

# Sedimented identities in texts: Instances of practice

JENNIFER ROWSELL

Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA

KATE PAHL

University of Sheffield, England

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his commentary describes text making as a process involving the sedimentation of identities into the text, which then can be seen as an artifact that reflects, through its materiality, the previous identities of the meaning maker. When children start to make texts, or produce a drawing at home, the finished text has a history. If it were made in the home, it would have been constructed in relation to ways of being and doing in the home, to the everyday practices surrounding the text. In this commentary, we argue that texts can be seen as traces of social practice, and their materiality is important in revealing those traces. We then explore the implications of that theoretical space for research and practice. We suggest that children's identities can be instantiated within texts, a concept we call *sedimented identities in texts*. We suggest a particular way of viewing texts, and consider what that way has to offer the field of literacy.

In recent issues of *Reading Research Quarterly*, there has been an increasing focus on a social practice and a socially situated perspective on literacy development (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004; Lewis & Fabbo, 2005; Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Mesa, 2003). The following commentary is an attempt to step back to reflect on why a socially situated account of literacy development is important. We also argue the need to reflect on the multimodal nature of text making and, at the same time, why we need to take account of identities in the making of multimodal texts. By multimodal texts, we mean that we see text making as having a material dimension. Materiality is a key notion within our use of multimodal theory and the physical aspects (i.e., all modes—oral, written, and dimensional) of texts as signifying producers' identities. For example, when a child puts pen to paper, the text is composed from a number of modes. The child draws on these modes when making meaning—oral composing, drawn representation, lettered representation. The

THE COMMENTARY argues for an understanding of how texts are put together that accounts for multimodality and draws on children's ways of being and doing in the home, their *habitus*. It focuses on identities as socially situated. It argues that it is important to trace the process of sedimenting identities during text production. This offers a way of viewing text production that can inform research into children's text making. Particular attention is paid to the producer, contexts, and practices used during text production and how the text becomes an artifact that holds important information about the meaning maker. Four case studies describe sedimented identities as a lens through which to see a more nuanced perspective on meaning making. This work offers a lens for research and practice in that it enables researchers to question and interrogate the way texts come into being.

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ESTE COMENTARIO apunta a la comprensión de un tipo de organización textual que dé cuenta de la diversidad de modos y considere las formas del ser y del hacer de los niños en el hogar, su *habitus*. Se pone el acento en las identidades en cuanto socialmente situadas. Se argumenta que es importante indagar en el proceso de consolidación de las identidades durante la producción de textos. Esto ofrece una manera de ver la producción textual que podría dar información acerca de la elaboración de textos por parte de los niños. Se presta particular atención al productor, contextos y prácticas usadas durante la producción textual y a cómo el texto se convierte en un artefacto que contiene información importante acerca del generador de significados. Cuatro estudios de caso describen identidades consolidadas como una lente a través de la cual puede tenerse una perspectiva más matizada de la construcción del significado. Este trabajo ofrece una lente para ver la investigación y la práctica de un modo que permita a los investigadores cuestionar e interrogar la forma en que surgen los textos.

**Identidades  
consolidadas en  
los textos:  
Instancias de  
práctica**

DER KOMMENTAR argumentiert für ein Verstehen wie Texte zusammengestellt werden, die für die Multimodalität bestimmend sind und bezieht sich auf die Art und Weise wie sich Kinder im Hause, ihrem *Habitus*, geben und was sie unternehmen. Man konzentriert sich auf gesellschaftlich festgesetzte Identitäten. Es wird argumentiert, dass es wesentlich ist, den Verlauf des Sedimentierens von Identitäten während der Texterstellung zurückzuverfolgen. Dies bietet eine Möglichkeit die Texterstellung zu beurteilen, welche die Erforschung bei der Erstellung von Kindertexten informativ beeinflussen kann. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit wird dem Verfasser, den Inhalten und den während der Texterstellung angewandten Praktiken geschenkt, und wie der Text zu einem kreativen Schrifterzeugnis wird, das ebenfalls wichtige Informationen über dessen Sinnkonstrukteur beinhaltet. Vier Fallstudien beschreiben sedimentierte Identitäten als eine Art Optik, durch die man eine wesentlich nuanziertere Perspektive zur Sinnkonstruktion erkennt. Dieses Werk bietet eine solche Optik zum Betrachten von Forschung und Praxis, wobei es die Forscher in die Lage versetzt, die Art und Weise wie Texte entstehen, in Frage zu stellen und zu untersuchen.

**Sedimentierte  
Identitäten in  
Texten: Abläufe in  
der Praxis**

## テキストにおける沈積したアイデンティティ：実践の例

本論評は、マルチモダリティーを説明し、子供達の家庭、即ちハビトゥスにおける在り方や行い方に頼る、テキストの統合され方に関する理解の重要性を議論する。社会的に埋め込まれたアイデンティティに焦点を当てる。テキスト生成におけるアイデンティティの沈積の過程を辿ることの重要性を議論する。これは、子供達のテキスト生成の研究に示唆を与え得るテキスト生成の見方を提供する。特に、生産者、コンテキスト、テキスト生産において使用された実践、そしてテキストがどのように意味の生産者に関する重要な情報を保持する加工物になるのかに注意が払われる。4件のケーススタディーが、沈積されたアイデンティティを意味の生成に関する、より含みのある見方をするためのレンズとして描写する。こうした研究は、研究者がテキストの生まれ方に疑問を投げ掛け問い直すことを可能にする点において、研究や実践を見るためのレンズを提供する。

Des identités  
sédimentées  
dans les textes :  
exemples de  
pratiques

CE TEXTE essaie de comprendre comment les textes sont mis ensemble pour rendre compte de la multimodalité, et esquisse les manières d'être et de faire des enfants à la maison, leur *habitus*. Il se centre sur les identités en tant qu'elles sont socialement situées. Il soutient qu'il est important de suivre le processus de sédimentation des identités au cours de la production de texte. Ceci ouvre une perspective sur la production de texte qui peut informer la recherche sur la façon dont les enfants font un texte. Une attention particulière est apportée au producteur, aux contextes, et aux pratiques mises en œuvre pendant la production du texte et à la façon dont un texte devient un objet construit comportant une information importante sur celui qui fabrique le sens. Dans quatre études de cas on présente les identités sédimentées comme une loupe qui permet d'avoir une perspective plus nuancée sur la fabrication du sens. Ce travail apporte une loupe considérant la recherche et la pratique comme permettant aux chercheurs de mettre en question et d'interroger la façon dont les textes arrivent à l'existence.

Отражение  
личности в  
текстах: случаи  
из практики

В настоящем комментарии дается толкование механизмов создания текста, которые основаны на полимодальности и связаны с ежедневным существованием ребенка в родном доме, то есть с его средой обитания. Личность в этом контексте – явление социально обусловленное. И важно проследить отражение личности в созданном тексте как некий постепенный процесс. Благодаря такому подходу можно рассматривать не просто текст как продукт, но исследовать механизм его создания, ответить на вопрос: как именно это делают дети? Особое внимание уделяется создателю текста, контексту, в котором создается текст, способам его создания и тому, каким образом текст становится артефактом, содержащим важную информацию о создателе нового смысла. В статье проанализированы четыре отдельных случая отражения личности в созданном тексте. В этих примерах, как в увеличительном стекле, видны все нюансы и особенности создания новых смыслов. Данная работа предлагает рассматривать исследования и практику под определенным углом, дающим исследователям возможность разобраться, как именно возникают тексты.

resulting ensemble of meaning making comprises a multimodal text. We have drawn on Kress's (1997) work to develop this definition.

In this commentary, we begin by offering an account of the New Literacy Studies and multimodality. We argue that we need to discuss the way in which multimodal texts are materially constructed. We also argue that the intersection of the New Literacy Studies and multimodality, while fruitful, needs an extended understanding of social practice. In looking at the relationship between social processes, such as national identities, and literacy, literacy and language theorists such as Collins and Blot (2003) have argued the importance of bringing in social theory to develop an understanding of texts in relation to social practice. Collins and Blot's contribution lies in carefully dismantling the arguments that keep literacy and language, its oral counterpart, separate. Instead, they argue for a socially situated view of literacies that also takes account of power. Many scholars argue that these power relations in relation to literacy and language practices need scrutinizing, particularly in educational contexts (e.g., Heller, 2002; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000; Rogers, 2003). In order to understand how different groups use different language practices in different contexts, scholars such as Collins and Blot and Heller have looked at the ways in which particular language and literacy practices are privileged in particular contexts, such as schools and institutions. In describing these processes, Collins and Blot and Heller have focused on the linking of microtextual interactions with macrosocial experience to enable the formulation of a more powerful theory of social being. They have suggested an approach that draws on Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) concept of *habitus* as a way of articulating macrosocial experience, and they have argued that *habitus*, combined with field, begins to unpack complex social relationships around literacy and language (Collins & Blot; Heller). Here, we develop this discussion with regard to texts.

*Habitus*, as defined by Bourdieu (1977, 1990), describes ways of being, doing, and acting in the world across generations, time, and space. In this commentary, we argue that *habitus*, as a set of dispositions, offers an insight on the understanding of text production. We consider *habitus* as instantiated in practice and look at how practices reveal the working of *habitus*. *Habitus* both drives dispositions and is transformed in the remaking of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990). Dispositions across generations shape and generate identities. *Habitus* is instantiated in everyday practices and in identities. For this reason, we focus in this commentary on identities in

practice. Specifically, we look at theories of identity and draw on the work of Holland and colleagues (Bartlett & Holland, 2002; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). We consider how an understanding of the practice theories of Bourdieu, together with a consideration of identities, from the work of these anthropologists who have worked with Bourdieu's theories of practice, can inform our understanding of children's texts.

### *The New Literacy Studies and texts as traces of social practice*

In this section, we consider the relationship between texts and social practice, drawing on the New Literacy Studies. The ideas of the New Literacy Studies enabled links to be made between the ways in which people lived their lives, experienced everyday practices, and the texts that they produced. For example, Heath (1983), in the Carolinas, described the everyday home lives, ways of decoration, routines, and care-giving practices of the families in her study. She then made a link from these routines to the families' literacy practices. Likewise, Street (1984, 1993), in Iran, was able to identify different literacy practices as associated with different domains of life; for example, commercial literacy practices, home literacy practices, and religious literacy. In both these examples the way in which life was lived shaped particular textual practices and resulted in identity constructions that shaped text making. The New Literacy Studies were identified by Gee (1996) as providing a "social turn" to literacy, and they led to a number of studies looking at community literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000; Keating, 2005; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000; Rogers, 2003; Zentella, 2005). In some cases, these studies focused on particular communities and their literacies. In each of the cases, an ethnographic eye was used to discover how members of communities lived their lives. The assumption was that there was a link from literacy to everyday life. It is that link that we explore further here.

From the New Literacy Studies, we argue that texts are multimodal. We draw on work by Kress (1997, 2003), which is focused on the ways in which children make texts. Kress (1997) argued that they do so by drawing on a plethora of modes. Children make choices about which modes to use, and these choices are evidence of the path they make as meaning makers. Kress's work has led to a number of studies looking closely at children's meaning making, many of them using the lens of the New Literacy

Studies—that is, with a link to practice (Kendrick & McKay, 2004; Kenner, 2004; Kress et al., 2005; Lancaster, 2003).

We suggest that the multimodal text can be seen as an artifact. In this, we are using the term *artifact* to describe a historical aspect to the making of texts. We would like to suggest that this artifact-like quality of texts is linked to the identity of the meaning maker. Kress (1997) argued that meaning making is bound up with the interest of the sign maker. Here, we want to unpack what Kress might have meant by *interest* and suggest that it could be the child's identities in practice, which create and support a child's interest. This preferred way of doing and being, in turn, can be traced back to the family habitus, the ways of doing and being engendered in the home, "systems of durable, transposable structures, that is, principles which generate and organize practices and representations" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53).

The process of making meaning starts when meaning makers assemble Discourses (Gee, 1996, 1999), negotiate them, transform them, and materialize them in a text/artifact. Gee described this process as pattern recognition: "[T]hinking and using language is an *active* matter of *assembling* the situated meanings that you need for action in the world" (1999, p. 49). Looking ahead to the data we will describe in this article, we will see that a student assembled Discourses that related to his dispositions, at-hand narratives, and home life. A teacher, in her planning and assessing of students, drew on Discourses relating to her governing philosophy and dispositions, to more contemporary teacher education Discourses, and to her childhood ideologies and Discourses. The conflation and intersection of Discourses become modalities in texts, which, alongside practices, provide a formative picture of the meaning makers—not only their pathway into literacy but also how they make meaning in certain contexts and engage in practice. The theory provides a lens on *how* producers sediment identities and *what* they sediment.

The text, then, becomes an artifact of identities as much informed by social practice, habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), and context as it is by the material choices made during its creation. We use the metaphor "identities sedimenting into texts" to describe the way in which the process can be slow, as sand becomes more rock-like and multifarious, as different grains of sand become assembled into a rock. The term indicates that sedimentation is a process, and it can be observed taking place within a variety of modes and across sites and domains.

### *How do texts and identities interrelate?*

In this section, we argue that we need to unite theories of identities with theories of texts to have a textured account of literacy development. In doing so, we engage with previous theories on the production of texts, on contexts, and on identities. Gee (1999) argued that texts are produced in a myriad of D/discourses and that we use different kinds of materials and modalities in our making of texts. The history of texts is as important as analyzing their materiality. Here, we consider work on the history of texts. We then move to locating texts in the context of work on identities. We think context and practices used in contexts are two ways we can develop the link from texts across to identities.

When considering text making, *context* comes to the fore as a unit of study. The work of Silverstein and Urban (1996) identified the way in which texts are changed as they are recontextualized or entextualized across sites. They argued that texts can be regarded as traces of interaction, and that "social identities may be durable projections from texts" (p. 6). They talked about the "text-artifact" as having "a certain concreteness and manipulability," comparing text-artifacts to "museum specimens" (p. 3). This notion that texts have histories, which can be traced, is also evident in the work of Floriani (1994), who argued that texts come into being through observable interactions, as these interactions produce a complex relationship between the text and its contexts, the genesis of which can be observed in interaction. Floriani argued, drawing from Duranti and Goodwin (1992), that context can be problematized and can be seen as intercontextual when texts are shaped. Floriani's work used taped interaction to look at the genesis of texts and how these texts are talked into being as they become written documents (artifacts). According to Floriani, patterns of relationships construct texts (p. 245). Although identities are invisible in contexts, they shape texts. Smith (1998), in her work on texts and everyday life, argued that texts are historical and material artifacts, with complex social histories. From these perspectives we can then conceptualize the relationship of artifact to text.

How are texts related to identities? We suggest that identities can be conceptualized as related to activities. When this notion of identity is applied to classrooms, learners' identities are evident in what they do. Wortham (2006) noted that "people learn as part of the same activities through which they act in the world, while performing social actions like identification. Knowledge exists only in activities"

(p. 14). Lived practice, or identities in practice (Holland et al., 1998), is a key concept here, wherein identities are formed in the space of practice and, in turn, texts sediment the process. People learn in praxis, and texts as artifacts trace identity making. In that sense, we work with the concept of different contexts for identities. Drawing on the work of Hull and Greeno (2006), we identify that different identities are enacted within different contexts of activity. Drawing on Holland and her colleagues, Hull and Greeno looked at the participation of children in out-of-school learning to argue that identities are made and constructed in different communities of practice and “figured worlds.” We also draw on the work of Gee (1999) on socioculturally situated identities connecting identities with lived worlds, to argue for an account of identities that is connected to texts, practices, and habitus. We use Gee’s theory to enable us to see how identities are instantiated in D/discourses and consider here the relationship of Discursive practices to meaning and materiality.

How does children’s text making shift identities in practice? When children make meaning, Kress (1997) observed that they also develop both their identities *and* the text. Wortham (2006) regarded such moments of meaning as an expansion of identities when people develop new tools and ways of acting: “When students and teachers built a new local model of individual/society relations and applied it to new texts, they entered an expansive cycle” (p. 104). Texts can be associated with the expansion of identities in that the making of the text can itself be accompanied by a transformation in the identities of the text maker (Kress).

Identities can also be identified with certain discursive practices. We have built our theorizing of identities on the work of Holland et al. (1998), who argued that identities in practice can be seen within texts and artifacts produced as a result of those identities. Holland and colleagues tell us that identity is a concept that works to connect the intimate and personal worlds with the wider world of social relations. We draw on their conceptualization of “identities in figured worlds” as in “people tell others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are” (Holland & Lave, 2001, p. 3). In this commentary, we draw on Holland’s work on identities as an accumulation of history or, as she and her coauthors express it, “history-in-person” (Holland et al.; Holland & Lave). We also note work by Holland and Leander (2004), which theorized identities as “laminated” as a way of describing the way in which identities are layered, and multidimensional, con-

structed in dynamic and interrelated ways. This theoretical move helps us understand the *layered* nature of identities and how these layered identities can be found sedimented within texts. Texts as artifacts instantiate the layers of lamination. Identities can also be time bound. Work with identities and timescales has revealed how identities are built up through interactional shifts, and these timescales can be studied, as identities are slowly ascribed and stay within individuals (Wortham, 2006). Texts can also be related to timescales (Lemke, 2000). Identities can be understood as a construction—Sarup (1994) described identities in terms of a process of construction among people, institutions, and practices. In this commentary, we argue that identities can be found within practices and that it is possible to trace the sedimentation of these practices into text making.

### *Materiality and multimodality*

This section considers the relationship between materiality and multimodality. If texts are seen as material objects, there are far more questions to ask about the way the text was put together. By looking at the different modalities, and the way they intersect, more complicated questions arise about the sense of how the text was produced. It is through the modalities of texts that we get a sense of the producer. What separates one text from another is, more often than not, how it looks—from the trim size of a book, to cutouts and bright colors on a child’s artwork, to bits of animation on a webpage. In our textured account of literacy learners, we focus on what modes they choose for particular kinds of texts, alongside attendant practices to identify how they sediment identities in texts.

We argue that materiality and multimodality are not quite the same thing. Materiality relates far more to a micro, fine-grained analysis of specific artifacts and how their content and design relates to the text maker. Materiality allows us to look simultaneously at product and process. What choices did the producer have? Why certain modes over others? How do these choices relate to the producer? How do choices reflect context and habitus? The physical features of texts thereby lead us to broader implications and to the dispositions of the meaning maker. Multimodality, on the other hand, has a broader influence tied to larger discourses and ideologies such as globalization, cultural migration, and technology. Modalities are connected to materiality in that they offer *choice* for meaning makers—the color, texture, shape of lines and figures, words used to articulate messages—that each carry affordances and con-

straints. While producing texts, meaning makers choose modes that best suit a desired or predetermined meaning. Modes carry with them both constraints and affordances. Constraints and affordances can be understood as material (whether a piece of paper will bend or not) and also as cultural (whether we would use tissue paper to make a bird or not). Both are brought to bear when children make texts (Pahl, 2006).

### *Habitus in social practices: Social practices in texts*

The term *habitus* describes the practice-infused space that surrounds and is changed by text making. Bourdieu (1990) argued that habitus is “a product of history” (p. 54) and also is an acquired system of generative schemes, which has “an infinite capacity for generating products—thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production” (p. 55). In this commentary, we draw on the historical nature of habitus to locate habitus in homes and families, and see how children draw on these generative structures when they make meaning. When doing ethnography in homes, we have observed how children draw on intergenerational ways of doing and being to construct new meanings (e.g., Pahl, 2004).

How can the conception of habitus be applied to texts? Holland et al. (1998) and Holland and Lave (2001) drew on Bourdieu’s practice theory to describe how the inherited dispositions of the last generation fall into, or sediment into, the next. The leap Holland and colleagues made was to describe that process as *textual*. Texts as artifacts are sites where the habitus can be discerned. We argue that the habitus informs practices, as families, for example, acquire long-term ways of doing things passed on from generation to generation. These practices can be glimpsed when they are sedimented into texts; for example, a child’s drawing of a farm reflects the experience of visiting and revisiting his granny’s farm in Wales (Pahl, 2004). We consider that this way of seeing texts as instantiations of the habitus might have important implications for education. It also offers a way of understanding the New Literacy Studies that is more richly textured. Rather than simply see literacy practices as shaped by social practice, it is now possible to glean the way the specificities of the habitus inform practice which then can be glimpsed instantiated within written and visual texts (Rowse, in press). Through ethnography, it is possible to uncover these traces of practice. Repeated ethnographic fieldwork can uncover repeated practices in sites such as homes, which then can be identified with certain texts. It is then possible to make a study of those texts as reflecting the processes and practices of their creation. When we look at texts within these contexts, children’s literacy practices become vitally infused with meaning.

**FIGURE 1**  
**PROCESS MODEL OF SEDIMENTED IDENTITIES IN TEXTS**

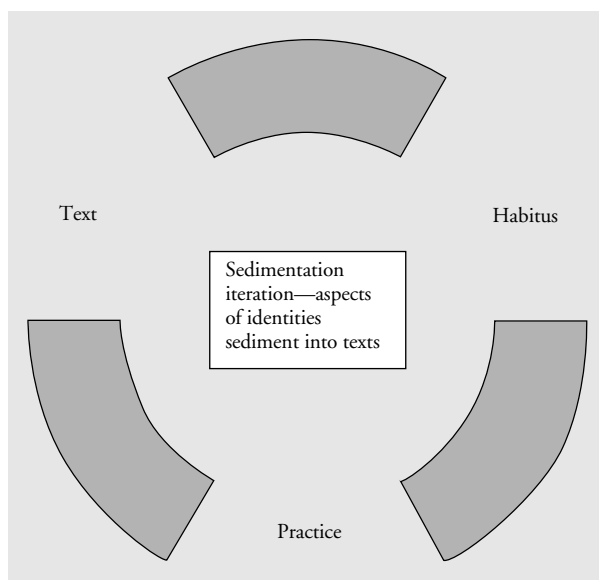


Figure 1 provides a model that operates as a heuristic to describe the way in which habitus, the everyday lived experience of people, sediments into texts. The model begins with habitus—which generates practice. These practices generate texts through a slow process of iteration. The way in which habitus sediments into texts can be understood as being highly nuanced and complex. In some cases, sedimented identity is direct, while in other cases it may be more subtle and couched. The model chronicles the past but can be understood in the context of the present.

The model can be understood as a heuristic, describing the process of production. The vectors indicate the iterative, continual nature of this process. The theory rests on a contemplation of the moment of production—the context, the producer with his or her set of dispositions, the text and what it points to, and how it reflects the context in which it was made. Here, we argue, through the model it is possible to see the sedimenting of practices into texts as a process, which then contributes to habitus. This

process is cyclical and iterative and is related to time, creating a patterned practice-based account. What is essential to this process is that intertextually linked clusters or sequences of texts and artifacts cross boundaries of modality and media in their meaning effects. Texts always bear traces of Discourses and other texts, which are disparate and carry longer or shorter timescales (thereby having varying degrees of meaning effect) and are bound up with spaces of practice.

Fatih made a bird from tissue paper, at home, using materials that were “to hand.” Detailed ethnographic work revealed that birds were salient where the child’s mother grew up, in Turkey. The child would visit the village and chase the chickens. In addition, bird making was observed as a practice by the child at school. When Pahl did ethnographic work in a home, repeated visits led to the conclusion that bird making was a very important part of the child’s regular text making at home (Pahl, in press). This led to an interest in the history of the meaning of the bird sign for the child. The example illustrates how intertextually linked clusters cross boundaries of modalities and media—which have different meaning effects on text production, the mediation of identities, and factors surrounding meaning making such as space and time.

### *Locating sedimented identity in theory*

Habitus in texts can be understood as being a way of conceptualizing the way in which households bring particular ways of being and doing to a number of sites (fields), and these sites include representation as well as practice. Here, we ask the question “How does this relate to other theoretical models?” One key model we have found useful is the concept of *funds of knowledge* from Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González (1992) and González, Moll, and Amanti (2005). In their work with Latino families, they were able to identify the ways in which a number of home-inculcated funds of knowledge could inform school-based skills such as literacy and numeracy. Funds of knowledge were discerned through ethnography, in the same way as sedimented identities in texts can be understood through longitudinal fieldwork, and their development was understood as being embedded within a wider network of family relations: “The person from whom the child learns carpentry, for example, may also be the uncle with whom the child’s family regularly celebrates birthdays or organizes barbecues” (González et al., 2005, p. 214).

This kind of work, mapping everyday practices, also links to the detailed ethnography of Heath (1983) and Barton and Hamilton (1998) in describing the ways in which literacies are used in everyday life. In looking at different families, it is clear that the phrase “there are different literacies associated with different domains of life” (Barton & Hamilton, p. 7) recognizes that literacy is infused with the meanings families create and weave as they journey through their lives. The concept of funds of knowledge widened that understanding in that it identifies knowledge as linked to everyday practice. By linking *funds of knowledge* to household practice and understanding it as a descriptive metaphor to identify the value, in a number of different domains and across intergenerational family members, of home practices and discourses, we can see the complementarity of the idea of sedimented identities in texts and the idea of funds of knowledge. One centers on identities and the other on different kinds of knowledge and the associated values of that knowledge. Our position in this commentary centers more closely on identities, on dispositions, and on Bourdieu’s habitus concept, which takes into account a person being within a space and the practices connected to that person (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus, as a set of acquired dispositions, can also be transformed across generations. The improvisations upon the habitus inform the making of texts (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The concept of *figured worlds* also informed the way we developed the theory. We have combined Bourdieu’s practice theory with the identity theory of Holland and colleagues (1998), who looked at how identities were realized within figured worlds, themselves mediated by artifacts. By focusing on the role of artifacts in mediating identities, Holland and colleagues brought concrete texts and narratives into the practice-infused space Bourdieu (1977, 1990) observed in the Kabyle House. Through detailed ethnography, they were able to trace how identities are culturally shaped and are created in connection with figured worlds.

In an account of *cultural* ways of learning, Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) explored “how individuals’ background experiences, together with their interests, may prepare them for knowing how to engage in particular forms of language and literacy activities” (p. 23). They considered the notion that we need “to examine the nature and forms of cultural artifacts and tools used; the social relations, rules, and division of labour; and the historical development of individuals and communities” (p. 23). We would argue that many aspects of their theory could



also apply to the practice-infused space that is habitus. The habitus has temporal structures and dispositions toward the future; it positions the child both as agent and within a structure, describing the shaped form of family life (Bourdieu, 1990). By focusing on a particular text as artifact, it is possible to understand how this is shaped by the habitus. In considering the artifact, we analyze the context and how, in the space of practice, individuals embed fundamental aspects of their identities into texts.

In the following studies, we provide an example of how the theoretical framework can be used for research. The studies presented are longitudinal in nature, ranging in length from nine months to three years. Ethnography allowed us to view multimodality within larger, broader contexts of patterned practice. By using ethnography, we account for identities working within spaces, which carry histories and power issues on local and global levels. The juxtaposition of contexts with their own particularities—texts with their mix of modalities—and practices that link back to identities allowed us to have a detailed picture of literacy learners and how they make meaning. The ethnographic and the multimodal complement each other in that ethnography gives us a detailed picture and multimodality furnished an analytical framework in which to work.

Throughout this commentary, we weave in and out of our data sets so that we provide a collage of sedimented identities in teaching practice, in children's texts, and in individual lives. Our voices separately and collectively inhabit this text as a trace of practice. The resultant artifact comes to us after many discussions by e-mail and in person and after thinking through these ideas on other projects and, we hope, future ones (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006). The use of

the "I" signals a shift to our own individual research identities, in the field and in relation to the data.

### *Sedimented identities in texts: Data examples*

In this section we present examples from our data, collected over the years in a variety of studies. For over three years, Pahl collected data from a family about its practices and texts. Rowsell presents how a teacher sediments her "history in person" (Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001) into her teaching and, importantly, into her teaching artifacts (e.g., her classroom design). Pahl describes her research with a group of visual artists in a community setting, and, finally, Rowsell describes a family literacy research project, focusing on interviews with parents.

Case studies presented in Table 1 illuminate theory. Each instance of practice shows how texts are linked to both the producer and the context in which the text is made, and then to the practice that is instantiated within the text. We see with Fatih that the practice-infused space of his home and cultural practices informs his text making. We see Discourses inhabiting Dorothy's past and present worlds finding their way and sedimenting into texts she produces for her teaching. Texts are constructed from a number of different domains of practice, and these different domains are revealed interwoven within each text-artifact. Each instance sees "sedimented identities" from a different lens—child, adult, community, and parent to child—but each shares a sedimentation process that is what gives the text meaning and relevance for the producer and, quite possibly, for the reader of the text. The following stories of producers cast sedimented identities into

**TABLE 1**  
**INSTANCES OF SEDIMENTED IDENTITY IN TEXT**

Instances of practice	1	2	3	4
Focus	An ethnographic study of a home	A study of a teacher and identities mediation in artifacts and in practice	A study of a group of visual artists working in a community setting	Series of focus groups with parents about literacy in the home
Site location	Home, North London	University and public school, Toronto	A community project in South Yorkshire	School library, Toronto
Participants	Elif, mother of Fatih, and Fatih	Dorothy, early years teacher	Alice, a visual artist	Rihana, mother of Ahmed
Timelines	3 years	1 year	2 years	1 year
Sedimented identities in texts and practices	Sedimented identities in texts	Texts carry memories that activate meaning making	Texts signal community and identities and carry affordances and constraints	Literacy practices take place within and as a part of our identities

relief, offering a particular way of seeing meaning making. We use pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants involved in our studies.

*Repeating a theme over time: The bird flew into the classroom*

In this example, I (Pahl) draw on my observations of Fatih's classroom and in his home. This episode has been described elsewhere (Pahl, 2006, in press; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). I had been visiting Fatih's home for about a year and had noticed his interest in birds. In order to make sense of the data, I moved between sites, and as each field visit unfolded some more data I began to see how the bird making was shaped by Fatih's identity over time. Fatih's home was a small housing-association-owned flat in North London. Elif, Fatih's mother, had come to London as a teenager as the result of an arranged marriage. She had grown up in a village in rural Turkey and regularly took her sons back to this village to visit her parents. Elif was a devout Muslim and wore a headscarf. Her flat was furnished simply with images she had drawn as a teenager, a waterfall that lit up, and a television set placed on a doily. Elif had separated from her husband and was living independently. Elif described her new life as being very happy after a difficult period. A cousin, visiting when I was there once, noted Fatih's interest in birds and said his interest dated from when he was very young.

The data described here come from a period when I was observing both in Fatih's home and in his classroom. When I visited at home, I was clear I was interested in children's text making, and the initial home visit concerned the making of a bird:

I asked if he had done anything. They shook their heads, but then Elif said, "He made a bird." She went to her bedroom, and behind the curtain was a bird made of cardboard and lined paper. Fatih said, "This doesn't look like a bird. It looks like a duck swimming 'cause it hasn't got legs." He did it three weeks ago. I asked him about the making of this bird. "I got a cardboard, and I got a cardboard bit, and I cut it out like a bird, but I done the bird wrong, and that's all, and I glued it." Fatih took the bird and made it flap up and down in the mirror, making bird noises. He asked me for some paper. We went into the kitchen, and I gave him three sheets of notebook paper. He had a huge pair of scissors, which he was using in a rather alarming fashion—dancing and pointing them at the walls. Elif protested and tried to take them away and substitute some smaller ones, but he wouldn't allow this. We went and sat down at the kitchen table. Fatih drew me another bird. As he drew the claws, he sang. Fatih cut this out; he found the legs difficult so I helped him. He said, "This one can't fly." (Field notes, October 23, 2000)

The following field notes were taken in Fatih's classroom, just over a week later on a Thursday afternoon, which I established was the time for free activity.

He said, "This is a naughty bird." I asked why. "Because he flies around inside the house. He's hungry and naughty," said Fatih with relish. Later in the session, Fatih came up. We asked him to draw a bird, because another child wanted a bird that could carry a star on its wings. "I can't do flying birds," he said, "only walking ones." He began with a walking bird, and progressed to a flying bird. "That is a swan," he said. (Field notes, October 30, 2000)

Classroom observations showed that Fatih had been listening to "The Ugly Duckling" story at school, and his interest in swans may have derived from hearing that story. Previous field notes had also recorded a strong interest in chickens, and bird making was one of Fatih's home practices. Repeated visits revealed many bird texts over a period of time. Fatih drew members of his family as birds and liked to play with birds. I had previously picked up this interest on an earlier field visit as the family described their visits to Turkey:

We talked of the journey—flying for three and a half hours to Istanbul and then the coach. "I like the coach," said Elif. Then a bus journey to her parents' farmhouse. They have cows, some chickens, and a dog. (Field notes, February 28, 2000)

Repeated field visits revealed that the chickens had been in a plot beside the grandparents' house, and a photograph from home showed the spot where the chickens had wandered when Fatih was young. Elif told me that when Fatih was about 6 the chickens were no longer there, so this was a memory from when Fatih was 5. The sign "bird" also was salient for Fatih, and he drew on this when making birds. About a year after the bird making had been observed in the classroom, I observed the following:

When I left Hanif was huddled in a blanket. "Little bird," said Elif—I said, "Oh, you call them birds." "Yes," she said, "Fatih too, *kuş* is bird in Turkish. When they were little, little bird," she laughed. (Field notes, September 16, 2001)

Here, the bird signals a pet name for a child. The process of creating meaning using tissue paper, scissors, paper, and pen in order to make the sign "bird" was in part affected by the material affordances of tissue paper, paper, cutting out, and drawing. However, behind the sign "bird" lay a plethora of meaning, which had been built up over many years. These accumulated meanings built up the cul-

tural concepts associated with the sign “bird” and were associated with much longer timescales of meaning than the material resources (Lemke, 2000). These longer timescales of meaning were associated with narratives of identity, meanings built up over time, connected to household practices. These examples show how Fatih’s intergenerational practices, connected to chasing chickens when he was young, and to his mother’s pet name for him, developed his own interest in making bird texts both at home and in the classroom. Through observations, over time, of the practices associated with the “bird” theme, habitus is glimpsed as the workings of a system, the movement across from Turkey to London. The play with the birds engenders particular kinds of texts; the sedimentation of practice into texts is caught.

### *Motivated signs: Discourses in pedagogical artifacts*

In this example, I (Rowell) draw on a yearlong ethnographic-style study with a teacher-education student in a bachelor of education program in Canada, which became a chapter in an edited book (Rowell & Rajaratnam, 2005). Over the course of a year, both authors pieced together the story of a teacher, Dorothy, who grew up in Sri Lanka, moved to Canada to study early childhood education, moved back to Sri Lanka to marry and have two children, and returned to Canada to train as a teacher and later settle there. Over the course of a year, I observed the teacher, Dorothy, during her two practica and conducted interviews with her. What emerged from our discussions was not only how Dorothy’s story sedimented into her teaching practice but also how parts of her story or “history in person” (Holland et al., 1998) materialized in teaching artifacts that she produced in her planning and in her classroom design.

In our work together, Dorothy and I analyzed how texts such as lesson and unit plans, assignments, and her classroom design were motivated by Discourses (Gee, 1996) inhabiting her world. Dorothy was chosen because of her marked gift for teaching and her capacity, from the outset, for inclusive, integrative, and engaging teaching. After observations and discussions, it became evident that this gift derived from a mixing and melding together of parts of herself or as Todorov (1984) describes it, “two halves communicating with each other to look for common ground and translating them to understand each other” (p. 4). Beknownst or unbeknownst to Dorothy, she foregrounded and backgrounded her

habitus based on the needs of the moment and the student.

One of the more compelling examples of materializing Discourses and sedimenting them into texts derives from our discussion about a design of her ideal classroom that she created for a portfolio as the final assignment for the bachelor of education program. As a template of her practice, the design sedimented her traditional, skill-based literacy education in Sri Lanka; her tie to a tropical, lush place and to the environment; and her adoption of a more interactive and progressive approach to teaching math, which collectively represent what Kress (1997) refers to as “the motivated nature of the sign,” signaling the identity of a meaning maker (p. 19). These Discourses materialized in artifacts she created as a part of her practice—which signaled important aspects of her identity. In this way, Dorothy’s habitus sedimented into her classroom design. In Figure 2 you see Dorothy’s classroom space as a materialization of parts of herself.

The shapes within components, like the math center, differentiate parts of her history in person (her Discourses, her practices, her beliefs, her education). The triangles represent what she learned over the course of her teacher preparation: Math needs to be interactive and engage the student (i.e., learn by doing/constructivist approaches to math); independent and paired reading should take place in a comfortable environment, but active language work takes place at tables and chairs. Differentiated by dots, the plants, fish tank, and terrarium represent her love of the environment, tied to her childhood. Larger dots in the figure signify her belief in having children appreciate and acknowledge what they are studying and when they are studying it. Finally, diagonal lines sediment her own habitus—as a teacher she does not want to take center stage but wants to privilege student identities. As a pedagogic artifact tracing practices, her classroom design carries older and newer timescales, and interwoven within them are dispositions to meaning making. The “green” area with the plants and fish harks back to a discussion we had when she articulated her tie to the environment:

First of all, I would like to take care of the environment, which is very degraded; and I’m a person who was brought up with a lot of nature. Back in Sri Lanka, it is a very tropical country; so I would make sure there are a few plants in the class to give that effect, because that puts something extra to motivate, and a lot of visual aids to support students.

Beside the science center, there are coat hooks, a sink, and more plants as a reminder of the ecological, green theme that is central to her program and to

her classroom. To forge a strong connection among the disciplines of technology, math, and science, she places a computer station in between the math and science centers. The classroom therefore signals strong undercurrents of Dorothy's habitus sedimented into a diagram of what she envisions to be an exemplary classroom. The classroom design and the teacher's story recall our overall claim that there is a key thread we need to understand among texts—text makers—and the identity of the producer.

### *Sedimented identity in texts and affordance and constraints*

One aspect of tracing sedimented identities in texts is to look at the affordances and constraints of particular modes in expressing identity narratives. The concept of *affordance*, a term meaning what is possible in relation to modes when making a text, was problematized by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) when they asked,

Is affordance more to do with the materiality of the medium in which the mode is constituted, or is it more a matter of the work of a particular culture with a medium over time, or is it a combination of both, sometimes more the one, sometimes more the other? It is a question which is in need of more exploration. (p. 125)

The concept of affordance in multimodal meaning making is linked to what is possible in the making of a sign. The concept indicates how the possibility of using a mode connects with the “best fit” for the meaning maker's intention (Jewitt, 2005). Within the notion of affordance also is the recognition of the ways in which producers often explicitly or implicitly understand the potential of certain modes to achieve an end or effect. As part of a research project looking at the work of visual artists in South Yorkshire, I (Pahl) conducted a series of extended interviews with artists from the arts organization Heads Together, who were working in schools, in order to look at their practices. I published this in an article looking at the role culture plays in shaping affordances (Pahl, 2006). The small section of data below comes from an interview with an artist, Alice, talking about work in rural Yorkshire, funded by the local council. I highlight these data because they describe how affordance and meaning can be linked together, in that the artist drew on the context when making choices about the mode children and parents used for their art. It shows how those choices sediment into texts, and the materiality of the affordance, as well as context, shapes the text. Alice was asked to work with young people in a rural location

in Yorkshire. In this interview, she was describing the area to me:

Richmondshire is a huge district; it starts at Richmond on the one side, and it spreads across Swaledale and Wensleydale valleys and it drops down quite a long way as well.... This district goes from incredibly rural to the incredibly transient army population.

Alice summed up the space she was working in as “very small schools and sheep” but added that “people get closed off.” Alice was asked to bring the people together and find out what young people wanted, using fine art, photography, and writing, and produce an exhibition of their work that reflected this experience. As an artist, she saw this as being a project she worked on for herself, alongside the young people. Alice described the process of working on the project:

We worked for a whole week up there. We did some personal work as well, I did some drawing. We had to do this exhibition so we went around and drove around and sketched—went up early and went for some walks and went climbing along [and] immersed ourselves in the landscape.... That was the thing, it was that space really. Because that's where we were working. All of the work with the young people was around—[her coworker] and I did the most work together. We found that what worked best was to talk to them. We asked them lots of questions like what's it like 'round here, what do you see when you come out of your house, what do you see...? I was working with the younger ones, they were 3 or 4 upwards, and they would say, “Oh, there's chickens and sheep and cows,” and when I said there's no cows where I live, they said, “Wow, oh, is that true?” So we would just start asking about where they lived and what they did, and the work that they did was around them—some of them started out drawing what we could see. (Interview, Alice, February 2005)

Alice described how working with the young people was affected by the context and the cultural experiences of the people who lived within the landscape in which she was immersed. When the exhibition opened, the effect was of “blue skies and sheep” because the context for the artistic work had shaped the exhibition. As Alice said,

Then we collected all this stuff and brought it down and we laid it out in the office. [The artist and her colleague] wanted to represent the top of the exhibition as a landscape and as a journey. And then with all the other work, we just used a background of their work of greens and blues in stone walls and overlaid it with work—winning pieces we put on top of that so basically the exhibition has grown from that. (Interview, Alice, February 2005)

Alice's description of the exhibition is very much a reflection of how she felt about the landscape, and

she has drawn on the cultural affordances of the discussion with the children and her experience of the landscape to make her own statement. Through her discussions with me, I was able to see how her internal vision shaped the affordances available to her for meaning making. She drew on what the children said to make the artwork, and her visual representation was shaped by the immersion she and her colleague experienced within the landscape. Her representation was affected by this experience, and the resulting text was a sedimented expression of the various stages she had experienced while putting together the exhibition (Pahl, 2006). The notion of affordances and constraints in the making of texts allows analysts to not only understand how it is possible to explore the sedimented identities within texts but also pay attention to what is and is not possible within the confines of particular modes and media. Alice's description of what was possible was heightened by her awareness of space. The space where she worked dictated how she put the exhibition together, and her use of materials reflected the content of the exhibition (sheep). But the space also dictated the exhibition's shape (as a landscape and a journey). Focusing on Alice's identities in practice as she moved through the project allows the resulting texts to be seen as an artifact of identities, reflecting her artistic habitus (Pahl).

### *Sedimenting home in school: Literacy practices as part of our identity*

Families are good places to start when researching sedimented identities in texts. As part of a yearlong study (Broad, Diiorio, Rowsell, & Tessaro, 2006; Rowsell, 2006) on bringing family literacy into literacy teaching at an inner-city school in Toronto, Rihana, a Muslim parent, spoke about literacy in her home. Rihana is a reader and always has been. Her parents read fiction and nonfiction voraciously, but her husband does not have as much interest in fiction; he reads some nonfiction. In particular, her husband is often seen at home reading fliers, with what she regarded as a frustrating habit of storing these fliers under the sofa in their living room. The fliers dealt with any number of items from computers on sale to used cars, but it was the format and the pictures and comparative price charts that interested him. What Rihana had recently noted was how her son, a struggling reader and writer, not only read fliers and housed them under his bed but also created them. She noted,

My husband likes stories of the past, like in Islamic history, or he has this stack of Urdu newspapers that he picks up

every day, and they sit under the sofa or in the corner somewhere, and I'm forever upset by it because he doesn't get rid of anything.... Ahmed has picked up this habit. The only thing he reads is fliers like his dad. He'll keep fliers in the corner, anywhere. (Interview, November 16, 2004)

What struck me (Rowsell) as Rihana spoke was not only the adoption of an intergenerational practice passed from father to son but also the fact that Ahmed, her son, went one step further and actually created his own version of the fliers. Ahmed has been considered at risk of failing literacy at various points in his schooling, and Rihana finds it difficult to spark any interest in language from him. In this instance of practice, Ahmed sedimented a learned, observed practice in a text within the comfort of his home. Ahmed had license and freedom within his home environment to embed as much of his own identity into texts as he wished (i.e., he is not constrained by standards or measures as he was at school). The skill of writing a flier became part of his literacy repertoire. This practice and these attendant texts are as much evidence of literacy skills as the types of activities that he was doing at school, but the schooling model of literacy (Street & Street, 1991) at the time did not necessarily align with his literate practices in the home and his habitus. In focus groups over the year, parents spoke about how their children's formative notions of literacy and what it means to be literate were forged at home through their familial patterns. Impressions, practices, and multimodal artifacts carried traces of sedimented identities. These artifacts housed essential information about meaning makers. Feeling at ease and letting habitus flow through was a key strand in our data.

### *Drawing together some threads: Implications for practice*

In these research studies there were themes that kept pointing back to the notion of *sedimented identities in texts*: familial literacy patterns, crossgenerational literacy habits, Discourses materializing in texts, affordances of particular modes together with cultural experiences sedimenting into texts, and a nexus between language and culture in the home. It is through our continual interactions with meaning making events that we come to solidify identities in practice.

The notion of "sedimented identities" can be used as a heuristic device to identify a triadic relationship in an artifact—where it is made, by whom, and through what set of practices. In a compendium

of research on principled practice for adolescent learners, Sturtevant et al. (2006) claimed,

As important as identity construction is in teaching all students, there is research to suggest that it alone is not sufficient for turning students into life-long readers and learners. For that to happen, educators must give equal attention to the contexts in which students become literate learners. (p. 13)

What we have offered in this commentary is an interpretative gaze that combines identities, practices, and contexts through analysis of meaning making. We believe that the concept can be useful for future literacy researchers in the following five ways:

1. First, it can enable researchers looking at children's text making in schools to identify ways in which children's written and drawn texts are concrete instantiations of habitus. Filling out this information with the use, for example, of take-home cameras can enable a research project to be undertaken on sedimented identities in texts.
2. Second, fundamental to the concept of sedimented identity is the understanding that individuals (children, adolescents, and adults, differently but equally) make meaning and produce texts through multiple modalities. This understanding needs to be a starting point in literacy research.
3. Third, researchers can identify the concept of sedimented identities when tracing identity narratives over time, in ethnographic projects, for example. They can do so when coding transcripts and making links between texts, such as children's texts, oral discourse, parental narratives, and home field visits. Visual data can also fill out and enable understanding of the history of texts and text making across the domains of home and school.
4. Fourth, those working in research into informal learning—for example, in museums, family learning, or homes—can draw on the concept to let families tell them what kinds of practices are common and to trace intergenerational sedimentations. Sometimes this can be done with families, and the concept can be used in the curating of an exhibition, for example.
5. Finally, we believe this concept can enrich research into literacy education and provide literacy researchers and educators with a lens through which to look at texts as part of a

wider social process that is active, creative, and infused with identities in practice.

There are also important implications for pedagogy. Classrooms are spaces that can be infused with our students' identities. As children come to write, the host of experiences they have had since birth are brought to bear on the writing processes. By recognizing and honoring that experience, teachers can bring students' identities into the classroom. Ways in which cultural patterns are handed down over time can be traced in children's texts.

We think this work has relevance for readers of *Reading Research Quarterly* in that it makes us question the way texts come into being. By paying close attention to text production, and understanding the way in which practices—mediated by identities—sediment into texts, a view of text production emerges that is alive to what happens during the making of texts. This kind of work has implications for teachers in schools who work to represent children's lived realities. The reading of texts becomes an active process, whereby identities are located and found within texts. The making of texts, as in this work above, becomes one of actively researching lived practices and instantiating them within multimodal texts.

Teachers can take this framework and use it with students to consider the choices made when making texts, to trace back to homes and community settings to the origin of texts and to celebrate students' identities in classroom settings in order to support the creation of new identity-infused texts. Our purpose in writing this commentary is to encourage more research studies and perhaps more teaching that tracks discursive and multimodal patternings within texts. There is a complex relationship between the author of a text and the environment in which it was made. The four examples provide a possible sense of the ways in which ethnographic, longitudinal studies offer perspectives on the making of texts in families and communities.

**JENNIFER ROWSELL** is an assistant professor at Rutgers Graduate School of Education, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in elementary and secondary literacy education. She teaches courses in the areas of multimodality, New Literacy Studies, multiliteracies, and family literacy. Her research interests include the production of new media and digital technologies by international and local corporations, adolescent reading and writing practices in Web space, parent networks and the circulation of concepts about literacy, and developing arts-based/multimodal and new literacy-based teacher education programs. She can be contacted at Rutgers Graduate School of Education, 10 Seminary Place, Room 217, New Brunswick, NJ 08901, USA, or by e-mail at [jrowsell@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:jrowsell@rci.rutgers.edu).

**KATE PAHL** is a senior lecturer in education at the School of Education, University of Sheffield, where she teaches graduate-level courses in literacy and language and new literacies and working with communities. Previously, she worked as a family literacy teacher. Her research interests include the New Literacy Studies, multilingual literacies, narratives and artifacts in homes, family literacy policy and practice, and creativity and literacy. She can be contacted at University of Sheffield, School of Education, 388 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2JA, UK, or by e-mail at k.pahl@sheffield.ac.uk.

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