Community Literacy Practices and Education: Australia

Trevor H. Cairney

Abstract

It is a truism to state that literacy is important to life; it is impossible escape it. In an age where literacy - even just as written text - is delivered via media as diverse as clothing, signs, bodies, music, rap, screens and paper, it cannot be missed. But it is still common when we speak of literacy to assume that we are thinking simply of words in a limited range of contexts and genres. As well, when we investigate it as a practice, we often do so simply in formal and institutional contexts. It is obvious that literacy is embedded in all of life, and that institutional and formal literacy can never be truly separated from the literacy practices of the world beyond school. This is not a new idea, but in the last 20 years, we have developed a richer understanding of what this might mean for the literacy practices sanctioned, supported, and used within schooling. Earlier discussions of the importance of community literacy by administrators, schools, and teachers, were generally framed by a recognition that the literacy experiences of home and community have a significant impact on literacy success at school. But much of this interest has been in how families and their literacy practices serve school agendas, with interest driven by limited definitions of literacy and at times deficit views of learning. This restricted view of the relationship between literacy practices in and out of school, has constrained attempts to build stronger relationships between schools and their communities. As Schultz and Hull state (see Schultz and Hull 2015, chapter "Literacies in and Out of School in the United States," Vol. 2), our students are never simply in school or out of school, for their identities move with them, and their practices are carried with them across contexts. And yet, we still know far less than we need to know about the way literacy touches lives in surprising contexts and in varied forms. There is so much

T.H. Cairney (✉)
School of Education, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
e-mail: t.cairney@unsw.edu.au

© Springer International Publishing AG 2017

B.V. Street, S. May (eds.), *Literacies and Language Education*, Encyclopedia of Language and Education, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-02252-9_18

more to know, and hence we require need new ways to help us understand literacy's varied forms, purposes and uses. And we need to widen our contexts and arenas for exploration.

Keywords
Community Literacy • Family literacy • Literacy

Contents

Introduction 250
A Brief Look at Early Research of Relevance 254
Major Contributions 257
 Studies That Describe Literacy Practices in the Home 257
 Studies That Attempted to Bridge Home, School, and Community Contexts 259
 Studies of Indigenous Literacy 260
 Understanding the Impact of Culture on School Achievement 261
 New Literacies 263
Problems and Gaps in Our Understanding 264
Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education 266
References 266

Introduction

It is a truism to state that literacy is important to life. It pervades all the varied situations in which people experience life. However, often when we think of literacy, we assume that it is a practice that occurs in formal and institutional contexts. Literacy becomes something narrowly defined and seen as operational (to use the descriptor from Green's 3D model of literacy[1]), and hence it is easily decontextualized. It is obvious that literacy is embedded in all of life and that institutional and formal literacy can never be truly separated from the literacy practices of the world beyond school. This is not a new idea, but in the last 20 years, we have developed a richer understanding of what this might mean for literacy practices sanctioned, supported, and used within schooling. Earlier discussions of the importance of community literacy by administrators, schools, and teachers were generally framed by a recognition that the literacy experiences of home and community have a significant impact on literacy success at school. But most interest has been in how families and their literacy practices serve school agendas with interest being driven by limited definitions of literacy and at times deficit views of learning. This restricted view of the relationship between literacy practices in and out of school has limited many attempts to build stronger relationships between schools and their

[1]Green (1988) discusses what he terms a 3D model of literacy. As a sociocultural practice, literacy requires operational skills that are always situated in a cultural context. The learning of the skills of literacy should always recognize the relationship of language to cultural meaning and the distribution of power. Literacy is always selective and embedded and hence requires interpretation and critique.

communities. As Schultz and Hull state (see Schultz and Hull 2015, "Literacies in and Out of School in the United States," Vol. 2), our students are never simply in school or out of school, for their identities move with them and their practices are carried with them across contexts.

Prior to the 1980s, most interest in nonschool literacy was focused on how parents might support children's print literacy learning and, to a lesser extent, how nonschool literacy[2] might have an impact on school literacy learning. This work paid little attention to variations in literacy practices across diverse communities and appeared to assume that literacy was a unitary skill, rather than sets of practices that vary depending on the communities of which they are part. Many sought simply to develop strategies, programs, and initiatives that helped children to succeed at a limited range of school literacy practices.

A shift in this perceived place of community literacy practices was related to the work of researchers like Heath (1983) and others[3] who began to challenge educators to consider, describe, and understand the variation that occurs in literacy across specific groups. Heath's early anthropological work considered talk associated with literacy within the home and found that it is related to differences in culture and language. Motivated by this work, other researchers began to examine the literacy practices of home and school more closely and noted increasingly that the way teachers shape classroom discourse can be limited in scope and not reflective of the diversity of student language and culture (Breen et al. 1994; Cairney et al. 1995; Cairney and Ruge 1998; Freebody et al. 1995; Street 1984).

In parallel to the above work, three other key and related areas of inquiry began to inform home and community literacy research. One fruitful area has reflected the growing understanding that literacy in the world is much more multimodal than was once thought (Cope and Kalantzis 2000). Such work has considered variation in literacy practices that reflect the increasing complexity of the way meaning is received and communicated to others. The changing nature of communication, growth in multimedia, and pervasiveness of social media and video have caused almost a seismic shift in the way we think about literacy and text. Limited definitions of literacy have increasingly been discarded for the richer concept of multiliteracies. This work has led researchers and practitioners to consider whether the more restricted literacy practices of schooling have effectively excluded a vast array of literacies that fall outside the boundaries of traditional school literacy.

A second area of related interest has been stimulated by the fields of critical theory, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies and has stressed the need to recognize that power relationships are also part of literacy practices (see Freebody (2008), Critical Literacy Education: On Living With "Innocent Language," Vol. 2). There

[2]This concern was primarily with how environmental print has an impact on early literacy development.

[3]There are numerous researchers whose work has contributed to the growing understanding of literacy diversity and its complex relationship to culture, ethnicity, and class. See, for example, Halliday (1975), Street (1984), and Lareau (1989).

are multiple ways that language can be used to "...understand, act in and on, and appraise the world" (Freebody 2008), and this calls for new forms of educational effort and disruptive practices, beyond those that support existing inequities. This work demonstrates that literacy is not value neutral and disconnected from other human activity, particularly the complex tapestry of relationships that characterize human existence. The theoretical research has also highlighted that some families and individuals are disadvantaged (and others advantaged) by power relationships that fail to value the funds of knowledge that they bring to school (Moll et al. 1992). This collective work has helped us to identify "the social practices by which schools, families and individuals reproduce, resist and transform hierarchies of social relations and their positions within them" (Solsken 1993, p. 7). Furthermore, it has enabled research and educational initiatives concerned with family literacy to be critiqued in new ways.

A third area of inquiry, which cuts across the first two categories, is worthy of mention. This group of studies has added an increasingly nuanced understanding that neat typologies and categories never capture the rich diversity of the literacy practices of our world. The research often takes the form of ethnographies or case studies of specific people groups to help us understand the rich nature of literacy for these groups. Heath's (1983) work was arguably the greatest stimulus for this type of fine-grained study, which looks at what gets counted as literacy, and how it is shaped within specific contexts. For example, the work of Li (2009) and others who have conducted research on immigrant families helps us to understand that the acquisition of literacy also requires the development of specific knowledges, attitudes, and understandings about the functions and purposes of literacy in specific social contexts. Another recent example is the work of Dickie (2011) that considered the literacy practices of Samoan children enrolled in a New Zealand primary school. What this study highlighted was the fact that the literacy of school and community had conflicting values that children needed to negotiate each day. Similarly, Watkins et al. (2012) considered the literacy practices of Karen people.[4] This work highlighted how closely literacy was integrated with the resettlement of refugee families with an impact ultimately on well-being. What specific ethnographies of this kind help us to understand is how school literacy and the literacy of other communities is very much interdependent.

One more recent area of research that has pushed the boundaries further in relation to the way literacy is defined and experienced has been suggested by Pahl and Khan (2015). They argue that objects such as books can hold "family values and ideals" that somehow are passed intergenerationally (p. 117). This of course resonates with the work of Kress (2010) who suggested that semiotic processes mediate meanings across time and place, as well as "through" people and the very objects implicated in acts of meaning.

[4]The Karen people are a Sino-Tibetan language group who came primarily from the state of Karen in Myanmar (formerly Burma). A large number of these people migrated to Thailand and from there have migrated to various countries around the world.

All these areas of study help us to understand how children from varied cultural and linguistic groups might continue to have difficulty in achieving school success. Many students struggle to cope with dominant pedagogical approaches that are based on “narrow understanding of school knowledge and literacy, which are defined and defended as what one needs to know and how one needs to know it in order to be successful in school and society” (Willis 1995, p. 34).

Remarkably, in the 6 years since the second edition of this volume, the complexity and diversity of literacy practices has increased within communities, and in the research literature, while school literacy has shifted less than would have been hoped. When I wrote an earlier version of this chapter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, FaceTime, Skype, Pinterest, and Twitter did not exist. And yet social media like these, and many other forms, have transformed the way we communicate with one another. They have also had an impact on how we negotiate meaning and co-construct texts of varied forms using social media and the many tools that are part of this phenomenon. It is now easier for children to publish their written texts for global audiences, but as well, they can now find numerous tools to produce videos, animation, graphic novels, and multimodal texts that integrate words, image, sound, and interactivity for readers and consumers of our texts[5] (see also in this volume chapter by Leander and Lewis).

Collectively our research in the field of community literacy has demonstrated that while the community literacy practices that children experience beyond the walls of classrooms have changed dramatically, what goes on in schools has still not shifted enough. This chapter is a review of what research has taught us about literacy beyond the school walls and the relationship of these diverse practices with what happens at school. It is assumed for the purposes of this chapter that “community literacy” refers to those social practices outside schools that involve the use of multiple sign systems to create and share meanings in whatever form is available (see also Maddox in this volume on chapter “▶ A Community Literacy Project: Nepal”). However, as this is a volume on language and education, there is a special interest and focus on how the reading and writing of text is part of such practices. While not denying the importance and impact of informal education and the increasingly blurred lines between the literacy of school and the literacy of life, education in this review is taken to mean that which is part of educational institutions for children.[6] In other words, the chapter seeks to look at the embeddedness of literacy within community, the community within the school, and the relationship between both.

---

[5]I have written about some of the ways we witness this increased multimodality in my blog “Literacy, Families and Learning” for a general audience. These posts describe some of the forms this takes – http://trevorcairney.blogspot.com.au/search?q=multimodal.

[6]This review does not attempt to address the significant work done in relation to adult literacy and workplace literacy. While each body of work is significant in understanding broader community literacy practices, a full discussion of each is outside the scope of this chapter that focuses primarily on the literacy worlds of children.

In the review that follows, there will be three major considerations: First, early foundational research efforts that explored community literacy practices as well as the relationship of this work to major theoretical traditions; second, significant recent and current explorations that have acknowledged more complex definitions of literacy and community, with special consideration of work in Australia; and, third, the need to problematize the existing research literature in this area and map out possible future directions.

A Brief Look at Early Research of Relevance

Early interest in community literacy practices was primarily motivated by a desire to enhance school success by ensuring that families supported school literacy. Some of the most significant early interest in the relationship between education and nonschool literacy practices occurred in the UK. The Plowden Report (Department of Education and Science 1967) was one of a number of stimuli that encouraged schools to become more concerned with the relationship of home to school learning. Plowden argued strongly for partnership between home and school. Such notions of partnership were primarily concerned with what families could do to support schools and lacked the richness of more recent attempts to build partnerships between home, school, and community (Cairney and Ruge 1998 for a fuller discussion of this issue).

The 1970s and 1980s saw a number of high-profile program initiatives take place that were judged to be successful at supporting school literacy. Many of these were programs designed to help parents support children at home in relation to school learning, particularly those experiencing reading problems.[7] However, typically, these early projects assumed a deficit view of families and sought to rectify what were seen as barriers to children's educational success (Cairney 2003). One well-known program in the UK, the Haringey Reading Project, found that some of the children whose parents were involved in their program made significant gains in reading achievement irrespective of reading ability. This project was to be a stimulus for other initiatives focusing on story reading strategies for parents and the provision of books to families (Tizard et al. 1982).

While not wanting to dismiss these early attempts to address the relationship between school and nonschool literacy practices, what is obvious is how such work was limited by the definitions of literacy that framed the work. Developments in other countries tended to parallel the UK experience. In the USA, interest in considering the impact of home and community literacy practices on schooling was a little slower to emerge, but by the 1990s, it was estimated that there were more than 500 family literacy programs alone in the USA (Nickse 1993).

In Australia, the early interest in the literacy practices of home and community was again primarily to obtain support for school learning. Curriculum documents during the 1970s and 1980s stressed the importance of parents and a supportive

[7]See Cairney (2000) for a more detailed review of this early work.

home environment in children's learning. Common to these early efforts was a desire to encourage parents to become more involved in school and support school agendas, rather than building on the rich literacy practices of home and community.

In a federally funded review of Australian initiatives, Cairney et al. (1995) identified 261 major initiatives and over 100 small-scale projects that showed an interest in using the relationship between the literacy of school and community to strengthen the school success of students who were struggling. This study showed that 76.3% of these projects were initiated by schools and were largely designed to fulfill school purposes and transmit information about schooling. The report concluded that more effort is needed to be given to understand the richness of family and community literacy practices and how this could be seen as a rich resource informing and supporting school-based literacy education. Almost 20 years later, it seems that this is a lesson still to be learned for many. The literacy of school for many children seems to have failed to adapt to the growing complexity of community literacy practices. While the literacy of the world has become increasingly more complex, multimodal, and cross-cultural, the literacy of schooling has changed a little.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, one of the first researchers to seriously explore the complex relationship between the literacy practices of community and school was Heath on the Piedmont Carolinas in the USA (1983). She found that there was variation in the acquisition of oral language, and the manner in which parents introduced children to literacy and its purposes, and was able to document significant differences in community styles of literacy socialization and the impact that this had on school success.

The work of Heath and others resonated well with earlier theoretical work on early language and literacy development[8] that had already challenged views on the role adults and families play in early literacy learning. The 1960s and 1970s had seen the emergence of important changes in our understanding or oral language development that were eventually to lead to a number of significant literacy studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For example, Harste et al. (1984, p. 56) demonstrated that preschool children were actively attempting to understand the nature of the language spoken around them, making predictions and testing hypotheses about how language worked, and demonstrating rich literacy understandings embedded in everyday reading and writing experiences. This work was a serious challenge to maturational theories of child development that had previously confined literacy learning to the school years. Early literacy researchers embraced the term "emergent" literacy to describe the significant literacy experiences that preschool children were encountering at home and in community settings.[9] These new insights helped researchers to

[8]Clay (1966), Halliday (1975), and Vygotsky (1978)

[9]Hall (1987) provided one of the earliest syntheses of the emergent literacy research and did much to translate this work into a form that could inform early childhood practice. However, this new view of preschool literacy had its roots in the work of many researchers including Clay (1966), Wells (1982, 1986), Harste et al. (1984), Mason and Allen (1986), and Teale and Sulzby (1986).

begin to view nonschool literacy experiences as relevant and significant to school success, and yet, the process of change has been slow.

Almost in parallel to the development of emergent literacy was the emergence of constructivist theories based strongly on the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1983). Rich literacy experiences, scaffolded support (Bruner 1986; Rogoff 1990), and encouragement of meaning making and risk taking were increasingly recognized as a vital part of child language learning. What this work again reinforced was the way literacy and language were constituted, defined, and used within communities of practice.

Sociolinguistic theories of language also contributed a great deal to our growing understanding of literacy diversity beyond school. Scholars like Bahktin (1929/1973,1935/1981) and Halliday (1975) built upon the basic understanding that language is made as people act and react to one another. Cook-Gumperz (1986) argued that spoken language and literacy are cultural tools that shape individuals as they grow and transform behavior as it is internalized. This work informed the view that people learn to be literate primarily in groups as they relate to others and seek to accomplish social and communicative functions. Literacy was seen as purpose driven and context bound, with people acting and reacting to the actions of others as well as to set patterns of group interaction.[10]

This work raised new questions about definitions of literacy and of how these definitions were being applied to community and family literacy. Street (1984) challenged what he called traditional "autonomous" models that he saw as dominated by "essay-text" forms of literacy and proposed an alternative "ideological" model. This model was concerned with the specific social practices of reading and writing, recognizing the ideological and culturally embedded nature of literacy. He argued that the meaning of literacy depends upon the social institution within which it is embedded, and he called for the use of the term "literacies" rather than literacy to recognize the social complexity of the practices. Street was one of a number of researchers seeking definitions that considered literacy as a set of social and cultural practices, not a unitary skill.

One final influence was the emergence of "critical literacy." This perspective drew heavily on the work of critical theorists, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies and attempted to critique and problematize the relationship between literacy and factors as diverse as school success, parental support, self-identity, gender, and family life. The work argued that:

- Differences between the discourses of home and school can make a difference to the success of some children (Gee 1990).
- An acceptance of cultural differences between home and school can lead to more responsive curricula that offer all children greater chances of success in learning.

[10]There are many key studies and publications including the critical work of Bloome (1987), Cazden (1988), Cook-Gumperz (1986), Street (1984), and Wells (1986).

- Some people are disadvantaged by power relationships that fail to value the funds of knowledge that some children and their families bring to school, while others are advantaged (see Freire and Macedo 1987; Gee 1990; Moll et al. 1992; Street 1995).

The combined and overlapping impact of the above quite disparate scholarly traditions was to bring about a significant shift in the way literacy was defined and studied and an increased understanding of the relationship between the literacy of home and school. In the following section, major contributions to this emerging understanding are discussed.

Major Contributions

Studies That Describe Literacy Practices in the Home

While a great deal is known about early literacy development, there are few studies that have provided a detailed description of literacy practices within a wide range of families. Denny Taylor has conducted some of the most significant work in the USA in the last 30 years. Taylor's (1983) detailed ethnographic research spawned the term "family literacy" and provided some of the most detailed insights into the nature of literacy practices within homes. Her series of studies began in 1977 with a detailed description of a single family. By 1979 her ongoing observations had grown to include six white middle-class families living in suburban New York City.

Taylor's close involvement in the families contributed a number of critical insights. She argued that literacy is implicated in the lives of family members and found that parents mediated literacy experiences in varied ways across and within families and that older siblings helped to shape younger siblings' experiences of literacy (see Gregory, this volume). She also observed "shifts" in parents' approaches to the "transmission of literacy styles and values," coinciding with children beginning to learn to read and write in school (Taylor 1983, p. 20). Literacy experiences within families she argued were rich and varied, surrounding family members as part of the fabric of life. Finally, she observed that children's growing awareness of literacy involved experiences that are woven into daily activities (Taylor 1983, p. 56).

Taylor's early work informed a number of later studies, most notably her work with Dorsey-Gaines in conducting an ethnography of black families living in urban poverty (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988). The combined work of Taylor and her colleagues challenged notions of what effective parent support of literacy involves and attempted to move beyond white middle-class definitions of effective parenting. Their work showed that within the poor black families studied, there was a richness of literacy experience that previous studies had not been able to recognize. This finding was later given support by the work of Auerbach (1989, 1995).

McNaughton's (1995) work in New Zealand is also relevant to this discussion. Based on case studies of 17 families in New Zealand, he concluded that families are

a critical determinant of children's early literacy development. His description of the literacy practices of Maori, Samoan, and Pakeha families whose income earners were from nonprofessional occupations provided a picture of resourceful families able to support their children's early literacy learning. McNaughton was able to describe the complex ways in which families use time, space, and varied resources to help preschool children to learn literacy. He noted that families used three different ways to support literacy learning: shared joint activities between the children and significant others, personal activities (e.g., scribbling or writing), and ambient activities where literacy was immersed in life.

Arguably the most extensive study conducted in Australia in the last 20 years was undertaken by Cairney and Ruge (1998) and sought to examine the relationship between home, school, and community literacy. This 2-year study employed school and community-based case studies across four varied settings and subsequently conducted an ethnography of 37 children from 27 families, observing and describing their literacy practices at home and school. The focus children were of primary school age, but within the families, there were approximately 20 additional preschool children. The participating families were asked to collect a range of data including audiotape literacy events, an audit of home literacy resources, a log of all reading and writing activities, and photographs of significant literacy events in the home (using disposable cameras supplied by the researchers). One member of each family was also asked to act as coresearcher and was trained to help record a range of home literacy events.

Cairney and Ruge (1998) identified four distinct purposes for literacy in the homes and classrooms in their study: literacy for establishing and maintaining relationships, literacy for accessing or displaying information, literacy for pleasure and/or self-expression, and literacy for skills development. All four purposes for literacy were active in relationship to one another and at the same time, cut across varied home and school contexts.

One critical finding from this study was that specific literacy practices may contribute to, and constitute part of, different literacy events in different contexts depending on the understandings and purposes of the participants. For example, the intended purpose of a newsletter from school may be to give parents access to information about school policies or activities. Alternatively, the intended purpose may be to maintain communication between home and school and thereby develop the relationship between families and the school. However, in reading the newsletter at home, families may have very different purposes and "use" the newsletter in different ways (e.g., one family used it for oral reading practice). This is consistent with the work of Street (1993) and his contention that different domains can place quite different demands on participants for literacy.

Cairney and Ruge (1998) also found that the families in their study differed greatly in the extent to which literacy was visible in everyday life. Similarly, families varied greatly in the amount and types of literacy resources available to them.

One of the striking features of literacy practices in the homes of many of the families in the Cairney and Ruge study was the extent to which "school literacy" appeared to dominate family life. That is, the particular types and uses of literacy

usually associated with schooling were prominent in many families. This prominence was manifested primarily in the amount of time spent on homework activities (up to 3 h per day in some families) and, to a lesser extent, siblings "playing schools." As well, there was evidence to suggest that the literacy practices privileged right from the birth of a first child are strongly shaped by the parents' experience of school literacy as well as the desire to prepare the preschool child for later schooling (Cairney and Ruge 1998).

Studies That Attempted to Bridge Home, School, and Community Contexts

While there have been a significant number of studies that have observed literacy practices within the home, there is less evidence of research that has been able to tap into children's experiences of literacy outside the family and the school. Putting to one side a few seminal studies that have managed to tap the home, school, and community contexts (e.g., Heath 1983 and this volume) and studies of "local" and "heritage" literacies[11] that are concerned primarily with the maintenance of culturally unique adult literacy practices, what we do have falls into two main categories.

The first group contains cultural ethnographies that have provided insights into the role that written language and other sign systems play within community and family life. This body of work has also helped us to understand the cultural variation that occurs across communities and families. One of the most significant early studies to document cultural variations in literacy acquisition was the work of Scribner and Cole (1981), who found that the Vai people of Liberia used three different writing systems for different purposes. Arabic literacy was learned by rote as part of religious practices, English was learned as part of formal schooling, and finally, the Vai language was learned informally at home and in the community and for personal communication such as letters. Each of these "literacies" was acquired and used for different social and cultural purposes.

Similarly, in an ethnography within the South Pacific, Duranti and Ochs (1986) found complexity and that this had an impact on how children coped with literacy at school. They observed that the children of families in a Samoan village needed to cope with different forms of interaction across home and school settings.

However, while anthropology has been a major stimulus for new directions in literacy and culturally sensitive accounts of literacy within communities, Street (1995) argues that such work has often been framed by traditional limited definitions of literacy. He suggests, for example, that early ethnographies like that of Clammer (1976) in Fijian villages assumed "autonomous" models of literacy in framing the study and failed to question the power relationships of the institution (in this case, the

[11]The term "local literacies" has been used by Barton and others (see for example, Barton and Hamilton 1998) to describe the literacy of everyday life. They observed that in everyday lives, people inhabit a textually mediated social world, bringing reading and writing into most activities.

church) in introducing literacy, thus failing to problematize the role that literacy played in the colonization of these people, although more recently ethnographies of literacy have adopted a broader social practice frame (as many contributions to this volume indicate).

One additional area that needs further attention is the very definitions of family that shape much of the research conducted. While many children are introduced to literacy within traditional family groups, far less research has sought to include less traditional family structures. For example, several studies have observed the practices of extended and alternative family structures. Reyes and Torres (2007) observed children who engaged with home-based literacy practices with extended family members, including aunts and uncles, cousins, in-laws, and grandparents. Whereas Rowe and Fain (2013) chose children who read regularly with any family with whom they had a strong personal bond.

In Australia, the federal government has funded a number of significant national studies over a 10-year period that have sought to understand the complexity of literacy practices in varied contexts, with a particular concern for the implications of this work for school literacy success. The work by Cairney et al. (1995) and Cairney and Ruge (1998) discussed above was part of this broad sweep of projects. However, other studies have explored the literacy practices of children undertaking schooling by distance education (Louden and Rivalland 1995), the experiences of children and families in the year prior to school as well as the first year of school (Hill et al. 1998), the literacy practices of urban and remote rural communities, and variations in literacy practices across rural and urban communities (Breen et al. 1994).

Breen et al. (1994), for example, conducted community-based case studies of 12 urban and 12 rural families and observed that "all children, regardless of specific language background, are very likely to enter school with different repertoires of language knowledge and use which express their initial communicative competence" (Breen et al. 1994, p. 35). They concluded that even when literacy practices across families appeared similar, they could have different meanings and values.

Similarly, Hill et al. (1998) found that Australian children come to school with diverse prior-to-school experiences. The 100 children who were studied were growing up in very different communities, families, and homes. The researchers suggested that their observations indicated inequalities in contemporary Australia that have an impact on children's early lives. Schools they argued need to construct a more appropriate curriculum which explicitly builds on children's existing cultural capital and preferred ways of learning.

Studies of Indigenous Literacy

Australia's Indigenous population has experienced special issues with literacy. A recent OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report indicates that 15-year-old Indigenous students scored 82 points lower, on average, than non-Indigenous students in reading literacy. This is more than one proficiency level, or more than two full years of schooling, below non-Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous students also performed significantly lower than the OECD average. Only 2.4% of 15-year-old Indigenous students reached grade level 5, and there were even fewer Indigenous students (0.3%) who were placed at level 6 (ACER 2010).

Some of the earliest and most influential attempts to understand issues associated with Indigenous literacy were conducted by Harris (1984) and described traditional indigenous learning styles among communities in the Northern Territory of Australia. He found that learning styles were often context specific and person orientated and were dependent on observation and imitation, as well as personal trial and error.

Subsequent studies in this tradition have pointed to the failure of existing pedagogy to accommodate aboriginal learning styles. Malin (1990) was able to demonstrate that conflicts between aboriginal home socialization practices and teacher expectations had a significant effect on Indigenous success at school (cf Susan Phillips' 1983 seminal study of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in the USA).

Other researchers have also highlighted the significant linguistic diversity of Indigenous learners and observed that Indigenous students in both urban and rural areas speak aboriginal English in informal community contexts and then have to switch to standard English. Such work has argued for the valuing of the community English that Indigenous learners bring to school and the impact that such actions has on the central relationships between teachers, their students, and communities (see, for example, Munns et al. (1999).

Understanding the Impact of Culture on School Achievement

Studies of Indigenous literacy in Australia reflect international research that acknowledges a new valuing of the richness of community and family literacy. Critical to this has been the growing understanding that literacies vary depending on purpose and life "domains" (Barton 1994). Researchers have begun to argue that there are many forms of literacy, each with specific purposes and contexts in which they are used. They conclude that to understand literacy fully, we need to understand the groups and institutions through which we are socialized into specific literacy practices (Gee 1990).

A key focus of research has been to identify why and how people learn through participation in the practices that make up specific groups and communities. How do communities organize their resources, and how does participation in the culture shape identity? As Moll (1993) has suggested, this has represented a move away from viewing individual learners to viewing learning as participation in funds of knowledge as part of a community of practice. Consequently, a number of American researchers have explored differences in the suitability and impact of curricula and pedagogy on minority groups. For example, Foster (1992, p. 303) concluded that "... many of the difficulties African-American students encounter in becoming literate result in part from the misunderstandings that occur when the speaking and communication styles of their community vary from those expected and valued in

the school setting" (p. 303). James Gee's (1990, 2008) work on primary and secondary discourses helps us to partially understand some of the issues operating here to create disadvantage. Our language and literacy practices are an extension of who we are, not just what we know or our operational understanding of language and literacy. Our primary discourses of home and community have a relationship to the secondary discourses of schooling. To understand this is to understand some of the challenges that children face within classrooms.

A deeper understanding of this clash of discourse practices can be seen in the work of researchers who have investigated the impact of differences between the cultural beliefs and expectations of Native Americans and those of mainstream cultures (Deyhle and LeCompte 1994; Locust 1989). For example, Locust (1989) examined traditional Native American belief systems, including their holistic approach to life and death, their emphasis on nonverbal communication, and their valuing of visual, motor, and memory skills over verbal skills. She investigated the ways in which these beliefs conflict with the education system and argued that traditional psychological education tests reflect the dominant culture resulting in Native American children achieving low scores and being treated as learning disabled.

However, Cummins (1986) has argued that the educational success or failure of minority students is related to more than just curricula mismatches, suggesting that it is "a function of the extent to which schools reflect or counteract the power relations that exist within the broader society" (p. 32). As a result he has argued for the incorporation of minority students' culture and language in the education of their children (see Cummins, chapter "▶ BICS and CALP: Empirical and Theoretical Status of the Distinction," Vol. 2).

In a related Australian study, Cairney and Ruge (1998) conducted case studies of four schools judged effective at acknowledging community language and cultural diversity. They found that within each of these schools, five basic premises drove curriculum:

1. Staff believed that all children could achieve school success irrespective of language or cultural background.
2. Language was used in an integrated way across the curriculum.
3. Curricula acknowledged that literacy development benefits from the maintenance of first language competence.
4. Success was seen as critical to learning and students were given opportunities to succeed as they learnt new skills.
5. Parents were seen as playing an important role in children's educational success and were actively involved in the activities of the school.

What the above research demonstrates is that an understanding of language and cultural diversity of a school's students and families is important. It also highlights the need to understand the complexity of community literacies in other than school terms and in ways that transcends "autonomous" models.

In a related research study, Street et al. (2005) have considered how nonschool factors affect school achievement. Adopting a sociocultural perspective on learning

the Leverhulme Numeracy Research Program was a 5-year longitudinal project that sought to examine the meanings and uses of numeracy in school and community settings. Another focus was the language practices associated with numeracy, namely, reading, writing, speaking, and listening. A key concern was the influence of home contexts on school achievement. The Leverhulme Program attempted to develop ways of measuring pupil progression across a 5-year period. The fieldwork involved observation of selected schools and classrooms and of informal situations in and out of school. It drew on interviews with teachers and pupils, analysis of texts from home and school, curriculum school policy documents, school programs and homework, and teacher feedback.

One of the most interesting insights from this research was that numeracy practices were often invisible to the researcher, with observations affected by how both the observers and the observed defined such practices. The question that this raised for the researchers was "what counts as numeracy?" The varied answers to this question impact not just on what is observed and recorded but what is valued and communicated between home and school. Street et al. (2005) found that when questions were asked of parents about numeracy that discussions often turned to school numeracy practices. This is very similar to the findings of Cairney and Ruge (1998) that also showed how school literacy pushed out and devalued other literacy forms or, at the very least, forced them "underground" or outside the classroom.

Street and his coresearchers were left with the key question "how are the borders between numeracy practices and other social practices constructed by researchers, schools, and families?" This led the researchers to ask a related question, "How damaging are any omissions?" Such observations and questions have relevance to the observation already made in this chapter that researchers have noted that school literacy practices dominate home practices. One critical question that obviously needs to be explored is whether observations of school literacy or numeracy practices at home may involve (at least in part) a masking of other practices that researchers or participants simply don't count or define as literacy or numeracy. This topic requires further research.

New Literacies

One of the obvious gaps in community literacy research has been the failure to adequately tap and understand the richness of nonprint literacy available to children outside school. Rarely have studies been able to identify, observe, and document use of multiple sign systems or even the relationship of multiple sign systems to print-based literacy. While early childhood studies have come closest to identifying the richness of children's early experiences,[12] few studies have adequately tapped the diversity of literacy practices experienced day by day within communities.

[12]See, for example, Harste et al. (1984), Clay (1966), and Wells (1986).

The work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) has perhaps achieved more in challenging views on the impact of visual literacy and its different demands for the learner. The New London Group (NLG) (Cope and Kalantzis 2000) has also sought to retheorize literacy and challenge "authoritarian" conceptions of unitary literacy (see Leander and Lewis, chapter "▶ Literacy and Internet Technologies," Vol. 2).

The NLG has proposed a metalanguage of multiliteracies based on the concept of "design" (Cope and Kalantzis 2000). Multiliteracies for the New London Group are based on the understanding that "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." They suggest that meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal, and our world is marked simultaneously by increasing local diversity and increasing global connectedness.

What we do know is that children are being exposed to richer opportunities to encounter written text in diverse digital as well as print forms and that many of these have a relationship to visual, audio, spatial, and behavioral experiences.

What this work promises to deliver is research that will demonstrate the increasingly demanding and diverse literacy practices that are encountered in community settings. The work of researchers like Lemke (2002) suggests that there is much that we need to explore and understand. Having investigated hypertexts, he has concluded that there is great complexity in the processes required to combine words and images giving attention to sounds, music, graphics, hyperlinks, menu bars, hot spots, etc. If children are experiencing the richness of textual and visual forms outside the classroom, then one suspects that previous conceptions of the relationship between the literacy of home, school, and community will need to be revised. There may be ever-increasing hybridity of literacy practices as popular culture and new media merge with more traditional literary forms.

Problems and Gaps in Our Understanding

What the above discussion should have demonstrated is that there is much that we still do not know about community literacy practices. While the studies discussed shed light on the topic, there are a number of difficulties in moving forward.

One problem is that in trying to understand community literacy practices, it is difficult to separate out the impact of school literacy practices that have such a strong impact on families and attitudes toward what counts as literacy within the wider community (see Cairney and Ruge 1998; and Freebody et al. 1995). Alongside this must be held the questions raised by Street et al. (2005) about the invisibility of some practices.

A second (and related) problem is the limitation of the methods that have been used to examine community literacy practices. Rarely have studies of family and community literacy managed to achieve an "insider" view of literacy practices. This should not surprise us as it is difficult to observe family and community literacy practices, and the researcher's presence makes a difference to that which is observed.

Rarely have in-depth observations been made of natural settings, and except for a small number of significant ethnographies and case studies, most research has involved limited time with small numbers of families. Getting at the "invisible" literacy practices of home and community is one of the major challenges of researchers. The impact of multimedia and its prevalence poses special challenges for the researcher. What is counted? How is it observed? How are complex relationships between multiliteracies to be uncovered and understood?

As well as these generic issues, there are many specific issues to explore. We need, for example, more studies that consider how gender, social class, and culture interact with issues of literacy practice. Are the experiences of some students at home and school influenced by secondary factors such as language background, social class,[13] gender, and so on. We also need considerable attention to be given to the impact of school literacy on home literacy as well as the reverse. Rather than simply examining family and community literacy to gain lessons for school literacy, we need to consider the synergistic relationship between the two contexts and the roles that students play as mediators between them. Some of the early intergenerational literacy work may be a useful starting point for this exploration (see Cairney and Ruge 1998; Gregory, this volume).

Finally, we need to remember that literacy is not culturally and ideologically neutral (Street 1995). Hence we need to examine what this means for literacy acquisition and the relationship of family literacy to life and, in particular, public institutions such as schools. It is important to understand how family literacy practices and their relationship to school literacy are implicated in power relationships that affect life chances.

The research reviewed in this chapter provides an incomplete picture of community literacy practices. While the literature is rich in its findings concerning the importance of the family as the first and perhaps most critical site for literacy acquisition, less is known about the literacy practices that are part of children's lives outside school and how this relates to learning within school. Children experience a richness of literacy practices at home that is not replicated in school (Cairney and Ruge 1998). This richness may be even more significant when children's involvement in complex communities outside the home is considered.

Since I wrote this chapter for the first edition of the book, the literacy practices we experience in our world have changed in extraordinary ways. Digital literacies associated with print alone have undergone dramatic change, with an inevitable impact on the early literacy experiences of young children. Once we used to speak of children's first experience of print in their environment as the reading of signs, food packaging, and simple picture books. While these still remain, the toddler is more likely to be experiencing interactive play with print, image, and sound via iPads, televisions, their parents' phones, and other electronic devices in their world. In doing this children will be observing and interacting with a rich array of digital devices in the home and community from the first year of life. We need to continue to

[13]One of the seminal works on this topic is the work of Lareau (1989).

ask what impact does this have on the literacy of schooling. Second, we need to keep asking what impact might this have on their future.

There is so much more that we still need to know. I see three areas of rich research opportunity that require further concerted action.

We need more ethnographies that uncover the richness of life as children experience and engage in the literacy practices of the multiple communities that they inhabit day by day.

We need more detailed thick descriptions of literacy life that interrogate the relationship between the language practices that represent literacy, the rich social contexts in which they are experienced, and the interplay of power, values, beliefs, and ideologies that are part of our world.

As well, as we observe the form and place of literacy changing in our world, we need to pay closer attention to the "materials" that Gee (2008) argues are the foundation of discourses, the "people, things, artifacts, symbols, tools, technologies, actions, interactions, times, places, ways of speaking, listening, writing, reading, feeling, thinking, valuing," and so on. We need better tools to do this and more time observing them. Deep embeddedness in communities is the only way that we will see what is going on.

It is only by understanding the rich diversity of practices that characterize the term literacy that we will be better placed to create and sustain equally rich educational contexts that will build on the knowledge, practices, beliefs, and experiences that students bring with them to school each day. In this way, we will create better opportunities to transform school literacy into something that approximates the richness of the literacy of communities outside the walls of the school. The communities of practice that we must understand are both physical and virtual. Our students live in and negotiate these daily, using literacy practices far more complex and diverse than we currently provide for them in our schools. We must learn from this and change our schools accordingly.

Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

Joseph Lo Bianco and Yvette Slaughter: Language Policy and Education in Australia. In Volume: Language Policy and Political Issues in Education

Margaret Gearon and Sue Fernandez: Community Language Learning in Australia. In Volume: Second and Foreign Language Learning

Gillian Wigglesworth and Beverly Baker: Language Assessment in Indigenous Contexts in Australia and Canada. In Volume: Language Testing and Assessment

References

Auerbach, E. (1989). Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy. *Harvard Educational Review, 59*, 165–181.

Auerbach, E. (1995). Which way for family literacy: Intervention or empowerment? In L. M. Morrow (Ed.), *Family literacy: Connections in schools and communities*. Newark: International Reading Association.

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). (2010). *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA Australia)*. Melbourne: ACER.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1935/81). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (ed: Holquist, M.; trans: Emerson, C., & Holquist, M.). Austin: University of Texas Press (TX).

Bakhtin, M. (1929/1973). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (trans: Rotsel, R.W., 1973). Ann Arbor: Ardis.

Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community.* London: Routledge.

Barton, D. (1994). *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of written language*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bloome, D. (1987). Literacy and schooling. Norwood: Ablex.

Breen, M. P., Louden, W., Barrat-Pugh, C., Rivalland, J., Rohl, M., Rhydwen, M., Lloyd, S., & Carr, T. (1994). *Literacy in its place: Literacy practices in urban and rural communities* (Vol. 1 & 2). Canberra: DEET.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (1983). *Child's talk: Learning to use language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cairney, T. H. (2003). Literacy in family life. In N. Hall, J. Larson, & J. Marsh (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood literacy* (pp. 85–98). London: SAGE.

Cairney, T. H. (2000). Beyond the classroom walls: The rediscovery of the family and community as partners in education. *Educational Review, 52*(2), 163–174.

Cairney, T. H., & Ruge, J. (1998). *Community literacy practices and schooling: Towards effective support for students*. Sydney: DEETYA.

Cairney, T. H., Ruge, J., Buchanan, J., Lowe, K., & Munsie, L. (1995). *Developing partnerships: The home, school and community interface* (Vol. 1–3). Canberra: DEET.

Cazden, C. (1988). *Classroom discourse*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Clammer, J. (1976). *Literacy and social change: A case study of Fiji*. Leiden: Brill.

Clay, M. (1966). *Emergent reading behaviour.* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Auckland.

Cook-Gumperz, J. (1986). *The social construction of literacy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. Melbourne: Macmillan Publishers Australia Pty.

Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. *Harvard Educational Review, 56*, 18–36.

Department of Education and Science. (1967). *Children and heir primary schools: A report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) Vol. 1: Report & Vol 2: Research and surveys (Plowden Report)*. London: HMSO.

Deyhle, D., & LeCompte, M. (1994). Cultural differences in child development: Navajo adolescents in middle schools. *Theory Into Practice, 33*(3), 156–166.

Dickie, J. (2011). Samoan students documenting their out-of-school literacies: An insider view of conflicting values. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 34*(3), 247–259.

Duranti, A., & Ochs, E. (1986). Literacy instruction in a Samoan village. In B. Schieffelin & P. Gilmore (Eds.), *The acquisition of literacy: Ethnographic perspectives* (Vol. 21, pp. 213–232). Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Foster, M. (1992). Sociolinguistics and the African-American community: Implications for literacy. *Theory Into Practice, 31*(4), p303E.

Freebody, P. (2008). Critical literacy education: On living with "innocent language". In B. V. Street & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education. Vol. 2: Literacy* (2nd ed.). Philadelphia: Springer.

Freebody, P., Ludwig, C., & Gunn, S. (1995). *Everyday literacy practices in and out of schools in low socio-economic status urban communities: A descriptive and interpretive research program*. Canberra: DEETYA.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey.

Gee, J. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. London: The Falmer Press.

Gee, J. (2008). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.

Green, B. (1988). Subject-specific literacy and school learning: A focus on writing. *Australian Journal of Education, 32*(2), 156–179.

Hall, N. (1987). *The emergence of literacy*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1975). *Learning how to mean: Explorations in the development of language*. London: Edward Arnold.

Harris, S. (1984). Aboriginal learning styles and formal schooling. *Aboriginal Child at School, 12*(4), 3–22.

Harste, J., Woodward, V., & Burke, C. (1984). *Language stories and literacy lessons*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in community and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hill, S., Comber, B., Louden, W., Rivalland, J., & Reid, J. (1998). *100 children go to school, Vol. 2*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training & Youth Affairs.

Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. New York: Routledge.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse*. London: Arnold.

Lareau, A. (1989). Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education. London: The Falmer Press.

Lemke, J. (2002). Travels in hypermodality. *Visual Communication, 1*(3), 229–325.

Li, G. (Ed.). (2009). *Multicultural families, home literacies, and mainstream schooling*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.

Locust, C. (1989). Wounding the spirit: Discrimination and traditional American belief systems. *Harvard Educational Review, 55*(3), 315–330.

Louden, W., & Rivalland, J. (1995). *Literacy at a distance*. Canberra: Department of Education Training & Employment.

Malin, M. (1990). The visibility and invisibility of Aboriginal students in an urban classroom. *Australian Journal of Education, 34*(3), 312–329.

Mason, J. M., & Allen, J. (1986). A review of emergent literacy with implications for research and practice in reading. Champaign: Center for the Study of Reading. Technical Report No. 379.

McNaughton, S. (1995). *Patterns of emergent literacy*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice, 31*(2), 132–141.

Moll, L. (1993). Community-mediated educational practices. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Conference.

Munns, G., Simpson, L., Connelly, J., & Townsend, T. (1999). "*Baiyai* '. . . meeting place of two parties . . .' "(Wiradjuri)': The pedagogical literacy relationship. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 22*(2), 147–164.

Nickse, R. (1993). A typology of family and intergenerational literacy programmes; Implications for evaluation. *Viewpoints, 15*, 34–40.

Pahl, K., & Khan, A. (2015). Artifacts of resilience: Enduring narratives, texts, practices across three generations. In J. Sefton-Green & J. Rowsell (Eds.), *Learning and literacy over time: Longitudinal perspectives* (pp. 116–133). New York: Routledge.

Reyes, L. V., & Torres, M. N. (2007). Decolonizing family literacy in a culture circle: Reinventing the family literacy educator's role. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 7*, 73–94.

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rowe, D., & Fain, J. F. (2013). The family backpack project: Responding to dual-language texts through family journals. *Language Arts, 90*, 402–416.

Schultz, K., & Hull, G. (2015). Literacies in and out of school in the United States. In B. V. Street & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education. Vol. 2: Literacy* (3rd ed.). Philadelphia: Springer.

Scribner, S., & Cole, M. (1981). *The psychology of literacy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Solsken, J. W. (1993). *Literacy, gender and work: In families and in schools*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Street, B. (Ed.). (1993). *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Street, B. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy development, ethnography and education*. London: Longman.

Street, B., Baker, D., & Tomlin, A. (2005). *Navigating numeracies: Home/school numeracy practices*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Taylor, D. (1983). *Family literacy: Young children learning to read and write*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Taylor, D., & Dorsey-Gaines, C. (1988). *Growing up literate: Learning from inner city families*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Teale, W., & Sulzby, E. (1986). Emergent literacy: Writing and reading. Norwood: Ablex.

Tizard, J., Schofield, W., & Hewison, J. (1982). Collaboration between teachers and parents in assisting children's reading. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 52*, 1–15.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Watkins, P. G., Razee, H., & Richters, J. (2012). I'm telling you. . .the language barrier is the most, the biggest challenge. *Australian Journal of Education, 56*(2), 126–141.

Wells, C. G. (1982). Some antecedents of early educational attainment. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 2*, 181–200.

Wells, G. (1986). *The meaning makers*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Willis, A. I. (1995). Reading the world of school literacy: Contextualising the experience of a young African American male. *Harvard Educational Review, 65*(1), 30–48.