

1

The New Literacy Studies and teaching literacy: Where we were and where we are going

The following vignette was written by a participant in a high school study. Using the principles of **New Literacy Studies** and **multimodality**, Winston found his way into writing.

Vignette: Rutgers admission letter

By Winston Charlebon (pseudonym)

For many years, the small Caribbean Island of Haiti has been shunned by the world. Children have been starving, families have been homeless and the government has been negligent. The murders will never be reprimanded; the kidnappers celebrate showing no remorse for their actions while they spend their ransoms on life's vices. The children's clothes are saturated with dirt; their hands are worn down from strenuous labor. Their shoes are torn and old, their feet are swollen and blistered from the countless miles they walk. Their evangelical families pray to God anxiously waiting his return. For them Judgment Day is a liberation from this terrible life they live. January 12, 2010 their prayers were not answered. Instead, an earthquake ravaged through the capital city. People ran trying to escape the flying debris. The elderly were too weak to run and could not evade a horrible fate. And children studying in their classrooms were crushed by heavy bricks and wood and could not even say goodbye to their loved ones. My loved ones were right in the midst of it. They were left with

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literally nothing, not even their lives. People heard about the earthquake and read about the earthquake and read the news report but very few people actually know what is occurring in Haiti and in other countries today. That is why I co-founded the Multicultural Awareness Group in order to help educate my fellow peers about different cultures that they might know about. Rutgers University is a unique university because of its immense diversity. If I am fortunate enough to be accepted into this university, I intend to take advantage of its diversity and use it as an opportunity to educate others about cultures that most individuals have not heard of. For many years, the small quintessential town of Princeton has attracted people from all over the globe. The children have been well fed, their families live in big houses, and the government has always been extremely gracious towards them. Violence is almost unheard of and any crime is punished severely. The children wear the latest designer clothes. The most expensive and fine jewelry hug their necks and wrists. Their hands are soft and smooth. Their fingers are pampered and manicured. However this is not how I have lived in Princeton. I lived in a small house with 7 people to share three bedrooms. I would make my own dinner and didn't have anyone to do my work for me. If I am accepted into Rutgers University, I will be able to open the eyes of several other students to a variety of different cultures, which would greatly benefit the diverse environment.

Reprinted with permission from Winston, October 11, 2010

 Key themes in the chapter:

- Literacy as a social practice
- Literacy as an event and a set of practices
- Literacy as a global and local practice
- Literacy as faith-based
- Literacy as critical

INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you are teaching students, like Winston, who have been identified as 'underachieving in literacy'. These are young people who come from a number of different backgrounds. Jennifer first met Winston when he was in a 9th Grade support English class when he expressed little interest in reading and writing. When she encountered

Winston he was struggling in English class and he showed little interest in reading literature and ‘the canon’, Shakespeare and Homer, and writing formal essays were not his favoured literacy practices. In his out-of-school life, Winston listens to rap, hip-hop, contributes (constantly) to *Facebook*, and takes photographs of his neighbourhood.

- How would you teach Winston?

Four years after meeting Winston, he came to see Jennifer with his Dad to discuss what he needs to do to get accepted into Rutgers University. Winston was a different young man, more serious, confident, and mature. During our conversation, we talked about writing a short **narrative** that captured him and that gave a specific picture to the reader about how he would contribute to Rutgers. We talked about his family and his aspirations and what inspired these aspirations. What resulted from the conversation is the first vignette in this book as a powerful signifier of enacting how to understand New Literacy Studies in a classroom. Clearly, something shifted with Winston and his relationship with English and writing formal essays. Winston attributes his change of heart to a supportive family and to good teachers at his high school. Jennifer still corresponds with Winston, who did not end up at Rutgers University but at a university further afield and he is very happy. Winston’s thoughtful narrative is very much in the spirit of New Literacy Studies, in that it demonstrates his awareness of:

- Lived cultural practice
- Local–global connections
- Identity issues
- Felt emotions

The vignette depicts the dramatic change Winston experienced as he completed high school. Jennifer recollects his gradual socialization and eventual enjoyment of English over his years in high school. The vignette begins a journey into key themes introduced in this chapter and themes that run throughout the book.

These themes are:

- 1 Literacy as ecologies. By ecology we mean that literacy exists in places, as a set of actions by particular individuals that is in a network of other actions around literacy.

4 LITERACY AND EDUCATION

- 2 Literacy is an embodied practice that requires movement and action (e.g., scrolling, tapping, reading, sliding) and as an embodied experience it requires more modes of representation than ever, i.e. multimodality.
- 3 Critical literacy has always been important, but it is more important than ever that we critically frame the diverse texts our students use.
- 4 Literacy is still hand-made and artifactual, and it relates to real worlds and embodied experience.
- 5 Writing takes place in the home, in the street and in the school. This activity can be invisible and is materialized in different ways such as gardening and textiles.
- 6 More than ever, literacy is about digital and immersive worlds. It is also about challenging the binaries between the online and offline.
- 7 Literacy exists within curricular objectives and frameworks. We can't forget as educators that we need to negotiate our own philosophies and understandings of practice with curricula objectives and in the book we try to mediate new ideas with more traditional notions, such as academic literacy.
- 8 **Literacy** has a different logic that we uncover in the book, a logic more in line with twenty-first-century needs and practices.

The view of literacy as a **social practice** has been around for some time now. In writing this second edition of *Literacy and Education*, it is clear that the field has indeed moved on. Our aim in the second edition is to update our accounts of New Literacy Studies to see how this understanding of literacy can be applied to classrooms in new times, with potentially more immediate demands than in 2005. In this chapter, the concepts behind the idea of literacy as a social practice will be explained and then contextualized within important studies that have contributed to the field, five years on. What continue to be central to New Literacy Studies are the key ideas of **literacy events** and **literacy practices**.

The moment of composing a **text** can be described as a literacy event, an event in which literacy forms a part. Now, five years on, it is even more pressing to open up a definition of text to any kind of entity from which an individual makes meaning. For instance, a contemporary literacy event might be writing on someone's *Facebook* wall about an event that happened and getting immediate feedback from friends and

family. Part of the composing process for a text draws on a meaning maker's experience of literacy practices. Winston pulls on his experience of creating voice in narratives through deft attention to detail and using the correct register for the reader. Working within a persuasive narrative, Winston knows how to rhetorically structure his argument so that the reader recognizes his unique contribution to a place. This view of literacy as informed by patterns of practice can be contrasted with a view of literacy as a set of skills. In this book, we argue that it is possible to combine an understanding of literacy as a set of skills *with* an understanding of how we use literacy in everyday life. In fact, we argue that if we bring these understandings together, it helps. What is more, we consider how the idea of literacy as a social practice encourages our students' writing and reading development in classroom settings.

Winston's vignette is a fitting segue to look at contemporary New Literacy Studies because it illustrates that when students draw on cultural experiences they have had in their lives, *they have more fluency in their writing*. Students may come from different parts of the globe, and then learn within an urban space. They may live in a remote rural community, on an island, but be connected to the world through the Internet. If literacy is understood as a *global and social practice*, this helps us understand why children need to communicate not only across different cultures, but also in relation to changing global communication.

- How can Winston access fluent writing?

Here we explore ways of engaging students who have rich experience of the world in writing so that they can access academic literacy. When Winston drew on his own experience, **culture**, lived history to write his admission essay, he drew on his **identity** as a teenager and child who knows about the reality of a culture under tremendous strain and arduous conditions. He speaks Haitian dialect, and this history and culture informs his perspective. At the same time, Winston lived in Princeton, a privileged university town in the United States. Locating his global identity within his local identity brings power, force, the everyday into his narrative.

Students within everyday and global spaces need to both pull on their global identities and make a success for themselves within local learning contexts. Literacy very quickly moves between local and global. At one moment you can be having a *Facebook* conversation with your friend down the corridor and, in the next moment, you can be emailing your Granny in Buenos Aires. In the book, we signal the thread between the local and the global. In Chapter 4 the spatial nature of literacy is explored, and we consider how an understanding of place and space can

help shape literacy practices. Power comes into these discussions, as place-based literacies are connected to more powerful or less powerful spaces (Comber, 2010).

When our students write and read, they infuse these practices into their identities. Literacy learners bring their identities into the making of meaning, and as they learn to read, or put marks on a page, their marks are inscribed with that experience. This book connects to new ideas about the relationship between literacy and identity and how this works in classrooms. You will also consider what this perspective does to aid classroom practice. Identities are complex, made up of hybrid and multiple experiences. Identities shape our literacy practices. These identity-infused literacy practices are then taken up in school and encounter different literacy practices.

- How can we ensure that our students' literacy practices in classrooms account for their identities out of school?

Thinking about Winston and the story that he recounts about the harsh reality of life in Haiti, especially after the earthquake, how does Winston's story inform and empower his narrative? His narrative is that much richer when we consider his experience, living among privilege and aware of disparities between his Haitian roots and his Princeton life. With details such as 'the murders will never be reprimanded; the kidnapers celebrate showing no remorse for their actions while they spend their ransoms on life's vices', Winston imbues power through detail and through negotiating his immediate life with his cultural roots. His use of such writing devices as parallelism, nuanced descriptions give the narrative meaning and heart.

Points of Reflection

These techniques might prompt you to reflect on the following *key questions*:

- How are student literacy practices and lived experiences different from their in-school literacy practices?
- Are there links between home literacy practices and school literacy practices? If there are, what are these links?
- Do the teaching resources and strategies that you use speak to or not speak to your students' sense of identity?

These questions are the focus of this chapter. The next section explains the theory behind New Literacy Studies and how you can use these theories to understand literacy practices.

NEW LITERACY STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW

This section introduces you to some of the key thinkers in this field, which has been identified as the New Literacy Studies. There are a number of scholars who have looked at literacy in everyday life (Street, 1995; Gee, 1996; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Stein, 2007; Janks, 2010; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). These scholars have drawn on research from communication and anthropology to look at the role of literacy in people’s lives.

Research from the New Literacy Studies examines literacy practices, and literacy events, and many researchers have used its perspective to look at what people do with literacy. Because of studies looking at how people used literacy in everyday life, the concept of literacy began to be rethought. Previously, literacy was something associated with books and writing and with language schema in our minds, collected over time. Literacy was perceived as a set of skills, which were taught in schools. In the mid-1980s, literacy was recognized as a social practice, something that people do in everyday life, in their homes, at work and at school. For example, in an ethnographic study in Lancaster, researchers watched people write notes at allotment meetings and observed people read to their children, and write diaries, letters and poems at home for pleasure (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

- What do you like to write for pleasure?

As an example, consider the *Facebook* description given earlier. If this is described in terms of literacy practices, it could look like this:

Literacy event	Literacy practice	Social practice
Sending a message	Facebook messaging	Facebooking to a friend in the next corridor

A literacy event is the observed event, often most easily spotted in the classroom. When your students write and read, they are engaged in a set of literacy events. These events are often regular, and relate to the practices

of reading and writing. A student will read a book as part of the literacy practice of book reading in the classroom.

- Think of a literacy event that you regularly observe in your classroom.

In considering the New Literacy Studies, the field has been shaped by an anthropological, ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis. **Anthropology** is the study of people in everyday contexts. Within literacy education, researchers have gone to particular contexts to think about literacy and to watch people, and then they write up their observations.

A critical point in the history of literacy was the debate between James Paul Gee and Catherine Snow about the National Reading Panel's report on early literacy. As a response to Snow et al's report, 'Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children' (1998), Gee (1999a) drew attention to the dearth of studies that take a socially situated account of early literacy. This debate was highlighted by Jim Cummins in our first edition of *Literacy and Education*. Cummins claimed: 'underlying the problems with the report, he [Gee] argued, was a conception of reading as a process that happened exclusively within the heads of individuals rather than as a social practice intimately dependent on context' (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005: 145). This debate is still an underlining concern in areas such as book sharing and picture books where the field starts from a contested paradigm. Looking across cultures, religions, races, book sharing is one way to become literate, but it is not the only way. What we have found in writing this second edition is that certain fields still privilege paradigms and models that narrow their scope.

For the rest of the chapter, we follow a progression of stages and researchers who moved the field of New Literacy Studies forward into several intersecting fields such as new literacies, **multiliteracies**, multi-modality, and **digital literacies**.

DOMAINS AND PRACTICES

Mapping literacy practices across sites is a helpful way of viewing the variability of literacy practices across sites, and beyond strictly viewing literacy practices as school-based. **Spaces** offer people multiple identities. These different identities inform literacy practices. A study of literacy and space offers the opportunity to think about what people do with literacy in different spaces.

Theory Box: Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole on literacy practices in different domains

Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole were psychologists who studied the Vai people of West Africa, in Liberia. They wanted to understand the relationship between local cultural contexts and the learning of literacy. Unusually, the people they studied, the Vai, had invented an original writing system, which was learned outside school. The school language was English, and the schools for the Quran used Arabic. Scribner and Cole studied the different language practices within the different settings. They found that specific types of literacy practices affected how people learned things. Scribner and Cole taught us that there is not just one literacy, but many forms of literacy, all linked to different domains of practice. The published study, *The Psychology of Literacy*, became a key text in the history of the New Literacy Studies, in that for the first time literacy practices were described in different domains of practice (Scribner & Cole, 1981).

The word 'domain' refers to a particular space, or world, where literacy is practised (e.g., the Church, the school, the home). Researchers have identified a number of literacy practices within different domains. Multiple identities come to the fore in specific domains. You may express yourself differently in a formal letter written at work, than you do in an email written to a friend at home.

- Where do you locate literacy in your life?



Activity

Domains of Literacy

Divide your world into domains (i.e., places where literacy is carried out, for example, home, workplace, community, and so on). Within each domain, write a brief account of the literacy events you engage in. Note which are different and which are the same. Make a list of social practices that underpin the identified event. Writing an email to a work colleague, for example, is linked to the social practice of emailing.

A **domain** can be identified with a way of being, and in many cases, as a set of cultural beliefs, or a worldview. Sometimes it is site-specific, such

as in a school, with buildings, but sometimes literacy practices from one domain, such as school, cross to another, such as home. Homework is an example of a literacy practice that is from the school domain, but is carried out in the home *site*.

- Which literacy practices cross sites?

Theory Box: Brian V. Street on ideological and autonomous literacies

Working as a social anthropologist in Iran, Brian Street described literacy practices in different domains. He conducted fieldwork in the village where he lived, which focused on literacy practices in different domains. These included what he termed:

- *maktab* literacy, or literacy associated with Islam and taught in the local Quranic schools;
- *commercial* literacy, or the reading and writing used for the management of fruit sales in the local village;
- *school* literacy, associated with the state schools more recently built in the villages and located in the urban areas as well.

This description of literacy enabled Street to identify how particular views of literacy were linked to particular ways of thinking (Street, 1995). From this, Street developed the concepts of *ideological* and *autonomous* literacy. He argued that literacy has been viewed, in particular by government agencies, as a separate thing-like object, which people should acquire, as a set of decontextualized skills. This view of literacy sees literacy as a technical skill. Writing, in particular, can be viewed as an autonomous skill, which can be related to individual cognitive processes. Street identified this view with a certain governmental trend to think of literacy as a set of skills that can be acquired. However, this view of literacy did not take into consideration how people used literacy. Instead, he argued, the term *ideological* could be used to describe the way in which literacy is grounded in how it is used, and how it relates to power structures within society (Street, 1993b).

Street therefore challenged us not to see literacy as a neutral skill, but as a *socially situated practice*. This was a key insight within the field known as the New Literacy Studies.



Points of Reflection

When and where can literacy be regarded as shaped by cultural and ideological forces?

When is literacy regarded as a set of skills?

Consider ways in which literacy is described where you work, and how it is regarded.

How does it change when you consider it as a reflection of social and cultural practice?

Theory Box: Shirley Brice Heath on literacy events and literacy practices

In the 1970s, in the rural Carolinas, another area of literacy was being researched. Shirley Brice Heath and her team of researchers were considering how different communities used and interacted around literacy. *Ways with Words* described the different language and literacy practices of two communities in the rural Carolinas, USA. In the book, Heath contrasted a black community, Trackton, with a white working-class community, Roadville. Heath paid close attention to the way parents in these two communities spoke to their children, raised them, how they decorated their homes and how the children interacted with their parents. Then she looked at what happened when they went to school. In the case of both Trackton and Roadville children, there was a disjuncture between their home literacy practices and their school literacy practices. This was in contrast to the children from the town. Heath called the town community, Maintown. The children in Maintown were teachers' children, who had been raised and talked to in a way which echoed the norms of 'school' literacy. In order to understand how different ways of interacting contributed to different outcomes in literacy, Heath focused her study around the concept of *literacy events*, which she defined as 'any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role' (Heath, 1983: 386). This concept enabled Heath to understand in a contrastive way the different events and practices around literacy, by isolating specific instances. Heath also looked at communicative utterances and contrasted them across communities.

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For example, Heath describes how an African-American 2½-year-old named Lem made an oral response to his experience of hearing a distant bell ring, which meshed with his experience of Church-going:

Way Far

Now

It a Church bell

Ringin'

Dey singin'

Ringin'

You hear it?

I hear it

Far

Now

(Heath, 1983: 170)

Heath isolated this piece of oral talk, almost a poem, as one that was deeply embedded within the community's oral traditions, but did not have a corresponding link to classrooms.

Heath's work led many researchers to look more closely at literacy practices in home and communities. In this chapter, we ask you to consider what Heath's study can tell you in your teaching.

- Can it be used to consider how the literacy practices of school contrast with those of your students' **out-of-school literacy practices**?

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION

Heath's work emerged from a tradition called the *ethnography of communication*, which understood how it was possible to understand different communicative events in different settings. By combining **ethnography** – as a way of studying different contexts and grounded in a particular methodological frame – with communication – the study of how people communicate – the ethnography of communication conceived a richer understanding of literacy and language skills. This

has relevance to institutional settings such as schools. Dell Hymes, in particular, was able to describe why African-American children sometimes were not succeeding in schools. African-American forms of speech and narrative structures often differed from those of their white counterparts (Hymes, 1996). This led to African-American children's narratives not being recognized in classroom settings. Hymes argued that we do not appreciate narrative as a form of knowledge. Indeed, we under-appreciate the ways in which speech patterns are recognized in different contexts. A key concept to describe language in use is *discourse*. Hymes's work on the ethnography of communication can be linked to work by James Paul Gee on discourse and language patterns in different linguistic communities.

Theory Box: James Paul Gee on d/Discourse

James Paul Gee has worked both within the New Literacy Studies and within the ethnography of communication. Gee developed theories of language that viewed language as socially situated. Gee argued that when we try to understand a person's language-in-use, or discourse, we not only pay attention to accent, intonation and speech style of that person, among other things, but also pay attention to that person's style of clothing, gestures, and bodily movements. He calls this language-in-use discourse. When he talks about language plus other stuff he uses the term 'Discourse' (Gee, 1999b).

Hymes, Heath, Street and Gee, and many others working from socio-cultural perspectives, rendered visible issues of power within everyday meaning-making.

- What kinds of Discourses signal power?

Thinking about issues of power in relation to text perspective, purposes of texts, associated texts, practices, etc., helps readers have meta-awareness of the layered nature of literacy and meaning-making.

DISCOURSE, IDENTITY AND LITERACY

Gee's concept of **discourse** can be used with reference to a classroom. Students bring the different **Discourses** they are involved with into the classroom setting, for example, teenagers may locate their **discursive**

identity in music, clothes, ways of speaking, their artifacts, such as mobile phones, and so on. Language is rarely the only way that we display our identity. As Gee said:

To 'pull off' being an 'X' doing 'Y' (e.g., a Los Angeles Latino street-gang member warning another gang member off his territory, or a laboratory physicist warning another laboratory physicist off her research territory) it is not enough to get just the words 'right', though that is crucial. It is necessary, as well, to get one's body, clothes, gestures, actions, interactions, ways with things, symbols, tools, technologies (be they guns or graphs), and values, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions 'right' as well, and all at the 'right' places and times. When little 'd' discourse (language-in-use) is melded integrally with non-language 'stuff' to enact specific identities and activities, then, I say that 'big D' Discourses are involved. We are all members of a many, a great many, different Discourses, Discourses which often influence each other in positive and negative ways, and which sometimes breed with each other to create new hybrids. (Gee, 1999b: 7)

This can be understood like this:

discourse	Language-in-use
Discourse	Language-in-use that signals membership in speech community

- What big 'D' discourses do you carry with you?

Literacy and learning practices are embedded in various Discourses, or ways of knowing, doing, talking, reading and writing, which are constructed and reproduced in social and cultural practice and interaction. Literacy practices are inextricably linked to oral language and how it is used. Gee's work focused on how we interact with one another, and on how the words we use are important as well as the accent, gestures, tone and body.

Discourses can represent the ways we signal our identities. Our ways of dressing, speaking, and acting all signal our membership of different identities in practice. Gee considered that people occupy different, or multiple identities, in relation to the different discourse communities we occupy. We might be a parent in one context, a teacher in another, and a member of a band in another. We can move between these identities as we go about our life. Gee, like other scholars spotlighted in the chapter, located literacy within society. He saw how literacy was shaped by how we use it. He wanted us to understand literacy as socially situated in order to foreground why school versions of literacy help some students, while hindering others. In doing so, he asked that we look at literacy and power.

Theory Box: David Barton and Mary Hamilton on local literacies

The work of Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, and others at the University of Lancaster, has focused on how literacy practices mesh with everyday lives. In a series of studies, the socially situated nature of literacy was explored and documented. Literacy practices could be observed in communities by:

- analyzing notes taken at an allotment meeting;
- hearing about the reading of a bedtime story to a child;
- documenting the writing of letters from prison.

All of the literacy practices were associated with different domains of life, such as home, community, and classroom.

Barton and Hamilton examined the role of literacy practices and literacy events in people's lives in Lancaster. Their book, *Local Literacies*, explored the complex web of literacy practices with which people engaged. Barton and Hamilton came up with the idea of 'ruling passions' to explain how people's interests often dictated their literacy practices. These ruling passions enabled researchers to get at why literacy mattered to people, and what they used literacy for (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

- What are your **ruling passions**? How do they shape your understanding of literacy?

This work enables us to look at how we use literacy in everyday life, and where we can use different literacies. By associating **multiple literacies** with different domains, we can trace across a number of spaces the multiple ways literacy is used.

DIFFERENTIATING NEW LITERACY STUDIES FROM NEW LITERACIES

Given obvious and rapid changes in communication and in our ways of using communication, there have been several fields emerge within literacy education that address how we can adapt to shifts in literacy in the face of our changed **communicational landscapes**. One term that recurs in literature in the field of literacy education is 'new literacies'.

New literacies signals new kinds of texts, practices and understandings that have arisen with increased use and prevalence of technology. New literacies is a helpful way of framing literacy in the twenty-first-century.

In a handbook on new literacies, Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear and Leu (2008) identify four characteristics of new literacies research:

- New technologies offer a way to envision new literacy practices;
- New literacies are essential to economic, civic and personal participation in a world community;
- New literacies change, remix and converge as defining technologies change;
- New literacies are multimodal and multifaceted (Coiro et al., 2008).

New literacies has become a catch-all phrase for describing twenty-first-century literacy, but it should not be confused with New Literacy Studies, which has a longer tradition and which is very much a precursor to new literacies.

- What, in your view, defines the difference between new literacies and New Literacy Studies?

New Literacy Studies signals the roles of contexts and practices within contexts and the subjectivities of individuals involved in meaning-making. Building on disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics and semiotics, scholars in New Literacy Studies broadened our understandings of literacy beyond schooling. New Literacy Studies opened up a way of seeing literacy as contextualized. Through ethnographic research methods, researchers working in New Literacy Studies commit their work to a belief that literacy is best understood as a set of social practices and that there are different literacies associated with different domains of life. Literacy practices have a purpose and they are embedded in broader social and **cultural practices**. This is a distinctly different position and it should be differentiated as such.

WHY DOES LITERACY NEED THE NEW LITERACY STUDIES?

This section reflects on what these ideas can offer educators. New Literacy Studies moved literacy beyond school into different spaces, with an account of identity, and an acknowledgement of particular domains. School is just one space where literacy practices occur. However, there are

other places where literacy practices have developed. In the first edition, there were a series of questions asked that are even more relevant today to educators:

- Does it help to understand how students use literacy in different domains of their lives?
- Are these forms different?
- What is the difference between image-sound texts and word-based texts?
- How often do students move from local texts to global texts?

There are certainly more questions now than there were in 2005.

Consider your students for a moment. A key aspect of your job as an educator is to teach them literacy practices.

- Do you cover all of the literacy practices that they need to survive, live, work, based on today's communicational demands?

You might notice that you have a student with a keen interest in Manga and you want to incorporate the genesis and evolution of Manga in Japan and in the West into a unit that you are doing as a part of your literacy programme. Manga is a Japanese term for comics or cartoons, which makes it an ideal genre of text to unite texts with culture and cultural practices. Part of the unit of study could involve students creating their own comics and cartoons and linking them to different cultures.

Some of the best writing is anchored in student experience and identity. Think back to Winston's eloquent narrative about contrasts between his Princeton life and the harsh realities of living in Haiti. Winston drew on his culture and his socio-economic background to express his heart-felt desire to make other students aware of racial and economic differentials of different cultures. He applied rhetorical devices and imagery to compel his reader to see his world.

- How would you introduce your literacy world to your students?

Since the first edition of *Literacy and Education*, the field has moved on with exciting work by scholars such as Hilary Janks in South Africa, who powerfully applies linguistic theory on to visual texts to demonstrate the exertion of power within texts (Janks, 2010).

The work of Kris Gutiérrez takes account of misconceptions about dual language learners and monolithic views on the literacy practices of other cultures living in the United States (Gutiérrez, 2008). Eve Gregory and

Charmian Kenner in the United Kingdom examine the importance of considering religious diversity as part of the drive to social inclusion (Gregory et al., 2007).

There is a rich repository of research on place-based education profiled in Chapter 5 by such scholars in Australia as Barbara Comber, Bill Green, and Helen Nixon (Comber et al. 2007). Catherine Compton-Lilly in the United States has followed African-American learners in Rochester, NY, over a decade, charting their literacy lives with rich ethnographic detail (Compton-Lilly, 2007). We have looked at the notion of artifactual literacy as a modern heuristic for approaching literacy in the classroom (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). This work, separately and collectively, has moved New Literacy Studies forward into nuanced perspectives on the early work of Scribner and Cole, Shirley Brice Heath, and David Barton and Mary Hamilton.

- Who were your founding thinkers when you began as a teacher?

In this second edition of the book, we look at the New Literacy Studies five years on. In the next chapter, we look at the voluminous work in the areas of digital literacies, multimodality and multiliteracies. The focus of this chapter is research in the area of New Literacy Studies that continues to make us aware of our learners in relation to their identities, cultures, and ruling passions. New Literacy Studies continues to incorporate multiple modes of expression and communication in addition to the written word, such as drawing, talking, and texting. Literacy learners make, read, talk about, and listen to texts all of the time, and taking a New Literacy Studies approach opens up more space for learners in your classrooms.

There are new issues and different kinds of texts today than there were even five years ago. Texts are more complicated, more diffuse, and diverse. You can send emails with pictures, or upload *YouTube* videos on a teaching website while making a PowerPoint for students.

- How do you think texts have changed?

The world has moved on, but the core principles of New Literacy Studies as they were conceived in the early 1980s are alive and well.

It is still possible to observe how in ordinary life people draw on different literacy practices at different times in their lives: filling in forms, adding to a blog, sending a photograph are all part of our regular repertoires of practice. If you observe a child for any sustained period of time, you will recognize how children may make marks, play games on the computer, draw pictures, build things and this meaning-making is

literacy. Some of these texts and practices you might keep and others you will throw away. In Kate's study of three London homes, 'mess' was connected with children's communicative practices: drawings and bits of writing on paper were often seen as 'stuff' to be tidied up and thrown away (Pahl, 2002).

- So, what does the New Literacy Studies offer the classroom?

The New Literacy Studies offers both a new way of looking at students, as involved in literacy in a number of different domains, and a way of seeing literacy in the classroom, as part of everyday life, meshed in with everything else. It makes the classroom both local and global.



Activity

Using New Literacy Studies in Classrooms

At the beginning, middle, and end of the year, take an inventory of student interests and outside literacy practices. Ask students questions such as: what do you read, watch, play, and listen to outside school? You can do this as a student conference or as a questionnaire.

Access culture and cultural practice by building lessons and units around cultures and faith literacies in the classroom.

Foster an awareness of place and place-based education by conducting community walkarounds.

Make it a priority in your classroom to use different modes of expression and representation, such as analyzing photographs or illustrations, listening to songs and interpreting meanings, and reading graphic texts.

If possible, work across digital and print domains to teach lessons across the curriculum. Then, critically frame the texts that you look at in terms of format, layout, and language so that students have meta-awareness of the texts that they engage with.

Encourage modal flexibility in composition by asking students to make sound-based texts or image-based texts in addition to word-based texts.

The classroom is simply one domain where literacy occurs, but not the only one. Your classroom can reflect **local domains**: the mall, the community centre, the library; or **global domains**: the Internet, console games, popular films, raps and stories. Children's *popular culture* offers a range of ideas to link in with your students' literacy experiences out of school.

- Which artifacts are associated with local and global literacies in your classroom?

In the next section, we hone in on some of the concepts from the New Literacy Studies that might be particularly helpful.

REFLECTIONS ON LITERACY EVENTS AND LITERACY PRACTICES

In this section, we reflect once more about why the concept of literacy events and literacy practices helps us teach our students. For example, it gives you an opportunity to describe a moment when your student reads a piece of text in class as a *literacy event*. Literacy events can be found in formal and informal settings, when a student writes an essay, or when your child writes a birthday card. By putting a name on the practice, the event can be analyzed.

- What is the link between literacy events and practices?

This is worth reflecting on. While you may connect a literacy event to a classroom setting, a literacy practice is often connected to out-of-classroom settings and can be observed as a regular, iterative event. Iterative implies that something happens over and over again. Many practices have this quality: in a mosque, the same prayers are heard, in a church, the liturgy is the same every week. Many families have things they do on a regular basis, and literacy practices fit into this: thank-you letters to relatives, or e-cards to friends and family. We can hold a literacy practice in our heads from one day to the next. The practice of filling in a form can be drawn upon when filling in a new form. Thinking about literacy as situated in **autonomous** and ideological models of literacy is explained below.

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: We take the concepts of 'autonomous models of literacy' and 'ideological models of literacy' from Brian Street (1995). He saw the words as meaning:	
: Autonomous	: Ideological
: Literacy as a separate 'thing', as a set of skills	: Literacy as connected with cultural and social practices in the world

.....

- When would you identify autonomous models and literacy and when would you understand literacy to be ideologically situated?

CRITICAL LITERACY AND THE NEW LITERACY STUDIES

With strong ties to New Literacy Studies, **critical literacy** has been an emerging conceptual framework for literacy scholars. Researchers engaged at grassroots levels in out-of-school contexts with students who experience marginalization and disempowerment in many areas of their lives take a critical literacy approach to research, theory and practice. Recent international studies, featured in Chapter 6, have focused on critical literacy in the context of post-apartheid South Africa (Janks, 2010), and critical multiliteracies in relation to place and space in the context of climate change in Australia (Comber, 2010).

Scholars using critical literacy **pedagogy** have interrogated texts as sites of power imbalances. As educators, you can combine the principles of New Literacy Studies with critical literacy by adopting such text analyses models as Janks' Power, Access, Diversity, and Design model, which unveils and interrogates hidden ideologies and discourses in texts (Janks, 2010). This approach draws on previous research that also studied texts as ideologically situated and therefore capable of being broken apart. Muspratt, Luke and Freebody (1997), in their four resources model, showed how this could be done with a focus on texts as a source of power, and provided a methodology for interrogating texts that uncovered the processes and practices of ideologies within discourses. Rogers and colleagues (Rogers et al., 2009) have shown that a focus on critical inquiry and analysis creates a problem-solving, inclusive space within classrooms and communities that can shift and sustain change. In Rogers' work, she focuses on the notion of *teacher inquiry*, whereby a circle of change, involving questioning, considering data, and then creating new kinds of questions, can emerge (Rogers et al., 2009).

- What kind of questions would you want to engage with in your classroom?

ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO LITERACY

In an effort to link data collection and analysis to neighbourhoods and communities, several researchers who work within New Literacy Studies and related fields have adopted **ecological** approaches to theorize the relationship between home and school, for instance, as interconnected systems. Neuman and Celano (2001) conducted a comparative study of four neighbourhoods in Philadelphia in terms of the opportunities that they offered for children and their families to engage in literacy-related

activities. They argue that 'learning and development cannot be considered apart from the individual's social environment, the ecological niche' (Neuman & Celano, 2001: 8). Their method involved walking through a block of each neighbourhood and systematically noting:

- every store and stand likely to sell reading materials;
- every **sign** and its condition (readability);
- public spaces where reading could be undertaken;
- relevant institutional sites (libraries, child care centres, etc.).

They found that neighbourhoods of different socio-economic status showed 'major and striking differences at almost all levels' in terms of access to literacy resources and opportunities (Neuman & Celano, 2001: 15).

- What are the resources for literacy in your community?

Scholars working in the New Literacy Studies examined the local and the situated literacies of people living in particular communities, but what has been less explored is how the local and local hubs co-exist as networks of influence on people in different circumstances. Relatively few studies have focused on the nuances of varied contexts and the relationship of community sites to each other. Future directions in New Literacy Studies will lead to more studies that examine ecological dimensions of communities as geographies of opportunities or misfortunes.

Theory Box: Sue Nichols on capturing children's artifacts through multimodal literacies

The 'Changing Lives' project invited children in Years 1 to 6 to become family and self-historians and to 'catch' what they had found through using multiple modalities. The project was designed to be inclusive of children's diverse cultural resources, adaptable to their ages and abilities, and connectable with different curriculum areas. The Year 1 class focused on exploring the very beginning of their lives – their birth and infancy.

In the first session, the author told the children a story from her own life. She recalled how at the age of four, she had been invited to choose just one toy to take with her on a long journey to a new country. This introduced two key ideas: that our life pathways can take us to different places and that objects may take on special meanings. In the discussion that followed, children were asked if they knew where they had been born. This

discussion was inclusive of local as well as more distant places with care taken not to communicate value for one over the other. Children were invited to take the conversation home in three ways:

- To talk with family members about the circumstances of their birth;
- To borrow family photos;
- To select a special object which had been in their possession from their early years to bring in to school.

These materials were worked on in several ways but one activity stands out as particularly generative for engaging young children in the process of producing multimodal texts. Using an ordinary digital camera, a cheap tripod, and a classroom table covered and backed with sheets of blue cardboard, a photo studio was set up in the classroom. Each child had brought in a special object and they took it in turns to pose their object (mostly soft toys) in front of the camera, coming back behind the camera to check on the view.

Talk between the author and each child focused on design choices for composing an image, with options including the degree of close-up, lighting, angle and the way the object was placed. Some children were quite particular about the features of their object that they wanted to highlight in the composition of the image. One boy had brought in a plush toy shark and stated that he wanted it to 'look scary'; he was assisted to prop the shark with its mouth facing the camera and to take the zoom in close.

At the next session, children were encouraged to add linguistic text to the images of their significant objects through one or more of three options: speech bubble, thought bubble and caption. Beforehand, the author had copied each image into a PowerPoint slide; in this programme, bubbles are 'callouts' and are accessed through the shapes menu, while captions can be made by inserting a text box. Several children chose to comment on the circumstances of their toy's unusual visit to the classroom, e.g., 'Beafo is very shy. It is her first time to go out' or in a thought bubble 'Where am I?' There were narrative elements in some captions, as in the case of when a boy attributed his car with an exciting back-story: 'My car knows everything about the world. My car has been all over the world'. It was interesting to see some children describe the qualities of their toy in a thought bubble (e.g., 'I think I am cute and snugly') rather than in a caption (e.g., 'My toy is cute and snugly'). This design choice highlights the toy's status as a character rather than a mere object.

The PowerPoint became a class text that expressed, through the use of artifacts, images, linguistic text and digital design elements, a significant aspect of their young lives. It was displayed at the school's 'Art Night' and attracted considerable attention from the children and their family members.

- Can you think of a valued artifact that you could bring to a group situation and talk about?

CONCLUSION

Literacy is bound up with our identity and our practices. The shaping of our literacy practices takes place in a number of different domains, for example, home, school, and workplace. Taking on an approach that looks at literacy as a social practice involves a number of key thoughts. It involves acknowledging that school is only *one setting* where literacy takes place. It recognizes that the resources used to teach in classrooms might be different from the resources used by students in their homes. To conclude the chapter, New Literacy Studies research has widened its scope to examine and critically frame the nuances of power within communities, to document ecological aspects of the local and differentials in access to resources in communities, to understand specific sites in the local, such as churches, libraries and malls, and to expand our understanding of texts beyond the written word.

READING THIS BOOK

As you read this book you will note that there are repetitions. We have deliberately returned to concepts that we consider central to contemporary understandings of New Literacy Studies in the classroom:

- Literacy as material;
- Literacy as social practice;
- The integral role of culture, community and identity;
- Literacy and space;
- Literacy and time;
- Multimodal literacies.

Reading this book becomes a spiral process by which concepts are elaborated on and their different facets explored in each individual chapter. **We then tie these ideas together in our final chapter on curriculum and pedagogy.**