INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 2: LITERACY

This collection of articles is intended to be both Encyclopaedia and something more. The chapters represent an Encyclopaedic account of current knowledge in the literacy field, in the sense that they cover a broad range of topics and regions by the leading researchers in the field. But they also aim to provide something more in that they are also cutting edge considerations of the nature of the field and how new concepts and ideas are being applied in different contexts. And that itself is a break through in literacy studies, in the sense that traditionally research in literacy has tended to focus on narrower issues, such as the acquisition of skills by those lacking literacy—mostly children but also encompassing ‘illiterate’ adults—and the measurement and recording of these skill ‘levels’. Certainly national and international agencies have been concerned to address this category of people and to ‘improve’ their ‘literacy rates’ by enhancing methods of delivery, so requiring attention to pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. But recent research in the field has begun to step back from these assumptions and has asked ‘what is literacy?’ as a prior question to issues of delivery and learning. The answers to the question ‘what is literacy?’ have been sometimes surprising. It turns out that literacy means different things to different people across different periods of time and in different places. So the concern for those ‘lacking’ literacy has first to be located in time and space and the practical and policy responses will differ accordingly.

To address these prior questions, we have asked historians, anthropologists, linguists, and educationalists to review what we know about literacy across these spans of time and space and to explain to readers in accessible language how we can come to understand what literacy means in these different contexts and from these different perspectives. The result is not simple answers but further complexity. The in-depth, scholarly accounts provided here indicate just how literacy varies as authors consider what it has meant in past times, whether in Europe and the USA (Harvey J. Graff and John Duffy), in Africa (Pippa Stein) or in South America (Kwesi K. Prah) or across different social contexts, such as urban spaces in the UK (Eve Gregory) or communities in Australia (Trevor Cairney) in the UK (Eve Gregory) or in the USA (Harvey J. Graff and John Duffy), or in Africa (Pippa Stein) or in South America (Kwesi K. Prah). Or, to take another cut through the perspectives that scholars now bring to bear on literacy, some authors address what literacy means for children and parents in

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South Africa (Pippa Stein) or the USA (Vivian Gadsden, Kathy Schultz, and Glynda Hull). And this perspective raise further conceptual points, as researchers consider the relationship between literacies in and out of school (Jabari Mahiri; Kathy Schultz and Glynda Hull; David Bloome; Alan Rogers) and also in higher education (Mary Lea).

Nor is it just a matter of educational contexts, whether for children or adults, that are at stake in reviewing what we know about literacy. What we take literacy to be, whose definitions count and have power in different societies, lie at the heart of all of these accounts—as Arlette Ingram Willis brings out in her accounts of Critical Race Theory and Gemma Moss in considering Gender and Literacy. The issue of definitions and of power is also evident in chapters on language and literacy by Jim Cummins, Marcia Farr and Constant Leung and how we frame these social issues associated with the definitions and meanings of literacy are put into broader context for us by Peter Freebody in a review of the literature on Critical Literacy and by Viniti Vaish on Biliteracy and Globalization. Still, this does not exhaust the range of topics we need to take into account in considering literacy in the contemporary age. Inevitably, we have to look at the place of literacy in broader communicative patterns, notably recent developments in ‘Literacy and Internet Technologies’, which are explored in a chapter by Kevin Leander and Cynthia Lewis whilst Brian Street attempts an overview of these developments in his ‘New Literacies, New Times’ piece. But at the same time, more familiar considerations regarding how literacy is acquired remain important for our understanding of the field and a number of papers do address reading as a significant dimension of literacy practices, notably John Edwards in his chapter ‘Reading: Attitudes, Interests, Practices’ and also those papers already signalled that deal with literacies in and out of school, such as those by David Bloome and by Kathy Schultz and Glynda Hull.

This summary, then, has in a sense come full circle, starting with reference to ‘traditional’ concerns with literacy as reading acquisition, moving through varieties of time and space, attending to social categories such as gender and race, taking on board recent sophisticated considerations of language and language varieties as they relate to literacy, noting the significance of new technologies and finally reminding ourselves of the role that education and learning must play in addressing these issues. And that is probably the major significance of what the authors in this volume have to tell us—that if we wish to address issues of policy and practice with regard to literacy, including how we learn to use it, then we will need to take account of various combinations of all of these other issues and the complexity they indicate even as we address any one context and set of practices. How these issues and topics combine will vary, as the authors show in demonstrating the different
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literacies and policies and meanings to be found in Africa, Asia, the American continent and Europe and across different time spans. If that makes it harder for all of those involved—policy makers, educationalists and researchers—then that is the job of an Encyclopaedia such as this, to help us to come to such topics in the full light of what is known rather than acting out of partial knowledge.

Having indicated some of the key themes and issues, we now provide a brief summary of the 26 chapters included in this Volume, as a kind of map of the overall text. The first section of the volume is entitled ‘Literacies and Social Theory’ and attempts to provide the reader with some key theoretical frames and organising concepts before authors address more closely particular social institutions, in Section 2 and particular social and cultural experiences of literacy, in Section 3. The sections inevitably overlap but this organisation can provide one route through the volume for those who wish to move from the more theoretical to the more concrete and contextualised accounts of literacy. However, since the topic itself is literacy, we are acutely conscious that each reader will develop your own route through the text.

SECTION 1: LITERACIES AND SOCIAL THEORY

The volume begins with a piece by the editor, who suggests his own map of the field of literacy studies and how it is learning to deal with what he terms ‘New Literacies, New Times’. He begins with an outline of the current theoretical frameworks, in particular work in New Literacy Studies, in multi-modality, and in theories of technology and artefact. He then considers some of the educational responses evident in different countries as they come to terms with the challenges posed by new literacies. Anticipating the end rather than the beginning of the Volume, he also makes some suggestions as to why it is that policy in some countries—notably the USA and UK—seems to be facing in the opposite direction to that which the research base tells us is needed.

We begin to see possible answers to this question straight away in the recognition by Arlette Willis, writing about the USA, that literacy cannot be separated from social position, which for many is a racialised position. In addressing Critical Race (CRT) Theory she argues, firstly, that this topic is not limited to some sub categories of society, such as African Americans’ experience, or individual acts of prejudice. Rather, she suggests, activists and scholars have long believed that it is equally important to address epistemological and ideological racism along with psychological and emotional effects of racism situated in US social and political systems and institutions. And secondly, she argues that the acquisition and use of literacy can be seen a key component of such epistemological and ideological positioning. To understand
the nexus of CRT and literacy, she reviews the genesis, definitions, basic concepts, and tenets of CRT from legal studies, followed by its evolution in educational and literacy research. Pointing, as all of the chapters do, to ‘Future Directions’, she suggests that work by Literacy scholars will envisage CRT’s ‘emancipatory and transformative positioning’ so that knowledge of racial/cultural positioning will be effected through use of narratives and voice and that this in turn will offer a more adequate route to examine race, racism, and power in society. Literacy, in the sense of narrative and voice, calling upon autobiography, biography, parables, stories, testimonio, voice infusing humor, and allegory can expose hidden truths and explicate and situate race, racism, and power within the experiences of people of colour. This, then, is a broader and more ‘social’ and power laden view of literacy than many accounts simply of acquisition or of reading have allowed.

Moving to another continent, Kwesi K. Prah provides a scholarly and detailed summary of Language, Literacy and Knowledge Production in Africa, that likewise brings home the significance of power relations and of different epistemological and language based definitions in understanding literacy. Kwesi locates our view of literacy within the larger purview of language and provides a detailed account of the different languages known to exist in Africa and how they have been mapped by linguists. This is partly in contrast with earlier and perhaps still dominant perspectives that are uncertain what we really know about Africa—the ‘uncertainty principle lingers,’ as Prah suggests. Following this account we should be less uncertain both about the actual languages but also about their social roles and their relationship to literacy. For instance, Prah indicates the difference to be observed between the languages of the elites and the languages of the broad societal majorities. Education and literacy, in the dominant languages (and in English), have a significant role to play in both reinforcing and challenging this divide. The relationship between oral and written channels of communication and bases for knowledge may not be as clear cut as earlier scholars such as Goody suggested or as superficial views of Africa may suggest—indigenous knowledge, embedded in oral cultures, plays a significant role even as literacy spreads. Following a scholarly summary of the impact of outside scripts and the development of indigenous scripts in Africa in the past century, Prah argues that African development requires the spread of literacy in African languages.

Prah’s historical account of literacy development in Africa is complemented by an analysis by Harvey J. Graff and John Duffy of the development of literacy in western societies. Building on Graff’s earlier historical work they argue that our understanding of these developments is often better characterised as ‘Literacy Myths’ and, like Prah, they throw doubt on Goody’s and others’ hypotheses that ‘the acquisition
of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility’. Problems of definition and measurement in particular have undermined such claims. Despite this, as they show, many public institutions continue to develop policy and practice based on this myth. In keeping with many of the chapters, for which theirs provides a key conceptual framing, they argue that the myth ‘is not so much a falsehood but an expression of the ideology of those who sanction it and are invested in its outcomes’. Building on this social analysis, they document major elements of the myth over time—the myth of decline, and the myth of the alphabet—and then consider its role in current public policy. Like many authors in this volume they suggest that what research can tell us, in terms of educational implications, is that ‘there are multiple paths to literacy learning’. They conclude that the reflections provided in this chapter ‘offer a more complex narrative than that of the Literacy Myth. They may also point toward new and different ways of understanding, using, and benefiting from the broad and still developing potentials that literacy may offer individuals and societies’.

Kevin Leander and Cynthia Lewis bring these historically based arguments up to date in a chapter entitled ‘Literacy and Internet Technologies’. In keeping with the other authors, Leander and Lewis recognise that such an account ‘reveals as much about the current theoretical and ideological paradigms operating in any time period as it does about technology’s relationship to literacy’. Nevertheless, we learn a great deal about contemporary technologies and their uses in literacy activity, such as interactive and networked computing media, and the use of a range of semiotic modalities beyond just print in order to make meaning, including sound, icons, graphics, and video. They are particularly interested in ‘how networked technologies fundamentally change the relationships of literacy to social relations’ and the chapter provides detailed examples of such practices in and out of school, including inevitable reference to blogs, video games, multimedia etc. Maintaining their focus, though, on the social contexts rather than just the technologies, they point to the location of technologies in fanfiction communities, in children’s learning in and out of school, and in ‘zones of mobility for underserved youth’ and argue for multidisciplinary approaches to understanding such processes.

Jim Cummins has been one of the leading scholars in developing theory about language development in educational settings and in this chapter he addresses some of the criticisms that have been made of his work as it relates to literacy theory. He takes us through the distinction he developed, that has provided the basis for much work in education, between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). He discusses
its relationship to other theoretical constructs, and shows how it has evolved such as with regard to studies of power relations between teachers and students and with respect to theories of multiple literacies. With regard to critiques that his distinction locates him within an autonomous model of literacy, Cummins argues that there is no contradiction between his theoretical interests and those of New Literacy Studies but that the BICS/CALP distinction has been specifically located in educational settings where likewise different literacies may be operationalised: ‘One can accept the perspective that literacies are multiple, contextually specific, and constantly evolving (as I do) while at the same time arguing that in certain discursive contexts it is useful to distinguish between conversational fluency and academic language proficiency’. This latter stance is developed later in the volume in the account of ‘academic literacies’ by Mary Lea and what the argument indicates is that the authors in this Volume, whilst strongly grounded in the scholarship of their field, are using their chapters to develop key arguments and debates, not just providing lists of previous knowledge. In that spirit he concludes by seeing future directions in the field being dependent on ‘teachers, students, and researchers working together in instructional contexts collaboratively pushing (and documenting) the boundaries of language and literacy exploration’.

John Edwards picks up exactly this nexus of researchers and practitioners as the site for development of our understanding of that dimension of literacy concerned with ‘Reading: Attitudes, Interests, Practices’. He argues for the importance of the social psychology of reading, that attends to the ‘questions of what people read, how much they read, and the purposes and effects of their reading’ and not just the technical decoding skills that continue to dominate the literature and to influence policy and educational design. In this vein, he argues that ‘in many modern societies, aliteracy is as much an issue as functional literacy. It is certainly more compelling in a social-psychological sense, because the question here is why some of those who can read don’t read’. He summarises the research literature that considers what and why people read rather than more narrowly their cognitive skills, using surveys such as the Roehampton Institute’s study of children’s reading habits in the UK. He addresses through such studies, issues of gender differences in reading, the difficulty of measurement and questions of content and preferences such as fiction and non fiction, citing also his own survey of children’s reading habits that combined large respondent numbers with detailed assessment instruments. Despite a long record of such work, he still sees ‘future directions’ as needing to move beyond descriptive to more robust theoretical perspectives. One possibility here might be the marrying of the more ‘technical’ approaches with the more social ones evident in his work and that of others in the volume.
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A number of the chapters reviewed so far indicate that understanding of the relationship between gender and literacy is crucial to such new social and theoretical approaches. Gemma Moss provides an incisive overview of work in this field, linking it especially to educational interests. She notes that interest in gender and literacy has recently shifted from concern for girls to current worries about boys’ underachievement. She links this to the current dominance of performance-management cultures and their aim of securing maximum homogeneity in outcomes from education. Literacy plays a leading role in these debates but, as we have seen with other chapters, its definition is contingent on both specific contextual issues and broader policy frames, such as the concern for ‘homogeneity’ identified by Moss. Moss firstly summarises debates in the field, notably the two strands represented by feminist concern with content on the one hand and those more focussed on literacy learning on the other. By the 1990s it was boys’ underperformance that became a centre of attention and she provides close summaries of different perspectives on this theme, addressing views of what needed to be ‘fixed’. Her own position focuses on what she sees as the ‘turn in analysis from what the curriculum says directly about gender to how the curriculum orders its knowledge base and regulates knowers’ and she wonders whether this might be the best direction for committed researchers to turn. New regimes of accountability and managerialism, she suggests, may create new struggles for gender politics and the role of literacy may take on a different hue in this context than it did in earlier ones.

Peter Freebody addresses many of the themes raised so far, under the heading of ‘Critical Literacy Education’ for which he provides a subheading that indicates the focus of the chapter: On Living with ‘innocent language’. What he means by this is that ‘Socialization entails, among other things, using language as if its relation to material and social realities were innocent and natural—transparently determinable, fixed, singular, and portable’. It is this critical reflection on language that provides a grounding for likewise critical perspectives on literacy, a link that occurs in a number of other chapters in this Volume (e.g. Sichra, Leung, Farr). The educational dimension of this, especially, involves the contest between training students to critically think and providing regulatory frameworks. He summarises early accounts of this contestation and its significance for literacy in both theory and practice and then describes a ‘loose affiliation of theories’ that have particularly focussed on literacy in education. He then identifies some of the problems currently facing critical theories generally, notably their particular expressions in different disciplines, and ‘tussles between these disciplines for the ownership of the essence of the critical literacy education project’. He lists a set of questions that critical literacy theorists
will have to address and attempts to articulate in a succinct conclusion exactly what distinguishes the field:

There is a positive thesis at the heart of critical literacy pedagogies, methodologies, and practices: Interpreting and producing texts is a way of rendering experience more understandable, of transforming experience through the productive application of epistemological, ideological, and textual resources, thereby re-visiting and re-understanding experience though active work on articulating the ‘stuff’ of experience and on re-articulating the experience of others.

An appropriate conclusion to the first Section of this Volume is provided by Viniti Vaish whose chapter ‘Biliteracy and Globalization’ brings together many of the themes raised, within the wider context of global movements. Building on Hornberger’s seminal work on bi-literacy, she asks telling questions about who meets around what texts in the new global flows. More precisely, she asks ‘What does a biliterate text in our globalizing world look like?’, a question addressed (as do others in this volume) to both in and out of school. As a way of addressing these questions, she provides data from two countries where she conducted research—India and Singapore. In ‘Early Developments’ she provides a helpful summary of theoretical work in globalisation and in the field of biliteracy and raises a number of themes that emerge from putting these areas together: ‘changing media of instruction in national school systems, new literacies required in the workplace, the threatened linguistic ecology of the globe, and finally biliterate textual practices influenced by the internet’. She concludes with a brief summary of some of the problems that work in these areas signals, notably what implications new texts and practices have for the bilingual classroom, a theme that complements the questions raised by Street in the opening chapter. Future directions will include studies of local workplaces and their relationship to global markets and what role schools play in providing the skills needed in these new contexts. Many of the chapters in subsequent sections of this volume address these issues from their own specific contexts and the theme of literacy, language and education runs throughout.

SECTION 2: LITERACIES AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

In this Section authors consider many of the issues raised above in the context of specific social institutions in which literacy practices are located. Given the importance of educational institutions for the overall theme of this volume, a number of the chapters address educational issues both inside and outside of the formal institutions with which literacy is usually associated. We begin with a paper on Informal...
Learning and Literacy by Alan Rogers who points out that formal institutions tend to have dominated not only education for children but also that for adults. In contrast, he explores the learning of literacy by adults outside of the formal learning process. He first reviews some of the developments in our understanding of informal learning, discusses some new findings from research into adult literacy learning in developing societies, and suggests some applications of this to literacy learning programmes in the future. These proposals include a greater emphasis on task-related learning; cyclic rather than linear; collaborative learning rather than individual; real literacy activities and texts drawn from the literacy learners themselves rather than imposed from outside; critical reflection on both the literacy learning tasks and the contents of the teaching-learning materials; changed relationships of the teacher and learners.

Constant Leung brings together two aspects of literacy learning that have sometimes been kept too separate: Second Language learning and Academic Literacies. He points out that literacy learning has often been seen as a matter of moving to a second language, frequently English in formal educational contexts in many parts of the world. However, the ability to communicate informally for social purposes in a second language does not automatically translate into effective academic use, particularly in relation to reading and writing. Some of the requirements of academic literacy, as we saw in Cummins’ piece and as Mary Lea also points out in her paper, may be specific to that context and not easily derived from more everyday social uses of a second language (L2). Drawing upon communicative approaches to language learning he concludes that we need to move beyond general abstractions and take account of the actual ways in which students and tutors do things with language in context, as a way to then facilitate the learning of academic literacy in context.

Vivian Gadsden brings together many of the themes raised by other authors under the heading of Family Literacy. She notes the shift in this as in other such topic areas within the overall field of literacy, from a more normative perspective focused on an autonomous model of literacy to a more analytic approach based on the notion of multiple literacies. In particular she cites the traditional deficit views that informed family literacy policy and shows how more recent research has looked more broadly at the cultural and social dimensions of learning and the contexts in which it occurs. Future work, then, is likely to address a more in depth focus on and analysis of culture, attention to gender and identity, and recognition of the different learning environments for families and their literacies. Understanding of variation and difference seems to be the underlying theme here, as in many of the chapters. Gadsden concludes by recognising just what a challenge this shift of agenda and perspective entails.
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Gadsden’s reference to gender here echoes that by Gemma Moss in Section 1, which provided an overview of the ways in which gender issues have been raised in the context of literacy learning. Anna Robinson-Pant now provides an application of some of these themes in the field of Literacy and Development. She reviews early programmes that focused on Women in Development (WiD) and charts the change to a Gender and Development (GAD) approach. Current work in feminist and ‘ideological’ approaches to literacy, informed by the New Literacy Studies challenges the dominant agenda evident in the programmes of development agencies. She concludes by noting the slow movement towards a rights perspective on literacy and argues that the growing popularity of qualitative research approaches within this area suggests that a gendered perspective on literacy and development may be more evident in the future.

Still working within the development context, Roshan Chitrakar and Bryan Maddox describe A Community Literacies Project in Nepal in which many of the principles raised by authors so far, including by Anna Robinson-Pant who also worked in Nepal, are worked through in practice. They begin with the principle enshrined in the programme that local meanings and uses of literacy should inform the design and implementation of adult literacy programmes, and that literacy programmes should respond, and be flexible to people’s expressed needs. They describe how this principle was worked through in a number of sites in Nepal, and indicate the problems this raised in particular concerning the tensions between the articulation of ‘local’ meanings of literacy within the wider national and international discourses of development. Indeed this raises questions about any reified use of the term community, since ‘local’ communities are always shot through with national and international politics and institutional politics, a theme that again runs throughout the Volume and is picked up in the next chapter by Trevor Cairney. He looks at Community Literacy Practices and Education in Australia, using the local case to make broader points beyond, for instance, the focus on ‘family literacy’ that has tended to dominate government agendas. Cairney is especially interested to identify variation in literacy practices within the community and draws upon the home school literature cited by authors in Section 1. One such variation is to be seen in the changing nature of communication and growth in multimedia, of the kind signalled earlier by Leander and Lewis and by Street, whilst another range of community literacy practices is signalled by work in critical theory, of the kind summarised by Freebody who also works in Australia. Building on these insights, Cairney offers a review of the literature that encompasses, firstly, early foundational research efforts that explored community literacy practices as well as the relationship of this work to major theoretical traditions. Secondly
he summarises significant recent and current explorations that have acknowledged more complex definitions of literacy and community, with special consideration of work in Australia, including that on indigenous literacy. Finally he iterates the need to problematise the existing research literature in this area and map out possible future directions. These include again a recognition of how literacy varies across home, school and community contexts, and how these relate to other factors such as social disadvantage, gender, and language diversity.

Mary Lea moves from everyday community contexts to the role of literacy in higher education, applying many of the same theoretical and methodological principles as we have seen in other contexts. She explores the concept of Academic Literacies as a way of understanding student writing, which highlights the relationship between language and learning in higher education. She reviews early approaches that tended to see literacy as a unitary skill, looking at work in freshman composition in the USA and notes the shift there and elsewhere to a more social view of writing. Recent expansion of universities, in the UK amongst other countries, has led to concern there too for student writing and approaches from New Literacy Studies, notably the concept of ‘academic literacies’, have been added to the array of theoretical perspectives. Lea also notes the methodological issues involved here, as approaches shifted from simple ‘measurement’ of student attainment to new forms of data collection that are more qualitative and ethnographic.

She locates current research in the larger context of globalisation and of changing media, of the kind already indicated by Leander and Lewis and by Vaish, amongst others. One new direction she indicates in these changing contexts is for researchers to pay more explicit attention to reading as part of writing, in both print based and virtual contexts and she suggests that this could be combined with research that addresses the lack of longitudinal ethnographic research in specific institutional settings.

Work on literacies in and out of school has already been signalled by a number of authors and Kathy Schultz and Glynda Hull look at research in this area in the USA, at the same time offering broader theoretical and practical frameworks for comparative work. They sketch the major theoretical traditions that have shaped research on the relationships and borders of literacy in- and out-of-school—the ethnography of communication, cultural historical activity theory, and the New Literacy Studies—and then introduce recent perspectives from cultural geography and semiotics. Their own previously published work has established a key benchmark for such approaches and they locate this in the longer history of approaches to literacy in both the in-school and the out-of-school traditions. They summarise the recent documentation of literacy practices across the boundaries of school and out-of-school
contexts, noting such specific examples as Chinese immigrant youth in the USA, and youth uses of digital technologies and blogging. They conclude by expecting and encouraging research on several fronts: ever changing conceptions of space, place, and borders; multiple identities; and inequality and social reproduction. Many of the chapters in this volume offer ways of addressing these aims in specific contexts, in and out of formal education.

David Bloome then brings us back to Literacies in the Classroom, but now seen from a broader and more methodologically sophisticated perspective than usually serves to pronounce on mandated policy in this area. Whilst recognising the role of ‘unofficial’ literacies, he focuses here on ‘official’ literacies. He summarises research on the nature of classroom literacy practices; on the relationship of literacy practices outside of the classroom (in home and community) to literacy practices in classrooms; and on the use of classroom literacy practices for schooling, academic literacies, critique, and community action, many of which have been addressed in other chapters in this volume. His particular concern is with such questions as what is going on in the literacy classroom and how can we research it? He notes recent interest in the cultural and the power dimensions of such activity and cites research that has facilitated students themselves to reflect upon their own community literacies, using ethnographic methods. Such work points towards a way of handling the problems of the next generation, how to conceptualise and to teach literacy in changing times. For instance, communities will vary; some will choose to resist, to adapt themselves, to balance between the local and the global, to incorporate globalisation within their own economic, cultural, and linguistic frames, or some combination. Such choices will affect classroom literacy practices as such choices shift the epistemological context and the context of social relationships. We cannot, then, avoid making the links across contexts for literacy learning and use that tend to be ignored in research and policy that detaches school from its wider context.

SECTION 3: LIVING LITERACIES—SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

In this section authors explore in greater depth the specific issues associated with literacy for people in different social and cultural environments, whether multilingual Chicago, post apartheid South Africa or South American communities. Marcia Farr opens the section with a classic linguistic survey of the city of Chicago and draws out the implications of such language variation for literacy uses and learning. An immediate link to the chapters we have been considering above is that she sees Chicago as a global city, closely linked to other places in the
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world economically, culturally, and linguistically. Another is that she addresses the issue of identities in such a context, as linked to the ways of using language and literacy. She takes us through historical accounts of the language map of the city, looks at current demographics that show the linguistic and ethnic diversity and the associated variations in scripts and uses of literacy. Amidst these general surveys she also focuses upon specific examples that indicate the relationship between identities and literacies, noting how use of proverbs constructs people in a Mexican transnational social network and how Chinese migrants use traditional Chinese writing systems. There are many populations in Chicago not yet studied in these ways and the links across communities also remain to be researched. Farr’s work provides a model of how such future research could be conducted.

In a similar vein, Inge Sichra documents Language Diversity and Indigenous Literacy in the Andes. In particular she provides a review of indigenous literacy in the Andes centering on Andean languages that have managed to survive Spanish language rule and maintain certain functional spaces in national societies and she puts such local language variety in the broader context of national policies and of research interests. Local languages have increasingly come to symbolise ethnic identity and she notes how in this context literacy acquires a driving role in the social participation of sectors Traditionally marginalised by their societies. She reviews the literature from seventeenth century Spanish conquest through to current post-Freirean debates, educational reforms and indigenous publishing. One ironic problem is that amidst all of this challenge to central hegemony of Spanish, the language of the conquest is still seen as the model for standards and for education by many in government. Against this and building upon new research directions that are more sensitive to multiple literacies, she sees two directions for research in this field: On the one hand, understanding and promoting indigenous literacy must take as a point of departure the indigenous languages themselves and their characteristic orality. On the other hand, multiple, complementary modes of literacy (alphabetic, graphic, textile) must be taken into account.

Jabari Mahiri shows the limitations of depending upon the traditional view, in this case within cities in the USA, where surprisingly similar issues emerge to those signalled by Sichra and others for different contexts. He looks at Literacies in the Lives of Urban Youth and pays particular attention to What They Don’t Learn in School. He sees the urban youth he is concerned with as living in the new digital age, the new times signalled by authors in Section 1 and his work, both in this chapter and more broadly published, can be read as a concrete working through of the implications of some of those ideas. Again he associates local literacies for such youth with broader links to global culture
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that involve particular styles of music, language, dress, and other practices linked to hip-hop culture and that serve for core representations of meaning and identity. He takes us through shifts in literacy theory as researchers have attempted to come to terms with these changes and then focuses in on work that began to explore sociocultural contexts like transnational communities and the uses of new media. In doing so he draws upon ethnographic work amongst Mexican communities, Heath’s accounts of communities in the Piedmont Carolinas, Gutiérrez’s notion of ‘third space’ and the work of Richardson whose chapter in this volume on Hip Hop literacies nicely complements that by Mahiri. Indeed, his own current research is at the intersection of digital media and hip-hop culture and he cites others who are building up a rich pool of data in this field. A key direction, then, for future research on the literacy and learning of youth is the centrality of practices of meaning making and representation through musical texts and how their selection enacts narratives.

Shifting continents again, Pippa Stein takes us to urban and rural schools and out of school practices in South Africa, again pursuing many similar themes. Her particular question in the context of literacy and education is: what does it mean, in practice, to design a curriculum which works towards integrated understandings of South African identities, despite the diversity of races, cultures, languages, religions, and histories? To address this question she provides a selected overview of research projects in South Africa which investigate alternative ways of conceptualising literacy learning. For Stein, literacy is constructed as a multiple semiotic practice, in keeping with the frequent references by authors in the volume (Kevin Leander and Cynthia Lewis, Literacy and Internet Technologies, Volume 2; Brian Street, New Literacies, New Times:Developments in Literacy Studies, Volume 2, etc.). She summarises, firstly, work in post-colonial, cultural and historical studies that explores the relations between indigenous cultural and linguistic forms in Southern Africa, which were predominantly oral and performative in nature, and their interaction with western cultural forms and epistemologies, including literacy. She then looks at education policy initiated in the post apartheid era and its implications for literacy learning. Here significant research projects have been conducted in and out of school to address these changes and their implications in a multilingual and multiethnic context. Stein herself has been involved in the Wits Multiliteracies Project that has developed classroom-based pedagogies which are multimodal, multilingual and involve different kinds of ‘crossings’. Pointing to future directions, she calls for not only a continuation of the research on out-of-school literacies that she has cited, but also for research into ‘in’ school literacies which has been neglected: it is time to look in much deeper ways into children’s
actual experience of literacy learning across the curriculum (as Bloome, Literacies in the Classroom, does in Volume 2).

Switching continent again, Judy Kalman provides an overview of research into Literacies in Latin America. Complementing Sichra’s account of Andean Literacies, Kalman likewise provides an overview of research traditions in the region known as Latin America and the Caribbean that includes not only the land mass stretching from Mexico to Argentina but also the small English, Spanish, and French speaking islands as well. Unlike many of the other regions mentioned in this volume, Latin America has high educational gender equality. Male and female enrolment is nearly equal and the difference between genders in adult literacy statistics is just 4%. However, indigenous peoples are more likely to be illiterate than other groups and, as with Andean literacies it is here in particular that research and policy are focusing. Kalman provides first an overview of the role of schooling in the region. With respect to literacy she notes that not all prehispanic languages were unwritten; in Mexico, for instance, writing developed around 600 B.C. and was passed on from one culture to another. In more recent times, the role of literacy has been located within national educational development programmes but research suggests that their attention to narrow technical features of acquisition was in practice offset by the importance of literacy classes as sites for socialisation. Again the broader view of literacy described by many authors in this volume points towards new understandings and indeed new data sets. There is now a small but growing body of research on literacy, schooling, and social practice in Latin America. Indeed, Kalman’s own study from Mexico, documenting the dissemination of literacy in a semi urban township, recently won the UNESCO International Literacy Research Award. Ongoing discussions in Latin America and the Caribbean around the meanings of the term literacy and its representation in different languages and the recent UNESCO Global Monitoring Report have given more credence in policy circles to the notion of a ‘literate environment’ rather than simply individual skills and statistical accounts of ‘literacy rates’. However, one direction for future research is to study literacy in indigenous communities which continues to be problematic and insufficiently understood. Like other authors, Kalman also notes that new literacies, including graffiti and murals and new technologies will become increasingly important in practice and therefore need to be taken into account in both educational policy and in research.

In the USA similar themes emerge as researchers look more closely at youth patterns of literacy use and their connections with other media of communication. Elaine Richardson’s account of African-American Literacies complements both the kind of study indicated by Kalman for other continents and also the work on urban youth already signalled
in the chapter by Mahiri. Focusing on African American literacies involves looking at how cultural identities, social locations, and social practices influence ways that members of this discourse group make meaning. She takes us through sociocultural approaches to African American literacy education advanced by the various subfields: including sociolinguistics, rhetoric and composition, and New Literacies Studies. Early developments in African-American literacies, as Willis showed in her piece on Critical Race Theory, inevitably involved issues of race and prejudice as the Civil Rights and Black Liberation Movements of the 1950s and 1960s struggled for access to educational and other institutions for African American people. The work of academic researchers played a part here as it showed the validity and power of local dialects, a perspective that has only recently begun to also play a part in the definition and consideration of local literacies. In this vein, researchers have sought to develop literacy curricula using well-documented research on African American language and culture as the basis of instruction. Making visible language and literacy practices that appeared hidden has been a major role of researchers in both educational environments and policy more broadly. The achievement gap for African American children in formal education may, from this new research perspective, have to be explained in terms other than cognitive ‘deficit’. Work in progress includes attention to youth identities, links to other semiotic practices: again the role of music, hip hop—on which Richardson has just written a significant book—and new media play a key role. Richardson concludes by noting the contribution of the work on African American literacies to broader comparative study of the kind indicated by the authors in this volume.

Finally, Eve Gregory brings us back to the theme of cities, focusing on London where she has conducted ethnographic research on community literacies over a long period but also, like Richardson and others, linking this local knowledge with the broader themes articulated throughout the volume. Cities, she suggests, are the home of many of the world’s great libraries, and have traditionally been recognised as a hub of both literacy and illiteracy. She provides, then, a review of existing literature documenting the history and development of ‘city literacies’, translated into ‘literacies in cities’ This is followed by a more detailed account of recent major contributions to the field and trends in research in progress with special reference to individuals growing up and becoming literate at the beginning and the end of the twentieth century in London, one of the largest and most ethnically diverse cities in the world. Looking at early developments in the study of city literacies, she goes back to Athens around 500 B.C., gradually bringing us up to date with accounts of Renaissance cities and then the industrial revolution with its associated class and educational issues. Throughout, the theme has been of cities as
both facilitating high levels of ‘cultural’ literacy and at the same time excluding a great many of their inhabitants. More recent debates have addressed inequality though largely in policy terms through surveys, tables indicating literacy rates and it is only now that the literacy lives of urban populations are being addressed in more qualitative and ethnographic terms. Gregory’s own work (with Williams) entitled ‘City Literacies’ represents one amongst a small number of key contributions to this growing field (along with that of the Lancaster group in the UK and of a UK organisation Research and Practice in Adult Literacy and the recent publication by the UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE) of studies in Urban Literacy—see Rogers, Informal Learning and Literacy, Volume 2). New directions she signals will have to include taking account of the literacies brought by the many migrants who now move into cities from rural areas, bringing with them literacy practices developed in their own communities and sometimes perhaps not acknowledged by educators and policy makers. Here, as in Farr’s and others’ work, the issue of multilingual literacies will loom large, whilst in educational terms the key issue will be the ‘many pathways to literacy’ that such varied backgrounds involve, as well as new ways of addressing the relationship of literacies in and out of formal contexts. Finally new technologies may mean that libraries may no longer be the main repositories of information, giving way to new digital technologies which may be sited outside as well as within new urban contexts.

As with other papers and in keeping with the opening comments of this Introduction, we find that when we address a particular site of literacy practice—in this case urban literacy, but in others as we have seen it might embrace different continents and different time periods—we have to take into account a range of themes that until recently were considered extraneous to the study of literacy: gender, class, race; literacies in and out of school; language variety; new technologies and in particular their uses by youth; national policy and its relation to what ethnographic accounts tell us about actual uses and meanings of literacy on the ground. This volume, then, has pointed to such themes as key elements in future literacy research and practice.

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