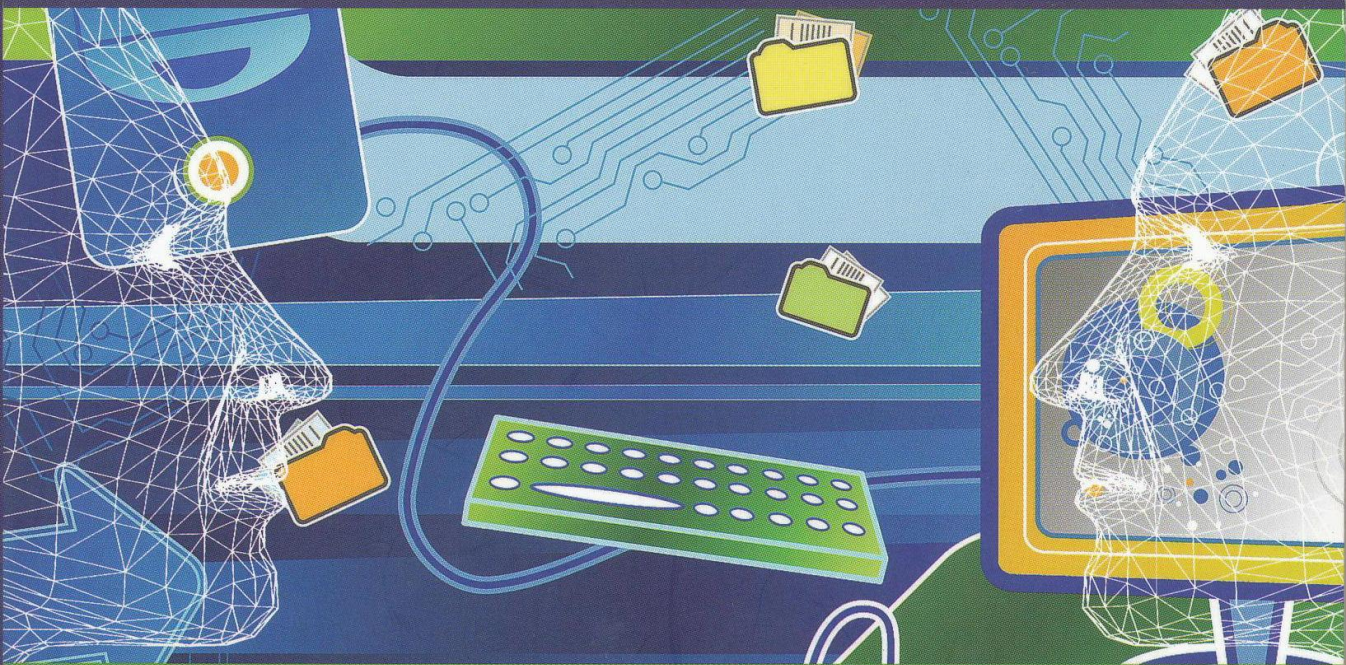


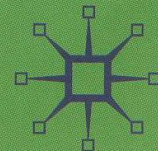
PALGRAVE ADVANCES  
IN LINGUISTICS



# the future of literacy studies

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**the future of literacy studies**

edited by

**mike baynham and  
mastin prinsloo**

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## introduction: the future of literacy studies

Mike Baynham and  
Mastin Prinsloo

a practice is a mediated action with a history.

Scollon

### the 'new' literacy studies

It is now some twenty-five years since Literacy Studies took a new direction, turning away from questions of pedagogy and the psycholinguistic processes of the individual reader—writer and looking outside the classroom to study literacy in its social context. Foundational works in this approach were Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words* (Heath 1983) and Brian Street's *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Street 1984). Both studies memorably shifted the focus of literacy research onto domains and contexts beyond the classroom. Along with Scribner and Cole's landmark *Psychology of Literacy* (Scribner & Cole 1981) which again emphasized the local and contextual practices by which literacy operates in social groups these are what Baynham (2004) calls the *first-generation* Literacy Studies. *Second generation* works such as Barton and Hamilton (1998), Besnier (1993), Kulick and Stroud (1993), Prinsloo and Breier (1996) developed these approaches in a series of significant empirical studies. In this book we ask what the future of Literacy Studies is, inviting a number of scholars actively involved in shaping the field of Literacy Studies both to take stock of the current state of activity and to point to future directions for literacy research. In doing so, this book provides an introduction to current *third-generation* empirical work which is pushing the boundaries of literacy research in a number of

key directions: the focus has shifted from the local to the translocal, from print based literacies to electronic and multimedia literacies and from the verbal to the multimodal. Dynamic changes in the object of inquiry, brought about by both social and technological change, have challenged literacy researchers to revisit foundational principles and constructs to deal with new contexts and new data.

The chapters in this collection all take the conceptual turn that sees literacy, as Street (this volume, p. 21) puts it, 'not as an issue of measurement or of skills but as social practices that vary from one context to another'. They draw upon, and, indeed have mostly been influential shapers of this direction of research, often called the New Literacy Studies (NLS). Literacy is seen in this approach as variable with regard to its forms, functions, uses and values across social settings, and thus varying in its social meanings and effects. This work has drawn in researchers from a range of disciplines. They have studied literacy in everyday social life, on the understanding that literacy goings-on are always and already embedded in particular forms of activity; that one cannot define literacy or its uses in a vacuum; that reading and writing are studied in the context of social (cultural, historical, political and economic) practices of which they are a part and which operate in particular social spaces. This work opposes the position which views literacy as merely a matter of generic skills, as a unitary process, one where 'readers' and 'writers' are generalized subjects without any social location and who are more or less efficient processors of text.

In this introductory chapter we examine what the study of literacy as social practice has entailed and explore, in particular, the issue of what is meant by 'practice', in the study of literacy and how this idea has both been productive and challenging. The issues that confront literacy researchers in everyday settings and in educational, work and other institutional contexts have changed, dramatically in some ways, in the past twenty-five years and we can ask how some of the key understandings of the social literacies approach have changed. We ask how practices have been theorized in Literacy Studies and examine how literacy practices and literacy events have been enabling terms and concepts in this work and how they have been applied and revised.

### **what is meant by practice in literacy studies?**

One of the key early texts in the social practices approach to literacy, that of Scribner and Cole (1981: 236), drawing closely on the work of Vygotsky, defined practice as 'a recurrent, goal-directed sequence

of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge'. They contrasted this concept with that of 'skills', 'the coordinated sets of actions involved in applying this knowledge in particular settings' and saw skills as comprising sensory-motor, linguistic and cognitive skills. So, the practice of law, on the one hand, and basket weaving, on the other, both required all three of those components of skills, but in different ways. This notion of 'practice' guided the way that Scribner and Cole sought to understand literacy, as always constituted within socially organized practices which make use of a symbolic system or systems as well as a technology for producing and disseminating it. The nature of these practices, including of course, their technological aspects, would determine the balance of skills and the consequences associated with literacy. Scribner and Cole thus noted that letter writing amongst the Vai in Liberia (perhaps using the Vai script and language) must be considered as a literacy practice different from, for example, the keeping of a personal diary, or a ledger, since each of these required different measures and weightings of technology, knowledge and skills as they were part of different social activities, or practices.

A somewhat different and highly influential view of how literacy and language were embedded in socio-cultural practice was presented in Shirley Heath's seminal ethnographic research (e.g. 1982, 1983) which contrasted the home and school language and literacy practices of two working class communities, black and white, with middle class people in the same town in the Piedmont Carolinas, USA, at a time when legal desegregation was newly in place and racially integrated schooling was a relatively new phenomenon. Heath focused empirically on 'literacy events', which she described as 'the occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies' (Heath, 1982: 50).

She followed Dell Hymes in insisting that what counted in effective communication was not a generalized competence (e.g. being able to 'speak English' or 'code and decode letters') but a situated, communicative competence embedded in acquired, 'deep' cultural knowledge and learnt models of using situated language in specific ways. She concluded that patterns of language and literacy use varied across local communities (and across social classes) and were consistent with other cultural practices, such as 'space and time orderings, problem-solving techniques, group loyalties, and preferred patterns of recreation' (Heath 1983: 344). She argued persuasively that children's successes and failures could not be adequately explained with

reference to single-factor explanations, such as relative amounts of parent-child interaction or formal language, structural differences across home and school. They needed, rather, to be understood with reference to wider and deeper cultural practices, the situated 'ways of knowing' that children took to school, that then encountered the schools' ways.

Street's (1984) study of literacy in an Iranian village developed a complementary perspective. In a setting where government educators and planners identified villagers as predominantly 'illiterate', Street studied the complexities of the literacy practices in the village which varied from religious to market to school-based practices. As he describes it in this volume, he called for a more developed conceptualization of the theoretical and methodological issues involved in understanding and representing local literacy practices. Street criticized what he referred to as the autonomous model of literacy, which suggests that literacy functions outside of political contexts. Street's ideological model (1983, 1995) of literacy sees 'literacy' as a shorthand term for literacy practices which are rooted in social, cultural and political contexts and which can be studied ethnographically.

David Barton, together with Mary Hamilton, Roz Ivanic and colleagues in Lancaster developed a body of work that focuses on practices in Literacy Studies primarily as 'everyday practices', which starts out from what people do in their lives. Their work complemented similar work done elsewhere (Baynham 1995, as one example, stressed the combination of talk and texts and the roles of literacy mediators in multilingual settings). Noting that various texts, including notes, newspapers, books, schedules, documents, diagrams, images and standardized forms, permeate daily activities, Barton, Hamilton and colleagues argued that large parts of social interactions are literacy practices, influenced by literacy texts and practices. The way into understanding these practices, as they saw it, was through the study of particular events, as part of situated practices.

Researchers working with the resources of this 'social literacies' approach, such as those described above, have since become increasingly aware that the focus on literacy practices as located in immediate social, cultural and political contexts has to be tempered with a sense of how remote sites, and remote literate practices shape and constrain local literacy practices. As Brandt and Clinton (2002: 338) argued, if 'reading and writing are means by which people reach - and are reached by - other contexts, then more is going on locally than just local practice'.

The theme of how literacy practices are, in many contemporary cases, so often translocal and transnational practice, is taken up and examined in several of the chapters in this volume and is one reason for looking again at the concepts of practice and literacy events in Literacy Studies. Another reason is the growing concern with the multiple communicative modalities that underwrite literacy practices in contemporary times, besides print, including images, sound and movement, particularly with regard to screen-based multimedia literacies (Kress 2003; also see Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, 2001). There is a conversation going on amongst researchers working on multimodal studies, who stress that communication is nearly always multi-sensory and therefore multi-modal, and between researchers who have focused on literacy as situated social practice. Increasingly, researchers are drawing on resources from both these approaches (e.g. Pahl & Rowsell 2005). A question that has been examined is whether the affordances of particular media (e.g. that language and sound are associated with sequence and time and images lend themselves to displays of relationships, proportionality and simultaneity) have an autonomy independent of social relationships, and whether they maintain their semiotic affordances and communicative functions when they appear in different settings, as part of different social practices. It is as likely that they are themselves socially shaped and situationally variable resources, whose affordances are shaped by social practices. In the light of these concerns we go on to look closer at practice accounts of literacy, its roots and various directions in Literacy Studies.

The sense in which practice is used as a productive theoretical category in Literacy Studies can be traced via the work of Bourdieu to the early Marx of the theses on Feuerbach:

The principal defect of all materialism up to now — including that of Feuerbach — is that the external object, reality, the sensible world is grasped only in the form of an object or an intuition; but not as concrete human activity, as practice. ... (Marx Theses on Feuerbach epigraph to Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977))

This kind of practice is a combination of action and reflection. The concept of practice is thus used in different senses in social practice theory, first from practice to refer to a more or less coherent or coordinated entity or activity (such as schooling, cuisine or fashion) and, second, to a performance or the carrying out of an action. Reckwitz (2002: 249-50) defines the concept as follows:

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A 'practice' ... is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice ... forms so to speak a 'block' whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements.

For Scollon, apparently following in this tradition, a practice is a mediated action with a history (cf. Scollon [2001: 66-9]). One of the issues about practice as a construct however is one of scope, and indeed Scollon raises this explicitly. On the one hand, practice can be treated as perhaps the smallest identifiable unit of the social world, comparable to an action, albeit an action with a history. At the other end of the scale, for social theorists like Bourdieu (1977, 1991), Foucault (1977), Chouliaraki and Fairclough practices are something bigger, less definable in the interactional here-and-now. For Althusser practices hail or interpellate the subject (Althusser 1994: 128-32). We are no longer talking about single actions but of the sustained operations of institutions and ideologies over time. Perhaps the scale of such conceptualizations of practice creates a disconnect between the worlds of practice and the interactional here-and-now. This would be Scollon's position and his solution is to write practice small. In Literacy Studies, it's fair to say, the notion of practice operates less on the micro or macro end of the practice scale, more at some meso level though with some slippage between issues of scale. Here is how Tusting, Ivanic and Wilson put it:

The term practices is central to the NLS approach to literacy. The term is used in two ways:

to refer to observable, collectable and/or documentable specific ethnographic detail of situated literacy events, involving real people, relationships, purposes, actions, places, times, circumstances, feelings, tools, resources. The term 'practices' in this sense often contrasts with, and hence complements the term 'texts', since it refers to those other aspects of literacy which go beyond the text itself; and

to refer to culturally recognizable patterns of behaviour, which can be generalised from the observation of specifics. The term practices in this sense often includes 'textual practices' the culturally recognisable patterns for constructing texts. (Tusting, Ivanic & Wilson 2000: 213)



Arising from this, another distinction worth making is between the notice of practice as a property of human activity and practice as a property of non-human entities, institutions, texts. In this further sense we can talk about institutional practices, disciplinary practices, discursive practices, textual practices with the further implication that human subjects are hailed, interpellated, subjected to these discourses and practices in the Althusserian sense. The sociologist Bob Connell (Connell 1987) further extends our understanding of such institutional, social or discursive practices in relation to gender, by talking about them not just in terms of constraints but also in terms of affordances or opportunities. So being interpellated, hailed or subjected to a particular discursive practice (say, for example, by particular kinds of academic writing, or by gendering practices) creates opportunities and affordances as well as constraints.

### **bourdieu, practice and literacy habitus**

We go on to look more closely at notions of practice in the work of Bourdieu and Latour, as they have been explicitly drawn on in recent Literacy Studies, to address issues of the social and political location of practices and the links between the social and the material in such practices. We find, again, that this work has been used to suggest both more constrained and less constrained understandings of agency with regard to literacy in social interaction.

Bourdieu (1991) critically engaged with what he identified as objectivist epistemologies (both Marxist and structuralist/post-structuralist) which sought to construct the objective relations which structure practices. His alternative was that of an epistemology of practice, where a specific structure or order is given to social institutions or social fields by the ways in which people think, act and interact, and such human activity is simultaneously structured by institutional forces, such that it cannot be said that one precedes the other.

According to Bourdieu, the social and material conditions that pertain to an individual's experience, and in collective history, dispose individuals in certain ways, rather than others, which both enable and constrain them in particular ways. Individuals bring to those interactions their habitus, which is made up of those durable, transposable dispositions, or embodied history internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history (Bourdieu 1991: 12). Habitus reflects those possibilities and resources, and their limitations which people tacitly draw upon in their actions and interactions. Habitus also refers to a person's competence as

a strategic player in a social field, and how such personal resources are continually being sanctioned by relative successes and failures in social interaction. A notion of social practice that draws upon the concept of *habitus* sees semiotic production not as the outcome of static norms or pre-given social and cognitive techniques, but rather as the effects of the dynamic positioning of individuals within a linguistic, semiotic and conceptual 'market' (Bourdieu 1991: ch 1). *Habitus* outlines a mechanism of regulated/regulating behaviour as well as for structured creativity on the part of individuals. *Habitus* is located and developed in social fields which are constituted by interactions among individuals holding relative positions of social power within such fields.

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital and social fields account for both the interactive and micro-dimensions of social practices combined with a theory of social structure. *Habitus* for Bourdieu is the principle of the generation and structuring of practices and representations and produces systems of durable, transposable dispositions. Bourdieu describes habitus as a set of historically rooted, socially organized dispositions. Persons who have been socialized into these dispositions are able to interpret and creatively engage in the flow of social practices. *Habitus* is the socially induced strategic 'sense of the game' which practitioners draw upon both to sustain a social field and their standing within it. They display a 'feel for the game' that is at hand. *Habitus* affords both regularity and improvisation in social life, yielding social practices that are 'spontaneously orchestrated' (Bourdieu 1991: 80).

Hasan (2002) drew on Bourdieu to explain the interactive dynamics that she found in the concept of *invisible semiotic mediation*. She identified semiotic mediation as referring to how the unself-conscious everyday discourse mediates mental dispositions, tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways and how it puts in place beliefs about the world one lives in, including both about phenomena that are supposedly in nature and those which are said to be in our culture. She claimed the primacy of this invisible semiotic mediation in a person's life, not simply because it regulates cognitive functions, but because it is also 'central to the shaping of "dispositions, identities and practices"' (Hasan 2002: 26). Hasan's view here presents a perspective on practice theory which stresses their determining effects on individual behaviour. An alternative perspective stresses that practices are constructed by what people do, 'they are "enacted" in specific events of communicative conduct, and their effectivity depends on the conditions of enactment' (Collins and Slembrouck 2004: 9). A more reflexive model (e.g. in Bloome and Egan-Robertson 1993) thus

stresses the indeterminacy of outcomes. Such indeterminacy is a positive resource in so far as it means that things are never settled, there is always the possibility of contestation and reformulation. Interactive social activity is not simply the acting out of predetermined codes. There is a creative dimension to interaction, in that new meanings, consequences and adaptations are possible, not excluding those that are conflictual or misunderstood.

Pahl (2008) offers one good example of a Literacy Studies approach that draws upon the concept of habitus to describe the relationship between social practice, repeated practices in home settings and the habitus. She examines instances of children's multimodal text-making (including the making of a map of Turkey using prayer beads, on the part of Turkish-English children) and connects these creative practices with the habitus, the disposition of the household and wider social-structural forces. She sees habitus as a heuristic device for making sense of how the literacy practices of the children in her study are shaped by resources from different social spaces and how they provide the material for creative design on the children's part. Hull and Nelson's chapter takes up this theme of creative design in their account of digital storytelling among urban youth and adults in California.

Gee (2005, 2008) also sees social interaction as only partly scripted. He sees that social practices give individuals what he calls 'models' for acting. Models are 'partial storylines, metaphors, routines, scripts, principles, rules of thumb, or images that help one act and interact in relatively typical situations in a domain' (p. 142). He describes these models through the lens of Bourdieu's habitus but with a particular concern with the design potential of such inherited resources: 'Models are the way in which history, institutions, and affinity groups think and act in and through us. We pick them up — often unconsciously — and operate in their terms, thereby reproducing traditional action, interaction, and thinking in the domain' (p. 143). Such models are multiple because of the multiple domains of social life, just as our semiotic resources (or 'social languages') are multiple. Gee views practices as semiotic domains which each have a 'design grammar' — a set of principles or patterns in terms of which materials in the domain (e.g. oral or written language, images, equations, symbols, sounds, gestures, graphs, artifacts and so forth) are combined to communicate complex meanings.

Schatzki (1996, 2001) distinguishes between two forms of practices: 'Dispersed practices' are general and appear in many different contexts, examples being describing, explaining and imagining. 'Integrative practices' are 'the more complex practices found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life'.  
Examples of integrative practices

that Schatzki gives include farming practices, cooking practices and business practices (Schatzki 1996: 98). Schatzki suggests that integrative practices will often include some of the dispersed practices, sometimes in a specialized form. In these terms we might say that while literacy appears to some as a dispersed practice, it in fact takes on a specialized form as part of an integrated practice in almost all instances. Gee appears to draw on a related idea when he suggests that some semiotic domains (or practices) can be precursors for other domains. This is so, he says, because one or more of the elements associated with the precursor domain ('ways of situating meaning, pieces of a social language, cultural models') facilitates learning in the other domain. He suggests that children who come to school 'looking gifted' have probably been immersed in a wide variety of precursory practices, that give them easy access to the specialized practices of schools in particular contexts.

### **Latour, actor network theory and literacy studies**

Latour's work in Actor Network Theory (and also that of Law (2004), as well as Bowker and Starr (2003, 1999), amongst others) has become influential in Literacy Studies (cf. Hamilton 2001; Lemke 1998; Barton and Hamilton 2005; Baynham 2006; Clarke 2008; Prinsloo 2008), raising in particular the question whether the theorizations of the sociocultural in practice theories give due weight to the significance which material artefacts bear in the social world. Actor Network Theory (ANT) presents the idea of objects as artefacts, as 'things' which are necessary components of social networks or practices. Social networks, or practices in their historical variability, consist not only of human beings and their intersubjective relationships but also simultaneously of nonhuman 'actants'; things that are necessary and are so-to-speak 'equal' components of a social practice. Artefacts provide more than just objects of knowledge but are necessary, irreplaceable components of certain social practices; their social significance does not only consist in their being 'interpreted' in certain ways but also in their being 'handled' in certain ways and in being constitutive, effective elements of social practices. For ANT, artefacts have the status of hybrids. On the one hand, they are definitively not simply part of the physical world alone as within practices they are socially and culturally interpreted and handled. On the other hand, they are definitely more than 'cultural representations': they are used and have effects in their materiality.

Latour applies what he calls the principle of generalized symmetry (1993: 103) which insists that all entities, human or non-human, must

be subjected to the same processes of social analysis. Actor network theory studies ethnographically the resources that are mobilized to establish an object of knowledge: the configuration of people, devices, texts, decisions, organizations and inter-organizational relations, in varying degrees of extensiveness and complexity. Such research follows the chain of events, actors and artefacts, including documents, institutional domains, activities of experts and access to these by 'non-experts' (Latour 1987; Hamilton 2001).

One feature of networks that follows is that they draw local actors into broader configurations not of their making, which play out away from the local scene. Agents, both human and non—human are enrolled onto the network, and Latour's work draws attention to the places where this work gets done, where humans and non—humans are constructed as equivalent to assure that these networks stick together (Bowker and Star 1999: 301). In networked practices, material things are routinely drawn upon and applied by different agents in different situations. The objects handled again and again endure, thus making social reproduction beyond temporal and spatial limits possible.

### **the literacy event and 'eventness' in literacy studies**

We have earlier identified the crucial issue of how a connection is retained between the interactional here-and-now and the world of practice, however broadly or narrowly construed. Literacy Studies has typically referred to the event as a unit of analysis which keeps us close to the empirically observable lifeworld. However, once you begin to look more closely there are also problems from a number of angles with 'eventness', which we will outline briefly. The notion of the event implies some distinct structured set of activities, which can be readily distinguishable, having a schematic structure. In that sense the notion of event, in the way characterized, for example, by Hymes and linguistic ethnography more generally has much in common with the linguistic notion of genre.

However, one of the problems with this discrete, as it were prototypical notion of the literacy event, as something that can be easily detached from its context for analytical purposes is that much literacy activity is not like this. If I am driving down to London on the M1, my peripheral vision is continually engaging with text as I pass motorway signs, and am aware of the instrumentation on the dashboard. Does this make my driving to London a literacy event? Similarly there are questions of temporal/spatial discontinuity: if at the supper table one of my children is texting a friend, what kind of event is that? The notion

of event is postulated as it were on the Aristotelian unities of time and space. How does it work when participants are not in the same time/space coordinates? What happens, as Cathy Kell has shown us in her analysis of literacy activity surrounding buildings in South African townships, when literacy activity extends over time and space in different locations? Where can events be identified? The truth is that we live in a text saturated world and the textuality of the world is not necessarily grouped into neatly differentiable event structures. Literacy activity spills over particular space/time coordinates, the immutable mobiles of text circulate in chains of entextualization which are only beginning to be studied seriously.

This question of the event bears some similarity with recent arguments made by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) concerning small narratives in contrast to prototypical narratives. Literacy events are like prototypical narratives, yet much small-scale incidental literacy activity, characteristic of our text saturated world, would slip through the net of the 'eventness'. We think it is also possible to argue that the focus on the event in the here-and-now is characteristic of the focus on the local in Literacy Studies, with context understood as something fixed and settled.

### **beyond the local: from local to translocal literacies?**

One of the characteristics of the development of the NLS has been, as we have seen an emphasis on the situated, the local. This tendency is perhaps articulated most clearly in Barton and Hamilton's landmark *Local Literacies* (Barton and Hamilton 1998). Yet all around, as is apparent as well in *Local Literacies*, is evidence that the local exists in a networked global world, that literacies have to be seen as transnational or at least translocal. Looking at literacies from a translocal rather than local perspective raises questions of the processes by which texts are produced and consumed across contexts and localities, how written texts are talked up.

### **how to retain the focus on activity in the analysis of practices**

In the analysis of practice there is a danger of slippage towards representation (cf. Scollon 2001: 6) 'Discourse is best conceived as a matter of social actions, not a system of representation or thought or values.' We would argue that there is an analytic bias towards losing

the performativity of the object of analysis and reducing it to a set of representations. This is something that Bourdieu alerts us to:

The 'knowing subject' as the idealist tradition rightly calls him, inflicts on practice a much more fundamental and pernicious alteration which, being a constituent condition of the cognitive operation, is bound to pass unnoticed: in taking up a point of view on the action, withdrawing from it in order to observe it from above and from a distance, he constitutes practical activity as an *object of observation and analysis, a representation*. (Bourdieu 1977: 2)

What the event construct brings with it is a focus on the here-and-now of the encounter; in this case the textually mediated encounter.

### **re-theorizing the relation between spoken and written language from the point of view of spoken language**

In Literacy Studies we have tended to regard talk as the occasion for literate activity, rarely something that is of interest in its own right. Conversely those research traditions which have focused centrally on spoken language, for example Conversation Analysis (CA), have hardly reacted to the text saturation of talk, the shifts and blends which are so commonplace, but somehow below the radar of both Literacy Studies and CA. We are reminded again here of Alexandra Georgakopoulou's and Michael Bamberg's notion of the small narrative (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou [2008] Georgakopoulou [2007]), which similarly slips below the radar of canonical narrative analysis. Literacy Studies has been good at locating the event in (local) context and the practices implied and structuring the event. Maybe the analytical focus needs to shift to the subtle saturations of literateness in daily life, the ways that texts are talked up over time and space.

### **multimodality and literacy practices**

Kress and others have presented an understanding of literacy as being multimodal in terms of the semiotic means through which it is communicated, where texts are not just products of language written down but also get their meanings through other modes of semiosis, including visual, aural and other modalities, besides written language (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Kress 1997, 2001; Kress and Jewitt 2003).

As Kress (2001: 1, 2) describes it:

Representation and communication always draw in a multiplicity of modes, all of which contribute to meaning. First, material media are socially shaped to become over time meaning making resources, to articulate the (social and individual/affective) meanings demanded by the requirements of different communities. Second, the meanings of the modes of language-as-speech or language-as-writing, as of all other modes, are always interwoven with the meanings made with all other modes co-present and 'co-operating' in the communicative context. Third, what is considered a 'mode' is always contingent: resources of meaning are not static or stable; they are fluid. Modes of representation and communication are constantly transformed by their users in response to the communicative needs of society; new modes are created, existing modes are transformed.

Kress (1997: 137) made the argument that children happily combine various semiotic systems, such as talk, drawing, gesture, dramatic play and writing. He described 'multimodality' as 'an absolute fact of children's semiotic practices'.

In the context of reading and writing practices in screen-based media, where the 'old literacies' are print-based, paper-based and language-based, reading and writing associated with the 'new literacies' are seen to integrate written, oral and audiovisual modalities of interactive human communication within screen-based and networked electronic systems. Graphic resources such as pictures and diagrams have increasingly moved to front-stage, imparting information directly, rather than providing backup for knowledge that is text-based (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Kress 1997, 2001). Along these lines, Lemke argued that meanings in multimedia are not fixed or additive, in the way word-meaning and picture-meanings relate. Rather, they are multiplicative, where word-meaning is modified by image-context, and image-meaning in turn is modified by textual context (Lemke 1997: 287). Readers of the 'new literacies' must organize their reading across a range of media, flexible constructs and typologies that break from traditional grammar orthodoxies (Kress 1997).

#### **beyond events/practices: scale theory?**

What are the strategies for bringing into alignment the face-to-face encounter with phenomena at different scales, retaining the activity/



event orientation while bringing into the analysis the larger scale phenomena that have interested the theorists of practice? It is interesting to compare the concerns articulated by Street (1993) at a comparatively early stage in the NLS project with the problematic currently addressed through scale theory by Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck (2005) and others. Street argues against the restricted notion of context then current in linguistics generally and pragmatics in particular (cf. Street 1993: 13-15 'Context in Linguistics and Anthropology'). In terms of the concerns of scale theory the question is how does an analysis account for the effects of large scale, for example institutional, national, transnational features, and how does it account for the Goffmanian dynamics of face-to-face interaction? What we see then is a bringing back of the large-scale social categories adumbrated by Street into face-to-face interaction.

### **contributions to the volume**

The chapters of this book bring together current perspectives on Literacy Studies from leading researchers. We start with a foundational overview of the development of the field by Street, illustrated through his current work on Academic Literacies, Development studies, Multimodality. The chapter reviews some of the key features in what has been called the 'New Literacy Studies'. Complementing Street's chapter is another foundational overview chapter by Barton, reviewing in addition to the focus on events and practices, key constructs such as mediators, mentors, brokers, networks and sponsors. Barton contextualizes literacy in an increasingly, textually mediated social world. The themes he identifies are picked up and developed in other chapters, Ivanic on literacy practices in further education, Farrell on the workplace and the knowledge economy, Hull and Nelson on the aesthetics of literacy.

Brandt's chapter is built around historical arguments concerning the emergence of literacy practices in nineteenth-twenty-first-century America. She argues that there is currently a shift from the dominance of reading to that of writing, documenting very different ideological constructions of reading and writing practices. The point she makes about the degree of regulation and surveillance involved in the production of writing is echoed and supported in Farrell's chapter on workplace writing practices. Brandt makes an interesting use of oral history methods to document literacy practices.

Kell provides a critical review of some of the key constructs such as practices and events, interrogating the local in Literacy Studies, via an

analysis of transcontextual literacy practices, modelling flows, crossing, text trajectories (particularly literacy activity associated with house building projects in the Khayaletu township, South Africa). To implement the transcontextual analysis she advocates a methodology of long-term participant observation in multiple domains to track text trajectories. Her chapter has a thematic focus on materiality and agency; context and the local/global; and multimodality and multiliteracies, extending the notion of life history to the history of literacy objects and artefacts.

Ivanic's chapter has a focus on the study of literacy practices in educational settings: 'uses of reading and writing to mediate learning'. She critiques the scope of the term 'practice' and develops a position similar to that of Scollon. According to Ivanic 'The Literacy Studies research paradigm can make invisible, discounted practices visible not only in the full panoply of people's lives, but also on courses of study in all disciplines and subject areas across all sectors of education.' In the research presented she documents a theoretical shift which is also adumbrated in Kell's chapter from 'situated' to what she terms 'border literacies', echoing Kell's transcontextual analysis. This involves theorizing contact and crossing between vernacular literacies as studied in the classic studies of local literacies and literacy practices in educational domains (here, Further Education), thus enabling an interesting reconceptualization of broad-brush cognitive constructs such as 'transfer'.

Warschauer and Snyder address the impact of electronic media of different sorts on literacy practices, albeit from slightly different perspectives. According to Warschauer there is wide societal recognition of the importance of new technologies in daily life and learning. In contrast Snyder points to considerable dissent in public discourse about the impact of new technologies. Warschauer focuses on identifying diverse semiotic modes and cross-language interaction, new forms of digital interaction. He proposes an ideological model of electronic literacy (indexing Street's productive formulation) and develops a discussion of digital literacies in relation to learning.

According to Snyder, literacy classrooms in schools remain overwhelmingly print-oriented in their approach to the teaching and learning of reading and writing. Her media-based research identifies digital literacies as a site of controversy and struggle. She uses an analysis of media texts to understand broad-brush societal constructions of literacy, identifying both trends towards and resistances to developing digital literacies. The chapter reviews research-based claims about how

the use of digital technologies affects literacy learning and practices. She concludes that the literacy classroom of the future must involve the effective integration of print literacy and digital literacy and that teachers' attitudes to technological change are a key factor as are public discourses about literacy and new technology as exemplified in the media.

Warriner's chapter brings a preoccupation with global, transnational flows and literacy practices. The chapter suggests that transnationalism and literacy provide mutually enriching perspectives on both phenomena. Echoing Kell's focus on transcontextual methodologies, Warriner suggests that researching transnational literacy practices requires a radical rethinking of research methods to work across trans-national sites.

Farrell's chapter examines literacy practices and the knowledge economy. As with a number of other contributions, there is a sustained examination of the impact of global/local practices, here in the globalized workplace. She emphasizes the power of remote sites to shape and constrain local literacy practices. The discussion of literacy and workforce regulation strongly echo points made by Brandt. Her emphasis on literacy and multimodality and the diversification of electronic literacy activity resonate with Warschauer's chapter. Farrell identifies differences in the way literacy education is conceptualized in a technologised workspace concluding that 'Local workplaces are the sites where the global movement of people, capital and ideas play out in urgent ways, generating new literate practices from the local and remote resources available to them, and the new identities, relationships and institutions that attend these new practices' (Farrell, this volume, p. 193).

According to Hull and Nelson 'being able and willing to communicate and understand within and across differences in language, ideology, culture, and geography reside at the heart of what it means to be literate now'. They place emphasis on multimodality, on 'literacies that are multimodal, aesthetically alert, and morally attuned' (Hull and Nelson, this volume, p. 199). They orient their approach to the work of the New London Group (1996), a consistent influence in a number of the contributions, particularly here the New London Group focus on design, that is the designing of multimodal meanings, where the 'online self' is most often both narrated and displayed by a combination of text and image. They conclude by invoking through examples 'the appropriation of multimodal textual forms to participate, undaunted, in local and global conversations that are respectfully alert to difference' (Hull and Nelson, this volume, p. 218).

Over the past two decades, changes in the semiotic landscape, its dominant modalities and in the volume and rapidity of socio-economic interactions at global level have challenged what some have seen as the localism of Literacy Studies, resulting, as we will see in this volume, in re-evaluations, both theoretical and methodological, of the key contextual orientations laid down in foundational work in the field. Theoretically, the shift is from literacy situated in given places and times towards a conceptualization of dynamic transcontextual flows, from print to multimodal and digital literacies. Nor have key constructs such as practice gone unscrutinized: contributions to the volume emphasize the need for a rigorous approach to deploying such constructs. Alongside these theoretical re-orientations we see a developing awareness of the new methodologies required for transcontextual literacy research. We think that the readers of this volume will find evidence of continuity with the research parameters laid down in the foundational studies as well as change. The rich diversity of literacy practices identified by this research approach continues to challenge the narrow, decontextualized skills-based orientation that dominates many national literacy curricula.

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