CHAPTER 1

The New Literacy Studies and Teaching Literacy: Where We Were and Where We Are Going

Vignette: Designing dual-language books

A child is making a book. However, the child is not using paper and pens. She is sitting at a computer screen. She is not even writing. She is looking at a number of different images on screen. These images are drawings she has done at home. They are images she has previously drawn. They are being selected to create a dual-language text, in the child’s home language, Chinese, and in the language used at school, English. The child selects the drawing she thinks goes together with the words, which she has already composed also in Chinese, and places them side by side using a mouse. She is making a book, using drawings she did at home and scanned into the computer, and words constructed together with her mother, from stories she has heard, at home. The words were then written with the help of her teacher. The finished book has hand-drawn pictures, writing in English, and writing in Chinese, side by side. The book will be used by other children learning to read in Chinese and English, and their parents, at school and in homes. (Vignette courtesy of J. Cummins, keynote talk, British Association for Applied Linguistics, 2003.)

KEY THEMES IN THE CHAPTER

- Literacy as a social practice
- Literacy as an event and a set of practices
- Literacy as a global and local practice
Imagine that you are teaching students who have been identified as ‘under-achieving in literacy’. These are young teenagers who come from a number of different backgrounds. In your classroom you are teaching students from a number of war-torn countries. With time, you appreciate that your students all love music. In their out-of-school lives they listen to rap music, and enjoy surfing the Web at the local Internet café. Instead of shutting out this experience, you bring it in. You encourage students to look at words in rap songs, and discuss poetry, metaphor and assonance, using words from Eminem. These students begin to engage with literacy, to write poetry and to tell their life stories. You have drawn on their out-of-school literacies to engage them in the classroom.

The vignette that begins the chapter comes from a Canadian classroom. It depicts the multiplicity of literacy practices involved in making a book for children to use in classrooms. It begins a journey into key themes introduced in this chapter and at the heart of the book.

The view of literacy as a social practice, is one of the key themes of this chapter. In the vignette, the child drew on the social practice of story-telling to compose a story. An aim of this book is to open your eyes to the multiplicity of literacy practices that exist around us, and to see how this understanding can be applied to classrooms where students engage with literacy practices. In this chapter, the concepts behind the idea of literacy as a social practice will be explained, and you will be introduced to key ideas, including the idea of literacy events and literacy practices.

The moment of composing a text can be described as a literacy event, an event in which literacy forms a part. Part of the composing process draws on a child’s experience of literacy practices, particularly the practice of reading books and the practice of writing and composing in classrooms. This view of literacy can be contrasted with a view of literacy as a set of skills. In this book, we argue that it is possible to combine an understanding of literacy as a set of skills with an understanding of how we use literacy in everyday life. In fact, we argue that if we bring these understandings together, it helps. What is more, we consider how the idea of literacy as a social practice encourages our students’ writing and reading development in classroom settings.

When our students write, they draw on cultural experiences they have had in their lives. They may come from different parts of the globe, and then sit within an urbanized space. They may live in a remote rural community, on
an island, but be connected to the world through the Internet. If literacy is understood as a *global and social practice*, this helps us understand why children need to communicate not only across different cultures, but also in relation to changing global communication.

This thought can be understood in relation to the opening vignette. When the child at the beginning of this chapter drew on her own script in Chinese, she was drawing on her identity as a child who speaks Chinese, and was locating her global identity alongside the local identity within the classroom. The Internet and email make communicating different – and even closer than ever before. This field has been identified with *literacy* and *globalization*. In Chapter 4, the link between global literacy practices and local literacy practices will be explored, especially with regard to students in classrooms. For example, how do your students view the Internet? As a way of finding out about science projects? As a place to meet and chat with others? Or as a literacy practice?

The concept of literacy as a social practice helps us to see literacy as connected to other things. For example, when you go to a bank and fill in a form, you are engaging with literacy as a social practice. This social practice links up with other social practices, for example, banking practices. When we type on screen we are situated within a specific time and place as we type, but as we open up our email the world comes rushing in. The global practices from the World Wide Web infuse our local spaces.

When our students write and read, they infuse these practices into their identities. Literacy learners bring their identities into the making of meaning, and as they learn to read, or put marks on a page, their cultural experience goes before them, and their marks are inscribed with that experience. This book connects to new ideas about the relationship between literacy and *identity* and how this works in classrooms. You will also consider what this perspective does to aid classroom practice. Identities are complex, made up of hybrid and multiple experiences. Identities shape our literacy practices. These identity-infused literacy practices are then taken up in school and encounter different literacy practices. How can we ensure that our students’ literacy practices in classrooms account for their identities out of school?

For example, thinking back to the child in the vignette at the beginning of the chapter, how was her identity upheld by her work in making stories? If we consider the child’s cultural identity in relation to her literacy practices, she is experiencing a positive link between the child as a person reading stories in the home and her identity in school. The child’s identity as a
Chinese speaker is recognized alongside the child’s identity as an English speaker, by constructing the text as a dual-language book. Through use of the dual language, and by giving the child space to draw her own illustrations, her home identity and her schooled identity are brought closer together through the school project of making a book.

These themes might prompt you to reflect on the following key questions:

- How do your students’ home/out-of-the-classroom literacy practices contrast with your students’ literacy practices in a learning situation?
- What are the links between literacy practices and the learning of literacy skills?
- How do the tools used to support literacy learning in an educational setting confirm or not confirm your students’ sense of identity?

These questions are the focus of this chapter. The following section explains where you can find the theory behind these ideas, and how you can use these theories to understand literacy practices.

THE NEW LITERACY STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW

This section introduces you to some of the key thinkers in this field, which has been identified as the New Literacy Studies. The term has been used in relation to a number of scholars who looked at literacy in everyday life (Street, 1984; Gee, 1996; Barton and Hamilton, 1998). They drew on research on communication and on anthropology to look at the role of literacy in people’s lives. There are many people associated with the New Literacy Studies. In this section, we offer an overview to a wide field.

Research from the New Literacy Studies examines literacy practices, and literacy events, and many researchers have used it’s perspective to look at what people do with literacy. Because of studies looking at how people used literacy in everyday life, the concept of literacy began to be rethought. Previously, literacy was something associated with books and writing, and perceived as a set of skills, which were taught in schools. More recently, literacy has been recognized as a social practice, something that people do in everyday life, in their homes, at work and at school. For example, in an ethnographic study in Lancaster, researchers watched people write notes at allotment meetings and observed people read to their children, and write diaries, letters and poems at home for pleasure (Barton and Hamilton, 1998).
As an example, consider the banking description given earlier. If this is described in terms of literacy practices, it could look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy event</th>
<th>Literacy practice</th>
<th>Social practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signing the bank cheque</td>
<td>Filling the cheque in — form filling</td>
<td>Banking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A literacy event is the observed event, often most easily spotted in the classroom. When your students write and read, they are engaged in a set of literacy events. These events are often regular, and relate to the practices of reading and writing. A student will read a book as part of the literacy practice of book reading in the classroom.

In considering the New Literacy Studies, the field has been shaped by people. They have gone out and thought and watched people, and then have written up their ideas. You will find below some of the most important ideas that contribute to this field, along with people who have contributed to them.

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**Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole: Literacy practices in different domains**

Scribner and Cole were psychologists who studied the Vai people of West Africa, in Liberia. They wanted to understand the relationship between local cultural contexts and the learning of literacy. Unusually, the people they studied, the Vai, had invented an original writing system, which was learned outside of school. The school language was English, and the schools for the Qu’ran used Arabic. Scribner and Cole studied the different language practices within the different settings. They found that specific types of literacy practices affected how people learned things. Scribner and Cole taught us that there is not just one literacy, but many forms of literacy, all linked to different domains of practice. The published study, *The Psychology of Literacy*, became a key text in the history of the New Literacy Studies, in that for the first time literacy practices were described in different domains of practice (Scribner and Cole, 1981).

Mapping literacy practices across sites is a fruitful task. Spaces provide different kinds of opportunities for literacy practices. Spaces offer people multiple identities. These different identities infuse their literacy practices.
A study of literacy and space offers the opportunity to think about what people do with literacy in different spaces.

The word ‘domain’ refers to a particular space, or world where literacy is practised (for example, the Church, the school, the home). Researchers have identified a number of literacy practices within different domains. Multiple identities come to the fore in specific domains. You may express yourself differently in a formal letter written at work, than in an email written to a friend at home.

### ACTIVITY

**Writing and identity**

Think about some writing you have done which you feel strongly about. This could be a letter to a Member of Parliament, a piece of poetry, even an assignment you were very fond of. How did that affect the way you wrote and how you wrote? How does your identity-in-practice shape your writing style?

A domain can be identified with a way of being, and in many cases, as a set of cultural beliefs, or a world view. Sometimes it is site-specific, such as a school, with buildings, but sometimes literacy practices from one domain, such as school, cross to another, such as home. Homework is an example of a literacy practice which is from the school domain, but is carried out in the home site.

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**Brian V. Street: Ideological or autonomous literacies**

Brian Street, working as a social anthropologist in Iran, also described literacy practices in different domains. He conducted fieldwork in the village where he lived which focused on literacy practices in different domains. These included what he termed:

- *maktab* literacy, or literacy associated with Islam and taught in the local Qur’anic schools;
- *commercial* literacy, or the reading and writing used for the management of fruit sales in the local village;
- *school* literacy, associated with the state schools more recently built in the villages and located in the urban areas as well.
This description of literacy enabled Street to identify how particular views of literacy were linked to particular ways of thinking (Street, 1984). From this, Street developed the concepts of *ideological* and *autonomous* literacy. He argued that literacy has been viewed, in particular by government agencies, as a separate, thing-like object which people should acquire, as a set of decontextualized skills. This view of literacy sees literacy as a technical skill. Writing, in particular, can be viewed as an autonomous skill, which can be related to individual cognitive processes. Street identified this view with a certain governmental trend to think of literacy as a set of skills which can be acquired. However, this view of literacy did not take into consideration how people used literacy. Instead, he argued, the term *ideological* could be used to describe the way in which literacy is grounded in how it is used, and how it relates to power structures within society (Street, 1993).

Street therefore challenged us not to see literacy as a neutral skill, but as a *socially situated practice*. This was a key insight within the field known as the New Literacy Studies.

**REFLECTION**

When can literacy be regarded as shaped by cultural and ideological forces?

And when is it written down as a set of skills?

Consider ways in which literacy is described where you work, and how it is regarded.

How does it change when you consider it as a reflection of social and cultural practice?

**Shirley Brice Heath: Literacy events and literacy practices**

In the 1970s, in the rural Carolinas, another area of literacy was being researched. Shirley Brice Heath, and her team of researchers, were considering how different communities used and interacted around literacy. *Ways with Words* described the different language and literacy practices of two communities in the rural Carolinas, USA. In the book, Heath contrasted a black community, Trackton, with a white working-class community,
Roadville. She paid close attention to the way parents in these two communities spoke to their children, raised them, how they decorated their homes and how the children interacted with their parents. Then she looked at what happened when they went to school. In the case of both Trackton and Roadville children, there was a disjuncture between their home literacy practices and their school literacy practices. This was in contrast to the children from the town. Heath called the town community Maintown. The children in Maintown were teacher’s children, who had been raised and talked to in a way which echoed the norms of ‘school’ literacy. In order to understand how different ways of interacting contributed to different outcomes in literacy, Heath focused her study around the concept of literacy events which she defined, as, ‘any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role’ (Heath, 1983: 386). This concept enabled Heath to understand in a contrastive way the different events and practices around literacy, by isolating specific instances. Heath also looked at communicative utterances and contrasted them across the communities.

For example, Heath describes how a 2½-year-old named Lem made an oral response to his experience of hearing a distant bell ring, which meshed with his experience of Church going.

Way Far  
Now  
It a Church bell  
Ringin’  
Dey singin’  
Ringin’  
You hear it?  
I hear it  
Far  
Now  

(Heath, 1983: 170)

Heath isolated this piece of oral talk, almost a poem, as one which was deeply embedded within the community’s oral traditions, but did not have a corresponding link to classrooms.
Her work led many researchers to look more closely at literacy practices in homes and communities. In this chapter, we ask you to consider what Heath’s study could tell you in your teaching. Could it be used to consider how the literacy practices of school contrast with those of your students’ out-of-school literacy practices?

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION

Heath’s work came from a tradition called the *ethnography of communication*, which understood how it was possible to understand different communicative events in different settings. By combining *ethnography* – as a way of studying different contexts and grounded in a particular methodological frame – with communication – the study of how people communicate – the ethnography of communication conceived of a richer understanding of literacy and language skills. This has relevance to institutional settings such as schools. Dell Hymes, in particular, was able to describe why African-American children sometimes were not succeeding in schools. African-American forms of speech and narrative structures often differed from those of their white counterparts (Hymes, 1996). This led to African-American children’s *narratives* not being recognized in classroom settings. Hymes argued that we do not appreciate narrative as a form of knowledge. Indeed, we under-appreciate the ways in which speech patterns are recognized in different contexts. A key concept to describe language in use is *discourse*. Hymes’s work on the ethnography of communication can be linked to work by James Paul Gee on discourse and language patterns of different linguistic communities.

**Gee’s work on discourse**

James Paul Gee has worked both within the New Literacy Studies and within the ethnography of communication. Gee developed theories of language which viewed language as socially situated. Gee argued that when we try to understand a person’s language-in-use, or discourse, we not only pay attention to the accent, intonation and speech style of that person, among other things, but also we pay attention to that person’s style of clothing, gestures, and bodily movements. He calls language-in-use *discourse*. When he talks about language plus other stuff he uses the term *Discourse* (Gee, 1999).
Gee’s concept of discourse can be used with reference to a classroom. Students bring the different Discourses they are involved with into the classroom setting, for example, teenagers may locate their discursive identity in clothes, their way of speaking, their artefacts, such as mobile phones, and so on. Language is rarely the only way we display our identity. As Gee said,

To ‘pull off’ being an ‘X’ doing ‘Y’ (eg a Los Angeles Latino street-gang member warning another gang member off his territory, or a laboratory physicist warning another laboratory physicist off her research territory) it is not enough to get just the words ‘right’, though that is crucial. It is necessary, as well, to get one’s body, clothes, gestures, actions, interactions, ways with things, symbols, tools, technologies (be they guns or graphs), and values, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions ‘right’ as well, and all at the ‘right’ places and times.

When ‘little d’ discourse (language-in-use) is melded integrally with non-language ‘stuff’ to enact specific identities and activities, then, I say that ‘big D’ Discourses are involved. We are all members of a many, a great many, different Discourses, Discourses which often influence each other in positive and negative ways, and which sometimes breed with each other to create new hybrids. (Gee, 1999: 7)

This can be understood like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>discourse</th>
<th>Language-in-use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discourse</td>
<td>Language-in-use plus other stuff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Literacy and learning practices are embedded in various Discourses, or ways of knowing, doing, talking, reading and writing, which are constructed and reproduced in social and cultural practice and interaction. Literacy practices are inextricably linked to oral language and how it is used. Gee’s work focused on how we interact with one another, and on how the words we use are important as well as the accent, gestures, tone and body.

Discourses can represent the ways we signal our identities. Our ways of dressing, speaking and acting all signal our membership of different identities in practice. Gee considered that people can occupy different, or multiple identities, in relation to the different discourse communities we occupy. We might be a parent in one context, a teacher in another, a member of a band in another. We can move between these identities as we go about our life. Gee, like other scholars spotlighted in the chapter,
located literacy within society. He saw how literacy was shaped by how we use it. He wanted us to understand literacy as socially situated in order to foreground why school versions of literacy help some students, while hindering others. In doing so, he asked that we look at literacy and power.

David Barton and Mary Hamilton: Local literacies

The work of Barton, Hamilton, Ivanic and others at Lancaster, has focused on how literacy practices mesh with everyday lives. In a series of studies, the socially situated nature of literacy was explored and documented. Literacy practices could be observed in communities by analysing notes taken at an allotment meeting, through hearing about the reading of a bedtime story to a child or through documenting the writing of letters from prison. All these different literacy practices were associated with different domains of life, such as home, community and classroom.

Barton and Hamilton examined the role of literacy practices and literacy events in people’s lives in Lancaster. Their book, Local Literacies, explored the complex web of literacy practices that people engaged with. Barton and Hamilton came up with the idea of ruling passions to explain how people’s interests often dictated their literacy practices. People’s ruling passions varied: pop stars, gardening, hobbies and a host of other interests guided people’s literacy practices. These ruling passions enabled researchers to get at why literacy mattered to people, and what they used literacy for (Barton and Hamilton, 1998).

This work enables us to look at how we use literacy in everyday life, and where we use different literacies. By associating multiple literacies with different domains, we can trace across a number of spaces the multiple ways literacy is used.

ACTIVITY

The domains of literacy

Divide your world into domains (that is, places where literacy is carried out, for example, home, workplace, community, and so on). Within each domain, write a brief account of the literacy events you engage in. Note which are different, and which are the same. Make a list of social practices that underpin the identified event. Making a shopping list, for example, is linked to the social practice of shopping.
WHY DOES LITERACY NEED THE NEW LITERACY STUDIES?

This is a space to reflect on what these ideas can offer the practitioner. You have read above how there are particular literacy practices associated with different domains, that is, spaces in life. School is just one space where literacy practices occur. However, there are other places where literacy practices have developed. Does it help to understand how students use literacy in different domains of their lives? Are these forms of literacy different? Do children, when they go onto the Internet and click at their favourite pictures, still use literacy?

If you consider your students, one of the key aspects of your work is to support them in their literacy practices. You might notice a student has an interest in a particular country, such as Turkey, based on his cultural identity. You could then ask the student to draw a map of Turkey. The student could then work on telling some stories from Turkey, or describing some home practices using Turkish as a medium for the story. These practices could be playing console games, or watching Turkish television.

The child in the vignette at the start of the chapter was drawing on a different domain of literacy, the home domain, in order to make her book. More importantly, she was drawing on a panoply of ‘skills’: decoding and encoding print; viewing and representing; visual communication; multiple literacies (Chinese and English); multimodal meaning-making (choosing a font and colour scheme); and interpersonal relationships and home–school ties (her Mum and her teacher). She was also drawing on a number of literacy events embedded in practices, including the practice of her mother telling her a story in her home language, Chinese. The vignette also illustrates the importance of the connection of domains of home and school for learners to succeed, and for that as a way of overcoming possible distances between home and school.

In this book, we argue that the New Literacy Studies opens up our frame of reference about literacy. It makes us aware of our learners in relation to their identities. Literacy learners produce texts – bits of writing and other expressions of meaning, like drawing and talking. They become makers of texts and, as such, they infuse their texts with their sense of identity. They also are receivers of texts, which are embedded with all the everyday life things that happen to people. These include shopping and cooking and watching television as well as a myriad other practices, all interwoven into the act of being literate.
It is possible to observe how in ordinary life people draw on different literacy practices at different times in their lives: filling in forms, writing a letter and writing for leisure or work purposes. Children in families draw and write as part of their communicative practices. If you share your home with a child, you will recognize how children may make marks, draw and write as part of a spectrum of communication, which includes literacy. Some of these bits of paper you will keep, and others you will throw away. In a recent study of three London homes ‘mess’ was connected up with children’s communicative practices: drawings and bits of writing on paper were often seen as ‘stuff’ to be tidied up and thrown away (Pahl, 2002).

So what does the New Literacy Studies offer the classroom? The New Literacy Studies offers both a new way of looking at students, as involved in literacy in a number of different domains, and a way of seeing literacy in the classroom, as part of everyday life, meshed in with everything else. It makes the classroom both local and global.

Bits of literacy can be discovered in different spaces. Literacy is present on the street, and students can use their experience of street life and community spaces to document those in-between spaces. Many children attend after-school clubs where they play games and draw, attending to different parts of their literacy practices.

The classroom is simply one domain where literacy occurs, but not the only one. Your classroom can reflect local domains: shopping, the school journey, the local area; or global: the Internet, console games, popular films, raps and stories. Children’s popular culture offers a range of ideas to link in with your students’ literacy experiences out of school. In the next section, we hone in on some of the concepts from the New Literacy Studies which might be particularly helpful.

### Using New Literacy Studies in classrooms

1. Jot down or have your students jot down all types of reading, writing, viewing, and representing they do at home. Provide examples from your own life. Have them get into pairs to compare and contrast their list.

2. Make posters to advertise websites, films, books, console games, or any print media.

3. Identify parts of speech used in such popular media as comic books, game card rule books, or websites. Talk about the types of verbs, nouns, adjectives and pronouns used.
In this section, we reflect a little more on why the concept of literacy events and literacy practices helps us teach our students. For example, it gives you an opportunity to describe a moment when your student reads a piece of text in class as a literacy event. Literacy events can be found in formal and informal settings, when a student writes an essay, or when your child writes a birthday card. By putting a name on the practice, the event can be analysed. The link between events and practices is one that is worth reflecting on. While you may connect a literacy event to a classroom setting, a literacy practice is often connected to out-of-classroom settings and can be observed as a regular, iterative event. Iterative implies that something happens over and over again. Many practices have this quality: in a mosque, the same prayers are heard, in a church, the Liturgy is the same every week. Many families have things they do on a regular basis, and literacy practices fit into this: thank-you letters to relatives, or birthday cards to friends. We can hold a literacy practice in our heads from one day to the next. The practice of filling in a form can be drawn upon when filling in a new form.

Vignette: Liturgy class as a literacy practice

For some time, Rita Gravina, a secondary teacher in Toronto, prepared children for their first Communion by offering liturgy classes at a neighbouring Roman Catholic church. By participating in a number of activities and events on a weekly basis, children became full members of the Catholic Church. During each session, children listened to messages offered by Rita and the parish priest. What Rita noted over the course of these sessions were several literacy events that inducted children into a Christian identity. For example, a literacy event that took place is children were given a variety of physical objects used in a Catholic mass. Some of these included: ‘the
The following activity helps you think about domains of literacy. It also encourages you to consider how literacy is seen in that domain. It draws on the words autonomous and ideological from Street’s work.

He saw the words as meaning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autonomous</th>
<th>Ideological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy as a separate ‘thing’, as a set of skills</td>
<td>Literacy as connected with cultural and social practices in the world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following activity connects up your thinking on literacy events and practices, with the idea of autonomous and ideological models of literacy.

**ACTIVITY**

**Literacy events and literacy practices**

Go back to your list of literacy events and the practices which situated them. Which of these are linked to autonomous models of literacy, and which are linked to ideological models?

For example, a lot of workplace literacy practices, such as form-filling, are linked to an ideological model of literacy. Make a list of the domains which include the more autonomous literacy practices.

If you are currently working with a model of curriculum, reflect on which domain this model relates to, the ideological model or the autonomous model of literacy.
LITERACY AND POWER

In their introduction to *Situated Literacies* Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic argue that, ‘Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relations, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others’. (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000: 12)

It is important to recognize how different literacy practices shape the way we interact with literacy. Literacy is not value-free. Some discourses are more dominant than others. In some cases, we have to fit in with dominant models of literacy such as curricula. In this book, we do not refer to specific curricula, such as the National Literacy Strategy in the UK, but prefer to work with this idea of literacy as a social practice. The National Literacy Strategy is a literacy practice, imbued with the *traces* of its making. *It is not neutral.*

Individuals use literacy, as do groups. It can act as a resource for people, and a way of becoming empowered (Barton and Hamilton, 2000: 13). In this book, we also see it as a way of expressing identities, either as a group or individually, in particular domains. Our histories of literacy trace our own practices. Thinking back to when we were children, we can trace how we developed in the different ways we used literacy. We are shaped by the way we use literacy. Our unofficial hidden literacy practices are as important as the public, institutional ones we participate in. Rather than focus on one sort of literacy, here we focus on the multiple ways we use literacy, but recognizing that some are more heard and more visible than others. This book acknowledges that meaning can be made from a variety of modes, and some students may learn better using a multiplicity of modes. This chapter makes a point that you can look more closely at your students’ communicative practices in order to find clues as to how to develop your teaching in response to them. This brings more equity into the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Literacy is bound up with our identity and our practices. The shaping of our literacy practices takes place in a number of different domains, for example, home, school and workplace. Taking on an approach that looks at literacy as a social practice involves a number of key thoughts. It involves acknowledging that school is only one setting where literacy takes place. It recognizes that the resources used to teach in classrooms might be different from the resources used by students in their homes. To conclude this section, who we are and who we are allowed to be is shaped in part by the way we use literacy.
The literacy practices we use, however, may include multiple forms of representation. Like the child at the beginning of the chapter, we may use the computer and digitally manipulate material to create cards, messages and stories. When we engage with literacy we are also engaging with the visual. We discuss this at greater length in Chapter 2. Our understandings of what it means to be literate need to include other forms of symbol-making. This could include icons used on the screen, symbols and signs associated with the cultural spaces we occupy, drawings and photographs, which connect to oral and literacy practices. We will now explore this new communicational landscape and consider what this means for literacy.