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Part I

Society, Culture, and Community

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Chapter 1

Literacies in Homes and Communities

Kate Pahl and Cathy Burnett

Introduction

This chapter explores how inter-disciplinary approaches support an understanding of new perspectives in relation to children and young people's literacy practices in homes and communities. In particular it explores the significance of the 'spatial turn' in new literacies research and explores new perspectives drawing on material cultural studies. Conceptualizing home and community literacies involves entering the social spaces of the home. It also involves studying the various places that children inhabit such as faith settings, youth clubs, libraries – and schools. Such work is important in highlighting the varied and multiple literacies in which children engage. At the same time there is a need to problematize bounded or unitary conceptions of 'home' or 'community.' Communities may be fluid or transitory or experienced in different ways by different children and literacies may move within and across different locations. All this is complicated further by the varied ways in which local and global spaces intersect (Massey, 2005). Children grow up in a place and this structures their literacy practices (Comber, 2010; Mackey, 2010). However, their practices are patterned by texts and artifacts that originate in other times and places (Robinson and Turnball, 2004). They also engage with virtual spaces (Marsh, 2010, 2011; Wohlwend, 2010) that are both local and global. Time moreover has a part to play in the way literacy practices are experienced in home and community contexts (Compton-Lilly, 2010). Literacies are also multilingual (Kenner, 2004) and multimodal (Kress, 1997) with a variety of scripts and representations that challenge conventional concepts of what 'counts' as literacy. All this challenges unitary notions of the situatedness of literacy and suggests that we need to see literacy as multisited.

In this chapter, we argue that we need an interdisciplinary framework to investigate this multisitedness and explore the fluidity and hybridity of spaces for literacy. We begin by mapping the field of new literacies in homes and communities, and locate the disciplines that inform this field. We then focus on the way in which 'context' as a way into understanding literacy in homes and communities is conceptualized and describe methodologies that look at context. We focus on the concept of 'situated literacies' (Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic, 2000), as well as the crossing of literacy practices across home, school, and communities. Next, we

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explore how perspectives from different fields – linked to multimodality, material culture, and cultural geography – can contribute to an understanding of spaces for literacy. We conclude by signaling new directions in the field and suggesting some methodological directions to aid our insights. In particular we signal the importance of ecological approaches to literacy research (Nichols, Nixon, and Rowsell, 2009). We argue for an approach that combines a focus on spatial justice with a new literacies perspective that accounts for the diversity of literacy practices (Soja, 2010).

Mapping the Field

The field of literacies in homes and communities has been characterized by a number of different, but related strands. The first, and the most established, is the field commonly known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Street, 2000). NLS has been characterized by a series of ethnographic studies of home and community literacy and language practices by such scholars as Shirley Brice Heath (Heath, 1983); Brian Street (1984) and David Barton and Mary Hamilton (1998). While NLS has continued to be dominant, it has broadened in scope. For example, recent work on urban literacies, related to specific sites such as Harlem (Kinloch, 2010) and Los Angeles (Morrell, 2008) as well as a focus on rural literacies, for example by Brooke (2003), has shown how literacy practices are shaped by socio-cultural and geographical factors, enabling an understanding of literacy that is, literally, ‘from the feet up’ (Mackey, 2010).

The second strand is research that opened out the concept of literacy to a broader concept of *communicative practices*. Researchers conducting ethnographic research particularly in home settings were observing a diversity of meaning making practices that included writing, but also speech, drawing, gesture, and model making (e.g., Kenner, 2000; Lancaster 2003; Pahl, 2002). These studies used the framework of *multimodality* to describe the ways in which children quite naturally drew on a variety of modes to make meaning in home settings. Their work was inspired by the work of Gunther Kress, most notably his seminal work *Before Writing: Rethinking the Paths to Literacy* (1997). Equally important in this strand was the highlighting of digital literacy practices together with popular cultural practices in homes and communities, particularly through the work of Jackie Marsh (2005, 2010, 2011) and Anne Haas Dyson (Dyson, 1993a, 2003). Dyson used the concept of ‘remix’ to describe how children drew on literate practices outside school and mixed them with in-school practices (Dyson, 2003). She used Bakhtin’s theories of texts as being dialogic, to recognize the intertextual nature of children’s textual productions across sites (Dyson, 1993a). Dyson recognized the way in which children’s textual productions, despite being composed at school, seep outside into the worlds of home and community.

Finally, a related but broader area in this field emerges from studies of homes and communities from a number of disciplines including anthropology (e.g., Miller, 2008; Pink 2004) sociology (e.g., Hurdley, 2006), cultural studies and English (e.g., Steedman 1982; Willis 2000) and cultural and critical geography (Christiansen and O’Brien, 2003; Soja, 2010). These studies broaden an understanding of material culture, lived experience, cultural identities, and spatial insights to inform research on literacy in homes and communities. While literacy was not the focus of these studies, we consider them to be important in providing a framework for thinking about how children come to make meaning in home and community settings. For example, when investigating the meanings of writing in the home, understanding where writing is situated, that is, in textiles, on walls, and in different material objects, helps broaden and deepen an understanding of writing practices. An edited collection on *The Anthropology of Writing*

(Barton and Papen, 2010) signals the need to describe, using social anthropology, everyday writing and make sense of the textually mediated nature of out-of-school writing practices.

What characterizes all of this research is a focus on literacy practices in relation to place and space, as well as an understanding of time, either through literacy practices as connected to contexts (NLS), or to the use of texts in specific ways (multimodality) or through an understanding of material and historical/socio-cultural practices in space (social anthropology/cultural geography/history). In what follows we consider what each field brings to the study of home and community literacies and then suggest ways that extending this focus on space and place may help us gain new insights.

Conceptualizing Context in Relation to Home and Community Literacies

Thinking about literacy practices in homes and communities requires attention to context. Duranti and Goodwin (1992, p. 4) argue that this process involves focusing on the relationships between the data and the much larger world of which they are a part. Street's (1984) understanding of literacy practices as ideological, that is situated within relations of power, and therefore subject to analysis of their situated-ness, is also vital. School constructs literacy in relation to a set of skills, and sometimes the 'ideological' nature is lost in the detail of schooled literacy practices (Street and Street, 1991).

This perspective highlights how literacy relates to practice, and to identities and discourses in homes and communities. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' highlights the concept of lived experience that is handed down over generations (Bourdieu, 1990). The timescales of a family's interaction with literacy practices are important contextually. A study by Pahl (2008) of a Turkish child's meaning making at home showed how the habitus was transformed across generations in the form of texts that were shaped by improvisations and cultural reworking. Bartlett and Holland (2002) describe identity as being about improvisation and fluidity, and highlight how an understanding of narratives and text making can uncover the transformation of the habitus across generations. For example, in a home of British Asian heritage, textiles played a part in the way in which writing was understood. A child was observed producing a piece of embroidery with her sister's name on it. At the same time, her aunt observed in that:

The textile side of our heritage comes from the women in the family. We have older relatives that do appliqué, crochet, embroidery, sewing and knitting. From the girls' mother's side their grandmother's sister and cousin and from their father side his two cousins who live close by. My younger sister loves craft type of activities and buys the girls a lot of resources to do sewing and fabric work especially on birthdays, Christmas and Eid. (Written text from the girls' aunt, by email, August 2010: Pahl, 2012)

The comment from the girl's aunt situates the embroidery the girl produced within a heritage that merged textiles with culturally rich forms of meaning making.

Gee (1996) has looked at how discourse patterns of children outside school settings significantly differ from those in school settings. His work has been developed, for example, in Rebecca Rogers' study of the Treader Family (2003) and Catherine Compton-Lilly's work on family literacy across generations (Compton-Lilly, 2010; Compton-Lilly and Greene, 2011). These studies have looked at the rich resources within families that have been defined in negative terms by policy makers as being 'at risk.' Both Compton-Lilly and Rogers argue for a

more fluid and multiple conceptualization of literacies as multilingual, multiple, and multimodal to account for the diversity of literacy practices within families (Compton-Lilly, Rogers, and Lewis, 2012).

Research exploring discontinuities between literacies in home/community and school settings has demonstrated how certain literacies are privileged in educational contexts and highlighted the power relations they reflect and sustain (Hope, 2011; Levy, 2011). However, as Hull and Schultz (2002) argue, it is also important to study continuities. This means a different kind of methodology that traces the spaces children inhabit and highlights the ‘flows of meaning’ (Pahl and Rowsell, 2006, p. 2) that occur as practices, events, and texts across sites.

Considering such flows demands an attention to complex and fluid notions of context. Wohlwend (2009), for example, draws on Scollon’s work on geosemiotics (Scollon, 2001) in her analysis of children’s play in an early years setting. Highlighting the ‘nexus of practices’ circulating around this setting, she shows how home literacies may intersect with literacies associated with educational settings as children recruit new literacies to their play. Such work challenges binary distinctions between in/out of school and helps us understand how children’s literacies sit within broader ‘learning ecologies’ (Barron, 2006).

Incorporating an ecological perspective into the study of literacy involves recognizing the ‘Ariadne’s threads’ that extend outwards from texts to practices, while acknowledging the material reality of the text (Brandt and Clinton, 2002). Linking the threads together is partially the task of the ethnographer. These links can be between local and global contexts, or across home and school contexts. By drawing on an ecological understanding of literacy as nested within community contexts (see Neuman and Celano, 2001, 2006; Nichols, Nixon, and Rowsell, 2009) together with an ethnographic understanding of the home and home literacy practices (Pahl, 2002; Gregory, Long, and Volk, 2004) there emerges a complex picture of literacies across home and school, which flow in and out of context. This process is methodologically challenging as it requires an attention to the perspectives of the people within the research (Gregory and Ruby, 2011). Indeed, many of these studies, such as those carried out by Shirley Brice Heath, Brian Street, and Luis Moll, have relied upon ethnographic insights to enable ‘emic’ ways of conceptualizing literacy practices to be articulated; the ‘etic’ being the framing by the researcher and the ‘emic’ being the framing by the participants (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005, Heath and Street, 2008). This creates opportunities to use research tools that are congruent with everyday practices, such as film and photography (Pink, 2001, 2009). For example, in a recent study of literacy practices in a community library, Pahl and Allan (2011) asked the young people in their study about the research methodologies they wanted to use and developed the study with their methodological input.

Multimodality in Relation to Home and Community Literacies

To understand home and community literacies requires a wide-angle lens to ‘see’ what is there. This incorporates a multimodal perspective. Kress (1997) highlighted how children’s meaning making at home drew on the ‘stuff’ that was to hand, the ensemble of resources that were within homes. Pahl (2002) likewise observed how children created multimodal texts from prayer beads, tissue paper, and small pieces of ‘stuff’ within the home. Pahl described this process with the expression ‘ephemeral literacies.’ More recently in a study of writing in the home and in the street, Pahl (2012) found that in households where, for example, there was a strong textile heritage or focus on color and form in gardening, the textual productions of children at home were shaped by these practices. By using the term ‘multimodal literacies’ to describe these forms (Flewitt, 2008), it becomes possible to include the plethora of communicative practices children engage with outside school.

One of the challenges for the researcher is to ‘recognize’ these practices. Literacy practices associated with ‘school literacy’ (Street and Street, 1991) particularly those that are salient in middle-class homes, such as book sharing, alphabetic literacy, and highly resourced craft activities, are easily recognized. However there is also a need for research that traces the less visible ‘ephemeral literacies’ in homes that are less visible to the eye of school and mainstream media. For example, as described above, a home which draws on Arabic print literacies as well as cultural traditions involving textiles and gardening might not have ‘recognizable’ literacy practices within it, but will contain rich and meaningful practices that could be translated into school literacy. Gregory and Ruby (2011) have written about the ‘faith literacies’ that children carry with them from mosques, temples, and other religious sites to home. Rosowsky (2008) has also described the liturgical literacies that can be found within the Mosque settings. Kenner (2004) has identified how these bilingual literacies are multimodal and demonstrated how a broader recognition of home literacies is possible if we recognize the ways in which children draw on multimodal sign systems to make meaning.

A multimodal perspective can be extended to incorporate the digital literacy practices children encounter in homes. Marsh (2005, 2010, 2011) has traced the way in which children’s digital literacies online, such as Club Penguin, are associated with dancing to television and using a plethora of digital resources including mobile phones, digital toys, and online games. These practices encompass a variety of multimodal meaning making structures. Likewise Pahl (2005) watched the way in which the experience of playing online games then structures the way children create texts. Graham (2009) has looked at how the process of games playing affects the structuring of narrative texts in school. Popular cultural texts can become resources for meaning making in nursery settings as Wohlwend (2009) described, and can become anchors for play in the home (Pahl, 2005).

Material Cultural Studies Perspectives on Home and Community Literacies

Literacy practices in homes and communities can be understood as materially situated. By this, we mean that these practices are linked to material culture in homes (Miller, 2010; Pink, 2009). Studies have looked at the way in which the ecologies of literacy circulate across spaces but are linked together through textual practices (Neuman and Celano, 2001; Nichols, Nixon, and Rowsell, 2009). Homes are linked to other spaces through, for example, the objects and stories within them that might have travelled from other places (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). Literacy as an activity can therefore be seen as a social process involving tools and people, which can lead to a variety of inscriptions, or entangled lines that then represent meanings (Ingold, 2007). In considering new literacies in home and community settings we can ask the question, how is writing materialized in everyday settings? In such settings, it is sometimes difficult to separate writing from the context from which it has arisen. Everyday writing can often get lost and can dissolve in the researcher’s gaze, so entangled and enmeshed it is in cultural practices in everyday life (Pahl, 2002). In order to illustrate the ways in which literacies are materialized in home settings, what follows is an example from an ethnographic study of ‘Writing in the Home and in the Street’ (Steadman-Jones, Pahl, and Gould, 2010–2011):

When I enter a home, in this case, a family of British Asian heritage, in an industrial northern town in the UK, these are the forms of writing I note. I drive my car up a narrow street of Victorian terraced houses, although this particular house I am to visit happens to be detached. I get out of my car, and walk up to the front porch. Over the door to the house, itself a late-Victorian detached house, built about 1901, is the name of the house inscribed in plaster on the outside. This was

written in the early years of the late twentieth century and is fixed, being inscribed in a stone-like substance. As I enter, there are framed, small, inscriptions over the doors, which are written in Arabic, as they relate to sections of the Koran and signify holy words. These inscriptions are also fixed. They were put up when they first came to the house, in December 2010. The family are British Asian Muslims. They therefore see the inscriptions as important to provide holy texts for their home.

I walk into the back of the house, where there is a cosy fireplace, and a computer and two sofas to sit on. The family have three children; one aged two years of age, one of eight and one of twelve, all girls. When I walk in, the things on the floor and on the seating area vary. Sometimes there are toys and small books. There are to be found fragments of script within the toys and artifacts strewn about the floor of the back living room. For example a board book for the youngest was inscribed with Arabic letters. Most recently, I encountered an, 'Etch-a-Sketch' on which the youngest writes. These objects are relatively fluid, in that they move about, and are sometimes visible, and sometimes are tidied away when the youngest is asleep and the mother does the housework. A computer is placed in the corner, on which the older girls do their homework and write stories and emails to me, and the mother sends orders for garden products. This computer is fixed. I can observe some fixed and settled forms of writing (writing on the house, inscription on the framed images, the computer with the sign of the maker) and some less fixed forms of writing including those that are fixed but put away (toy laptop, books, drawing materials) and some that are never permanent (the lines made by the child on her Etch-a-Sketch). [Kate Pahl, May 2011]

Within this space, script is present, but it is not always fixed. It flows throughout the household. Sometimes it is momentarily fixed, as the girls bring in a cloth bag with script embroidered on it, or the family might decide to consult Street View to look at neighboring streets. Stories and colored-in writing are found within the home and presented as examples of script that the girls produce at home. Script is often ephemerally located and flows within family life. These forms of writing are not often recognizable as the writing forms located within schooling. The writing in the home is linked to the epistemologies of those who created it, to the builder who marked the house, to the person who made the Arabic inscription that was then purchased, and displayed like a picture in the home, to the momentary trace of writing by the two year old on the 'Etch-a-Sketch,' to the colored stitches of the eldest as she embroiders her bag. Each of these forms of writing was contained within an epistemological space. The writing is also linked to other spaces – to the sewing club where the bag was written, to the library where the coloring activities took place. Literacy practices are linked across by invisible lines to other spaces and contexts. This provides the ecologies of writing. Some of this writing takes place between contexts or en route to other settings.

Spatial Perspectives in Conceptualizing Home and Community Literacies

This discussion of fluidity, multimodality, and materiality highlights the entangled nature of literacy. Home and community literacies are deeply embedded in social and cultural practices but at the same time, connected in multiple ways to other locations. In this section, we suggest ways forward in researching and conceptualizing this complexity. We argue that a perspective that emphasizes the fluidity and multiplicity of *space* offers rich opportunities for conceptualizing home and community literacies.

Over recent years, a 'spatial turn' in social theory has explored the significance of space to social action, highlighting its reflexive relationship to discourse, identity, and practice. Space has been seen as *socially produced* as practices and experiences are both influenced by and help

to define its quality and boundaries (Lefebvre, 1991). This process of ongoing production means that spaces are not fixed. As Lefebvre noted, 'every spatial envelope implies a barrier between inside and out, but this barrier is always relative, and, as in the case of membranes, always permeable' (1991, p. 176). Therefore, although environments may have been designed (whether in contemporary or past times) to reflect certain assumptions, individuals' and groups' experience of such spaces may be more fluid. Massey's tripartite conceptualization of space helps to articulate this fluidity. She argues that space is: 'always under construction,' consists of 'coexisting trajectories,' and is a 'product of inter-relations' (Massey, 2005, p. 9). Massey's work challenges the boundaries of space in terms of time and location. It both highlights the significance of individual pathways and practices and recognizes the significance of broader structural forces. Rather than seeing homes or communities, for example, as defined or separate spaces contained within physical boundaries, we might see them as linked in multiple ways to other locations and relationships, produced through a complex interaction between the practices that enact them and the artifacts, identities, texts, and so forth that go alongside them. From this perspective, different trajectories and differently bounded spaces may open up to allow new kinds of interactions and relationships.

This focus on fluidity is particularly salient when investigating practices involving digital media. Research into digital practices has explored online identities and communities (Turkle, 1995; Thomas, 2007) and has considered how space and place are produced online (Burbules, 2004). Increasingly, however, studies have described the relationships *between* children and young people's activities in physical and virtual environments (Crowe and Bradford, 2006; Davidson, 2009; Marsh, 2010). In response, calls for a 'connective ethnography' recognize these relationships (Hine, 2000; Leander and McKim, 2003). Leander and McKim argue that literacies research should shift from 'identifying sites,' for literacy, to identify 'siting' as a productive process (Leander and McKim, 2003, p. 213). Rather than looking separately at online activity in 'online space,' this prompts us to look at how the online and offline intersect and how social spaces shift as a result of this (Burnett, 2011a).

This perspective, we argue, offers a valuable framework for looking at children's home/community literacies. This may involve looking at how practices work across different dimensions (Burnett, 2011b), which include the *material* or physical dimension – the artifacts, including texts, buildings, and general 'stuff' associated with literacy practices in different contexts – the *textual* dimension evoked through the words and images we encounter in texts and the *connected* dimensions generated as networked technologies link people, places, and texts rather than seeing these as separate spaces. Exploring how texts, identities, and practices move across and between these dimensions may provide more nuanced notions of situatedness. This then requires a rethinking of literacy practices in homes and communities as the process of production is more about flows and shifts, and less about where a text is produced. Social space becomes both more salient and less fixed.

New Directions in Home and Community Literacies Research

In this review, we have argued for researching literacy practices in homes and communities through a lens that incorporates multimodality, materiality, multilingualism, and a sensory engagement with place and space. The consequence of this lens is a methodological focus on literacy as being meshed within other modalities and other communicative practices (Flewitt, 2008) and an attention to cultural practices in homes. It means paying attention to lost things, travelling, inscriptions, lines and traces, street literacies and oral stories, in short the complex, meshed 'stuff' of everyday cultural life (Ingold, 2007; Miller, 2010). This requires particular

methodologies, which incorporate an ethnographic perspective that is situated and collaborative, participatory and visual (Lassiter, 2005; Pink, 2009), together with an understanding that methods and their practices construct reality (Law, 2004). This might involve making the familiar strange (Agar 1996; Heath and Street, 2008). An ecological approach to new literacies in homes and communities involves paying attention to sensory and embodied understandings of the world, through material cultural encounters (Ingold, 2007; Pink, 2009; Miller, 2010).

Building on the work cited above, we argue that effective methodologies for researching home and community literacies should incorporate children's epistemologies and recognize the inequalities in homes and communities in relation to access to literacy (Neuman and Celano, 2001) as well as access to digital technologies (Marsh, 2010, 2011). This highlights the significance of the policy background to how literacies in homes and communities are theorized and researched. Our thinking takes us into the realm of social and cultural geographies that map inequalities (Dorling and Thomas, 2011). By tracking the movement of literacy practices across sites, and the circulation of literacies between home, school, and community, research can locate the way certain literacies are privileged over others. Methodologies for doing this kind of research include the ecological methods used by Neuman and Celano (2001) and Nichols, Nixon, and Rowsell (2009) whereby literacy artifacts were located in particular hubs. Their work involved interviewing literacy sponsors or mediators and the focus was on access to literacy in communities. Some of this work includes understanding the nature of commercialized literacy texts (Nixon, 2011). Such work demonstrates how homes are not bounded spaces but networks resourced through other spaces such as libraries (Nichols, 2011). A study of home and community literacies needs to acknowledge the permeability of the home in accessing literacy.

All this has implications for language and literacy in educational settings. We see this in Dyson's ethnographic work exploring children's classroom interactions with, through, and around texts. These show how children may overlay classroom activities with relationships and interactions suited to varied social purposes, associated with both official and unofficial worlds (Dyson, 2008). Dyson demonstrates how children rework and renegotiate school-based activities in the light of their experiences beyond school and their own purposes within it. Home and community literacies become resources for establishing new kinds of meaning in classrooms. As she writes, 'Children are complex social actors in classroom worlds, and these ends influenced their ways of enacting, participating in, literacy events. They drew on diverse sorts of cultural materials as they worked towards varied ends' (Dyson, 1993b, p. 20). For Dyson, the challenge in responding to this complexity is to create a 'permeable curriculum' that recognizes and seeks to capitalize on intersections between teachers' and children's language and literacy experiences. A permeable curriculum would recognize the varied cultural materials children draw on in classrooms and find ways of enabling them to use, reflect upon, and build on these. As Dyson writes,

Such a curriculum seeks to acknowledge and respect the complexity of children's social worlds and cultural materials. And it attempts not only to create bridges between worlds, but to support children's own naming and manipulating of dynamic relationships between worlds. (1993b, p. 28)

Teachers need to be aware of the 'schema' they bring to an understanding of what literacy is. Further research that gathers together the disparate fields of social anthropology, material cultural studies, New Literacy Studies, multimodality, and cultural geography is required to provide a lens that recognizes and values literacy practices in homes and communities. If literacy involves playing computer games, watching television, making a purse with craft activities and putting stickers on it, creating textiles with writing embroidery on it, or making models

that are connected to stories, the process of recognition of those practices is more complex. Since home literacies are often embedded within multilingual scripts, craft activities, computer games, television programs, and oral stories it is important to widen the lens through which to recognize home literacy practices. A multidisciplinary lens is required to do that important work. We argue, in this review, for a bringing together of a lens that challenges contemporary ‘tropes’ of home literacy practices (for example, book sharing) and widens the scope of the ways in which home literacies are recognized so that this potential can be carried into the wider domains of school, workplace and community.

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