country's investment in an infrastructure that has the ability to equalise access to information and the means of symbolic production makes economic sense in the twenty-first century. As technologies converge, there can be little doubt that mobility will remain and that the 'computers' we carry in our pockets will become ever more powerful and more affordable. Now is also the time to invest in developing digital resources in the wide range of languages spoken in multilingual countries.

Because the rate of technological change is so rapid, it is impossible to predict what these new technologies will look like when children now in primary school graduate from high school. We need therefore to ensure that our students are part of the change process, such that as users they experience the changes as incremental rather than overwhelming. Students need to become members of online communities of practice that can support their development until they become experts in their own right. Back to the basics is not enough. We owe it to our students to take them forward into a digital future that is firmly grounded in both the basics and the not-yet-envisaged. We believe that an education in mobile literacies properly conceived, researched and taught can in the long run contribute to this vision.

Note

- 1 Mxit is the South African-based largest mobile social network in Africa, currently boasting 7.4 million active users across the continent (NewsCentralMedia 2013). It is low cost and can be run on the most basic of phones.

Related topics

Situated learning, Affordances and constraints, Play, Critical literacy.

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LITERACIES AND RESEARCH AS SOCIAL CHANGE

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Introduction

There is a much-quoted aphorism widely attributed to the well-known anthropologist Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” (as cited in Lutkehaus 2008). This raises a provocative question. Is this a romantic ideal or is this something that literacy educators and researchers can hang on to in relation to our work in classrooms and communities? Can research be used as a form of social change and social action? What form should this work take to ensure that it is useful for the populations that it is informed by? How might participatory research methodologies be used to promote community dialogue and ultimately social change in communities? Participatory research demands that the people who create the knowledge are the intended audience for the knowledge. How can we ensure that our research is useful to participants, and how can participatory methodologies be harnessed to promote positive social change through a framework of social justice? What are the limitations in this work and how can we address these limitations? These are key questions that we take up in this chapter.

While the idea of research as social change has been highlighted in the work of a number of researchers working across a variety of disciplinary areas (including sociology, health and education), the work of Schratz and Walker is particularly useful:

For some [research for social change] means finding new ways of looking at what is familiar in order to change it, for others it may begin as a need for a better understanding of changes forced on the situations in which they find themselves. For many people it means finding ways to seize the opportunity to become more reflexive in their practice, that is to say creating the means for looking at the situations in which they act as others in the situation see them.

(1995: 1)

In subscribing to a research as social change framework, we must acknowledge that the work that we produce must be worthwhile and useful to the communities with whom we work. The goal is for researchers to work with communities to advance what might be termed as knowledge ‘from the ground up’ (Choudry and Kapoor 2010) and in relation to policy dialogue surrounding

human rights, social justice, civic engagement and responsible citizenship. Exploring how communities see the world, what they consider to be critical issues, and how policy dialogue can be galvanized through public discussion and critical consciousness are issues that are fundamental to a research for social change framework. The concept of research for social change fits well with a broad framework of participatory methodologies including arts-based and visual methodologies such as photovoice, participatory video, drawing, map-making and digital story-telling (see for example Mitchell 2011a, 2011b; Moletsane *et al.* 2008; Stuart and Mitchell 2013). To do this, researcher reflexivity and positioning are also key as we work with participants (students in our classrooms, parents and various community members) to make sense of a phenomenon, and work towards understanding and changing inequitable practices.

Historical perspectives

In engaging in research for social change, we draw together several theoretical frameworks, (1) post-structuralism (2) New Literacy Studies and (3) participation and participatory cultures.

Post-structuralism

Language practices are linked to multiple experiences of power. Gee (2013: 30) asserts that diverse “identities and activities are enacted in and through language”, which is necessarily linked to experiences of power, and of justice. In situating research as social action in a post-structuralist lens, research for social action must be highlighted as a literacy practice itself (Burck 2005). Therefore, in situating research as social change there is a call for a “focus on the inextricable and diffuse linkages between power and knowledge, and on how individuals are constituted as subjects and given unified identities or subject positions” (Petersen *et al.* 1999: 3). This conception of power, knowledge, language and domination employs the theories of thinkers such as Foucault (1980), Fairclough (2001, 2006) and Bourdieu (1986, 1989, 1991). These theorists describe power as being experienced in multiple ways by multiple parties. This directly links to the goals of research for social change and the ways that research must be created by and for its intended populations. Therefore, within societies, institutions, languages and cultures, various ways of knowing exist, although the experience of power differs. Because these numerous ways of knowing and experiencing power relations necessarily occur simultaneously, these multiple experiences of power can work in opposition to each other (Newman 2005: 5). This conception of multiple ways of knowing and multiple ways of experiencing power relations works to ground research for social change and social action as it acknowledges that cultures, nations, institutions and individuals’ experiences are varied and heterogeneous. In this, post-structuralism works to contextualize experiences and ways of knowing.

New Literacy Studies: problematizing the autonomous model of literacy

To discuss research for social change as a form of literacy itself, we draw on the idea of multiliteracies, as put forth by the New London Group in the *Harvard Educational Review* (1996). As Brian Street attests, New Literacy Studies “takes nothing for granted with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated, problematizing what counts as literacy at any time and place and asking ‘whose literacies’ are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant” (2003: 77). This view of literacy as multiple (Finnegan 2002), suggests that literacies can be oral, visual, multimodal and written – as is the view of ‘text’. It also suggests that we use

literacies to connect with our communities, societies and others around the globe. In an effort to understand the relationship between literacy practices, discourses and social practices, the use of the autonomous model literacy as a tool of domination and a way of emphasizing 'otherness', must be made explicit (Street 2001a, 2001b). To contextualize research for social change as a literacy practice, we acknowledge the New Literacy Studies' assertion that language and literacy are multiple, rather than singular and autonomous. The theoretical considerations provided by the New London Group focuses our analysis on the effect of local literacy practices on minority and majority communities, and how literacy can be harnessed for social justice (Barton and Hamilton 1998, 2001; Dyer and Choksi 2001; Gee 1996, 2001; Purcell-Gates 2007). With this in mind, we look also to Gee, who suggests that institutions "render certain sorts of activities and identities meaningful; certain sorts of activities and identities constitute the nature and existence of specific social groups and institutions" (2013: 2). In this, we recognize that literacies are situated, and research for social justice asks everyday citizens to take action based on collaboration and participatory inquiry (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994).

Participatory cultures

Two broad areas of work inform the theoretical underpinning of a participatory cultures framework: community-based and participatory action research and digital and social media-based work. The vast body of work that links community-based research and participatory action research that may or may not draw on visual methodologies seeks to 'democratize' the research process by starting with community voice (see for example Burt and Code's 1995 *Changing Methods*), and the digital and social media-based work of Henry Jenkins and others focuses on 'participatory culture'. As Jenkins writes:

The term, participatory culture, contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands.

(2006: 3)

Jenkins *et al.* (2006: 5–6) refer to participatory cultures as being characterized by the following: (1) There are "relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement". Thus, everyone can participate and produce. Participation does not rest on expertise. (2) There is strong support for creating and sharing what you create with others. Audience, and some sort of public display or outlet is important. (3) There is often some kind of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced actors gets passed along to newbies and novices. This validates collaborative (and hence non-competitive) community work. (4) Members feel that their contributions matter. The issues and themes that participants take up are important to them. And finally, (5) Members feel some degree of social connection with each other at least to the degree to which they care what other people think about what they have created. This last point simply corroborates the significance of choice, ownership, community and public engagement. Participatory cultures thus point to affiliations (memberships, formal and informal, in online communities centred around various forms of media), expressions (producing new creative forms), collaborative problem-solving (working together in teams, formal and informal, to complete tasks and develop new knowledge) and circulations (shaping the flow of media). What is significant about this work is the fact that it is user-driven or DIY (do it yourself) in orientation and its social nature (with the potential for social change).

Critical topics and issues

In this section, we, Claudia and Casey, highlight critical topics and issues in a research as social change framework by (1) making clear that researcher reflexivity itself is a key feature of a research as social change framework; and (2) drawing attention to some tensions that can run through this work particularly in relation to reaching the audiences (and especially policy makers). In so doing we consider what a research as social change framework looks like in relation to literacies, using several published case studies. We write here as two separate voices, starting with a reflexive account written by Casey that highlights the ‘why’ of a social change framework. We then go on to offer two brief examples of ‘research as social change’ projects.

To write is not enough: Understanding the experiences of non-Chinese speaking youth in Hong Kong (Casey Burkholder)

I wrote a master’s thesis, inspired by my experiences as a ‘Native English Teacher’ (as I was called) at a public secondary school in Hong Kong where I taught non-Chinese speaking (NCS) ethnic minority youth (Burkholder 2013a). In my tenure at the school as a teacher, I believed that I had been successful in creating an inclusive community within my classroom (where multiple voices, viewpoints, language and literacy practices, and histories were shared and valued), but no other place in the school. Not in the lunchroom. Not in the courtyard. Not in the staffroom. Certainly not in the larger community. My participation as a teacher in the school was mediated by my own status as a Caucasian-Canadian NCS person. In reflecting on this history, and my inability to affect real and lasting change, it became my desire to understand the way that NCS students in my former school viewed themselves and their language practices. From my insider/outsider perspective as a former NCS teacher of NCS ethnic minority students at a public school, I sought to explore the educational policies and practices that have been directed at NCS youth in Hong Kong.

When I went back to my former students to ask about their understanding of non-Chinese speaking young people’s experiences of public secondary school, it became clear that their lived experiences of school did not match the Hong Kong government’s goal to integrate them into public schools and the community. Specifically, my study examined the way in which secondary-aged NCS young people’s experiences of school aligned with the discourses employed by Hong Kong’s Education Bureau (EDB). In doing so, the project examined the tensions that were present regarding language and literacy practices, as well as the notions of integrating NCS youth into the school and community, and the support directed at NCS youth by the government. These tensions were illuminated in a critical discourse analysis (Gee 2013) of twenty-seven online documents published by the EDB, through in-depth interviews with a participant from the EDB, as well as in private, open-ended, semi-structured interviews with twenty former students and three former colleagues. In these interviews, and through the discourse analysis of the twenty-seven online documents directed at NCS youth and their families, I examined the diverging perspectives on the schooling that NCS young people, which in practice appeared to separate NCS students from *local* Chinese students. A key finding from the study was that English was used as the medium of instruction for these NCS young people, who were, in a sense asked to ‘check their home languages and non-English literacy practices at the door’. However, the policy goal of integrating NCS youth into the community was mediated primarily through the development of Chinese language skills. At the school where the data was collected, NCS students were taught only very basic Cantonese, and the NCS participants in the study each noted that their existing Chinese language skills were a

barrier to their desired future scholastic, economic and social mobility. As a result, NCS youth have developed different conceptions of what it means to belong in the school and in the community, and which language practices are required for belonging. Beliefs about language and literacy practices were described as being linked to belonging, as well as social and economic advancement.

Hong Kong's Education Bureau has described biliteracy (English and Traditional Chinese) and trilingualism (Cantonese, English and Mandarin) as stated goals for all students to know to be a part of Hong Kong (EDB 2013). Therefore, to belong in the community, oral and written Chinese language skills must be developed. This means that NCS youth who were born in Hong Kong, but do not speak Chinese, may not qualify as members who *belong* in the community (Burkholder 2013b). Access to a sense of belonging has important consequences on NCS students' development of ideas about what it means to be a citizen in Hong Kong. I wrote about this study as my master's thesis, and successfully defended it. However, I felt that I had not done enough: my written work was completed, but it did not reach the intended audience – the policy makers. In a research for social change framework, the audience for the knowledge is necessarily the same as the producers of the knowledge. In this, I felt that my work was limited: who was actually going to read my thesis? How could it actually affect change? However, as the project continues to grow into follow-up work, my experience of the writing of my master's thesis as not being 'good enough' has made me think about the value of incorporating participatory methodologies to create dialogue amongst NCS communities, with policy makers, and to encourage social action. The use of participatory visual research such as participatory video and photovoice would help to illuminate the sociocultural context of NCS literacy practices, and how concepts of self and citizenship are negotiated and represented by participants. It could facilitate a process whereby youth can document their own notions of community-building, literacy, citizenship and critical consciousness. In turn, this approach – through screenings and photo exhibitions – could generate dialogue amongst NCS communities about the existing and desired educational and literacy rights of NCS youth.

Participatory video to address gender-based violence in the age of AIDS (Claudia Mitchell)

A participatory video project that has been written about extensively elsewhere in work with youth in South Africa in the context of high rates of sexual violence and HIV and AIDS highlights the ethical dilemmas that arise in this work (see Mitchell 2011a, 2011b; Moletsane *et al.* 2008; Weber and Mitchell 2007). Here the focus is more on how this work operates within a research as social change framework. In the project the research team conducted participatory video-making workshops in two school-community contexts in a rural district of KwaZulu-Natal with high rates of HIV and AIDS. Secondary school youth working in small groups brainstormed issues in relation to an 'in my life' prompt, and identified a key issue which in all but one of six groups focused on gender-based violence. They then learned how to develop a storyboard, worked with the video cameras, and in one session produced a three- to four-minute No-Editing Required (NER) video, which was screened for the whole group. As has been explored elsewhere, the productions themselves were chilling. Youth made videos about teachers raping female students, gang rape, and incest and screened these videos for each other and for members of the community.

At one level the project was already, by virtue of the intensity of the work and the shared screenings, a research as social change media project. At another level, however, the making of the videos was only the first step. The value of the videos as visual texts is that they could be

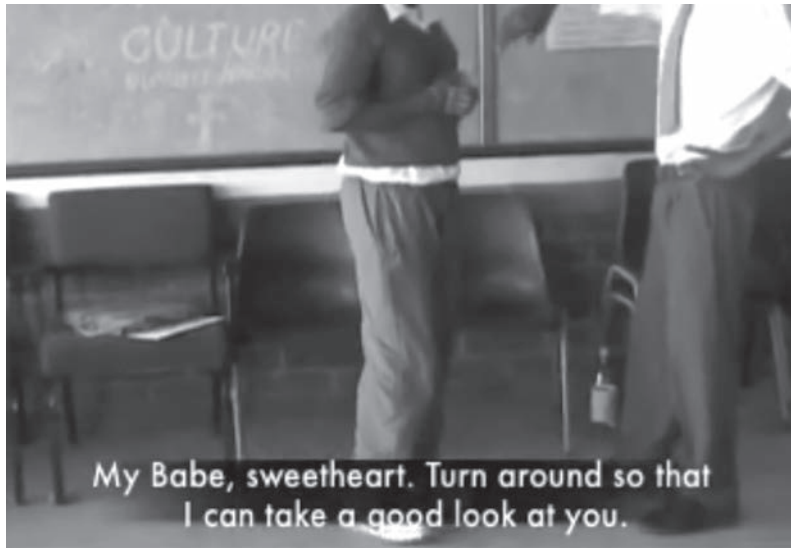


Figure 43.1 Screen shot from 'Rape' (reproduced with permission).

screened in many different contexts, and to many different audiences: faith-based organizations, traditional leaders, school governing bodies, other youth and so on. Through the Centre for Visual Methodologies for Social Change at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, our research team also produced two composite videos or 'videos of the videos' (*Seeing for Ourselves* and *Our Stories*) so that the production process and the various videos on gender-based violence could be viewed together.

It would be a research as social change success story if we could say that the incidence of gender violence in South Africa was reduced as a result of this intervention. This, of course, is far from being the case as the most recent studies on sexual violence reveal (Burton and Leoschut 2013). What is critical here, however, is the role of this collection of videos as catalysts in follow-up work in the community and we offer here a brief 'tracking' of what has taken place:

- Shortly after the initial video-making sessions, teachers in the schools participated in focus group sessions where they viewed the videos and discussed the issues – and while it would be difficult to say that this work resulted in immediate change, the viewing did facilitate in-depth discussions about gender violence and the ways in which male teachers and female teachers see the issues (Bhana *et al.* 2009; De Lange *et al.* 2012).
- A number of the teachers have participated in follow-up 'policy writing' workshops so that their schools might develop a policy on gender violence.
- Three of the teachers who were in those initial follow-up workshops have just participated in a workshop where they have designed their own composite video *Youth-led policy making in addressing gender violence* (De Lange and Mitchell 2014).
- Community health-care workers in the district viewed these videos as part of their professional development over several years and in collaboration with various members of the research team have co-produced a guide to addressing gender-based violence, *Stop Abuse: Together We Can End Violence in Our Community* (Karam 2012) and a series of posters with social messages about gender violence which are relevant to the community, based on their use of photovoice (see Figure 43.2).

**Being beaten by your husband, brother,
son or grandson is violence.**

SPEAK OUT



**Ukushaywa umyeni, umfowenu, indodana noma
umzukulu wakho kuwukuhlukunyezwa lokho**

KHULUMA NGAKO UNGATHULI

Concept and Design by Songonzima Clinic Community Health Workers @2013

Figure 43.2 Literacy change (reproduced with permission).

In essence, the participatory visual productions created by a group of young people in 2007 have led to various professionals (rural teachers and community health-care workers) becoming more involved in creating visual texts that address gender violence. This is in a context where rural teachers, often under-qualified and in schools that are under-resourced, and typically the ones who are the 'targets' for capacity building workshops, are taking the lead. That in itself is an example of research as social change.

Environmental literacy and photovoice: Wake Up and Smell the Coffee (Claudia Mitchell)

Two groups of ninth-grade students in Ethiopia living in the Jimma area, the birthplace of coffee, participated in a photovoice project on climate change (Mitchell 2012). As documented in a video production about the project, *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee*, the participants in the project focused on the ways in which such issues as deforestation are affecting climate change in their region and the possible effects of this in relation to coffee growing. The project was part of a larger Canadian funded-study in partnership with Jimma University. Each class produced their own photos and photo-narratives and also co-created (with members of the research team) public photo exhibitions, which they themselves curated. Although the *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee* images were produced in 2011, and the photo exhibition took place several months later, it may be too soon to see what the consequences of this work might be on a topic as 'global' as climate change. However the images are part of a travelling exhibition, and the film version (along with a facilitator's guide, Thompson 2013) has been used in both Canada and South Africa.

In Ethiopia there is an expectation that other universities, besides Jimma University where the project took place, may see the benefits of doing community outreach, and especially to engage youth in critical issues related to the environment. We can also study directly what difference this project might mean to future relationships between Jimma University and the schools involved. Other schools who see the exhibition may become inspired to carry out their own participatory projects. Indeed, the images in *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee* land into a rich policy environment for youth participation across a variety of issues and concerns in Ethiopia. The policy environment for addressing the needs of rural youth includes documents such as the *National Youth Policy* (MOYSC 2004). Indeed, the *National Youth Policy* was created to ensure that youth become active and recognized participants in the democratic growth of Ethiopia, to ensure that they receive all benefits made through economic progress on a regional and national level, and to ensure that they are integral to the creation of future policies and outcomes that will specifically benefit youth. In the Canadian context as a partner in this project, the expectation is that youth who see the images may become inspired to do their own environmental study, so the question 'what does it mean to grow up in the land of coffee' may give way to studying local environmental issues. As one follow-up study in Canada with eighth-grade youth who viewed the film *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee* highlights, there is a great deal to be gained through this work as a type of consciousness-raising in relation to global issues (see Cook 2013).

Current contributions and research

A major contribution of a research as social change framework is its validation of the idea of co-creating knowledge. This term 'co-creating knowledge' along with the idea of 'democratizing knowledge' and formulations such as 'youth as knowledge producers' (Lankshear and Knobel 2003) suggests ways of thinking about knowledge in new ways.

A research as social change framework also means re-examining previous practices through a new lens. The current interest in participatory video, for example, can be traced back to the National Film Board of Canada and its work on Fogo Island, Newfoundland in the 1960s (see Corneil 2012). The work that is currently underway highlights that the co-creation of knowledge should inspire a retrospective on earlier work, without necessarily romanticizing the findings. This historical perspective links well to the ‘revisiting’ work of Burawoy (2003).

More than anything, however, this work contributes to expanding notions of what literacies are or what they can do. Too often lip-service is paid in school curricula to digital literacies, media literacies and multiliteracies, but the ways in which this work can be transformative or useful in everyday life is typically not addressed.

Main research methods

Participatory visual methodologies help to illuminate the sociocultural context of literacy practices, and how concepts of self and community are negotiated and represented by participants. These methodologies work to promote individual and community engagement, which, in turn, looks to inform research for social justice, and social action. Participatory visual methodologies, specifically, build on the use of participatory video (Milne *et al.* 2012), cellfilms, or films made with a cellphone and for distribution through a cellphone (Dockney and Tomaselli 2009; Mitchell and De Lange 2013); drawing (Theron *et al.* 2011), digital storytelling (Gubrium and Harper 2013) and photovoice (Wang and Burris 1997; Wang 1999), and other uses of photography and literacy (Ewald *et al.* 2012). These methods encourage participants to document their own notions of community-building, literacy, citizenship and critical consciousness, and what social justice looks like to them. In turn, this approach is expected to generate policy dialogue about the existing and desired educational, literacy or health rights of participants, through their voices and through their viewpoints. A powerful policy-related example can be found in Caroline Wang’s work with Chinese peasant women who took photos of critical health and child-care issues. The photos, when exhibited, caused policy makers to address working conditions for women farmers. In another policy-related piece, girls in Swaziland took photos of the terrible state of the toilets at their school, particularly in the context of gender-based violence. When the photos were exhibited at a UN meeting involving people working in Water and Sanitation and those working in Child Protections, it was clear that safety and security issues had to be added to policies on water and sanitation (Mitchell 2009). The power of photographs and video lies within their ability to mobilize people to act (Mitchell *et al.* 2010).

Recommendations for practice

We offer here several recommendations for bringing together literacies and research as social change:

Asking the question ‘what difference does this make?’: As is obvious in the case studies that we offer above, social change can be a slow process. For short-term projects, it may be difficult to see change. At the same time, it is critical to find ways of documenting the process with the idea that change may be there but we need to be creative in finding it. Thus, we recommend documenting participatory projects through visual means with the possibility that the video or still camera may itself be a tool for change (Mitchell 2011a). We also recommend building a policy-related framework, which focuses on what can be changed. For example, the video productions of youth in the participatory video project noted above may not necessarily change

policy at a national level, but as highlighted, if three teachers begin to shift their perspectives towards agency they can have influence at a local level.

Does the method fit?: Sometimes it is tempting to put method over purpose, and it is not uncommon for someone to become excited about video-making as method for the sake of video: 'I just want to do a participatory video project!' We would recommend that the method should fit the research questions and not the other way around. It is possible that a method will be foisted on to a community without sufficient consultation 'from the ground up'. We recommend being very clear about what the goals of a project are and that as much as possible they are negotiated with the community from the beginning. This includes involving the community in learning about the methods and whether they would be appropriate.

Access to technologies: One of the challenges of doing this work is to make sure that participants have long-term access to the technologies they are introduced to in research projects. The use of a low-tech method such as drawing ensures that everyone can participate. If you are carrying out a photovoice project, can you arrange to leave cameras in the community? Can you use technology that is already there? The use of cellphones, for example, to carry out photovoice and participatory video projects could make sense simply because of the ubiquity of the cellphone. Dissemination practices also change since participants increasingly have access to YouTube and other social media platforms.

Sustainability: A related concern is the sustainability of a project (De Lange and Mitchell 2012). If social change is the goal then it is necessary to think of long-term commitments to a community and the importance of a team approach. Social research is too often tainted by what Rist (1980) calls a 'blitzkrieg' approach with a research team coming in to a community, collecting its data (even in participatory ways) and leaving.

Future directions

While there are a number of directions this work on research as social change might take, here we draw attention to several which come directly out of the work discussed in this chapter:

Marginal populations and democratizing knowledge: If we keep in mind the question 'what knowledge, whose knowledge and who can use this knowledge?' (Stuart and Mitchell 2013: 364), we can use this work on participatory visual methodologies and research as social change to contribute to transforming school curricula, particularly in relation to working with marginalized voices. In a photovoice project with girls with disabilities in Vietnam, the focus is on how to transform an educational policy landscape that remains exclusionary to one that is informed by girls' representations of their social and educational realities. (Nguyen *et al.* accepted.) While in theory this is a stated goal of much of the work with participatory methodologies, to date its use in areas of severe disability has been under-studied.

Social media and social change: Notwithstanding the important focus of the work of Jenkins *et al.* (2006) on social media and participatory cultures, there remains a tension on the social value of social media. The moral panics that have been associated with internet use (and especially cyber-bullying) continue to highlight the tension surrounding the idea of a democratization of social media, and its impact on social change. With the idea that all voices can be heard equally and democratically (at least theoretically), the use of social media provides an avenue for social change.

Policy dialogue and policy change: While emerging discourses speak to the idea of "learning from the ground up" (Choudry and Kapoor 2010), this is an area where much more work is needed. It requires collaborations between and amongst communities, researchers and policy makers and requires long-term commitment (financial and social) to dialogue that is informed

by communities themselves through virtual and ‘on the ground’ exhibitions and screenings. Instead of policy as an afterthought in literacy projects it needs to be something that is framed in proposals from the beginning.

Related topics

Participatory visual methodologies, Policy dialogue and policy change, Digital approaches, Co-constructing literacies with communities.

Further reading

Ewald, W., Hyde, K. and Lord, L. (2012) *Literacy and Justice Through Photography: A Classroom Guide*, New York, NY: Teachers College Press/New York, NY: Columbia University/Durham, NC: Center for Documentary Studies.

Ewald, Hyde and Lord describe social action as being a paramount issue which can be understood by examining photography and visual methods to encourage notions of literacy and justice. Building on Ewald’s photography and literacy projects with children from around the world, the book offers a framework to work through issues relating to social justice and moves its readers towards action. The book serves as a guide to implementing photography projects and is particularly useful because it grounds theories about social change within tangible methods to encourage action.

Mitchell, C., Stuart, J., De Lange, N., Moletsane, R., Buthelezi, T., Larkin, J. and Flicker, S. (2010) What difference does this make? Studying Sothern African youth as knowledge producers with a new literacy of HIV and AIDS, in C. Higgins and B. Norton (eds), *Language and HIV/AIDS*, Clevedon, UK/Buffalo, NY/Toronto, Canada: Multilingual Matters, pp. 214–232.

Mitchell *et al.* discuss the importance in harnessing visual and multimodal pedagogies to encourage young people to take action within a social justice framework in the age of HIV and AIDS. This work provides an overview of literature surrounding visual methodologies used in participatory research for social change, and situates the work in a number of case studies from South Africa.

Schatz, M. and Walker, R. (1995) *Research as Social Change*, London: Routledge.

Schatz and Walker outline the need to use research to act for social change. They do so by suggesting that subjectivity should be brought into our work as researchers, and that we use participatory action research to call attention to power, and in so doing give participants the ability to articulate responses and reclaim control from outside forces (particularly social and governmental restraints). The authors use participatory research as an action by which we can harness positive social change, by activating, challenging and engaging individuals and communities.

Stuart, J. and Mitchell, C. (2013) Media, participation, and social change: Working within a ‘youth as knowledge producers’ framework, in D. Lemish (ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Children, Adolescents and Media*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 359–365.

Stuart and Mitchell suggest that youth voices must be considered in relation to the development of policies and practices of concern to youth. To this end, they suggest the use of a variety of participatory methodologies (including: photovoice, participatory video work, drawing and map-making, and digital story-telling) to work with children and youth to engage them in the process of representing the challenges, issues and difficulties that matter to them in the context of their everyday lives.

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