CHAPTER 6
The implications of the ‘New Literacy Studies’ for literacy education
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The Literacy Debate
My ‘problem’ stems from the anthropological observation that a visiting Martian might be surprised at the extent to which arcane debates about literacy, language and learning appear in the public domain in contemporary British and American society. Popular newspapers and tabloids as well as the quality press, and also television and radio seem full of accounts by ‘experts’ of their own piece of the struggle over the meanings of literacy and in particular the acquisition of literacy: phonics vs. whole language, code-based vs. meaning-based reading, cognitive and situated models of literacy; student-centred vs. whole-class teaching. Although my own interest has mainly been in the uses rather than the acquisition of literacy, and my own part in the debate has been about social practices associated with reading and writing rather than psycholinguistic conflicts over the grapheme/phoneme relationship. I am intrigued by the way in which these debates have taken on a social character of their own.

Those in other niches of the intellectual horizon may go a lifetime without their debates splashed across full-page spreads of The Sunday Times (10 April 1994), The Independent (7 February 1993), etc., so it is a matter of intellectual and social history why this should be the case with respect to literacy and language in education. That this may appear common sense to some – ‘literacy is the basics, the ground on which other social practices in modern society rest’ – attracts my attention even more. What counts as common sense in one culture and in one era may indeed be arcane or ideologically fundamental in another. And there have certainly been many times and places where the view of literacy represented in the newspaper headlines of the late 1990s has not been the received wisdom.

So what is the Literacy Debate? I do not intend to outline it in detail here, as my concern is more with alternative models, but Wray (1997) has recently provided a clear summary of the issues. According to Wray the debate can be traced back through a quarter of a century, ‘yet still appears to centre around two polarised positions: Chall (1967) set the terms of the debate as being on the one hand between those who advocated a code-based approach to teaching reading and on the other those who emphasised the place of meaning’ (Wray, 1997, p.161). This basic divide seems to remain, even where the terms may have shifted somewhat, to conflicts between ‘phonics’ and whole language ‘real books’. (Goodman, 1996; Willinsky, 1990; Meek, 1991); the role of phonics in the UK National Curriculum (Raban, 1996; Beard, 1993); whether written alphabetic knowledge is best learned ‘naturally’ (Willinsky, 1990) or through formal delivery (Olsted,

1996); and to a distinction between 'autonomous' and 'ideological' models which I suggested in 1985 and which has recently been adapted for teachers in adult literacy programmes (Friedrich, 1996, reprinted in Literacy across the Curriculum, 1997).

Many researchers, including Wray himself, have tried to propose a 'balanced' approach and most teachers probably combine the use of 'real' materials and learning for meaning with workshop-type sessions on particular problems of the phoneme/grapheme relationship. Nagy and Anderson (1997) have recently argued on theoretical grounds that phonemic awareness requires both practice in 'natural' conditions and some explicit instruction. Research suggests that 'it should be considered an outcome, rather than a cause, of learning to read' (p. 2): they resolve what appears a paradox in the Literacy Debate by postulating 'a reciprocal relationship' between phonemic awareness and learning to read: although the concept of phoneme is essential to the alphabetic insight, letters provide a scaffold for the development of this difficult concept. 'It is the process of beginning to learn to read that draws the child's attention to letters, sounds and their relationships, enabling the insight which unlocks the system' (ibid. p. 2). In other words, formal learning of the phoneme/grapheme relationship – what is popularly known as phonics – is not enough: learners also learn through practice and use. But neither is practice and use sufficient, as some whole-language proponents suggest: some formal learning is also necessary. This, then, is the sense in which language and learning theory lead to a balanced approach.

Some recent balanced approaches, however, may not be quite as evenhanded as the term suggests. A recent book that claims to offer 'balanced perspectives' provides an object lesson in how ideological arguments are disguised behind the supposedly detached and neutral discourse of the autonomous model of literacy (Streef, 1995). Roger Beard (1993, p. 1) cites favourably Chall's (1967, 1983) claim that 'overall, code-emphasis approaches produce better results in the teaching of early reading'.

According to Beard, this is 'not a surprising conclusion because the English writing system is an alphabetic one ...', thereby apparently rejecting the 'balanced' view of the character of alphabetic systems put forward by Nagy and Anderson above. Although the book claims to provide a balanced approach to the phonics (or code-emphasis) and whole-language (or meaning-emphasis) approaches, it is quite clear that its editor and the selection of chapters lean towards the former: the term balance here does not refer to the balance of articles in the book, which mainly privilege a phonics and skills-based approach, but indicates that this book is intended to balance the influence of the whole-language and child-centred view, which has clearly held sway for too long. This notion of balance represents probably the dominant discourse in current policy documents (LTI, 1997; TTA, 1997), which frequently claim that research shows a phonics approach to be best and blames falling standards of literacy on the strength of the whole-language, meaning-based movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

The debate itself, then, is almost always loaded, despite the frequent claims to scientific knowledge, objectivity and common-sense truths about the nature of language and literacy. The debates and the discourses in which they are represented need both locating and explaining. In this paper I shall attempt to apply to it some insights from recent anthropologically oriented views of literacy, that are coming to be known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS). I will firstly explain what the term NLS refers to, detail some of the theoretical ground and understandings of language and literacy on which NLS stand and pursue the implications of these new approaches for the problem posed. Finally, I will suggest ways in which educational policies around
curriculum and teaching may be affected by these developments. This is not so much to resolve the debate as to shift the ground on which we consider issues of language and literacy in the first place.

**New understandings of language and literacy**

The New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1991; Street, 1984, 1993a and b) consist of a series of writings, in both research and practice, that treat language and literacy as social practices rather than technical skills to be learned in formal education. The research requires language and literacy to be studied as they occur naturally in social life, taking account of the context and their different meanings for different cultural groups. The practice requires curriculum designers, teachers and evaluators to take account of the variation in meanings and uses that students bring from their home backgrounds to formal learning contexts, such as the school and the classroom. The New Literacy Studies emphasise the importance of ‘culturally sensitive teaching’ (Villegas, 1991) in building upon students’ own knowledge and skills (Heath, 1983; Heath and Mangiola, 1991).

The new research and practice are based upon new ideas about the nature of language and literacy. In turn, the research has reinforced and developed these ideas (Collins, 1995). There are two major tenets to this new thinking: a) the notion of ‘social literacies’; b) that language is ‘dialogic’.

**Social literacies**

This phrase (Street, 1995) refers to the nature of literacy as social practice and to the plurality of literacies that this enables us to observe. That literacy is a social practice is an insight both banal and profound; banal, in the sense that once we think about it it is obvious that literacy is always practised in social contexts and that even the school – however artificial it may be accused of being in its ways of teaching reading and writing – is also a social construction. The school, like other contexts, has its own social beliefs and behaviours into which its particular literacy practices are inserted. The notion is, in this sense, also profound in that it leads to quite new ways of understanding and defining what counts as literacy and has profound implications for how we teach reading and writing. If literacy is a social practice, then it varies with social context and is not the same, uniform thing in each case.

I have described this latter view as an ‘autonomous’ model of literacy: the view that literacy in itself has consequences irrespective of, or autonomous of, context. In contrast with this view, I have posed an ‘ideological’ model of literacy, which argues that literacy not only varies with social context and with cultural norms and discourses regarding, for instance, identity, gender and belief, but that its uses and meanings are always embedded in relations of power. It is in this sense that literacy is always ideological – it always involves contexts over meanings, definitions and boundaries and struggles for control of the literacy agenda. If that is true, then it becomes harder to justify teaching only one particular form of literacy, whether in schools or in adult programmes – or at least the justification needs to be made explicit. If literacy is seen as simply a universal technical skill, the same everywhere, then the particular form being taught in school gets to be treated as the only kind, as the universal standard that naturalises its socially specific features and disguises their real history and ideological justifications. If literacy is seen as a social practice, then that history and those features and justifications need to be spelled out and students need to be able to discuss the basis for choices being made in the kind of literacy they are learning.
Recently there has been some elaboration of key concepts in this field, such as the notion of 'multiple literacies'; literacy events and practices; social, community and individual literacies; and I will briefly indicate the issues and outline my own position. One of the major tenets of the New Literacy Studies has been that literacy is not a single, essential thing, with predictable consequences for individual and social development. Instead there are multiple literacies that vary with time and place and are embedded in specific cultural practices.

Examples of variation in literacies have included Heath’s (1983) account of three literacies associated with three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas (Roadville, Trackton and Mainstown literacies); my own (Street, 1984) account of three literacies in an Iranian village (schooled literacy, Qur'anic literacy and commercial literacy; Barton and Paikus’s (1991) account of ‘community literacies’ in the north of England, descriptions of schooled and sub rosa literacies amongst adolescents in the US by Shuman (1986), Carnita (1993) and Bennet and Sola (1994), and Besnier’s (1996) analysis of the literacies associated with sermons and with letter-writing in Nukulaelae. Recently, concern has been expressed regarding this pluralisation of literacies. Wagner (personal communication) argues that this creates a new reification in which each literacy appears a fixed and essential thing. I have argued that there is a danger of associating a literacy with a culture where current anthropological perspectives suggest fragmentation and hybridity in both domains (Street, 1993c). Kress (1997) sees the claim for plurality of literacies as paradoxical for NLS since it implies a stability in each literacy that such researchers explicitly reject.

This paradox only exists if in the first place we assume that language is autonomous, unaffected by the social, and therefore stable. If we assume that language is dynamic because it is constantly being remade by its users in response to the demands of their social environments, we do not then have a need to invent a plurality of literacies: it is a normal and absolutely fundamental characteristic of language and of literacy to be constantly remade in relation to the needs of the moment; it is neither autonomous or stable, and nor is it a single integrated phenomenon; it is messy and diverse and not in need of pluralising. (p.115)

Although I agree with Kress in principle, and indeed this argument reinforces the point I am making here about dynamic models of language and literacy, I think that for strategic reasons it has been important to put forward the argument regarding plurality. I have found, particularly in development circles, where agencies present literacy as the panacea to social ills and the key ingredient in modernisation, the dominant assumption has been of a single autonomous literacy that is the same everywhere and simply needs transplanting to new environments. In order to challenge this view and to focus on the specificity and dynamic character of literacy, the notion of multiple literacies has played an important role. Indeed, a recent UNESCO document for an international conference to rethink approaches to literacy in development has accepted this view and the strategic and practical implications are immense (UNESCO, 1997). Whilst formally and for research purposes we might be better working with the concept of literacy practices – which I have argued elsewhere is more robust and sensitive to local variation – at the national and international levels of policy and strategy we still need to characterise the dynamic and culturally varied quality of literacy practices by referring to the plurality of literacies.

There is, however, another sense in which the plurality of literacies has come to be used and here I agree fully with Kress. He argues that this second sense comes from the metaphorical extension of the concept of literacy to other domains of social life, such as computing, politics, etc. One
even hears of emotional literacy. Apart from glib and lazy rhetorical usages, Kress also sees these extensions as flawed in that they fail to see language as just one of many modes of communication.

Because it is seen as the only real mode, as the most highly developed, the one that sustains thought and rationality, all other modes of communication, or for that matter, all cultural systems, have to be described as being literacy. This devalues the term, so that it comes to mean nothing more than 'skill' (as in keyboard skills) or competence. It also prevents the possibility of examining the actual function of other systems as systems in their own right. (Kress, 1997, p.115)

This then raises the question of the boundaries of what is included under the term literacy, which Kress and I would agree is a multiple and complex of phenomena, including print, text as block, letters, text as genre, letters as sound, media layout, etc. I would just add that recent debates about multi-literacies (cf. New London Group, 1996) seem to imply a similar reduction of the concept of literacy to a given channel — in this case the 'multi' in multi-literacy seems to refer to whether the particular literacy is in the visual, media or print domain, as though each were a separate literacy. I would prefer to think of literacies as some complex of these domains that varies with context, so that the mix of visual, print and other aspects depends upon cultural and contextual features. Computer literacy, for instance, is not a new single literacy but involves different uses of oral and literate channels in different situations: there is no one phenomenon called computer literacy and the term can be misleading in both research and policy terms.

I have preferred for research purposes, if not immediately for policy purposes, to work with the concept of literacy practices. This term enables us to specify the particularity of cultural practices with which uses of reading and or writing are associated in given contexts. Within a given cultural domain there may be many literacy practices, i.e. not one culture and one literacy. By literacy practices I mean not only the observable behaviours around literacy — Heath's 'literacy events' — but also the concepts and meanings brought to those events and which give them meaning. Strictly speaking, then, the literacies referred to above — Heath's three Piedmont communities and their different literacies; the Iranian village literacies; community literacies in the north of England; schooled and out-of-school literacies; etc — are best thought of as literacy practices. It is sometimes clumsy to refer to, for instance, 'schooled literacy practices', especially in contexts where policy makers and the media are still working with an autonomous model of literacy that scarcely gives credence to out-of-school literacies anyway. There the specification of the dynamic, culturally-specific and valued character of local literacies still requires the pluralisation, despite Kress and others' reservations. But in situ, when one is dealing with the particular forms of reading and writing and their meanings to different groups of people, the concept of literacy practices becomes the key term.

From this perspective one may ask what are the literacy practices at home of children whose schooled literacy practices are judged problematic or inadequate. From the school's point of view those home practices may represent simply inferior attempts at the real thing; from the researcher's point of view those home practices represent as important a part of the repertoire as different languages or language varieties. Viewing them as literacy practices can help both perspectives to address exactly what such literacy involves and, from a pedagogic point of view, what is there to be built upon if the aim is to help such people to add dominant literacy practices to their linguistic repertoire.
Again, however, there is a terminological confusion. For some the term literacy practices is taken to refer to what teachers and pupils do in school, i.e. schooled literacy practices, the practice of classroom literacy. When I have asked people on literacy training courses, from countries such as Bangladesh and Namibia, to describe the literacy practices in their area and consider their implications for educational policy, the answer has frequently been in terms of what happens during the literacy campaign, the literacy practice of the classroom. For research purposes, and in the long term I would argue for policy purposes, it is helpful to keep these two meanings distinct: whilst literacy practice may traditionally refer to classroom behaviours, literacy practices allow us to adopt a broader and more culturally relative perspective and thereby to see and value varieties of literacy practices that we might otherwise miss and that would certainly remain marginalised through such lack of attention.

**Dialogic language**

New theories of language closely associated with those regarding social literacies, focus upon the nature of language as a continually negotiated process of meaning making as well as taking. In this research tradition, it is viewed as always a social process, as interactive and dynamic (Volosinov, 1973; Hymes, 1977, Halliday, 1978). For Bakhtin (1981), language is both centrifugal and centripetal, in the sense that users are always struggling to extend its boundaries and meanings as well as working within prescribed limits; and it is dialogic in the sense that it is always in dialogue - language, even when employed silently by single individuals, is always part of a social interaction, whether with imagined others or with the meanings and uses of words that others have employed at other times and places. As Bakhtin states, "words come saturated with the meanings of others". Again this view of language might appear commonsensical at one level - we all know that languages vary, whether that means the differences between French and English, or at a more local level between different dialects, creoles and patois. But the implications of this stance, like that of 'social literacies', are at the same time profound. If language is always contested, negotiated and employed in social interaction, then the appropriateness of particular uses and interpretations have likewise to be opened to debate: it becomes impossible to lay down strict and formal rules for all time and the authority of particular users - whether teachers, grammarians or politicians - becomes problematised. We all, as it were, take possession of language again rather than being passive victims of its entanglements.

It is on this tradition in the study of language that Kress is calling when he argues, as we saw above, that 'language is dynamic because it is constantly being remade by its users in response to the demands of their social environments'. Similarly, theorists in the New Literacy Studies have tended to root their ideas about reading and writing, as aspects of language, in broader linguistic theories of a dialogic and constructivist kind. Gee (1991), one of the leading exponents of NLS, describes a case study of sharing time in US schools as frequently built upon dominant theories of language that the authors cited above are challenging:

> sharing time, as a literacy building activity, is based solidly on ... a myth: the view of language (deeply embedded in our language and our culture) that meaning is something that is packaged in nice little bundles (words and sentences) and conveyed down a little tube-like channel to someone else who simply undoes the package and takes out the morsel of meaning. (p.93)
In contrast to this atomised view of language that corresponds to the autonomous model of literacy, Gee poses a view of language that corresponds more closely to the ideological model of literacy and to the notion of language as dynamic expressed by writers like Bakhtin, Kress, etc.:

In fact, language is always something that is actively constructed in a context, physically present or imagined, by both speaker/writer and hearer reader through a complex process of inferencing that is guided by, but never fully determined by, the structural properties of the language. (ibid.)

The implications of this view of language are only just being felt in applied studies (cf. the work and publications of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL), e.g. Graddol, 1993). With respect to education, and schooling in particular, these perspectives have recently been conveyed through the notion of Critical Language Awareness (Fairclough, 1995), which argues that learners should be facilitated to engage in debates about the nature and meaning of language, rather than be treated as passive victims of its ‘structural properties’. This includes learning some metalinguistic terms, but a more inclusive set of such terms, learned for a different purpose, than those often put forward by state institutions, such as the recent TTA proposals for language in the Initial Teacher Training curriculum (TTA, 1997). It is to the basis of these dominant views of language, expressed in popular media and through state institutions, that I now turn, to discuss the implications for research and practice of the new, dialogic and social interpretations of language outlined above.

The implications for research and practice
The implications of this for research and practice are considerable. Both researchers and practitioners – and many of the best people in this field do both these days (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993) – acknowledge the fears and desires that come with investigating and reflecting on language and literacy in these ways: we are not just neutral observers, but social beings already inscribed with culturally influenced manifestations of the deeper fears and desires that influence all human life (see Street, 1997 for a fuller exposition). The fears and desires associated with dialogic and social interpretations of language and literacy have been largely associated with a reactionary and self-interested elite, afraid of the disorder and indiscipline that they associate with such open-ended theorising. It is to these fears and desires that the newspaper headlines about ‘illiteracy’, ‘failing standards’ and social breakdown are pandering. But progressive educators have their own fears and desires, built into the process of learning and studying themselves. The desire to privilege the dialogic, contestable and social nature of language and literacy, to live with diversity, still entails its own struggle: it is the struggle of all Utopian movements, with the order and constraint within which freedom and variation are possible. Utopian desires too are tempered by the reality that social life, including language and literacy practices, is patterned and persistent even amidst its rich diversity.

One way of adjusting this patterning to the flux, ambiguity and uncertainty that our research and our teaching experience honestly tell us we must face when dealing with language and literacy is through theory: to make explicit the theory on which our actions are based, and to follow through the implications of that theory, is to provide for order and authority without descending to authoritarianism. Advocates of the NLS may have felt that their approach has meant going against the grain, challenging dominant ‘ways of knowing’ (Baker et al., 1996); but it may be that the grain is not simply that of a dominant society with which they can feel romantically in
conflict but that of their own deepest desires and fears. We all have to live with the psychological and social consequences of the new theories.

What, then, are the practical consequences for educationalists of recognising these principles and difficulties? I would like to conclude by spelling out a provisional check list of the principles on which the application of NLS to education in general and to literacy in particular would be based, in the hope of stimulating further debate. Specific proposals for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment would follow:

a) Literacy is more complex than current curriculum and assessment allows.

b) Curricula and assessment that reduce literacy to a few simple and mechanistic skills fail to do justice to the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices in people's lives.

c) If we want learners to develop and enhance the richness and complexity of literacy practices evident in society at large, then we need curricula and assessment that are themselves rich and complex and based upon research into actual literacy practices.

d) In order to develop rich and complex curricula and assessment for literacy, we need models of literacy and of pedagogy that capture the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices.

What teaching methods are appropriate to this new understanding of literacies remains open to debate; there is no necessary one-to-one relationship between a specific theory of literacy and a specific teaching method, although NLS does point in some directions that challenge current
orthodoxies. For instance, teaching, whatever form it takes (e.g. whole-class; student-centred; phonics-based; 'real' books) has to be able to take account of the variation in literacy practices amongst students and to give value to their different backgrounds and the different literacies they employ in their home contexts. An emphasis on real uses of literacy and attention to the contexts of use appears more likely to follow from these tenets than a focus on artificial or formal features of supposed universal literacy. From this perspective the issue of standard English is not so much 'for or against' as recognising that the justification needs to be presented to students themselves and that they need to be able to discuss alternative varieties of language use and learn when it is appropriate to use them (cf. Fairclough, 1995), rather than simply reject them altogether from the classroom. This position corresponds to recent work on the role of argument in the science classroom (Driver et al., 1994; Mitchell, 1996), so the issue is not just one for English teachers.

The emphasis from this perspective, then, is on appropriateness, a key concept in the ethnography of communication (cf. Hymes, 1977), rather than on a pure concept of correctness that dominates much formal thinking on language and literacy. The NLS, then, do not eschew the focus on standard or deny the value of grammar and whole-class teaching: they intervene in those debates at a different level than the simple polarities set up in current media representations. Because they are rooted in research as well as practice, NLS imply a teaching method that likewise facilitates for students and teachers alike the development of provisional models that help them to describe, observe and analyse different literacies rather than just learning and teaching one literacy as given. In Heath's terms (1983), teachers and students become 'ethnographers', exploring the various meanings and uses of literacy in the social context of the school and its surrounding communities: 'schooled literacy' becomes one amongst many of the literacies with which they engage (Street and Street, 1991).

Recognition of 'the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices' has provided the basis for a number of new approaches to classroom practice, of which I will cite just a few examples from other countries which I hope will elicit responses regarding similar research and development here. Heath and Marigliola (1991) were commissioned by the National Education Association in the USA to develop a classroom text that would help teachers address 'the literacy needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse students who now populate our schools'. The resulting text offers detailed case studies of 'successful cross-age tutoring programs' where students who had been failing and dropping out were trained to tutor young elementary students in reading. The dramatic success of such programmes in terms of teacher attitudes and pupil improvement in literacy skills was put forward as a model for teacher research collaboration in the area of language and literacy diversity and it would be fruitful to explore the possibilities of adapting the model to the UK situation.

In South Africa, a recent research project has investigated the everyday literacy practices of people in the Cape area – activists in 'settlements; farm workers; taxi drivers; election officials; elderly township residents' (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996). Using the evidence of variation and complexity, the researchers have argued that the new education framework needs to be loosened at the edges to facilitate entry to those previously denied formal education: for many whose lifelong learning of language and literacy had made them competent communicators, the new formal requirements of bureaucracy and of education are creating marginalisation and 'illiteracy' – as with many Unesco-type Literacy programmes it is often the arrival of the programme itself, with its autonomous model of literacy, that creates the 'illiteracy' about which the media then
agonises. The research on everyday literacy practices in this project is now being used as the basis for a new, facilitating curriculum and pedagogy.

Similarly, a current ‘Community Literacy’ project in Nepal, funded by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA), is proposing to commence with research into actual uses of literacy in different communities as a basis for considering proposals for teaching and learning (Rogers, 1994). Eschewing the traditional dependence on primers – basic text books, frequently uniform across a whole country – the project instead emphasises ‘real’ materials – the actual texts, whether posters, signposts, labels and wrappers, religious documents, letters, development messages, political propaganda, etc. that constitute the literacy environment. The literacy programme will be based upon proposals by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for locally based uses of such materials to facilitate learning rather than on a national, uniform primer-based campaign.

In Australia, likewise, tutors and researchers are cooperating to develop literacy courses that build upon local meanings and uses. In one instance (Black and Thorp, 1997) a single literacy class in Sydney, Australia revealed a remarkable complexity of language choices amongst students that presented a significant challenge to tutors: one student from Afghanistan, for instance, switched between Farsi, Pashto, English and Arabic, employing two scripts according to context and function; another spoke five languages, including different dialects of Chinese, and likewise switched between scripts – in this case the roman alphabet and the Chinese logographic – according to situation. A research project in Brisbane, Australia similarly explored the complexity of home and school literacies, in this case focusing more on locality and class than on language and ethnicity (Freebody et al., 1995). A team of researchers funded by the Department of Education studied ‘everyday literacy practices in and out of schools in low socioeconomic urban communities’, observing in close detail the linguistic behaviour around texts both at home and at school in order to establish the relationships between them. Important implications were drawn out for pre-service and in-service programmes, notably attuning teachers more to local literacies and challenging dominant stereotypes about children’s ability to learn and use literacy. For the purposes of this article, a major finding that challenges the romantic perception of NLS as simply a way to critique dominant practices is that

With respect to the home-school relationship, our findings do not lead to any grounds for privileging home versus school literacy practices. Rather they lead to recommendations concerning the more effective mutual recognition of these practices in both sites. (ibid., p. xxii)

These examples suggest a challenge for educators in the UK likewise, where the new theories of language and literacy outlined above have been well understood for over a decade (Brookes and Hudson, 1982). For instance, research into community literacies has been conducted by a team of researchers from Lancaster University and their work has been particularly influential in adult literacy work (Barton and Ivanic, 1991; Barton and Hamilton, 1998). But the combination of ethnographic-style research into everyday literacy practices and constructive curriculum development and pedagogy that is beginning to characterise the adult field in many parts of the world has not. I suspect, penetrated so deeply into the school or into teacher training in the UK. Indeed, the present media and policy representations of literacy have made this harder by drawing upon tropes rooted in less culturally sensitive models of language and literacy. The task, then, appears to be twofold: to challenge the dominant representations of literacy; and to develop collaborative research projects that look at the actual literacy practices of both home and school, with a view, as Freebody (1995) states, to ‘effective mutual recognition of these practices in both
sites’. For the data thus collected to be fed into teacher training programmes and into curricula and pedagogy requires no little change in dominant representations. If this article has contributed in a small way to such a change, it will have served its purpose.

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