

THINK ABOUT READING: WHAT MAKES YOU LIKE SOMETHING? WHAT MAKES YOU SAY SOMETHING IS BORING?

“Getting” Reading

At one level, reading is a cognitive process: you learn how letters make patterns and how to interpret patterns as words. You have made it to college, so undoubtedly you have had some success with this cognitive work. If you hadn't, you couldn't read this. But beyond this level of cognition, reading gets a lot more complicated.

Maybe there are times when you struggle with reading. Sometimes, you might say you “can't get into it”—the reading seems boring, pointless, or hard to understand. When this is the case, it's likely that it's because you can't find a mental framework to put around the reading that helps you to connect it to things that are important for you. When you do “get into a reading,” it's meaningful because you are able to *make it mean* something. You are looking at it through your own lenses—that is, your own experiences, cultures, and ideas—and finding a way for it to matter for your world picture. This process of “getting into a reading” has to do with finding a way to engage the text for yourself, making connections between it and you. You might get into a reading because you enjoy it or engage with the content, or you find it to be a useful model for something you are thinking about or doing, for example.

Other times, you might say that you are having a hard time “getting” a reading, or understanding the ideas. “Getting it” is more complicated than “getting into it” because there's almost always at least one other person involved. You have to “get it” because someone else is trying to explain it to you (“Oh! I get it!”) or because you want to explain it to someone else (“Don't you get it?”). So while you approach and interpret any reading through your own experiences, cultures, and ideas—those things that come together to form lenses through which you filter your experiences and interpretations of everything—there are also other interpretations, filtered through other lenses, out there.

In school, these other readings can include what is seen as *the* meaning of a reading, or what academics call the “dominant reading.” Sometimes, the dominant reading isn't a *single* meaning; there will be several dominant interpretations of a reading, but the different interpretations will have similar features in common. Maybe you have had experiences in school where you really think that one thing is happening in a reading but your teacher says something else entirely is going on, or where you were told that a question you asked wasn't relevant to the text. These might be occasions when your reading might differ, in whole or in part, from the dominant reading. You might say that you don't, or can't, “get it”; as a result of not “getting it,” you might sometimes also write off the reading and say that you couldn't get into it.

But you also could look at this experience in another way. Maybe it's an example of a clash between your interpretation and what was understood as *the* meaning, or the dominant interpretation, of a text. Seen this way, moments like this become occasions to look at what is going on between your interpretation

and the other one and to think about whether and how you want to bring the two readings closer together. Teacher-researcher Sheridan Blau suggests that for interpretations to be considered valid, they need to share broad, common precepts with other readings that are already accepted. In other words, valid interpretations need to share the same broad understanding of the text's meaning, and be supported by evidence from that text (75). When we talk about this where I teach, we use the metaphor of “being in the ballpark.” A ballpark can be a big place (if you are a baseball fan, think of Yankee Stadium), so a reading that is way out in right field might be as valid as one in left field. If it is outside of the park, though, that is another thing entirely. At the same time, part of the goal of many readers (and many teachers) is to push the walls of the ballpark so that more interpretations reflecting more cultures are seen as valid.

In school (whether college, high school, or any other school), you sometimes will have to be able to show that you can arrive at the dominant interpretation of a reading—in other words, that you are in the ballpark. But since interpretation is shaped by experience and culture, you might not have had the same kinds of experiences or be part of the same cultures that those people whose ideas have formed the dominant interpretation have.

This might lead a teacher to discount your interpretation, to think that you just don't or can't “get” the reading, or to give you a lower grade. At the same time, *only* providing the dominant interpretation of a reading in school might mean that you are not finding readings and the work connected with them very meaningful for your own purposes. This could be a problem, too. You might just begin to go through the motions of interpretation as a sort of performance, or think that teachers are not very interested in your ideas, or see school as always about conforming to others' ideas.

Part of the goal of this book, and therefore of the reading activities outlined below, is to help you to find a way to engage with the readings from the book and achieve a balance—or to navigate the tension between—your own individual interpretation and the dominant interpretation. Ideally, by engaging with these questions, you will find that you can enter into a dialogue with the ideas in the readings and speak to the issues with authority as a reader. Hopefully, you will even push on the ballpark with your interpretations.

Reading Questions

Before you delve into the readings here, you should address three pre-reading questions:

- Why are you reading this piece?
- What is the assignment for which you are reading it?
- What do you hope to learn as you read it?

Of course, since you are answering the questions before you read, there is no expectation that you will know anything about the reading. But you do have an assignment, and you can learn a lot about a reading from a quick glance. For

what purposes might you be able to draw on this text? For what purposes do you hope to be able to do so?

You also should end each reading with two questions that ask you to consider your reading purposes, and how the reading did or did not facilitate those purposes:

How is this reading useful or not useful for the purposes for which you intend it?

If it is useful, what is useful about it, and what in the reading illustrates that use?

For example, if you intended to use a reading to learn about an idea, what did you learn? What in the reading helped you to learn that? If you intended to use it to think about a researcher's process (such as what they looked for during an observation or what they asked during an interview), what did you learn about that and what in the reading helped you to learn it?

As you read, find a passage, a quote, an idea, or some other element from this reading that strikes you as significant, perhaps for the essay you are thinking about writing, or perhaps for your own thinking. What is the passage, quote, idea, or other element, and why is it significant for you?

Your answers here will help you to begin making connections between the reading and your ideas about the purpose(s) for which you read it. Ideally, you can use this response as a starting point to develop those connections in your writing, entering into the kind of dialogue, with the text or about the issue, that is one of the hallmarks of engaging writing.

In addition to working with these pre- and post-reading questions for each reading, after individual readings you will find two kinds of questions that are specific to individual readings: *Critical Reflections* and *Making Connections*. *Critical Reflections* questions pose content- and process-based questions; sometimes, they also ask you to take a position with regard to your interpretation. *Making Connections* questions ask you to work with issues that a dominant reading might identify as central in two or more readings included here.

Strategic Reading

In addition to (or even instead of) using the reading questions included here, you also should think about other reading strategies that will help you to keep a record of your interpretation and develop connections between interpretations and the ideas you will develop in your writing.

Double-Entry Logs

One strategy for reading is to use a **double-entry log**. To create the log, take a piece of notebook paper and divide it into two columns. Write the name of the reading you are writing about across the top and be sure to write down page numbers for anything you quote. In one column, write down anything from the reading that catches your attention, seems significant, bores you silly, confuses you, or otherwise causes you to take note (or to stop taking note). On the other side, write about what led you to write it down. Here's an example:

Paolo Freire, "The Banking Concept of Education"

"Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher issues communications and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of the action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors of catalogues of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this misguided system." (74-75)

The banking concept really rings a bell with me. I had so many classes like this, where we were expected to sit quietly and absorb, absorb, absorb. I remember one in particular: my 10th grade English class. We had to read *Macbeth* out loud for what seemed like a year. We didn't talk about what we were reading, though. Instead, my teacher, Ms. Krabopple,* would lecture to us about the themes of the play that we had covered in that day's reading for the last 10 minutes of class. Boring! Wow! I had to make sure I remembered everything — in Freire's words, that I "collected the information," because otherwise I wouldn't do well on the tests. In fact, because I wasn't a very good collector, I didn't do very well. This reminds me of some of what I read in Mike Rose's "I Just Wanna Be Average," too. In a lot of the classes he describes there, it seems like students were expected to just sit quietly and absorb the information. Maybe that is why some of them were sometimes disruptive. Would this model of learning lead to behavioral things? Something to think about.

*Not her real name, but this is a real experience from my 10th grade English class.

In this log entry I've reflected on how I *feel* about the reading (it resonated with me); it also gets at my interpretation of the text (how I understand the banking concept). To make these connections, I needed to interpret the reading in particular ways. That interpretation is implied here, but I start to make it more explicit when I begin thinking about how I was a collector of information. Near the end, I also try to make connections to another reading in this book where I see similar kinds of things happening. I also raise a question that I want to think about as I continue thinking about education through the reading and writing I am doing here.

Annotating the Text

Another strategy for keeping track of your interpretations, considering connections, and raising questions about readings is annotating readings as you go. This means writing comments, questions, and ideas as you read. It sounds simple, but there are lots of different kinds of comments you can make. To illustrate, below are some excerpts from David Barton and Mary Hamilton's "Literacy Practices."

You might want to *restate important ideas* in your own words:

Our interest is in social practices in which literacy has a role; hence the basic unit of a social theory of unit is that of *literacy practices*. Literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy. However practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. (see Street 1993, p. 12)

Literacy practices — ways of using (written) language that people draw on — what people do with literacy.

This kind of annotation makes it easier for you to go back to the reading and remember what you found to be key ideas; the act of writing out the ideas in your own words also helps you interpret the ideas for yourself.

You also might want to *note what interests you and why* in the margins:

Looking at different literacy events it is clear that literacy is not the same in all contexts; rather, there are different *literacies*. The notion of different literacies has several senses: for example, practices which involve different media or symbolic systems, such as a film or computer, can be regarded as different literacies, as in *film literacy* or *computer literacy*. Another sense is that practices in different cultures and languages can be regarded as different literacies.

Different literacies! Can we imagine literate in one area — like visual literacy — but not as literate in another — computer literacy, for example. This could explain Cedric's struggles at Brown in "Ezra and Intimacies"???

This kind of annotation means that you are making connections between the reading and other ideas, such as your own experiences, other readings, and so on. This also can be useful when you are looking for material to use in your own writing.

Of course, you'll want to note *questions about the reading* and, perhaps, *places where you struggled with the reading* (e.g., where you found it confusing or boring!)

Socially powerful institutions, such as education, tend to support dominant literacy practices. These dominant practices can be seen as part of whole discourse formations, institutionalized configurations of power and knowledge which are embodied in social relationships. Other vernacular literacies which exist in people's every-

What do they mean here? How is education a socially powerful institution? How does

day lives are less visible and supported. This means that *dominant practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible, and influential than others.*

education — which is a BIG thing (and not even one thing, since there are loads of schools) support dominant practices? And what is a discourse formation?

Noting these spots helps you locate them when you want to return to them or when you want to ask questions about them with class colleagues or your instructor.

The key to annotating a reading is *writing in the book*. If you are thinking of preserving these pristine pages because you want to sell the book back at the end of the term, remember that it's unlikely that you will get less for a book if it's written in. On the other hand, you will be very glad as you go through the term when you have notes that make it easier for you to find reading you want to use in your writing.

Reading Images

In the same way that readers interpret words and entire texts to make meanings of them, the same happens with images. Although you might not think about it, when you look at a photograph or other graphic, you move at blazing speed through a process that helps you make that image mean something to you. Reading visual images can help you develop your ideas for writing in lots of ways; photographs or other visual images can also provide incredibly compelling evidence for the analysis in your writing.

In this book, several of the assignments ask you to choose photographs that resonate with you, to refer to them in your writing, and/or to use evidence from them. Implied in these requests are two ways that you can use these photographs for pre-writing and as evidence.

For Prewriting

Sometimes, looking at and thinking about your interpretation of an image can help you to get at how you understand the idea behind the image, and you will be surprised at the differences in how people interpret these pictures! For instance, a student once used the photograph entitled "Boys Read Storybooks in the Shade" in conjunction with the Category Two assignment, The Purpose of Education and Literacy. In her DW.2a, she wrote that these boys seemed to be reading for escape, to be alone with their ideas and thoughts. She then went on to write a long essay about how, as a student growing up in wartime Beirut, Lebanon, education both served as an opportunity to escape the realities of her everyday life and, later as a student in the U.S., to retreat from the struggles she had with assimilating into a new culture. Another student looked at the same

picture and saw two boys being punished by being sent to read in isolation because they had violated a rule or a norm. She went on to write a long essay about how education represented a form of isolation and punishment for her. In both of these cases, the photographs helped students to think through their own ideas about education and literacy. Their instructors also pressed them to think about what, in their own experiences, led them to interpret the photographs as they had. This is a helpful activity not only for thinking about interpreting photographs, but *any* text.

As Evidence

Most of the time, evidence for academic writing comes from written sources. But that's not always the case, and the conventions of writing in various disciplines are constantly changing. History textbooks, for instance, include a number of photographs and other visual images to support their interpretations. Using photographs as evidence also gives you a great chance to practice writing fully about what you see, and what evidence from your source (in this case, a photograph) helps you see that. When you can't use words from the text to help readers see what you mean, you have to generate those words yourself.

The photographs included here come from two sources. Most of them come from a collection held at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., called "America from the Great Depression to World War II: Photographs from the FSA [Farm Security Administration]-OWI [Office of War Information], 1935-1945." The Farm Security Administration was part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA), a program designed to bring the American economy out of the Great Depression, in which it was mired when Roosevelt was elected in 1932. Among other things, the WPA employed thousands of artists—writers, photographers, poets, and others—to document the condition of Americans. The photographs included in the FSA/OWI collection come from those efforts, as hundreds of photographers travelled around the country to take pictures of Americans living in difficult conditions. As you look at these photographs, remember that they reflect the time period from which they come. For instance, you will note that the titles of two refer to "Negroes," which was then the preferred term for referring to African-Americans.

Many of the other photographs included here come from a book called *School* by Nicholas Nixon, a photographer, and Robert Coles, a psychiatrist who has long worked with children. Nixon and Coles were both interested in documenting the experiences of students at different kinds of schools: a public school (Tobin School), an elite private, preparatory school (The Boston Latin School), and a private school for children with special needs (The Perkins School for the Blind). Still others are contemporary photos of activities and spaces connected with school-based activities like reading and writing.

ASSIGNMENTS

- 1 "Learning from Self" Assignments
- 2 "Learning from Others" Assignments
- 3 "Learning Through Research" Assignments
- 4 "Speaking Out, Joining In, Talking Back" Assignment

DAVID BARTON AND MARY HAMILTON

LITERACY PRACTICES

This reading is about a word that you have probably heard so often; you don't even notice it: literacy. In discussions about school, it is used a lot—for example, to bemoan falling literacy standards, or to talk about the kinds of literacy that students need to develop. But in these discussions, the definition of literacy is more often implied than it is made explicit. In this essay (adapted from a chapter of the same book that includes "How They've Fared in Education," also by Barton and Hamilton, which appears on pages 98–113), the authors offer a definition of *literacies* and suggest that several "base concepts"—a social theory of literacy, literacy events, and texts—are central to understanding how literacies function in peoples' lives rather than which literacy people do or do not have, as tends to be discussed more often. The authors suggest that different literacies are used in different contexts (times, places, situations), and that understanding literacies must be done within these contexts.

A SOCIAL THEORY OF LITERACY: PRACTICES AND EVENTS

In this chapter we provide a framework in terms of a theory of literacy. It is a brief overview of a social theory of literacy. This can be seen as the starting-point or orienting theory, which the detailed studies in this book then expand upon, react to and develop. We define what is meant by literacy practices and literacy events and explain some of the tenets of a social theory of literacy. This is pursued in Barton and Hamilton (1998), where a further example of situated literacies not covered in this book can be found.

We present here the theory of literacy as social practice in the form of a set of six propositions about the nature of literacy, as in Figure 1. The starting-point

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

FIGURE 1 LITERACY AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

of this approach is the assertion that *literacy is a social practice*, and the propositions are an elaboration of this. The discussion is a development on that in Barton (1994, pp. 34–32), where contemporary approaches to literacy are discussed within the framework of the metaphor of ecology. The notion of *literacy practices* offers a powerful way of conceptualising the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape. When we talk about practices, then, this is not just the superficial choice of a word but the possibilities that this perspective offers for new theoretical understandings about literacy.

Our interest is in social practices in which literacy has a role; hence the basic unit of a social theory of literacy is that of *literacy practices*. Literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy. However practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships (see Street 1993, p. 12). This includes people's awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy. These are processes internal to the individual; at the same time, practices are the social processes which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities. Practices are shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them. They straddle the distinction between individual and social worlds, and literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals.

To avoid confusion, it is worth emphasising that this usage is different from situations where the word *practice* is used to mean learning to do something by repetition. It is also different from the way the term is used in recent international surveys of literacy, to refer to 'common or typical activities or tasks' (OECD/Statistics Canada 1996). The notion of practices as we have defined it above—cultural ways of utilising literacy—is a more abstract one that cannot wholly be contained in observable activities and tasks.

Turning to another basic concept, *literacy events* are activities where literacy has a role. Usually there is a written text, or texts, central to the activity and there may be talk around the text. Events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them. The notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy, that it always exists in a social context. It is parallel to ideas developed in sociolinguistics and also, as Jay Lemke has pointed out, to Bakhtin's assertion that the starting point for the analysis of spoken language should be 'the social event of verbal interaction', rather than the formal linguistic properties of texts in isolation (Lemke 1995).

Many literacy events in life are regular, repeated activities, and these can often be a useful starting-point for research into literacy. Some events are linked into routine sequences and these may be part of the formal procedures and expectations of social institutions like work-places, schools, and welfare agencies. Some events are structured by the more informal expectations and pressures of the

home or peer group. Texts are a crucial part of literacy events and the study of literacy is partly a study of texts and how they are produced and used. These three components, practices, events, and texts, provide the first proposition of a social theory of literacy, that *literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these are observable in events which are mediated by written texts*. The local literacies study was concerned with identifying the events and texts of everyday life and describing people's associated practices. Our prime interest there was to analyse events in order to learn about practices. As with the definition of practices, we take a straightforward view of events at this point, as being activities which involve written texts: discussion throughout this book returns to the definitions of these terms. An example of an everyday literacy event, taken from the local literacies study, is that of cooking a pudding; it is described in Figure 2.

Once one begins to think in terms of literacy events there are certain things about the nature of reading and writing which become apparent. For instance, in many literacy events there is a mixture of written and spoken language. Many studies of literacy practices have print literacy and written texts as their starting

When baking a lemon pie in her kitchen, Rita follows a recipe. She uses it to check the amounts of the ingredients. She estimates the approximate amounts, using teacups and spoons chosen specially for this purpose. The recipe is hand written on a piece of note-paper; it was written out from a book by a friend more than ten years ago. The first time she read the recipe carefully at each stage, but now she only looks at it once or twice. The piece of paper is marked and greasy by having been near the cooking surface on many occasions. It is kept in an envelope with other hand-written recipes and ones cut out of magazines and newspapers. The envelope and some cookery books are on a shelf in the kitchen. The books range in age and condition and include some by Robert Carrier. Sometimes she sits and reads them for pleasure.

Rita does not always go through the same set of activities in making the pie. Sometimes she makes double the amount described in the recipe if more people will be eating it. Sometimes she cooks the pie with her daughter Hayley helping her where necessary. Sometimes she enjoys cooking it, at other times it is more of a chore, when time is limited or she has other things she would rather do. Rita has passed the recipe on to several friends who have enjoyed the pie.

Rita does not always follow recipes exactly, but will add herbs and spices to taste; sometimes she makes up recipes. At one point she describes making a vegetable and pasta dish similar to one she had had as a take-away meal. She exchanges recipes with other people, although she does not lend her books.

FIGURE 2. COOKING LITERACY

point but it is clear that in literacy events people use written language in an integrated way as part of a range of semiotic systems; these semiotic systems include mathematical systems, musical notation, maps, and other non-text based images. The cookery text has numeracy mixed with print literacy and the recipes come from books, magazines, television, and orally from friends and relatives. By identifying literacy as one of a range of communicative resources available to members of a community, we can examine some of the ways in which it is located in relation to other mass media and new technologies. This is especially pertinent at a time of rapidly changing technologies.

Looking at different literacy events it is clear that literacy is not the same in all contexts; rather, there are different *literacies*. The notion of different literacies has several senses; for example, practices which involve different media or symbolic systems, such as a film or computer, can be regarded as different literacies, as in *film literacy* and *computer literacy*. Another sense is that practices in different cultures and languages can be regarded as different literacies. While accepting these senses of the term, the main way in which we use the notion here is to say that literacies are coherent configurations of literacy practices; often these sets of practices are identifiable and named, as in *academic literacy* or *work-place literacy* and they are associated with particular aspects of cultural life.

This means that, within a given culture, *there are different literacies associated with different domains of life*. Contemporary life can be analysed in a simple way into domains of activity, such as home, school, work place. It is a useful starting-point to examine the distinct practices in these domains, and then to compare, for example, home and school, or school and work place. We begin with the home domain and everyday life. The home is often identified as a primary domain in people's literacy lives, for example by James Gee (1990), and central to people's developing sense of social identity. Work is another identifiable domain, where relationships and resources are often structured quite differently from in the home. We might expect the practices associated with cooking, for example, to be quite different in the home and in the work-place—supported, learned, and carried out in different ways. The division of labour is different in institutional kitchens, the scale of the operations, the clothing people wear when cooking, the health and safety precautions they are required to take, and so on. Such practices contribute to the idea that people participate in distinct *discourse communities* in different domains of life. These communities are groups of people held together by their characteristic ways of talking, acting, valuing, interpreting, and using written language. (See discussion in Swales 1990, pp. 25–27.)

Domains, and the discourse communities associated with them, are not clear-cut, however; there are questions of the permeability of boundaries, of leakages and movement between boundaries, and of overlap between domains. Home and community, for instance, are often treated as being the same domain; nevertheless they are distinct in many ways, including the dimension of public and private behaviour. An important part of the local literacies study was to clarify the domain being studied and to tease apart notions of home, household, neighbourhood, and community. Another aspect is the extent to which

This domain is a distinct one with its own practices, and the extent to which the practices that exist in the home originate there, or home practices are exported to other domains. In particular, the private home context appears to be infiltrated by practices from many different public domains.

90. Domains are structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned. Activities within these domains are not accidental or randomly varying: there are particular configurations of literacy practices and there are regular ways in which people act in many literacy events in particular contexts. Various institutions support and structure activities in particular domains of life. These include family, religion, and education, which are all social institutions. Some of these institutions are more formally structured than others, with explicit rules for procedures, documentation and legal penalties for infringement, whilst others are regulated by the pressure of social conventions and attitudes. Particular literacies have been created by and are structured and sustained by these institutions. Part of the study aims to highlight the ways in which institutions support particular literacy practices.

Socially powerful institutions, such as education, tend to support dominant literacy practices. These dominant practices can be seen as part of whole discourse formations, institutionalised configurations of power and knowledge which are embodied in social relationships. Other vernacular literacies which exist in people's everyday lives are less visible and less supported. This means that *literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible, and influential than others*. One can contrast dominant literacies and vernacular literacies; many of the studies in this book are concerned more with documenting the vernacular literacies which exist, and with exploring their relationship to more dominant literacies.

People are active in what they do and *literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices*. Whilst some reading and writing is carried out as an end in itself, typically literacy is a means to some other end. Any study of literacy practices must therefore situate reading and writing activities in these broader contexts and motivations for use. In the cooking example, for instance, the aim is to bake a lemon pie, and the reading of a recipe is incidental to this aim. The recipe is incorporated into a broader set of domestic social practices associated with providing food and caring for children, and it reflects broader social relationships and gendered divisions of labour.

A first step in reconceptualising literacy is to accept the multiple functions literacy may serve in a given activity: where it can replace spoken language, enable communication, solve a practical problem, or act as a memory aid—in some cases, all at the same time. It is also possible to explore the further work which literacy can do in an activity, and the social meanings it takes on. For instance, there are ways in which literacy acts as *evidence, as display, as threat, and as ritual*. Texts can have multiple roles in an activity and literacy can act in different ways for the different participants in a literacy event; people can be incorporated into the literacy practices of others without reading or writing a single word. The acts

of reading and writing are not the only ways in which texts are assigned meaning (as in Barton and Hamilton 1998, Chapter 14).

It is important to shift from a conception of literacy located in individuals to examine ways in which people in groups utilise literacy. In this way literacy becomes a community resource, realised in social relationships rather than a property of individuals. This is true at various levels; at the detailed micro level it can refer to the fact that in particular literacy events there are often several participants taking on different roles and creating something more than their individual practices. At a broader macro level it can mean the ways in which whole communities use literacy. There are social rules about who can produce and use particular literacies and we wish to examine this social regulation of texts. Shifting away from literacy as an individual attribute is one of the most important implications of a practice account of literacy, and one of the ways in which it differs most from more traditional accounts. The ways in which literacy acts as a resource for different sorts of groups are a central theme of Barton and Hamilton (1998), which describes some of the ways in which families, local communities, and organisations regulate and are regulated by literacy practices.

91. A person's practices can also be located in their own history of literacy. In order to understand this we need to take a life history approach, observing the history within a person's life. There are several dimensions to this: people use literacy to make changes in their lives, literacy changes people and people find themselves in the contemporary world of changing literacy practices. The literacy practices an individual engages with change across their lifetime, as a result of changing demands, available resources, as well as the possibilities and their interests.

Related to the constructed nature of literacy, any theory of literacy implies a theory of learning. *Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making* as well as formal education and training. This learning takes place in particular social contexts and part of this learning is the internalisation of social processes. It is therefore important to understand the nature of informal and vernacular learning strategies and the nature of situated cognition, linking with the work of researchers influenced by Lev Vygotsky, such as Sylvia Scribner, Jean Lave, and colleagues (Scribner 1984; Lave and Wenger, 1991). For this it is necessary to draw upon people's insights into how they learn, their theories about literacy and education, the vernacular strategies they use to learn new literacies. We start out from the position that people's understanding of literacy is an important aspect of their learning, and that people's theories guide their actions. It is here that a study of literacy practices has its most immediate links with education.

NOTE

This chapter is adapted from pages 6–13 of D. Barton and M. Hamilton, *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*, Routledge, 1998, with permission of the publishers.

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CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

1. Without doing any research at all, think about the ways that you have heard and/or seen the word literacy used and write all of those ways down. Do you find a pattern among them?
2. As the introduction to this reading outlines, literacy and literacies are key concepts here. How do you define literacy and literacies, and why do you define them as you do?
3. To illustrate their definition of literacies, Barton and Hamilton provide an example of Rita's cooking literacy as she makes a lemon pie. Create a representation—a chart, a list, a map, a diagram, or something else—that shows all of the elements of literacy involved in this illustration. Be sure to include connections to other people (like the friend who gave Rita the recipe) in your representation. What are the different elements of cooking literacy?
4. Reflecting on your representation of Rita's cooking literacy, think about the literacies in which you participate, and where you participate in them. (Barton and Hamilton refer to these different places as "domains.") Schooling is obviously one, since you are a student, and there are likely others,

as well (a religious affiliation or a club or fraternal organization membership, for example). How do you show that you have developed literacies in each of these domains? What skills, behaviors, and other factors are involved?

5. Barton and Hamilton's idea of literacy practices and literacy events are key concepts in this reading. How do you understand their definition of each?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Barton and Hamilton argue that "literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible, and influential than others. . . . Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices" (64). Consider connections between this statement and one or more of the readings included here that focus on students' school experiences: "The Last Shot," "Literacy Among the Amish," "I Just Wanna Be Average," "On the Uses of a Liberal Education I/It," "Fierce Intimacies," or other readings. What literacy practices are evident there? Which do you consider to be dominant, and in what domain? What "social goals and cultural practices" are advanced through those practices?
2. In this reading, Barton and Hamilton ground literacy practices in very specific contexts. Consider this definition against one implied in Nicholas Lemann's argument for a national curriculum. Could such a curriculum incorporate the definition of literacy practices developed by Barton and Hamilton? Should a national curriculum incorporate this definition of literacy practices?

BELL HOOKS

ENGAGED PEDAGOGY

Bell hooks is a teacher, writer, and scholar. This chapter, from hooks' first book, *Teaching to Transgress*, takes up some of the themes that run throughout hooks' many books and essays: race, the contradictory tensions of education, and feminism. bell hooks is the writing name of Gloria Watkins; the name "bell hooks" comes from Watkins' grandmother and mother. hooks says she uses a pen name in part because it connects her to her past, and in part because it can shift readers' focus away from the author and toward the issues in the writing.

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual