School's Out!

BRIDGING OUT-OF-SCHOOL LITERACIES WITH CLASSROOM PRACTICE

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Foreword by Shirley Brice Heath

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Foreword

This book makes us look to the past and future.

The editors and contributors have stepped courageously to the forefront of what will surely become a fundamental phenomenon characterizing civil societies in the coming decades. They have laid out principles and practices of learning as a full-time human activity without physical barriers of walls, doors, and fences or arbitrary limits imposed by age, gender, race, class, and geography. This is a big step forward within the profession of education that has for the past millennium “housed” teachers, students, texts, and tests to protect, promote, and privilege them. Upon the orders of the State—whether communist, socialist, or capitalist—education has implemented laws upholding age-grading and divisions based on categories of identity: sexual, ethnic, economic, and sociodemographic. For professional education, then, this book is ahead of its time, and points us toward a positive future.

However, outside the physical barriers and arbitrary limits of education, the concept of learning unrestricted by time and place is an ancient and instinctive one. As long as human memory has been recorded, individuals and groups have represented in visual, musical, dramatic, and choreographic terms their indebtedness to learning without direct instruction or written authorized texts and imposed tests. Such learning, and its forms of celebration, have been a core theme of the literary arts across all societies. Scientists and inventors, as well as explorers, have recorded with astonishment and gratitude their revelations resulting from observing, experimenting, and learning from mistakes. Notice to the smallest and most unexpected details and patterns of change have led to major advances in medicine, engineering, artistic production, and countless other fields.

Within the past two decades, scientists wishing to understand beyond philosophical and theological terms what it means to be human have taken the brain and the body as unexplored territories that can tell us much about how cognitive, linguistic, and physical knowledge changes. Much of this work, particularly that which depends on crossing disciplines, has had minimal impact on time-honored professions such as medicine, law, and educa...
tion. Effects have moved rapidly, however, at the edges, in worlds we have come to call "alternative," in arenas that have little or no professional standing. In health practices, pre-scientists now work with art historians to grasp visual and spatial learning. Teaching hospitals, prisons, and entrepreneurial cooperatives depend on seminars, workshops, and mixed-media to demonstrate ways to control pain, to release anger, and to make profit, not only financially but also socially. These benefts extend individual lives and improve the quality of life in communities.

It is worth reecting on contemporary forces that may be critical to the current appeal of "alternative" learning strategies, contexts, and agents. These same forces, no doubt, lie also behind the creation of this book. At least three such forces are simultaneously converging on professional education. The rst seems to be a sense of extraordinary eort by individuals, groups, and governments to generate improvement. The desire here is not only the more rapid and effective learning of more information and skills by more of us, but also a better means of putting people and knowledge to work on critical societal problems.

A close second among forces drawing us to new means of spreading learning environments is the atmosphere of desperation driven by the realization that technological challenges, health crises, environmental deterioration, and group hatreds far outstrip current skills and accumulated information. Formal education cannot, and should not, be the prime source of the will and the wisdom to imagine and sustain the means necessary to have a signicant positive inuence on the sources of our desperation. Complementary and alternative environments and motivations, as well as ends of learning, have to be available in powerfully attractive and sustaining shapes. These are certain to work in different combinations for every individual at particular points along the life-span, and through the various changes in health, employment, sel-interests, and community identity we all face at one time or another.

Finally, perhaps the most critical force pushing us to alternative ways of learning is the quickening pace of change and mutation properties of the ills that mark contemporary societies. Institutions have always been created to withstand change and hence do not learn or adapt with speed; inertia protects and sustains institutions and their members and must always do so to provide core stability for governments. Taken together, these three forces outstrip the capacity of professional or formal education to address them. They are not likely to diminish or disappear, so we can be sure that the push toward alternatives is likely to accelerate.

The editors and authors of this book demonstrate just how often and how well learning goes beyond institutional walls. The learning documented and theorized here bears qualities of generativity, inclusion, and dynamism that is difficult to maintain within institutions of formal education. But most important, though only a beginning, these accounts illustrate possibilities of extension and expansion. Much more can, and indeed must, be done to guide communities toward taking responsibility for ensuring healthy, challenging learning as part of everyday life. Entire nations, such as England, and numerous communities, such as those engaged in the international learning communities movement, have already moved ahead to ensure that learning has no physical or temporal boundaries. The capacity of this learning is certainly of great need in the United States for generating health awareness, information absorption and adaptation, and peaceful productive cooperation.

This book as a rst step will, we hope, inspire not a march or any such regimented forward movement. Instead, an ideal response would be something more akin to a grand series of newly inspired dances, absorbing hikes, and pleasurable jaunts—the effects of which will be felt in the quickened pulse, broadened experience, and deepened curiosity of learners when they cross the thresholds of formal education.

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Introduction

Negotiating the Boundaries Between School and Non-School Literacies

GLYNDI A HULL and KATHERINE SCHULTZ

School's out! School's out!
Teacher let the fools out!
No more pencils, no more books!
No more teacher's dirty looks!
(Knapp & Knapp, 1976)

During the last two decades researchers from a range of disciplines have documented the considerable intellectual accomplishments of children, youth, and adults in out-of-school settings, accomplishments that often contrast with their poor school-based performance and suggest a different view of their potential as capable learners and doers in the world. Much of this work has dealt with the practice of mathematics—for example, young candy-sellers in Brazil who, despite being unschooled, develop flexible methods for arriving at correct answers to math problems important to their vending (Saxe, 1988; see also Cole, 1996). Worlds away, southern California suburbanites have shown a comparable competence in real-world arithmetic problem-solving—figuring out the best bargain in supermarkets or calculating precise portions as part of weight-watching activities (Lave, 1988). Like the children in South America, these adults provide the illusion of incompetence in their performance on formal tests of the same mathematical operations.
In literacy research, too, there has been much interest in recent years in documenting and analyzing the writing and reading activities that go on out of school, activities diverse in function, form, and purpose. Some of these studies have highlighted the kinds of writing that adults do as part of everyday life (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton & Ivanic, 1991). Others have highlighted the literacy-related activities that many adolescents do on their own, including diaries and plays (e.g., Camitta, 1993; Finders, 1997), as well as the literacies that accompany engagement in sports and hobbies (e.g., Mahiri, 1998). Some researchers, while also focusing on youth culture, have centered their analyses of literate activity on notions of "text" more broadly conceived—the graffiti produced by youth in gangs (Cintron, 1991), for example, or Internet-related surfing and chat (e.g., Cohen, 2000; Knobel, 1999; Lankshear, 1997). In addition to personal literacy practices and those that flourish in friendship or peer networks, some researchers have noted the high levels of literacy and language use that anchor a variety of community-based activities (e.g., Ball, 2000; Cushman, 1998; Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Moss, 1993).

Others, notably Flower and colleagues (Flower, in preparation; Flower, Long, & Higgins, 2000) and Cole (e.g., Cole, 1996), have designed and organized theory-driven after-school programs. Others, researchers and teachers in the field of composition studies, have linked out-of-school literacy activities with in-school writing instruction, developing "service-learning" courses in which college students volunteer their time in a variety of organizations in exchange for real-world practice in writing (e.g., Adler-Kassner, Crooks, & Watters, 1997). Still another branch of out-of-school research on literacy has been attentive to the considerable pressures on recent immigrants to learn and put to the use the literate practices of their adopted countries (e.g., Weinstein-Shr, 1993). And finally, first spurred by worries about the economy and then inspired by features of our "new capitalism," researchers and corporate leaders alike have become interested in the role of literacy in the context of work (e.g., Hart-Landsberg & Reder, 1997; Hull, Jury, Ziv, & Katz, 1996).

In this edited volume we feature research on literacy in out-of-school settings—homes, after-school programs, and community-based organizations—where literacy practices flourish. This work was conducted with children, youth, and adults in quite different contexts and cultural worlds—an after-school program in Chicago, a YMCA in the California Bay Area, a community center in Pittsburgh, and the homes of immigrants from Mexico and Cambodia—yet it shares a focus on non-school practices. Why, we have wanted to know, does literacy so often flourish out of school? We hope the chapters in this volume will begin to answer this question through their rich and detailed histories, descriptions, and analyses of literate activities.

A second goal of the book is to imagine a range of possible relationships between school and non-school contexts. Could research on literacy and out-of-school learning help us think again and anew about literacy teaching and learning in the classroom—in formal, "traditional" educational settings? And if so, how? Interest in research on out-of-school learning is currently keen, and we are beginning to have portraits of children and adults performing successfully in a variety of out-of-school tasks that they've not been able or eager to complete in the classroom. But we are troubled by the tendency we have noticed to build and rely on a great divide between in school and out of school. Sometimes this dichotomy relegates all good things to out-of-school contexts and everything repressive to school. Sometimes it dismisses the engagement of children with non-school learning as merely frivolous or remedial or incidental. What we want to argue in this volume is that, rather than setting formal and informal education systems and contexts in opposition to each other, we might do well to look for overlap or complementarity or perhaps a respectful division of labor. Dewey (1899/1998) argued many years ago that there is much we can learn about successful pedagogies and curricula by foregrounding the relationship between formal education and ordinary life. "From the standpoint of the child," he observed, "the great waste in the school comes from its inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside of the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school" (pp. 76–78).

In this edited volume we bring together a number of researchers and educators who have made important contributions to understanding literacy learning through ethnographic or field-based studies in homes, community organizations, and after-school programs. The chapters pay particular attention to instances in which adults, youth, and children engage successfully in language and literacy practice and performance out of school. Yet they don't romanticize out-of-school contexts, but try instead to acknowledge the complexities, tensions, and opportunities that are often born there—when, to take one example, participants from different cultural worlds come together to learn, work, and play in after-school organizations. To signal the importance of building bridges between school, home, and community, we include responses to each chapter by classroom teachers and teacher educators. We intend these responses to shed light on what seems noteworthy or problematic to school-based educators about research on literacy out-of-school.

The Organization of This Book

The collection begins with two introductory chapters jointly written by the editors. Despite the fact that there exists a growing body of research on literacy in a variety of out-of-school contexts, to our knowledge no one has
yet synthesized this work. The first chapter reviews three theoretical traditions that have significantly informed research on literacy in out-of-school settings: the ethnography of communication; Vygotskian perspectives and activity theory; and the New Literacy Studies. We report here on our discovery that most of the conceptual advances in thinking about literacy in the last two decades have come from research on out-of-school literacy. The second chapter features recent research with children, adolescents, and adults engaged in literacy-related, non-school-based activities. We use vignettes drawn from this research to test the boundaries between out-of-school and in-school literacy and to draw attention to tensions, complementarity, overlap, and possible divisions of labor.

Part II, Literacy at Home and in the Community, begins with a chapter by Ellen Skilton-Sylveste that features her three years of comparative participatory observation in homes and schools. Skilton-Sylveste highlights the striking differences between the home literacy practices of a Cambodian girl and her writing at school in order to reveal the often hidden and untapped linguistic and social resources of immigrant students. Situating this examination of literacy, peer culture, and identity within the context of the Cambodian refugee experience, Skilton-Sylveste describes Nan’s home literacies. Rather than arguing that there is a mismatch between home and school cultures, Skilton-Sylveste suggests that Nan chose popularity rather than academic success at the same time that she brought to school abundant, but largely unnoticed, capabilities. She concludes by outlining some of the ways in which teachers might discover students’ invisible resources in the context of a peer culture that can mitigate against academic success.

Chapter 4, by Juan C. Guerra and Marcia Farr, describes the writing of two Mexicanas who are part of a social network the two researchers came to know over the course of 10 years of research and collaboration. They examine spiritual and autobiographical writings in order to reveal and understand cross-cultural misunderstandings in college composition classrooms. Guerra and Farr conclude with a discussion of the possibilities for writing classrooms, suggesting that instructors both respect students’ approaches and insist on essayist literacy in place of taking just one of these stances. In addition, they argue for the development of a more flexible conception of academic writing.

Part III, Literacy in After-School Programs, begins with a chapter by Ellenore Long, Wayne C. Peck, and Joyce A. Baskins in which they offer a model for the use of computer technology in community centers, one which has at its heart building human capacity and fostering community renewal. They call their model STRUGGLE, and they introduce it through their work with community members at a modern-day settlement house in Pittsburgh. Like many community activists, Long, Peck, and Baskins worry about the “digital divide” that separates lower-income communities from many of the resources associated with an information age, but we find their conception of how to cross that divide as different from standard fare as it is lyrical and thoughtful. Drawing variously on recent notions of cultural production theory, a Franaian-inspired commitment to personal and social transformation, and cognitively oriented research on rhetoric and problem-solving, they interweave portraits of young people and adults who come together “at the table” to shape responses to both personal and community dilemmas. Writing, they remind us, is at the heart of STRUGGLE, although the tool itself is an example of multimedia computer technology. Long, Peck, and Baskins thus offer an example of community-based literacy practices that build on both university-inspired research and community talents and resources, and that move young people toward views of themselves as agents of their own life choices.

The Fifth Dimension is an after-school “activity system” initially developed by Mike Cole and his colleagues at the University of California, San Diego, to bring computer technologies into after-school settings in a manner carefully organized to support students’ academic growth, especially literacy. It has spread to sites across the United States and internationally, including, as Gillian Dowley McNamara and Sarah Sivright show us in Chapter 6, an after-school computer lab serving African American children in Chicago. These authors focus on writing development and explore how children who were struggling in school benefited from participation in written dialogues with peers across a variety of contexts and under the guidance of a playful and caring adult figure known as “the Wizard.” Drawing on test scores and qualitative case studies based on a year of data collection, McNamara and Sivright concluded that this instantiation of the Fifth Dimension, with its incorporation of play and its attention to the personal interests of the children, supported children’s literacy learning across multiple dimensions. However, their chapter also reveals the many complexities and challenges of helping children develop their voices through writing after school.

Ellen Cushman and Chalon Emmons use their fieldwork at a San Francisco Bay Area YMCA to characterize those literacies that resulted when college students and children worked and played together and developed relationships of mutual trust and support. The instructors of a university-based course, Cushman and Emmons describe their efforts to promote stronger connections between their campus and a nearby community by giving children in an after-school program access to material, informational, and human resources, and by encouraging them to imagine a variety of futures and selves. Introducing readers both to undergraduates and to children from the Y, they offer a winsome portrait of the resulting collabora-
tions and relationships, but they also highlight the tensions that arose—the pull in one direction, for example, to teach “standard” English, and in the other, to encourage children’s creativity. Running as a thread through this chapter is the authors’ construct of “hybrid literacies,” a term they use to refer to the literacy practices developed by the children and the undergraduates. These hybrid literacies, say Cushman and Emmons, combine elements of oral and written discourse, multiple genres, and several forms of representation. Most importantly, they stand apart by giving primacy to social relationships; that is, literacy provided occasions for young people from different worlds to come to know and learn from each other.

In sum, Part I is our review of theory and research on out-of-school literacy, and Parts II and III, researchers’ reports of their recent after-school or out-of-school research and teachers’ and other educators’ responses to that work. We hope in these chapters to have crossed boundaries between school and non-school understandings of literacies. But, as Elyse Edman-Aadahl shows us in the book’s final chapter, there is another great divide to be bridged—that between policy and research and practice. In particular, she introduces us to policy perspectives on non-school time, youth organizations, and school–community partnerships. In so doing, she reveals how differently, to take one example, after-school time is represented in literacy studies as compared to policy debates, where arguments are cast in terms of the “productivity of youth” or the “value of discretionary time.” She urges us, too, to consider the need to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with community-based organizations and borrows Cushman and Emmons’ conception of “hybrid literacies” in order to ask for “hybrid organizational work practices.” And she warns, given the huge interest in after-school activities these days on the part of so many public and private agencies, that we may lose what makes after-school activities special, as standards and accountability packages seep from school to after-school sites. Yet Edman-Aadahl’s chapter is, in the end, optimistic, celebrating the wealth of opportunities available to those who wish to nurture partnerships with community-based organizations. Through the policy perspectives that she introduces in her chapter, she helps us approach those partnerships more thoughtfully in terms of understanding both constraints and possibilities.

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The childhood verse “School’s Out” has been recited by generations of North American schoolchildren, and it captures something of their rau- cous joy in the freedom signaled by the school bell at the end of the day. In this book we celebrate that exuberance, but we also hope to funnel it back into the classroom. Thus we call for researchers and educators to reexamine the boundaries and dispositions that characterize the school/out-of-school divide and to reconfigure our taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes rich locations for literacy and learning.

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Introduction


Locating Literacy Theory in Out-of-School Contexts

KATHERINE SCHULTZ and GLYNDIA HULL

In public discourse, literacy has long been associated with schooling. Talk about literacy crises is often accompanied by calls for better schools and more rigorous curricula, and images of reading and writing are closely connected to school-based or essayist forms of literacy. However, when we widen the lens of what we consider literacy and literate activities, homes, communities, and workplaces become sites for literacy use. It was in fact in these out-of-school contexts, rather than in school-based ones, that many of the major theoretical advances in the study of literacy have been made in the past 25 years. Studies of literacy out-of-school have been pivotal in shaping the field. Indeed, to talk about literacy these days, both in school and out, is to speak of events, practices, activities, ideologies, discourses, and identities, and at times to do so almost unreflectively, since these categories and terminology have become so much a part of our customary ways of thinking in academic domains. Through an exploration of three major theoretical traditions that have launched numerous studies of literacy, we show that in large part this new theoretical vocabulary sprang from examinations of the uses and functions of literacy in contexts other than school.

The three theoretical perspectives that we treat in this chapter are the ethnography of communication (e.g., Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988), Vygotskian perspectives and activity theory (e.g., Engeström, 1998; Scribner & Cole, 1981), and the New Literacy Studies (e.g., Gee, 1996; Street, 1993a, 1993b). To be sure, these theoretical categories are not impermeable and current projects often draw on more than one of these traditions. For instance, a study might reflect both certain methodological insights from the ethnography of communication and also the interest in...
power relations made manifest by the New Literacy Studies. And in some important ways, the more recent theoretical points of view are made possible by, even draw their life from, the earlier ones. However, our categories do provide a useful historical lens for seeing more clearly the pivotal role played by studies of literacy out of school, and they serve as well as a heuristic for mapping the ever-growing territory of research and practice in out-of-school settings, a topic we turn to in Chapter 2.

One other caveat before we begin. There are some ways in which the distinction between in school and out of school sets up a false dichotomy. By foregrounding physical space (i.e., contexts outside the school ‘house door’ or time (i.e., after-school programs), we may ignore important conceptual dimensions that more readily account for successful learning or its absence. We may fail to see the presence of school-like practice at home (e.g., Street & Street, 1991) or non-school-like activities in the formal classroom. Such contexts are not sealed tight or boarded off; rather, one should expect to find, and one should look to account for, the movement from one context to the other.

In a related way, Cole (1995) calls our attention to a possible danger in treating the notion of context as a container, as that which surrounds and therefore, of necessity, causes or influences or shapes. Writing primarily about hierarchical levels, Cole worries about the tendency to see a larger context (i.e., the school) as determining the smaller (i.e., the classroom). But his comments can be extended to apply more simply to our case of the adjacent contexts of school and out of school. That is, in any analysis of out-of-school programs, we will want to avoid the temptation to oversimplify the creative powers of context—to assume that successful learning in an after-school program occurs merely or only because it occurs after school.

All of this said, school has come to be such a particular, specialized institution, with its own particular brand of learning (cf. Miettinen, 1999), that it does seem useful to set it in opposition to other institutions and different contexts for learning. Doing so will allow us to consider what we’ve grown accustomed to taking as natural and normal as actually an artifact of a particular kind of learning that is associated primarily with schooling.

**The Ethnography of Communication**

We turn first to a series of studies that take what is now known as a sociolinguistic perspective on literacy and schooling. These studies reflect the conceptual leap made by bringing anthropological and linguistic perspectives and research methods to the study of literacy. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars from traditions outside of education, in particular anthropology and linguistics, looked beyond schools to family and community settings to understand how urban schools might reach students from cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds that differed from the mainstream. Educators were concerned that students of color, especially those from low-income families, were not doing well in school. Up until that time, the most prevalent explanations for children’s difficulties in school were deficit theories that blamed students and families. Anthropologists interested in the study of language and literacy in schools brought to the study of classrooms a view of culture as “patterns in a way of life characteristic of a bounded social group and passed down from one generation to the next” (Eisenhart, in press, p. 4). This view of socialization and culture prompted researchers to look to settings outside of schools in order to understand the patterns of school success and school failure across groups of students.

In 1962 Dell Hymes and John Gumperz organized a panel for the American Anthropology Association that brought together researchers from the fields of linguistics and anthropology. In his introduction to the proceedings, Hymes (1964) urged linguists to study language in context and anthropologists to include the study of language in their description of cultures. Hymes proposed the concept of an “ethnography of communication,” which would focus on the communicative patterns of a community and a comparison of these patterns across communities. Although Hymes intended the ethnography of communication to include writing and literacy, the early focus on speaking led many to believe his emphasis was on spoken language (Hornberger, 1995).

Then, in 1965, a group of scholars from a range of disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and education, were brought together by the Office of Education to examine the relationship between children’s language and school success. Since this came in the midst of Lyndon Johnson’s expansive Great Society programs, researchers were asked to consider why schools were failing “low-income and minority” children (Cazden, 1981). The conclusion reached by the group was that many “school problems” of “minority” students could be explained by discontinuities, specifically differences in language use, between a child’s home and school communities (Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1972). As a result, the National Institute of Education funded a number of studies to examine these issues. A major finding from this initial work was that children socialized in diverse contexts come to school differentially prepared to respond to the demands of school. As a result they experience school differently, resulting in success for some and failure for others. Hymes’s (e.g., 1974) notion of the communicative event, which included components such as the setting, participants,
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Locating Literacy Theory in Out-of-School Contexts

norms, and genres, became a useful framework for the documentation of language use, including literacy, in and out of school settings.

Following this initial work in language and speaking, Basso (1974) suggested that an ethnography of writing should be the centerpiece of ethnographies of communication. He called for studies of writing as it is distributed across a community rather than a single focus on the classroom. Basso introduced the term writing event, describing it as an act of writing and characterizing writing, like speaking, as a social activity. Building in turn on Basso's work and prefiguring the theory behind the New Literacy Studies (e.g., Gee, 1996; Street, 1993a), Szwed (1981) argued for an ethnography of literacy and proposed that, rather than a single continuum or level of literacy, we should imagine a variety of configurations or a plurality of literacies.

Although Basso's description seemed to arise out of an academic interest in bringing together sociolinguistics and anthropology, Szwed's focus on an ethnography of writing was a response to the "literacy crisis" of the 1980s. He suggested that despite the claims of a crisis of "illiteracy," we had not yet conceptualized literacy, nor did we know how literacy or reading and writing were used in social life. He linked his research interest directly to schools and explained that the definitions of reading (and we can add writing and speaking) that schools use may not take into account the reading a student does out of school. Thus he called for a study of the relationship between school and the world outside it and specified that the focus should be an inventory of one community's needs and resources.

Szwed's call for the cataloguing of how and where literacy occurred in the community was the basis for many studies that sought to document empirically this new concept of multiple literacies (c.f., Hornberger, 1995; Shuman, 1986; Weinstein-Sher. 1993; see also Chapters 3, 4, 7, this volume).

Around the same time, Heath (1981) signaled the importance of documenting the social history of writing, for which she coined the term ethnohistory of writing. Like Szwed, Heath made explicit links between writing in social or family settings and methods of writing instruction in school. Using preliminary data from what would become a pathbreaking ethnography, Heath described ethnographic research begun in response to complaints made by junior and senior high school teachers that it was impossible to teach students to write. According to the teachers, their classrooms were filled with students who planned to work in the textile mills, where reading and writing were not needed for work. Heath concluded that while there was a debate about how to teach writing in school, there was little systematic description of the functions of writing for specific groups of people. Her study suggested the possibility of using ethnographic studies of writing to reorganize schooling with potentially dramatic results. This early work, followed by her well-known study detailed later in this chapter (Heath, 1985), supported the notion of teacher and student research and prompted both teachers and students to investigate the functions and uses of literacy in their communities in order to inform classroom practice.

Likewise, Hymes's (1981) ethnographic research funded by the National Institute of Education, which included Heath as a team member, used conversations with teachers about their difficulties in teaching language arts as a starting point. Researchers worked with teachers to uncover the dimensions of their difficulties with students and to understand students' perspectives on their school experiences. The researchers were quickly convinced that any investigation of school phenomena would require the study of classroom and school structures as well as those in children's homes and wider communities. This work became the core of Gilmore and Glathorn's (1982) collection of educational ethnographies, Children in and out of School. Throughout the studies reported in this volume, schools were portrayed as cultures organized around a set of values and beliefs that frequently were not shared by the students and surrounding communities in which they are located. A major finding of this research was that children socialized in different contexts come to school differentially prepared to participate in school, which may result in failure—an argument now referred to as continuity-discontinuity theory (see Jacobs & Jordan, 1993). Heath (1982) explained in this volume that if education is seen as a process of cultural transmission, then formal schooling is only a part of this process. In her chapter on ethnography in education, Heath made an early argument for the need to study schools and classrooms in relation to the broader community or culture. She called for comprehensive, broad-based community studies.

Heath's (1985) long-term examination of and participation with three contiguous communities over a decade in the 1960s and 1970s illustrated how each community—a black working-class community, a white working-class community, and a racially mixed middle-class community—socialized their children into very different language practices. Heath documented each community's "ways with words" and found, for instance, that members of the white working-class community rarely used writing and generally viewed literacy as a tool to help them remember events and to buy and sell items. Although parents collected reading and writing materials so that children were surrounded by print, the parents rarely read themselves and used reading and writing mostly for functional purposes. In contrast, white residents of the black working-class community did not accumulate reading materials, reading was more seamlessly integrated into their daily activities and social interactions. Literacy was jointly accomplished in social settings.

Heath concluded that, "The place of language in the life of each social group [in these communities and throughout the world] is interdependent
with the habits and values of behaving shared among members of that group" (1983, p. 11). When children from each of these communities entered school, only the middle-class students, whose language use was similar to that of the teachers, were successful. In this way, Heath demonstrated how children from each of these communities were differentially prepared for school, which promoted and privileged only middle-class ways of using language. This study inspired and paved the way for many other research projects, though most were not as extensive or long term as Heath’s own work (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 1984; Gilmore, 1983; Weinstein-Shr, 1993). These studies helpfully documented both the functions and uses of literacy practices in various communities as well as the differential preparation children from different communities brought to school.

Begun as a turn away from schools and toward communities, Hymes’s conception of the ethnography of communication gave researchers and educators a frame for noticing the resources students bring to school and provided teachers with a way to imagine changing their pedagogy and curricula rather than assuming students themselves had to adapt and change. Subsequently, many researchers began to catalogue and describe the ways in which young people used language in competent and, indeed, exciting ways, in and out of school, in a manner that their teachers might not have noticed or acknowledged. This work not only reframed and broadened conceptions of literacy, it also gave researchers a new lens for documenting learning in out-of-school contexts.

**Vygotskian and Activity Theory Perspectives**

If the ethnography of communication grew from the union of two fields—linguistics and anthropology—activity theory was born of the need to reimagine a third discipline, that of psychology. As richly documented in various accounts (e.g., Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1998; Wertsch, 1991), this effort has centered on theorizing about and investigating not the mind in isolation or the mind as automaton, but mind in society or culture in mind. Whereas ethnographies of communication took and continue to have as their main focus the role of language in learning, with a special emphasis on language differences in and out of school, activity theory chooses a different centerpiece, learning and human development. To be sure, activity theory had its origins in the work of the Soviet scholar Lev Vygotsky, who placed a premium on the role of language as the premier psychological tool. He gave pride of place as well to written language. But it is certainly the case that many researchers who adopt an activity theory perspective get along quite well without directing their research toward language or writing per se (cf. Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki, 1999). This is because they are interested instead in honoring “activity” as a unit of analysis, an enterprise that might or might not include an analysis of sign-mediated communication per se as a principle concern.

Thus our discussion in this chapter of Vygotskian perspectives and activity theory represents but a small, if significant, slice of the pie: those pivotal theoretical studies that have examined literacy—literacy, that is, as part of integral units of human life, motivated by human goals, enacted in the course of everyday activities, especially beyond the school. We begin by briefly revisiting Vygotsky’s ideas about the importance of writing, move next to attempts to test his claims empirically, and turn finally to a few projects that embody present-day formulations of activity theory. We ask, all the while, why these researchers have been interested in examining literacy out of school and what thereby they have learned.

Vygotsky believed that human sign systems, such as language, writing, and mathematics, have significant consequences for how we think and how we interact with the world. As the products of human history that emerge over time and vary in their nature and use from culture to culture, such sign systems, or psychological tools as Vygotsky called them, structure mental activity, mediating between thought and action and interaction. Writing, Vygotsky reasoned, is a sign system that is especially noteworthy for its far-reaching impacts on thinking. The effects of psychological tools such as writing will vary, he also wagered, depending on the nature of the symbol systems available at particular historical junctures and their uses in particular societies.

In the 1930s, with the help of Alexander Luria, Vygotsky saw the opportunity to test this theory by empirically investigating how intellectual functioning might be affected by cultural change. Mounting a major field-based research project, Luria traveled to Central Asia, where vast and rapid reforms were at that time in progress—reforms requiring illiterate farmers to take part in collective ownership, for example, to use new agricultural technologies, and to acquire literacy through schooling. Luria found that the participants in his research did indeed respond differently to a variety of experimental tasks related to perception, classification, and reasoning, depending on their exposure to literacy and schooling. This he took as confirmation of Vygotsky’s theory that cultural change affects thinking. But given the complexity of the setting, we might ask exactly which change impacted thinking—was it literacy, or schooling, or collective farming, or other major shifts in the organization of everyday life? It is impossible to say. Further, Luria seemed to put too much stock in certain culturally biased test materials, in particular the syllogisms that were for a long time a standard part of the cross-cultural researcher’s experimental arsenal. He didn’t.
that is, take into account that such materials might merely measure an individual's familiarity with school-based types of tasks, rather than a person's ability to think abstractly or logically.

Thus a quick foray into the Soviet landscape of days gone by illustrates the preoccupation with literacy that was at the heart of Vygotsky's work, as well as aspects of his theorizing that still hold sway, especially his focus on writing as a mediational tool or the power of written language as an instrument for thinking. But the excursion also allows us to introduce the first important rationale within this tradition of work for juxtaposing school and non-school environments—that is, as a means (albeit often flawed) for ascertaining the effects of literacy/schooling on thought or cognitive development. If literacy is acquired in school, the reasoning went, and if adults and children differ in the amount of schooling to which they've been exposed, then whatever differences appear on tests of mental activity can be attributed to literacy—or at least to literacy coupled with schooling. A great deal of cross-cultural research during the 1960s was driven by just such reasoning. Although the majority of this work was limited by methodologies with a Western cultural bias, not to mention what now appears to be a naïve faith in the efficacy of schooling, one within-culture comparison stands out both for its methodological savoir faire and its contribution to current conceptions of literacy: the monumental analysis of literacy among the Vai conducted by Scribner and Cole (1981).

In the early 1970s, at the same time that linguists and ethnographers had begun to apply the approach called the ethnography of communication to problems of language difference in and out of school in the United States, psychologists Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole were organizing a research project in Liberia. Hoping to pick up where Vygotsky's theorizing had left off, they devised an ambitious plan to investigate the cognitive consequences of literacy but to avoid the methodological confounds that marred Luria's work. In particular, Scribner and Cole drew on local cultural practices in designing the content of their experiments, and they also decoupled the effects of literacy from the effects of schooling. The latter they could accomplish handily, since the Vai boast the unusual distinction of having invented an original writing system, the learning of which takes place out of school. While classes in government-sponsored schools were taught in English, and Qur'anic study was conducted in Arabic, the Vai used their indigenous script for specialized purposes such as record-keeping and letter-writing. Thus this unusual patterning of languages, scripts, and acquisition practices made it possible to find people who were literate but had become so outside schooling, or who were literate through school and biliterate in two scripts acquired informally, and so on. Scribner and Cole's research team gathered ethnographic and survey-based descriptions of language and literacy use, and they also administered a complex battery of experimental tasks designed to tap the cognitive processes traditionally believed to be connected to literacy—abstraction, memorization, categorization, verbal explanation, and the like.

In a nutshell, Scribner and Cole did not find that literacy was responsible for great shifts in mental functioning of the sort the Soviets and many policy makers and educators expect even today. But they did demonstrate that particular writing systems and particular reading and writing activities foster particular, specialized forms of thinking. For example, Qur'anic literacy improved people's performance on certain kinds of memory tasks, whereas Vai script literacy gave people an edge in certain varieties of phonological discrimination. In addition to sorting out the specialized effects of particular literacies, Scribner and Cole identified the equally specialized effects of schooling in and of itself apart from literacy—namely, the enhanced ability of schooled people to offer certain kinds of verbal explanations.

It should be noted that in scaling down the grand claims often made about the effects of literacy on cognition, Scribner and Cole took care to note that Vai literacy was a restricted literacy; it served relatively few, and a noticeably narrow, range of functions. They also made clear that in societies where economic, social, and technological conditions converge to warrant the increased use of literacy, the potential exists for literacy to serve many more functions and therefore to be more deeply implicated in thinking processes. The current moment, we would point out, is just such a time, as communication via the Internet for economic, social, and personal purposes becomes more and more widespread. Yet if we have learned anything from Scribner and Cole, it should be that literacy is not literacy is not literacy. Specialized forms of reading and writing, both in school and out, have specialized and distinctive effects, even in an information age. Scribner and Cole were the very first to teach us this.

In fact, they were the first, to our knowledge, to introduce the now-omnipresent term practice as a way to conceptualize literacy. Recently Cole (1995) has written about the current popularity of terms such as practice in studies of cognitive development. He attributes this popularity, as well as that of related terms such as activity, context, and situation, to a widespread desire these days to move beyond a focus on the individual person as a unit for psychological analysis. Cole has also traced the theoretical origins of this new language (1995, 1996). Looking back to Marx, for example, he explains that the notion of practice was a way to get around the separation of the mental and the material. Consulting post-Marxist social
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not wholly defined through our participation in society’s labor, it is unlikely we can fully understand the life cycle of development without examining what adults do when they work” (1997, p. 299). At its very core, then, activity theory reminds us to look not just in school and in research laboratories but outside them, always with the goal of capturing “human mental functioning and development in the full richness of its social and artificial texture” (Cole, Engeström, & Vasquez, 1997, p. 13). For literacy, this perspective opens the door to studies of reading, writing, and speaking within the context of a panoply of activities, activities themselves motivated by larger purposes and aims than literacy itself.

The New Literacy Studies

Located at the crossroads of sociolinguistic and anthropological theories of language and schooling and ethnographic and discourse methodologies is the recently conceptualized field of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Gee, 1996; Street, 1993a). Characterized by their focus on an understanding of literacies as multiple and situated within social and cultural practices and discourses, these studies point to the central role of power. As compared to the emphasis on language, learning, writing, and development in the studies reviewed in the first two sections, the NLS research has as its focus literacy and discourse. Like the other two theoretical traditions, the New Literacy Studies are noteworthy for their emphasis on literacy in out-of-school contexts. New Literacy Studies build on the ethnographic tradition of documenting literacy in local communities, often adding an analysis of the interplay between the meanings of local events and a structural analysis of broader cultural institutions and practices. Gee, a linguist who has been central to this field, situates the New Literacy Studies—together with the ethnography of communication and studies based on activity theory—within a group of movements that have taken a “social turn” from a focus on the study of individuals to an emphasis on social and cultural interaction (Gee, 2000). He points out that while these movements claim that meaning (or writing or literacy) is always situated, they often fail to articulate the mutually constitutive nature of their contexts.

Most work done under the banner of the New Literacy Studies takes “literacy” as its central unit of analysis. But Gee introduced and popularized a broader category, “discourse,” which he defines as “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or ‘types of people’) by specific groups of people . . . [Discourses] are, thus, always and everywhere social and products of social histories” (Gee, 1996, p. viii.)

theorists such as Giddens (1979), he reminds us that “practice” has also been offered as a construct that avoids the impasse of agency versus determinism.

In The Psychology of Literacy, Scribner and Cole (1981) did not reveal the theoretical etymology of their use of the term practice. But they did explain in some detail the framework they constructed to interpret their data, a framework centered on the notion of “practice.” They defined a practice as “a recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge” (p. 256). Literacy, as a socially organized practice, “is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use” (p. 236). It follows that, “in order to identify the consequences of literacy, we need to consider the specific characteristics of specific practices” (p. 257).

Central to a plurality of literacies is the notion of practice, with its emphasis on purpose within context and the patterned interplay of particular skills, knowledge, and technologies. Within the Vygotskian tradition, research on out-of-school literacy sprang from the desire to contrast the schooled, and their presumed literacy-enhanced cognitive capabilities, with the non-schooled, who were suspected of thinking differently. Aware of the pitfalls of the tradition of cross-cultural research, Scribner and Cole redirected such efforts through a complex and culturally sensitive research design, and thereby they also changed our thinking in literacy studies. Like ethnographers of communication, they helped the field understand literacy as a multiple rather than a unitary construct, calling attention to the distinctive literacies that can exist beyond the schoolhouse door.

Scribner and Cole’s project is an example of early research within a then-burgeoning activity theory perspective (cf. Scribner, 1987). In subsequent years Scribner turned her attention to a major non-school endeavor, that of work, while Cole became invested in establishing sustainable after-school activity systems for children that juxtapose learning and play (see Chapter 6, this volume). In both their new research agendas, Scribner and Cole were interested in studying not the isolated mental tasks that were thought (erroneously) to be elicited by means of laboratory experiments, but thinking as part of ongoing activity. Activities, we learn from the theory by the same name, serve larger goals and life purposes, rather than as ends in themselves.

Thus it makes sense from this theoretical perspective to study thinking as part of a dominant life activity—such as school—but more significantly for our purposes in this essay, as part of play or work. As Scribner pointed out, we would be quite remiss were our accounts of human development to ignore entire realms of activity. For example, “While we are certainly
emphasis in original). Gee explains further that people use discourses to affiliate and display their membership in particular social groups. Discourses are, in effect, an "identity kit" or a group of behaviors, activities and beliefs that are recognizable by others. Discourses are inherently ideological and, like literacies, are embedded in social hierarchies and reflect the distribution of power. The NLS research often explores the ways in which individual identities, social relationships, and institutional structures are instantiated and negotiated through what people say and do with texts (Maybin, 2000). Gee's discussion of Discourses provides a frame for understanding the connections among literacy, culture, identity, and power. By virtue of turning our gaze to the larger construct of "Discourse," and insisting that literacy is always about more than literacy, Gee's framework draws out attention away from a solitary focus on learning and language use in school settings and positions us to understand learning, literacy, and identity construction in and out of schools and across the life span.

While Gee illustrates how the term literacy can be limiting, Street (e.g., 1994a; 1995; Street & Street, 1991) has argued that schooling and pedagogy constrain our conceptions of literacy practices. Street defines literacy as an ideological practice, rather than a set of neutral or technical skills as it is traditionally conceived in schools, adult literacy programs, and mass literacy campaigns (Street 1984, 1993a, 1993b, 1995). Rather than focusing on neutral bits of information, this conception of literacy highlights its embedded or social nature. Thus, according to Street, Western notions of school or academic literacy are one form of literacy among many literacies.

Street's theoretical conceptualization of the New Literacy Studies is derived from his fieldwork in Iran in the early 1970s (1984, 1995). Through a careful examination of and participation in village life, Street identifies three different kinds of literacy practices used by youth and adults in the village where he resided. These include what he terms "māktāb" literacy, or literacy associated with Islam and taught in the local Qur'ānic schools; "commercial" literacy, or the reading and writing used for the management of fruit sales in the local village; and school literacy, associated with the state schools recently built in both villages and urban areas. Although teaching and learning in the religious schools was based on memorizing portions of religious text and traditional teaching methods, there were local reading groups connected to the "māktāb" schools that gathered at members' homes to read passages from the Qur'ān and commentary on it, in order to generate discussions and interpretation. Thus Street, through close examination of literacy and learning in the context of village life and culture, paints a portrait that differs from the conventional descriptions of religious training in Islamic schools as consisting exclusively of rote memorization.

Street describes the ways in which the skills students learned through this "māktāb" literacy were hidden in relation to Western notions of literacy. Children and adults educated in this manner were considered "illiterate" relative to those educated in the state schools designed to prepare youth for jobs in the modern sector. However, according to Street, the skills connected with "māktāb" literacy were a preparation for the "commercial" literacy that, as it turned out, were key to economic success during the early 1970s, when oil production resulted in an economic expansion. During this time, many students who went to the state-run schools in urban areas found themselves without work, while their peers, educated in the "backward" villages and drawing on their "māktāb" literacy practices, prospered from their work selling fruit.

This study, along with others in the NLS tradition, connects microanalyses of language and literacy use with macroanalyses of discourse and power. It also points to the dangers of reifying schooled notions of literacy. As scholars in this field contend, this study exemplifies, literacy must be studied in its social, cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts both in school and out (Gee, 1996, 2000). In this study Street articulates a conception of literacy as tied to social practices and ideologies, such as the economy, political, and social conditions; social structures; and local belief systems. He connects the literacy practices with identity and social positions in a manner that contrasts sharply with the dominant discourse about literacy. He uses his theory, grounded in anthropological research, to argue for research that makes visible the "complexity of local, everyday, community literacy practices," or literacies outside of school settings (Street, 2001).

Over the years, Street has repeatedly raised the question: When there are so many different types of literacy practices, why is it that school literacy has come to be seen as the defining form of reading and writing? He describes the "pedagogization" of literacy, or the defining of literacy solely in terms of school-based notions of teaching and learning while marginalizing other forms of literacy (Street & Street, 1991). This contrasts with historical evidence that suggests in the past literacy was associated with social institutions outside of school (Street & Street, 1991; see also Cook-Gumperz, 1986). For instance, educated middle-class women in seventeenth-century China wrote poems as a way to construct a community of women (Yin-yeo Ko, 1989). Historically, and across cultural contexts, women have used literacy in informal, nonreligious, and nonbureaucratic domains (Hepler, 1997; Rockhill, 1993; Street & Street, 1991). Street and Street (1991) argue that these uses of writing have been marginalized and destroyed by modern Western literacy "with its emphasis on formal, male, and schooled aspects of communication" (p. 116). One conclusion from this analysis is that rather than focusing on the conti-
It is important to note that, while studies growing from an activity theory tradition and those taking the NLS as a starting point both use the term *practice*, the usage is different in important ways. In Scribner and Cole’s early work, for example, *practice* explicitly includes notions of skill, technology, and knowledge as well as patterned activity. In the NLS, on the other hand, the focus is clearly on the ways in which activity is infused by ideology, and there is little interest in specifying the cognitive dimensions of social practices. Thus recent literacy theorists often employ the term *practice* in a narrower sense that is consonant with their focus on culture, ideology, and power, though this specialized use of the term is usually not acknowledged.

While literacy theorists have worked to conceptualize the New Literacy Studies, there has been a parallel and, at times, overlapping focus by researchers and practitioners in an area captured by the term *critical literacy*. Preceding the work in New Literacy Studies, much of this field is directly related to schools and pedagogy rather than to everyday practice. While both share a commitment to defining literacy in relation to power and identity, critical literacy has a stronger focus on praxis and schooling. Luke and Freebody (1997) recently defined critical literacy as “a coalition of educational interests committed to engaging with the possibilities that the technologies of writing and other modes of inscription offer for social change, cultural diversity, economic equity, and political enfranchisement” (p. 1). This tradition, noteworthy for its explicit political agenda, owes the most to Paulo Freire (e.g., 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987), whose teaching methods have been central to several national literacy campaigns around the world. Freire’s focus was on the ways in which education and literacy should support people to question and shape their worlds. As he explains, “Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world...[and] transforming it by means of conscious practical work” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35).

Although much of the work in the area of critical literacy is located in school contexts, it has clear implications for thinking about (and rethinking) literacy out-of-school (see Chapter 5, this volume). For instance, Lankshear and Knobel (1997) propose a rereading and rewriting of our impoverished notions of citizenship in order to produce a new discourse of active citizenship that enables students to understand their social positionings in relation to their identity formation and subjectivities. Lankshear and Knobel describe how this new discourse might look in an English class, but their formulation has implications for learning more broadly construed.

In 1996, a group of scholars from the United States, England, and Australia met and spent the following year in dialogue to develop a way of talking about the social context of literacy learning, including the context...
and form of literacy pedagogy. Calling themselves the New London Group (after the site of their first meeting in New London, New Hampshire), they built this dialogue in part on notions developed by researchers and practitioners identifying themselves with the critical literacy and New Literacy Studies movements as well as researchers from a range of disciplines. Their findings can be summed up by their central term—multiliteracies—that signals multiple communication channels, hybrid text forms, new social relations, and the increasing salience of linguistic and cultural diversity. As they explain, “Multiliteracies also creates a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes” (New London Group, 1996, p. 61).

In their discussion of multiliteracies and the implications of what Gee and his colleagues have termed “fast capitalism” (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996), Luke and Freebody (1997) raise persistent questions about who will get access to the new forms of writing and representations and how the traditional fractures of race, culture, class, gender, and sexuality will get reinscribed. As they explain:

The challenge then is not just one of equity of access (or lack of access) to such technologies and institutions, but also of the possibilities of using discourse and literacy to reinvent institutions, to critique and reform the roles for the conversion of cultural and textual capital in communities and workplaces, and to explore the possibilities of hybrid social contracts and hybrid cultural actions. The challenge is about what kinds of citizenship, public forums for discourse and difference are practicable and possible. (p. 9)

Gee and colleagues (1996) take up this challenge in their recent book, The New Work Order. They extend the notion of literacy as social practices to include their concept of sociotechnical practices, which they describe as “the design of technology and social relations within the workplace to facilitate productivity and commitment, sometimes in highly ‘indoctrinating’ ways” (p. 6). These researchers go on to write that while old forms and organizational structures of work may have been alienating, new workplaces are asking workers to invest themselves in their work, merging public and private lives, in ways that might be considered coercive. They raise a number of provocative questions that suggest a blurring of the lines separating literate practices in and out of school. These questions include: “How should we construe learning and knowledge in general in a world where the new capitalism progressively seeks to define what counts as learning and knowledge in a ‘knowledge economy’ made up of ‘knowledge workers’ doing ‘knowledge work’” (p. 23)?

The New Literacy Studies thus focus our attention to the shifting landscape of home, community, work, and schools and give us a language and set of theoretical constructs for describing the close connections between literacy practices and identities. Perhaps more than any other theoretical tradition, the NLS have embraced out-of-school contexts, almost to the exclusion of looking in schools, and have unabashedly valued out-of-school literacy practices as distinct from those associated with schools. At the same time, the close description of literacy practices in out-of-school contexts and the concurrent focus on how these practices are shaped by power and ideology lead us to look with fresh eyes at what kinds of literacy we teach in school and what we count as literate practices.

What would our conceptions of literacy be like had researchers such as Hymes, Heath, Scribner, Cole, Street, and Gee never ventured in their formulations outside of schools, either literally or figuratively? We believe that our understandings of literacy, literacy learning, and literacy “problems” would be narrower, less helpful and generative. We suspect that what we now acknowledge as appreciable differences in home and school language and literacy practices, we might still treat, knee-jerk fashion, as a lack or a deficit. We might yet be content to see literacy in monochrome, as singular, as neutral, as just a skill. We would surely be less savvy about the rainbow of literate practices that color the world and less aware of how, as social practices, literacies come stitched tight with activities, identities, and discourses. In the next chapter, in order to provide particular, on-the-ground instances of these and other theoretical insights, as well as to think through their implications, we turn to recent research in the traditions of the ethnography of literacy, activity theory, and the New Literacy Studies.

Note

1. We don’t review here but want to acknowledge the important scholarship associated with “critical discourse analysis,” a field that, like the critical literacy area, is politically alert but uses the tools of discourse analysis to critique and challenge dominant institutional practices. See, for example, Fairclough (1995).

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Szwed, J. F. (1981). The ethnography of literacy. In M. F. Whiteman (Ed.), Writing...
As centerpieces for our following discussion, we offer six vignettes of children, youth, and adults engaged in literate activities outside of school, vignettes adapted from recent reports of research growing out of the theoretical traditions of the ethnography of communication, activity theory, and the New Literacy Studies. One reason for providing these accounts is to foreground representations of real people and their activities after, in Chapter 1, a very theoretical journey. A strength of the research conducted in all three traditions is its ability to bring to life literacy activities through fine-grained ethnographic and qualitative accounts of particular lives, contexts, and historical moments. Through such research we come to know, even to feel, we know intimately, a panoply of individuals, families, networks, communities, organizations, and institutions. And we also begin to understand some of the multifaceted ways in which literacy connects with learning, doing, and becoming outside of school. Through the following vignettes, then, we hope to at least hint at this richness.

Second, the portraits themselves form a backdrop for thinking through the policy, curricular, and pedagogical insights for schooling and school/non-school partnerships that can be gleaned from recent studies of literacies beyond the schoolhouse door, as well as for raising the questions and problems that still persist for literacy education and research. We begin with a page from Down Under, an account of a cool teenager, reluctant writer, and budding businessman in urban Australia.

Jacques: "I'm not a pencil man."

Jacques is 13 years old and lives with his parents and siblings in a white, affluent neighborhood of Brisbane. A disengaged student in the classroom, one who often "loses" his homework and would die a thousand deaths before volunteering an answer to a teacher's general query, he nonetheless provides a running satiric gloss on classroom activity, waxing in turn ironic, humorous, dramatic. This self-designated joker has "great difficulty with literacy" according to his teacher. But he is quite good at derailing attempts to involve him in the classroom milieu. No "writing process" pedagogy for this young man. Rather than use the Writer's Centre to produce and publish a story, Jacques spends days stapling together a miniature book in which he writes, to his teacher's dismay and his peers' delight, a mere 10 words. Made to repeat first grade, Jacques now patiently measures time until he can leave school for good. Neither professing nor demonstrating an interest in reading and writing, he explains: "I'm like my dad. I'm not a pencil man" (Knobel, 1999, p. 104).

Out of school, Jacques participates in two worlds valued by his family.
work and religion. A member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, he ably takes part in a variety of literacy-related religious activities—scriptural exegesis, the distribution on Saturday rounds of church literature such as The Watchtower, presentations at a weekly Theocratic School. But it is being a working man, with certain specialized ways of interacting and valuing, that offers Jacques a current identity and a future vision of the person he expects—and wants—to become. His father owns a successful business as an excavator, and it is his potential role in this physically palpable occupation, revolving as it does around machines and action in and upon the world, that captures Jacques’s attention and his energy. His involvement in and apprenticeship for the adult world of work also includes some home-based literacy activities. There is, for example, the design and publication with a home computer of an advertisement for Jacques’s own neighborhood mowing service. This professional-looking flyer promises “efficiency” and “reliability” and even offers “phone quotes”—terms of phrase we all can recognize as ubiquitous in the world of business advertising. Jacques’s out-of-school identity as an aspiring businessman and the social practices that support it, so obvious at home, are invisible in school, where he appears unengaged and less than competent. Yet one might wager that he will nonetheless lead a successful adult life, finding a comfortable economic and social niche, given his cooperative immersion in valued adult worlds.

The vignette of Jacques is adapted from Michele Knobel’s (1999) recent book, Everyday Literacies: Students, Discourse, and Social Practice, an ethnographic case study of four adolescents coming of age in urban Australia. Framing her study with Gee’s discourse theory (e.g., 1996) and methodological insights drawn from Green and the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (e.g., Green & Harker, 1988), Knobel poses what we believe is the central question raised (but not yet answered) by years of research on out-of-school literacy. She asks: “What is the relationship between school learning and students’ everyday lives, and what might an effective relationship between them be” (p. 6)?

Knobel’s study reminds us, as does an important tradition of work in literacy theory and research, of the resources, both personal and community based, that children, adolescents, and adults bring to school. We think, for example, of Moll’s work with Latino communities in the Southwest and his generative term funds of knowledge, used to describe the networked expertise woven through community practices (Moll, 1992; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; see also Vasquez, 1993). The power of Moll’s work for us is his convincing demonstration of how funds of knowledge can be used to bridge communities to classrooms by acknowledging the expertise of parents and community members. He has, for example, provided examples of lessons in which teachers have brought community members into the schoolroom to share their knowledge and know-how, and he has documented as well the positive effects of such activities on children’s interest and investment in the curriculum.

Developing a culturally relevant pedagogy for teaching African American youth literacy interpretation, Lee (1993) has also looked to cultural funds of knowledge, particularly language forms and discourse structures. In their most recent work, Lee and colleagues (Lee, 2000; Majors, 2000; Rivers, Hutchinson, & Dixon, 2000) have examined language practices across contexts, identifying participation structures of talk in the community, such as African American hair salons, and using these structures to inform ways of conducting classroom discussions about texts. This research shows that teachers can successfully engage students in high levels of reasoning about literary texts by drawing on their tacit knowledge about cultural forms out of school.

We think as well of Dyson’s (1997, 1999, in press) long-term studies of early writing development in particular, the “resources” that children bring to their writing from their social worlds, including the linguistic and symbolic tools appropriated from popular culture. Dyson has argued for the permeability of the curriculum, where teachers imagine their classrooms in such a way as to continually welcome the diverse resources that children, of necessity, bring to their writing. While Dyson’s research is situated physically within classroom walls, we think it noteworthy that her conceptual framework embraces children’s out-of-school lives.

We see here two powerful, but distinct, ways to bridge home and school worlds. Moll and Lee literally go into homes, community centers, and other out-of-school contexts to learn about social and cultural resources; they then bring people and linguistic and cultural knowledge back into the classroom. Dyson, on the other hand, is continually alert to the ways in which children themselves bring their outside worlds into the classroom through their writing and the oral performances that encircle literacy events.

We admire work in the vein of Moll, Lee and colleagues, and Dyson, and we are captured by the portraits of classrooms, communities, and students that they give us. The question here is what such classrooms and the perspectives that undergird them can hold for students such as Jacques. Disadvantaged youth, adults, and even children are legion—those individuals and groups for whom alienation from school-based learning seems sadly confirmed. For them, perhaps, community-based opportunities are especially crucial for developing the desire we all share to become more fully human, to borrow Freire’s (1970) still-inspirational words. Of course, the possibility of engaging in literacy activities in the community does not ex-
cuse school-based teachers or the rest of us from asking how out-of-school identities, social practices, and the literacies they recruit might be leveraged in the classroom. How might teachers incorporate students' out-of-school interests and predilections but also extend the range of the literacies with which they are conversant? And in what ways must our thinking about what constitutes curriculum and pedagogy be modified in order to appeal to students who don’t readily fit the common mold? How, to ask the hardest question, do we keep youth involved in school when their adult lives seem to hold little promise of work or civic activity or personal fulfillment that draws strongly on school-based literacy?

**Marquis, Delilah, and Samson: “You gotta pay.”**

Marquis (age 11), Delilah (age 10), and Samson (age 9) are at an inner-city community center when Ellen arrives, parking ticket in hand. A volunteer at the center and a friend of the children, she asks what to do with this ticket. Marquis asks where she found it, and Ellen answers, “On my windshield.” “Oooo, you got a ticket for parking where you shouldn’t have!” Delilah quickly chides, while Samson teases that she’ll surely go to jail. Marquis states with the wisdom of his years, “She ain’t going to jail for no ticket. She gonna pay some.” And then Marquis and Delilah set about problem-solving, analyzing the ticket and sorting through strategies for dealing with it.

Delilah suggests that Ellen will need to go downtown to pay it, but upon examining the ticket again, Samson figures out that it can be mailed and that the ticket itself, once folded over, will serve as an envelope. Marquis recommends simply putting it on someone else’s car. “Yeah, on another Mazda,” Delilah adds. But once the children deduce that Ellen’s license number is recorded on the ticket, that plan seems less than ideal. “They got a copy of the ticket at the office, and if she don’t pay, she’ll go to jail,” a sober child concludes. Marquis and Delilah have the final say: “You gotta pay.” And they commiserate over the steep fine of $25. “You got it?” Delilah asks. The problem-solving moment ends with a story. Marquis tells how his little brother once gave him a ticket for parking his big wheeled in front of the house, a ticket for $100. “Said I had to give it to him, too, or I was going to jail!” Everyone joins in the laughter.

And so we see a group of African American inner-city children turning a parking ticket this way and that, holding it up to the light, both literally and metaphorically. They draw on various literate and discursive strategies to find a way to obviate its influence—trying out scenarios, studying the artifact for information and directives, enumerating and questioning op-

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In other words, the children employ their developing language and reasoning skills to solve a material problem in their resource-scarce community. Their negotiation of a traffic ticket thus lays bare a host of literate and problem-solving practices and reveals as well the ways in which urban youth learn to hone their abilities to understand, function within, and circumvent the powers that be.

We are introduced to these children in Ellen Cushman’s (1998) recent ethnography, *The Struggle and the Tools*, a book that documents and celebrates inner-city residents’ “institutional” language—those oral and literate skills crucial for daily negotiations with gatekeeping institutions. Taking issue with critical scholars who too quickly resort to notions of hegemony and false consciousness when they theorize about the “underclass” or the “marginalized,” Cushman takes as her project redefining critical consciousness. She demonstrates, and pays homage to, the ways in which the individuals she came to know as part of her research navigate the social structures that constrain them, both accommodating and resisting and even undermining such constraints through everyday language and literacy activities. In so doing, Cushman adopts what she calls an “activist methodology,” one that lays bare her role as a participant in the research and the community (notice her presence in the vignette above) and that makes possible reciprocally beneficial relationships with the people from her study.

Cushman’s study stands out for us first because of its insistence on acknowledging the communicative competence displayed by people in their everyday lives. She examines kids’ conversations and finds, for example, not just chit-chat, but the use of a particular kind of strategic oral language to analyze that most common of local literacy artifacts, the dreaded parking ticket. Much of the work on out-of-school literacy has as its starting place a respect for and acknowledgment of people’s abilities. As McDermott (1993) has noted, the stance that people are OK, that they are competent within their cultural milieu, is common within the field of anthropology—but expecting people to fail is more commonly an artifact of schooling.

Nowhere in the out-of-school research is an expectation for success more evident than in Heath’s long-term work in a multitude of out-of-school youth organizations around the United States (c.f., Heath, 1994, 1990, 1998a, 1998b; Heath & McLaughlin, 1993). She has been especially impressed by young people’s participation in arts-based organizations and offers this description of their important features:

Within the organizations that host these arts programs, opportunities for young people to learn derive primarily from an ethos that actively considers them to be resources for themselves, their peers, families, and communities. These programs thus engage the young in learning, both for themselves and for oth-
ers, through highly participatory projects that encompass listening, writing and reading, as well as mathematical, scientific and social skills and strategies. (Heath, 1998a, p. 2)

To be sure, one of the most important lessons to be gleaned from research on literacy and out-of-school contexts is the benefits that accrue from achieving competence. As Griffin and Cole (1987; see also Cole & Traupmann, 1981; McDermott, 1995) have discovered in their exemplary work with after-school programs, such competence becomes most apparent when we allow many starting points for learning and many paths to progress.

We wonder, as we admire Cushman’s study and her activist stance: What must we do to cultivate such attitudes about children and adults’ competence in formal classrooms? And having done so, how might teachers build on people’s abilities as strategic language users in school? What, as a matter of fact, does “building on” entail? Terribly important, too, what special skills are required of teachers in order to nurture students whose critical consciousness as members of oppressed groups is finely honed (and rightly so)? Further, how can teachers and researchers learn about and participate in communities apart from school in a respectful and reciprocal manner?

The metaphor of a journey is often invoked as part of much research on out-of-school literacy, as researchers voyage into less familiar communities and cultures to retrieve collectibles for their scholarship and the classroom. Such studies have been valuable as ways of unveiling and foregrounding language and literacy practices that differ from those of the mainstream. But it is time, we think, to find a different metaphor and another reason for traveling, one that facilitates the sharing of projects with participants and that directs research toward the amelioration of problems that community members, along with researchers and teachers, find compelling. The work of Flower and colleagues in Pittsburgh (Flower, 1997, in preparation; Flower, Long, & Higgins, 2000; Peck, Flower, & Higgins, 1995; see also Chapter 5, this volume) and that of Engeström (1987, 1993, 1998) and colleagues in Finland stands out in this regard.

**Mr. San: Of Mice and Managers**

In a high-tech workplace in northern California’s Silicon Valley, frontline workers, most of them recent immigrants, participate in numerous literacy-rich activities, activities that accompany their participation in “self-directed” work teams, their documentation of their own productivity and quality scores, and the oral presentation of problem-solving data. Literacy is every-
“How can we write goals,” he had argued, “if our standard times are incorrect?” Pressing his point with an engineer, he eventually succeeded in having the company’s time-study experts recalculate the standard times. Only after all of this did Mr. San consent to learn how to perform—and to encourage his team members to do so as well—the often burdensome, even daunting tasks of filling out multitudes of forms and completing the elaborate new documentation associated with productivity and quality measurements. In this case, it seems that Mr. San’s willingness to participate in literacy-related activities was linked to the identity he was constructing for himself as a worker, an identity most aptly described as advocate for his team—“my people,” as he liked to call them.

Hull (2000) provides our Silicon Valley vignette from her ethnographic examination of two companies in the circuit board assembly industry. She and her research team asked what kinds of workers the companies were looking to hire or to fashion, and what kinds of literacies the new forms of work, such as self-directed work teams, seemed to privilege. Frameworks drawn from the New Literacy Studies (e.g., Gee, 1996; Street, 1993) and sociocultural perspectives on writing (e.g., Freedman, Dyson, Flower, & Cope, 1987) positioned Hull to link literacy and identity, focusing on how particular work identities can lead to acceptance or rejection of certain literacy practices. Constructing new work identities is, of course, unproblematic. As Gee, Hull, and Lankshear (1996) illustrate in their analysis of the rhetoric of “fast capitalist” texts, the new work order calls on even frontline workers to invest themselves completely in their jobs, taking on the company’s notions of the flexible, multiskilled problem-solver and worker cum manager. Yet doing so, and excelling at literate activities and developing a working identity that involves a sense of oneself as a proficient user of multiple semiotic systems, doesn’t necessarily, or even often, lead to full-time work with benefits, let alone advancement. Such work makes urgent the need to rethink standard curricular fare for non-college-bound youth. But just as insistently, it asks us to acknowledge the contradictions that exist in the most progressive high-performance work environments, where workers are directed to develop literate identities, but identities that are circumscribed. We are prompted, then, to ask: How should we think about school in relation to students’ future work.

Other researchers who have examined the literacy demands of entry-level work include Gowen (1992), in her account of hospital workers; Darrah (1996), in his analysis of the electronics industry; and Hart-Landsberg and Reder (1997), in their look at auto-accessory manufacturers. However, the vast majority of studies have focused on the work and writing lives of college graduates who enter managerial or technical positions in which writing mediates work in quite visible and powerful ways. (For a review of the particular tradition of such work that draws on activity theory approaches, see Russell, 1997.) These studies help us look critically at how college writing courses, writing across the curriculum programs, and training in technical communication do and don’t prepare students for professional lives in which the mastery of written genres is central. They also give us detailed understandings of the literacy requirements and literacy-related social practices of a variety of workplaces, often making the case that writing at school and at work are “worlds apart” (Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999). This body of research has provided, finally, compelling portraits of the struggles of competent writers engaged in high-stakes, real-world activity through which they become professional wordsmiths (Beaufort, 1999).

It of course makes intuitive sense for writing researchers to focus their attention on professionals in the work world for whom the production of written language is a prime activity. But such a gaze, when it does not also include entry-level workers at least in peripheral vision, can obscure the ways in which literacy has become part and parcel of most working lives. Even more importantly, if we ignore entry-level work, we will also ignore, if we are not vigilant, the ways in which literacy is implicated in the sustenance of traditional relations of power in the workplace, including career ladders and other means of advancement, making the gulf that separates occupational hierarchies too broad to span (Hull & Schulz, 2001).

There are other great divides that deserve the attention of researchers and educators if we are to rethink the school-to-work relationship and the roles of literacy within it. There is worry about a growing digital divide, one associated with schools (where access to technology and its meaningful use is unequal), with disparate technology and other resources, and also with workplaces in which low-income people of color are shut out of high-tech, well-paying jobs. How can teachers, researchers, and other educators join forces to bridge such divides? What models really have a chance of interrupting longstanding patterns of poverty and miseducation? Kalantzis and Cope (2000) argue persuasively for pluralism as an organizing concept for education in new times; similarly, they suggest that in imagining new work orders, we must work toward “productive diversity,” whereby people are valued for their difference and expertise at work centers on the ability to engage and negotiate difference. Gee (2000) wonders whether new capitalist rhetoric and practice—flexibility, teamwork, communities of practice—can be reclaimed for more radical social and educational ends. For our own part, we see practical promise in new coalitions of community organizations, schools, and universities that are attempting to sponsor tech-
Framing the Issues

Mary TallMountain: Creating “something true”

In the heart of San Francisco’s Tenderloin, a down-and-out district associated mostly with drugs and crime, women file into the Herald, a residential hotel and meeting place for the Tenderloin Women Writers Workshop. Seated with pens and notebooks in their laps, they settle in to listen to Mary TallMountain. A Native American born close to the Arctic Circle in Alaska, Mary came to San Francisco in 1945 as a recent widow; she worked first as a legal secretary and later opened her own business as a stenographer. A bout with cancer without medical insurance left her bankrupt and homeless; it was then that she moved into a small room in the Tenderloin and began to write. Mary announces that she has finished a poem entitled “Soogha Dancing” (soogha being the Athabaskan word for “brother”). In Mary’s poem her brother is honored by being asked to dance before his tribe. Here are the first, second, and last stanzas:

Soogha

Eldest brother I never knew.
The people gave you new clothes.
In spring they honored men

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Outstanding in Kaltag village.
At potlatch after giveaway
Those honored danced alone.

Your arms flying
Emine parka whirling
Beaver hood like brown velvet
Lynx-trimmed mukluks
Furs trapped by your friends
The women stitched in winter.

... You dance bright behind my eyes.
Soogha brother, I see you
In that spirit-given spring
Dancing for the people.
Arms open like furry wings.

The women in the workshop deeply appreciate this poem, and they are proud, too, of their own role in its creation:

Nikki: Oh, that was a wonderful last line.
Anita: I always liked that line.
Mary: All the help you gave me, you know, here. (She leafs back through her papers.) It’s back here, all the different things you suggested.
Martha: It’s a wonderful poem. And it’s a pleasure, I think, for us to hear it after, you know, we critiqued it, to hear the suggestions in it.
Mary (looking around the group): You consider it finished, then, do you?
Clara: That turned out beautiful, Mary. That turned out beautiful.
Martha: Yeah, it’s like you took some of the suggestions—other ones didn’t work—and it turned into something true to you.
(Heller, 1997, p. 4)

Thus Caroline Heller begins her book Until We Are Strong Together: Women Writers in the Tenderloin. This is an account of the power of literacy for members of an unlikely writing group who met weekly to share their experiences, poetry, and prose. Writing and conversing together served several important social, political, and educational functions for this group of “marginalized” women—among them, sharing life histories, rais-
ing political awareness, and building skills as writers through critique. The meetings also served as a point of integration for the emotional and the intellectual, the mind and the spirit. By providing a rich enactment of how literacy and community can intersect to nurture common needs, Heller builds from and extends Freirian and liberatory approaches to critical literacy.

Readers of Heller’s work are sometimes surprised by the intensely literate activity of the Tenderloin women, noting that Heller found literacy where we might least expect it—in a distressed urban community facing the many problems that accompany poverty and neglect. Yet as our understanding of what counts as literacy has broadened, researchers from around the world have documented literate practices in the lives of children and adults everywhere: taxi drivers in South Africa (Breier, Tachtsche, & Sait, 1996); cattle auctioneers in Wales (Jones, 2000); scribes in Mexico City (Kalman, 1999); members of a youth basketball league (Mahiri, 1998); middle school girls with their teen ‘zines in the North American Midwest (Finders, 1997); diary keepers and racing fans in Lancaster, England (Barton & Hamilton, 1998); and a 5-year-old Australian boy with his own Web site, “Alex’s Scribbles—Koala Trouble” (Lankshere & Knobel, 1997). This work illustrates in glorious detail Geertz’s observation long ago that “man’s [sic] mental processes indeed take place at the scholar’s desk or the football field, in the studio or lorry-driver’s seat, on the platform, the chessboard, or the judge’s bench” (quoted in Cole, Engeström, & Vasquez, 1997, p. 13).

And it denotes as well the enlivened interest of current researchers from a range of fields in everyday practical activity (see Cole et al., 1997).

Evidence of the abundant, diverse forms of out-of-school literacy—crossing class, race, gender, culture, and nationality—certainly enrich our definitions of literacy. In an interesting way, juxtaposed to Heller’s portraits, this work makes us think again of school-based, “academic” literacy and ask: What is or might be the value of essayist texts? The Tenderloin women described by Heller were empowered by what we usually consider traditional genres generally introduced in school—essays, poems, short stories, other fiction and imaginative writing. These longer texts contrast with the lists, forms, letters, and advertisements that make up everyday reading and writing. They also remind us of the permeability between in-school and out-of-school borders. In our efforts to document and validate the plethora of personal and local literacy practices, we don’t want to abandon the opportunities that school could provide in developing valued forms of text-based expertise. But we might want to reexamine the way in which those opportunities are provided, taking care, with Heller (1997) and the Tenderloin Women Writers Workshop, not to “create false oppositions between the

emotions and the intellect, the spirit and mind, the person and the community” (p. 160).

Others worry that, in honoring out-of-school capabilities, we also romanticize them. While really noting that “children will adapt intelligently to their worlds” (p. 34), Damon (1990) acknowledges the tension between youth’s perceptions of what about the world is useful to know and adults’ understandings. Noting the tendency to valorize out-of-school skills and to put them on equal footing with schooled knowledge—perhaps, he speculates, in reaction to the longstanding tendency among academics to denigrate the nonacademic—he asserts:

[It serves no useful purpose to imbue unschooled forms of knowledge with a sentimental gloss. Just as we should not lose sight of the remarkable adaptive ness of some unschooled abilities, we also must guard against expecting more from them than they can deliver. (p. 38)]

These are strong words that run counter to the ideologies of much recent and useful literacy research. But perhaps they are a helpful reminder to give school-based literacies their due, and all children access to their power, while simultaneously honoring and building on everyday literacies (see Delpitt, 1995).

At the end of her book, Heller (1997) asks how we might reconcile our relationships with the most marginalized. We ask, with her, how those who have “been excluded from the mainstream, or who have chosen to live and/or learn apart from it” (p. 160) can help us rethink in fundamental ways our theories and our work in formal classrooms.

Martha: “Yo no sabia que era bilingue.”

A third-grade bilingual Latina, Martha likes to tell jokes and show her wit when she interacts with people she knows and trusts, such as friends at Las Redes. During this after-school program, children not only collaborate with each other and UCLA undergraduates as they play and master a variety of computer-related games and puzzles, they venture into cyberspace as well. A centerpiece of the children’s activities is an e-mail exchange with a mysterious entity called “El Maga,” whose identity and gender are objects of great speculation, but ultimately remain unknown. Children recount to El Maga their progress in completing the various computer games and related activities and report any difficulties they encounter. El Maga, for his or her part, is known to ask a lot of questions, as well as to initiate personal dia-
logues with individual children. The intent of these e-mail exchanges is to foster children’s participation in and affiliation with Las Redes, socializing them, if you will, into the culture of an after-school activity system.

Martha begins her correspondence with El Maga by mentioning the sometimes frustrating experiences she has had playing a computer game that has as its central character a frog. Martha writes in one early message:

dear El Maga, are you? The pond was little bit hardier. I couldn’t understand the game and Christina [UCLA undergrad] helped me figure it out. In the end, I passed the first level and I was surprised. thanks for writing to me.

El Maga responds:

Dear Martha,
I am doing pretty good, thank you for asking!!! How are you? I hope you still have that big smile!!! The pond was difficult to figure out, huh? That frog causes many of us problems. It has a mind of its own and sometimes it does not want to do what we program it to do. Que ranaí [That mischievous little frog]. . . .

El Maga

The next time Martha writes an e-mail message to El Maga, she does so in Spanish. She professes her surprise that El Maga is bilingual, presses El Maga for information on his or her gender, and reports her recent computer game activities. In so doing, Martha demonstrates certain Spanish literacy skills, such as knowledge about a formal register, and she also indicates, through her more familiar salutation and closing, that she is ready to establish a more intimate relationship with El Maga:

Querido/a
Yo no sabia que era bilingue. Usted es mujer o hombre? Haora jueque boggle, y un rompe cabezas de batman, y Bertha nos ayudo armario.
Adios, Martha

[Dear
I did not know that you were bilingual. Are you a man or a woman? Today I played boggle and a batman puzzle. And Bertha helped us put it together.
Goodbye, Martha]
source for reordering everyday power relations, thereby creating interesting changes in the typical division of labor" (Cole, 1996, p. 298). He emphasizes as well the importance of choice—children participate voluntarily—but choice balanced by discipline and learning infused with play and imagination.

We agree with Cole (1996) and with Underwood, Welsch, Gauvain, and Duffy (2000) when they caution that early on such after-school programs must confront issues of sustainability. If after-school programs are to last, to become viable community institutions that exist past their founder’s interest, then they must be accompanied by structural changes within both community institutions—such as YMCAs, Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, and churches—and university partners.

A further tension that after-school programs must continually address is the extent to which they become school-like organizations—serving essentially as arms of classrooms that extend the schoolday, providing assistance with homework and safe spaces for youth after school—and the extent to which they define themselves apart from schools as alternative sites for learning (see Chapter 8, this volume). The push, we predict, will be toward the former, given the current availability of federal and local funding for after-school programs and given the tendency of textbook publishers and other vendors to provide standardized materials and prepackaged materials. The danger, of course, is that we will lose a currently available creative space for doing academics differently.

When researchers such as Dyson first began to document “unofficial” literacy practices in school—such as passing notes—there was worry that bringing these forms of writing into the official curriculum would take away the interest and delight students found in them. In a similar vein, there is sometimes concern about attempts to import new literacy practices that flourish in after-school programs and other after-school settings to school. This topic sometimes comes up in discussions of new technologies, such as multimedia composition, Web-based authoring, and chat rooms and other sites for identity construction and playful writing, as documented by Lankshear and Knobel (1997). The concern is that, if school appropriates these potentially subversive forms, there is the chance that they will be domesticated and lose their vigor, appeal, and edge. On the other hand, an important opportunity to address the digital divide comes with preparing teachers to think differently about what counts as literacy and with equipping schools with technology, making opportunities to engage with new technologies available to more students. We need examples, then, of the integration of new media and Internet use into schools in ways that allow youth culture and its varied literacies to flourish alongside, as well as to influence, academic genres.

Denise: “This world is a world of fear and hate. That is what led me to be a writer.”

Denise attends a multi-racial, comprehensive high school set in an urban West Coast community, one caught in the cross-currents of longstanding, systemic problems of poverty, crime, and malaise. As her classmates sit together and write their arguments for a constitutional convention, arguing loudly with each other and alternatively focusing on the task at hand, Denise is off to the side working on her homework and staring into space. She has refused to participate in this exciting set of activities that draw in even the most reluctant students. In fact, she has made clear her decision not to engage in any public performances, and even accepted an “F” as a consequence for this strongly held view.

At home Denise writes poetry about her grandmother and a play for a favorite middle school teacher. The play, titled “Gangsta Lean” after a rap popular at that time, is based on actual events in her own life—the shooting death of her cousin in a drug-related incident at a dice game. One day Denise shows the script to her drama teacher who produces it in the only drama class in the school. Yet Denise keeps her distance from this performance in its initial stages and only reluctantly steps forward to receive flowers at the evening performance of the play.

After the performance of her play, Denise seems to link her writing of poetry and plays at home to her identity as a writer at school. After her teachers point out that she can use her play as her senior project, she reluctantly begins work on this step toward graduation. On an audio-tape that accompanied this final project of her high school career, she speaks these words which describe the role of writing in her life:

Growing up in [our city] Me, my mother and my brothers. It wasn’t easy. It’s not easy. And it ain’t going to be easy. Every time I walk home from school, I don’t feel safe. Not at all. I start to think of my family and all the friends I have seen killed, that have been killed. And I also think about the one that might be killed. When a car goes past me, my neck shivers as if I am going to be shot. It’s a terrible, terrible feeling. This world is a world of fear and hate. That is what led me to be a writer.

While writing I don’t feel nothing. . . . All I think about is writing. If I don’t write, all I think about is the deaths in the world today. So to keep my mind off of that, I write. It’s not easy to be a writer. You have to have your mind set on being a writer. . . . When writing a play popped into my mind, all I thought about was the painful things that I see in the world today. . . . So, I started to write.
And I couldn't stop. It felt like I was being trapped. I was being held captive. And believe me, I know what that feels like. (Senior project tape, June 1994)

Denise's out-of-school speaking and writing is a stunning reminder of her daily experience. Her teachers found a way for her to bring this writing into the school curriculum on her own terms. While she attended school, Denise continued to resist the official school curriculum and continued to write at home. Once she graduated, she stopped writing all together.

Katherine Schultz introduces us to Denise and a few of her classmates in her study of writing in the lives of urban adolescents (Schultz, in press). She describes the writing that seemed to flourish outside of school from students who were reluctant writers inside their classrooms. Student writing took many forms: primarily they wrote poems, letters, and journals, although some of them wrote plays and a variety of fiction and non-fiction prose. For the most part, they did not share their writing with their peers. Schultz describes the ways that youths like Denise tentatively constructed literate identities while in school by writing at home, and how, once they graduated, they seemed to stop writing. She poses the question: How can we construct pedagogy and curriculum that support students to construct and hold on to enduring literate identities and to become powerful speakers, readers, and writers while they are in school and beyond?

Schultz's study on personal out-of-school writing is unusual in being longitudinal: she stayed in touch with the young people for several years after they graduated from high school, documenting their writing across home and school contexts rather than focusing on one context or the other. We suggest that it would be useful to explore what it is about being in school, even if students are reluctantly bidding time in classrooms, that allows them to find these alternative spaces to write. We recognize that for all of us, writing may be more or less important at various times in our lives; for a virtual non-writer in early adulthood, the written word may become central later on. This leads us to ask: How are time and space organized in adolescents' lives while they are in school in such a way as to allow them to develop identities as writers? Is the personal writing students engage in connected to a particular time in their lives? If so, will these students hold on to the knowledge that writing was important to them at one time and return to it later on? How can educators reconceptualize classroom practices to account for the writing students engage in outside of school, and how can practitioners teach in such a way that adolescents acquire and hold onto literate identities past their time in classrooms?

More broadly, how can we conceptualize education, and literacy within it, as a system of second chances, one that allows multiple entry points across the life span, and that provides support for individuals who wish or need to return to a focus on writing or literacy after a time away? "The notion of a second chance," wrote Dan Inbar, "is derived from the basic belief that everyone has the right to attempt success and mobility, and the right to try again, to choose a different way, and that failures should not be regarded as final" (1990, p. 1). We might think of literacy the very same way.

Conclusion

When researchers have looked at out-of-school literacy, they have done so with several goals in mind, including a desire to decouple the effects of literacy from the effects of schooling. They have asked questions such as: What are the cognitive consequences of literacy separate from the mediating impact of formal schooling? How are our conceptions of literacy constrained by a version of literacy, that is, schooled literacy? Researchers have also sought to develop the notion of literacy as multiple, asking questions such as: How do language and literacy practices in homes and communities differ from those valued in school? What new forms of and technologies for literacy exist out of school?

An early goal in research on out-of-school literacy was to account for school failure and out-of-school success through questions such as: What are the resources that children and youth from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and socioeconomic groups bring to the classroom? What are the differences among contexts, conceptions of knowledge, and performance for successful learners out of school and unsuccessful learners in school? In addition, researchers hoped to identify additional support mechanisms for children, youth, and adults. They wondered, for example: What institutions in addition to our beleaguered schools can support learning? How can out-of-school learning environments serve as stimuli for rethinking schools and classrooms?

Researchers have looked to out-of-school settings to push notions of learning and development. They have posed questions such as: What understandings of mature versions of social practices can be found in out-of-school settings that we can connect to child or adult learning? How might we document the intersection of literacy with social identity or study the connection of ways of reading and writing to ways of talking, acting, interacting, valuing, and being in the world? How might we cultivate a long and broad view of learning, one that focuses on "human lives seen as trajectories through multiple social practices in various social institutions" (Gee et al., 1996, p. 4)?
What has been accomplished through the body of research we have reviewed in this chapter is more than impressive. Yet despite dazzling theoretical advances in how we conceive of literacy, despite provocative research on out-of-school literacies in an array of interesting settings, a depressing fact remains: We still have not succeeded in improving the educational experiences and life chances of the vast majority of children, adolescents, and adults. Indeed, the gap between those deemed literate and those labeled poor readers and writers and performers at academic tasks has widened and widened and widened some more. To make this situation sadder still, the educational pendulum in the United States, Australia, and Great Britain has taken a big swing to the right of late, in effect halting and reversing many of the conceptual and practical steps forward that have been made in conceptualizing and teaching reading and writing. Taylor offers this portrait: "In the UK children sit each day and do their phonics, and in the USA there are cities in which every child in a particular grade is supposed to be working on the same page, in the same way, at the same time, on any given day" (2000, p. xiii). What counts as appropriate literacy in school is being narrowed and narrowed and narrowed still more.

Countless school-based educators teach their hearts out and do so with intelligence and energy and commitment, working their magic in their classrooms day in, day out. Indeed, many of the current educational reforms that we and others believe take us backward, not forward, are handed down to teachers for implementation, not debate or consideration. Thus the unflattering portraits of schools and teachers and academic literacy that sometimes accompany the literature on out-of-school learning are, we believe, overly harsh. We wince when we read the sweeping claims—in-school learning is top-down with teachers doing most of the thinking; schooled literacy is based on a universal model that reduces other literacies to deficits; schools are hostile, demeaning places where young people aren’t heard nor their interests considered. Out of school, these accounts sometimes go on to claim, learning is participatory and democratic, literacies are multiple and satisfying, and programs so appeal to children and young people that participants have to be turned away. It must be more complicated than that. In a discussion of the last decade’s impressive body of research on "situated" learning, some of which we reviewed earlier, Rose (1999) gives this work its due, noting its worth to both theory-building and educational practice. But he also observes that the sometimes stated, sometimes implied critique of traditional schooling that is a part of this work “tends to be quickly executed, a single-hued portrait of mainstream classrooms that has the unintended effect of stripping instruction from its setting” (p. 155). We share his concern.

Connecting Schools with Out-of-School Worlds

The fulfillment of the promise of equity through education is in important ways at the heart of each of the theoretical positions we reviewed earlier and the raison d'être, at least implicitly, for much of the research on out-of-school literacy and learning. And it is also the goal of progressive educators everywhere. Given the vast gulf that separates, there is no better time for literacy theorists and researchers, now practiced in detailing the successful literate practices that occur out of school, to put their energies toward investigating potential relationships, collaborations, and helpful divisions of labor between schools and formal classrooms and the informal learning that flourishes in a range of settings.

Note

1. Most of our vignettes are written in the ethnographic present. We are aware of the dangers of representing people as static, and their situations as perpetual, but have chosen to write in present tense in an effort to make our vignettes more engaging.

References


Connecting Schools with Out-of-School Worlds


Framing the Issues


