



Living Literacies

Literacy for Social Change

Kate Pahl and Jennifer Rowsell

with Diane Collier, Steve Pool, Zanib Rasool, and Terry Trzeciak

LIVING LITERACIES

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RETHINKING LITERACY RESEARCH AND
PRACTICE THROUGH THE EVERYDAY

KATE PAHL AND JENNIFER ROWSELL

WITH DIANE COLLIER, STEVE POOL,
ZANIB RASOOL, AND TERRY TRZECAK

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Brian V. Street (October 24, 1943–June 21, 2017), a utopian scholar who inspired both Kate and Jennifer, and to Gunther Kress (March 18, 1940–June 20, 2019), a true visionary who made us see the world differently.



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FOREWORD

Steve Pool

Fifteen years ago, I encountered New Literacy Studies. I was lucky enough to be introduced to the field through working with Kate Pahl and later Jennifer Rowsell. I say working “with” in a very practical sense; I was not interested in their written work, their books or journal papers. I encountered their ideas in the messy, often-frustrating world of trying to find things out about literacy together.

As a birthright dyslexic, I had spent forty years trying to avoid working directly with words. Through introducing me to New Literacy Studies, Kate allowed me to reimagine what could be considered a text. We stood in front of a display case in a museum containing glass objects on small acrylic mounts, images, and words on museum panels. Kate saw the whole case as a single text with multiple potential meanings. But it took me a while to see this, to extend my definition and therefore the potential of what a text could be.

When you first meet Kate, she tells you a foundational story about her Ph.D. study. She explains how she studied young boys in London playing with action figures; how their whispered under-the-breath play worlds create plateaus of meaning, flows of connections. In liberating texts from the page, New Literacy Studies gives us a way to value, to understand, and to reinvent our conception of what literacy is, but also, and more important, what it does.

Jennifer Rowsell's work sets out to ask what New Literacy Studies can do in the world within and beyond education. Not satisfied with a warning shot across the bow of established literacy education, she is a modern-day pirate of multimodality, boarding ships and taking few prisoners.

New Literacy Studies offers us a way to critique what came before, and it affords a robust and now established approach to reading the world differently. There is a problem at the heart of the term "New Literacy Studies" in that it is no longer new; its critique of the old, although not universally accepted, is now part of the canon.

Living Literacies is a timely book. With the passing of Gunther Kress and Brian Street, we have lost two great scholars and friends. Their legacy may be not only in changing the way we look at the uses of literacy but also in inspiring a group of new scholars who situate themselves in the world with the people who use and own language, who write their love and anger on the world in texts that are no longer held between pages. In questioning its own relevance, *Living Literacies* makes an important contribution to the field.

The writing that Kate and Jennifer do together is always at the edge of the field and often moves the fence posts. *Living Literacies* is a messy book; ideas stick to your feet like the surface coating of beer on the carpet of a backstreet bar. Full of contradictions, inspirations, and cul-de-sacs, it is to be read with an open mind and in good faith. A living text is never complete and meaning is never fixed—this book is no exception.

1

WHAT IS LIVING LITERACIES?

Jennifer Rowsell and Kate Pahl

DEFINING LIVING LITERACIES

A living literacies approach to research starts from the ways that meaning is made as people conduct everyday activities. Indeed, it relies as much on more routine, everyday activities like scrolling through Instagram, watching news footage, or listening to music as it does on official, schooled literacy activities like reading, writing, speaking, and listening to lectures. Living literacies involves being in and of the world: we move through and within literacy all the time (see glossary), and the mind, heart, and body of each of us play equal roles in the process.

Seen in this way, “literacy” naturally conflates felt, sensory experiences with more deliberate ways of thinking and knowing. In the past, literacy has often been framed in terms of its performed, communicational, and informational dimensions at the expense of its more hidden, lived, and sometimes intensely affective dimensions (Ehret 2018a; Leander and Boldt 2013; Leander and Wells Rowe 2006). As it is lived and in constant use, literacy flows through people’s rites and practices, and its dynamism and vitality rest firmly on thoughts, emotions, movements, materials, spaces, and places. For us, as literacy researchers, literacy comes alive through observations and reflections on the many ways people engage with texts and technologies across varied spaces. We are very much implicated in the

process of observing and taking part in living literacies, and our minds and bodies are never the same after working and connecting with people in research sites (Lewis and Tierney 2013). The forces, relations, and connections between researchers, co-researchers, and co-participants change everyone involved. We, each to each, live with and live from the research process. To engage in literacy broadly and fully, and in literacy research specifically, demands that we view from multiple perspectives the ways people call on their own feelings and ways of knowing to complete the varied tasks before them.

A lived literacies approach implies a turn to activism, to hopeful practice, to creativity, to making, to seeing, and to knowing. “Hoping,” “Creating,” “Making,” “Seeing,” and “Knowing” are some of the titles of our chapters, which are oriented as much toward affect (Lewis and Tierney 2013; Leander and Ehret 2019) as they are toward habits of mind (Bruner 1960). And the structure of *Living Literacies* is oriented toward what we can do *with* literacy, *about* literacy, and *for* literacy. We are aware of the huge challenges facing us in the world—climate change, increased concerns about identity, pervasive sexism, nationalism, the rise of racist and Far Right movements, governmental fissures and fractures, and continuing wars. We see our research as profoundly engaged with these challenges. Like the chapters in this book, our studies have often been collaborative and coproduced, and this has given us a wide-angled lens in our explorations.

LIVING LITERACIES THROUGH THE EYES OF THE EVERYDAY

Literacy is about seeing, disrupting, hoping, knowing, creating, and making; we have featured these key aspects of the literacy experience as separate chapters. Looking at literacy through the eyes of the everyday, our living literacies approach is grounded not only in theories concerned with everyday literacies, but also in new theoretical paradigms that point to the importance of feeling, affect, embodiment, and emotion. We have drawn on the methodologies of traditional anthropology, such as those of ethnography, and on artistic methodologies as well, and we have learned much from coproducing with researchers situated in communities, including young people and activists. All of this has enabled us to see literacy through the eyes of those who live it.

Our work draws on New Literacy Studies, which argues that literacy is an everyday social practice and, as such, situated within the purview of anthropology. In their exploration of everyday life, anthropologists rely on participant observation, doing fieldwork in given settings, often for extended periods of time as part of longitudinal studies (Ingold 2014). Our work has been particularly influenced by that of Brian Street, an anthropologist who studied everyday literacy practices, and references to Street's work run throughout this book. In 1984, with the publication of his *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, literacy came to be known more and more as a social and essentially ideological practice. Within a social group, whether an institution, a discipline, a local community, or a grade school class, the use of written language is seen to be guided by a set of shared literacy practices. But, far from abstract cultural models held in people's minds, these practices are embedded in all aspects of their social situations.

Living Literacies aims to gather together research on literacy and to refocus its gaze. Scholars working in new materialist and posthuman paradigms (see glossary) argue that literacy studies need a wider perspective on meaning making, one that moves beyond humans to "more-than-humans" (Truman 2019) and that extends a more expansive view of literacy into objects, the nonhuman, and affect. Although we are cognizant of the recent turn to materialist and posthuman perspectives (Kuby and Gutshall Rucker 2016), our focus is on literacies as *lived*.

Our impetus to write this book comes from our awareness that literacy is more than the sum of its parts: although it can be followed through traces of practices across sites and spaces, literacy is also a concept that can be ontologically constructed from the bottom up. Indeed, to fully understand it, we need to explore what is happening when we read, write, speak, create, make, and live literacy. As David Bloome and Judith Green (2015, 20) explain: "Literacy cannot be separated from what people are doing, how they are doing it, when, where, under what conditions and with whom they are doing it; metaphorically, there is no separation of the dancer from the dance (cf. Yeats 1962)."

This exploration needs to be collaborative and to encompass both the lived reality of moving through the world and the "not yet" and "What if ... ?" emergent understandings of literacy that doing so gives rise to. Although we recognize the importance of university knowledge about

language and literacy, it is in the everyday world that we learn from one another, and it is this “learning from” (Ingold 2014) that makes knowing more present, more felt, more embodied, more situated. To articulate more clearly what could be, the “not yet” (Daniel and Moylan 1997), we need to address the emotions that accompany literacies and to show how living literacies could be coproduced to imagine different communities and make them happen. Our work draws on the idea of practice as research (Barrett and Bolt 2010) and on “material thinking” (Carter 2004). We see perceptual understandings about literacy as built up from the ontological understandings of the people we work with, especially children and young people (Escott and Pahl 2017). In the sections that follow, we chart a history to foreground lineages that have brought us to the present day in literacy studies.

LIVING LITERACIES AND INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGIES

There are parallels between the concept of living literacies in the everyday and indigenous pedagogies such as New Zealand’s early childhood Te Whariki curriculum, based entirely on the Te Whariki philosophy of the Maori (My ECE Experts 2013–2019). This curriculum, whose central metaphor is the woven mat, has four main principles: empowerment; holistic development; family and community; and relationships—all of which are tied to the notion of living literacies—and five complementary strands that go along with the main principles: well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration. The Te Whariki curriculum believes in children depending on one another to make meaning and regards each child in his or her own right (My ECE Experts 2013–2019). Living literacies shares similar values, emphasizing that literacy is idiosyncratic, informed by the ways, beliefs, experiences, and ontologies of individual lives.

CONFRONTING THE LITERACIES OF POWER

Our work is crucially concerned with power and with whose voices count in literacy research and why. In *Critical Literacy and Urban Youth*, Ernest Morrell (2008) argues that, to leverage and articulate what they have to say, students need to develop tools to dissect and make sense of the world

in new ways. Valerie Kinloch's work (2010) explains how the literacies of place are racialized. She shows how young people can use particular ways to reclaim their space, in this case Harlem, away from gentrification, and how working with them to do so can begin to unpeel the power structures that constrain how their voices are heard.

Critical race theory describes the ways in which racism percolates throughout societies to systematically exclude and define people as "other" in racialized ways (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Drawing on the work of Carol Lee (2003), we acknowledge the need to make power structures visible and to recognize white privilege in literacy education. A living literacies approach deconstructs this privilege and recognizes that knowledge production structures from the global North inadequately account for how knowledge is produced and recognized. Indeed, indigenous scholars have begun to reveal the ways in which knowledge mapping has systematically excluded and marginalized certain communities from knowledge production within academia (Tuhiwai-Smith, Tuck, and Yang 2019). In acknowledging this, we seek to decenter our work away from a central space into a more contingent zone built on learning *with* participants: coproduction and collaboration invite people to become the definers of their worlds. They give rise both to new conceptualizations of literacies, including hip-hop literacies (Richardson 2007) and the felt literacies of neighborhoods (Kinloch 2010), and to ways of knowing that are neither written nor spoken but something in between across gestural, visual, spoken, and written modes (Finnegan 2015).

WALKING IN SPACES AND TRAVELING IN TIME

Literacy is on the move (Norquist 2017), as global and local literacies blur and seamlessly combine in new and evolving forms. Using the word "transliteracies" as a term to describe this development, Amy Stornaiuolo, Anna Smith, and Nathan Phillips (2017, 74) articulate how "literacies are lived, explored, described, analyzed, and enacted in critical and social practices, situated within and across ideological systems and characterized by the movements and interactions of people and things."

In their walks around neighborhoods, scholars like Ronald and Suzanne Scollon (Scollon and Scollon 2003) have identified the nested and signed

spatial nature of literacies. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory ([1974] 1991) of space as produced, Kevin Leander and Margaret Sheehy (2004) have determined that literacy practices are not just produced by space; they also produce space. Nearly a decade later, using ecological models to map neighborhoods, Sue Nichols and colleagues (2012) would identify literacy hubs and investigate how these hubs worked, as would Susan Neuman and Donna Celano (2013). Walking as a way of knowing and coming to know the literacies of a place through stories has been developed in collaborative work by Valerie Kinloch (2010) and by Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman (2018). And, for their part, cultural geographers and anthropologists have mapped and experienced place in visceral, sensory, and embodied ways (Pink 2009).

Reminded of the importance of revisiting in longitudinal studies (Sefton-Green and Rowsell 2015), we have seen time to be a key focus of literacy studies, providing a lens through which to look at unfolding events and literacies across generations. Indeed, Kate and her co-researcher Aliya Khan (Pahl and Khan 2015) have investigated the ways in which literacies have traveled across generations and been transformed in the process—from an elderly grandmother's material-covered Qur'an to the literacies of *Harry Potter* and A-level psychology textbooks—as has Catherine Compton-Lilly, who lists the four main purposes of longitudinal research:

1. research that provides a depth of information about a particular site, community or issue;
2. research that explores change over time;
3. research that documents and examines trajectories;
4. research that focuses on the construction of ways of being over time. (Compton-Lilly 2015, 218)

Our work acknowledges the importance of extended time within the field to build up understandings with our participants. Recognizing its site-specific nature—Jennifer's in St. Catharines, Ontario, and Kate's in Rotherham and Sheffield, Yorkshire—it focuses on concepts of success and failure over time and how these can be rethought in the light of new conceptual frameworks. Living literacies research across time and space involves issues of mobility and thinking about people on the move, making meaning across contexts and histories (Norquist 2017).

BECOMING (IM)MATERIAL ACROSS SCREENS AND MEDIA

Our work has engaged strongly with the turn to the visual, material, and multimodal (see Pahl and Rowsell 2006, 2010). We recognize that visual ethnography opens up a different kind of research practice, one that can develop lines of inquiry that are coexistent with participants' perceptual frameworks (Pink 2006). We acknowledge the power of multimodal approaches to understanding the shape and form of everyday texts (Maybin 2013). Such approaches enable researchers to encompass the emergent mark making of children's artwork within an understanding of literacy, as Gunther Kress observed in his seminal work *Before Writing* (1997). Abigail Hackett (2014) has identified children running circles in a museum setting as a form of embodied mark making. Tracing literacies across visual maps and geographies means moving into online worlds. Material and (im)material literacies are intertwined in digital worlds (Burnett, Merchant, et al. 2014). Wider frameworks for literacy are needed to make sense of the lived worlds of children and young people, as they engage with digital script and online images on their smartphones and tablets (Burnett 2015).

Digital literacies cut into these spatialities in complex ways. We see the spatial move as young people mash up their daily life in YouTube videos and cross time zones when they send messages across the globe using WhatsApp and SnapChat. These ways of communicating can be apprehended only by paying attention to the located and distant scales of activity. Tracing the scalar movements (Stornaiuolo, Smith, and Phillips 2017; see also glossary) of literacies across the globe can involve being attentive to the "Ariadne's thread" that connects apparently invisible literacies (Brandt and Clinton 2002). Our work, in recognizing these intersecting transliteracies as part of living literacies, highlights the need to attend to their emergence, resonance, uptake, and scale (Stornaiuolo, Smith, and Phillips 2017). We appreciate this transliteracies framework as it focuses on freeze-framing the moments when literacies are taken up, resonate, move, and then emerge in new sites.

Our studies have drawn on the idea of literacy as "worldmaking" (Stornaiuolo 2015), which in itself engenders further creative practices. Literacy events quickly settle into practices as they spread across the globe. Aesthetic understandings offer a sense of how literacies are crafted and shaped and

how they emerge through handling over time (Pahl 2014b). Amy Stornaiuolo (2015, 568) describes the role of the imagination in worldmaking:

One of the most important dimensions of worldmaking is the capacity to imagine. Creativity is at the heart of the semiotic and social work involved in imagining social worlds, and imagination forms the cornerstone of our capacity to agentively shape meaning, especially within asymmetries of power.

We locate the thinking embedded in a worldmaking view within many of the ingredients of *Living Literacies*—in its focus on reaching out, its engaged cosmopolitanism, and its emphasis on young people as makers and creators, for example.

KNOWING DIFFERENTLY—THINKING AND FEELING

The “doing” of emotions ... is bound up with the sticky relation between signs and bodies: emotions work by working through signs and bodies to materialize the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds.

—Sara Ahmed (2014, 191)

Our living literacies approach recognizes the role of affect, embodiment, and emotions in the ways people live literacies. Indeed, drawing on work by Christian Ehret (2018b) and Maggie MacLure (2011), we view affect as key to a living literacies approach. Ehret (2018a) argues that, in focusing only on social practices, texts, and what already exists, New Literacy Studies accounts overlook feelings, sensations, and ways of knowing that are foundational to the qualities of meaning. Describing his research in hospitals, he points out the importance of including affect: “Knowing and feeling affective dimensions of literacies as they emerge through the moments ... require speculative propositions that lure us into grasping relational transformations as they happen” (Ehret 2018b, 566).

This produces a speculative concept of “literacy” as “becoming.” Ella and Cole, two young people with whom Ehret worked on compositions, think and feel with literacy, working in moment-by-moment ways to transform what literacy could be. Focusing on affect in literacy studies can unsettle ways of knowing and the idea of the autonomous subject (Truman 2019). Discussion of queer literacies gives rise to messy, sticky, and uncomfortable understandings of the exclusions that dominant definitions of literacy can

bring (Ahmed 2014). Our vision of literacy, then, is that it can encompass more than representational work; it can include affect, and it can push back at ways of knowing that define the world in particular ways.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR THE BOOK

Living Literacies builds on a tradition that has explored the literacies of the everyday, using mainly ethnographic research methods. In this section, we provide the scholarly historical context for the book and its ideas. To orient readers toward our living literacies approach, we introduce them to the key scholars whose work has influenced ours and describe their contributions to a living literacies approach by revisiting classic accounts of literacy practices in communities.

We start with the work of Shirley Brice Heath, who spent many years in the Piedmont Carolinas documenting community literacy and language practices, drawing on studies of communicative practices developed by the anthropologist Dell Hymes (1996). In *Ways with Words*, Heath (1983, 2) shares a question that led her on the long journey to her historic, groundbreaking study: “What were the effects of preschool home and community environments on the learning of those language structures and uses which were needed in classrooms and job settings?” She lived literacy alongside her research communities in three locations: Trackton (predominantly African American and working class), Roadville (predominantly white and working class), and Maintown (mixed race and predominantly middle class), in South Carolina. Heath not only documented rites and practices related to literacy, but she also unraveled “ways of living, eating, sleeping, worshipping, using space, and filling time” (Heath 1983, 3) that surrounded the communities in which she lived and researched for over a decade. Her book argues that the ways in which children learned to use language in Roadville and Trackton were dependent on the ways in which communities structured families, defined roles, set up spaces, and formed concepts of childhood (Heath 1983, 11). As with all social contexts, legacies solidified at the time informing how children and adults communicated and how literacies were lived.

Through her detailed ethnographic work, Heath gave readers a way into understanding the literacy practices of specific communities in South

Carolina in the 1970s. Although generations of white working-class families in Roadville had changed over the years, there were certain commonalities that stretched across their past, prominent among them religion and religious activities, doing for oneself by sewing, woodwork, crafts, gardening, and maintaining a home. And there were also paradigmatic assumptions—men were the breadwinners, paychecks were devoted to running the home, and a home had to have a garden that was harvested every year. The African American working-class families in Trackton had their own codes of behavior, habits, and values that shaped the ways that they lived their lives and made meaning. There were generational patterns, with respectable people and “no-accounts” and transients. The no-accounts were often linked with respectable families, but they had fallen in with the wrong crowd or had made poor life choices. Trackton residents hated the notion of welfare or being regarded as poor. Though the outsides of their houses were frequently run-down, the interiors were highly decorated, filled with valued artifacts and supplies. In Trackton as in Roadville, there were gender divides, with women rearing children and working on the fields and men working at the mill and having to move north and send money back home. Heath chronicled these habits, rites and practices, and demonstrated time and again in her groundbreaking book that literacy is lived deeply and richly across communities.

Heath’s descriptions of community lives offered readers a way to appreciate connections between actions and habits as well as more profound ways of knowing. Her documenting how disparate people practiced literacy in the everyday gave researchers new ways of documenting the development of language and communication skills across communities of use.

To better understand how literacy is entangled within people’s everyday, we need to revisit Heath’s concept of a “literacy event,” which she defines as an occasion when written text and talk around text create interpretations and meanings and often lead to other types of text, where “text” plays a diverse and expansive role that can involve talk, listening, written texts, and pictures (Heath 1983, 22; see also glossary). Street (1995, 2) extended this work by describing social and linguistic practices that encompass literacy events: “The concept of literacy practices is pitched at a higher level of abstraction and refers to both behavior

and the social and cultural conceptualizations that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing." A modern-day literacy practice could be adding comments or liking a comment on social media. The idea of the "literacy event" has been rethought in chapter 7 to include the processes and affect behind the event. Closely researching literacy practices as they emerge in the world provides a complex and nuanced understanding of literacy as in-process (Ehret 2018b).

The work of Dell Hymes, who documented linguistic practices of communities, was influential in forming our ideas about what language and literacy mean in the everyday. In Hymes's ethnographies, he strove to focus on how ordinary life is practiced, extending the concept of "literacy" into "what every human being must do" (Hymes 1996, 13). Hymes stressed the importance of the interdependence of the general and the particular; he showed how the layers and complexities within communities should be thought of not as single languages, but instead as "repertoires of language" practiced across contexts (Hymes 1996, 33). In the "Warm Springs Interlude," he noted that, within indigenous linguistic habits, there is a building up of narratives about specific events over time; that "experience becomes an event by being told and retold and it eventually takes shape into a narrative" (Hymes 1996, 116); and that performance and language are braided together within such moments, when "incidents, even apparently slight incidents, have pervasively the potentiality of an interest that is worth retelling" (Hymes 1996, 118). This example, drawing on lived experience, enables us to consider the relationship between culture and literacy through lived engagement with practice.

Literacy is not a separate set of skills, stripped of meaning, but located within social practices. From his fieldwork in Iranian villages in the early 1970s, Street (1984) came to understand the ideologically situated nature of literacy. What began to emerge as literacy practices were uses and meanings of literacy around three domains of social activity: *maktab* literacy practices, associated with the primary Qur'anic school; schooled literacy practices in the more secular and modernizing context of the state school; and commercial literacy practices associated with buying and selling fruit for transport to the cities and the markets (Street 1984, 133). The practices in this third domain were quite different from those in either of the other

two. Characterizing these domains of social activity as literacy practices helped Street to understand their differences, and he could then articulate whether there were certain identities associated with particular practices. Thus the identity associated with maktab literacy was derived from traditional authority in the village located in Qur'anic learning and with a social hierarchy dominated by men, whereas schooled literacy was associated with new learning and with modernization, leading some village children to urban lives and jobs. And commercial literacy emerged in response to the economic activity of selling fruit to the nearby cities at a time of economic boom and involved writing notes, checks, lists, names on crates, and so on to facilitate the purchase and sale of quantities of fruit.

The framework for understanding literacy that Street (1984) was developing at this time, which included the concept of "literacy practices," aimed to explain why commercial literacy was mainly undertaken by those who had been taught at the Qur'anic school rather than by those taught at the modern state school, even though we might expect the literacy skills of the latter to be more functionally oriented to commercial practices. Here again a living literacies approach shows literacy bubbling up into so many different aspects and spaces of life and living. Where Qur'anic school literacy offered status and authority to carry on commercial practices, state school literacy lacked a grounding in the local and everyday village life. These were distinctly different approaches to language development and making meaning—both equally embedded within daily lives. In this village context, then, literacy was not simply a set of functional skills, as much modern schooling and many literacy agencies represent it, but rather a set of social practices deeply associated with identity and social position.

We argue in this book that literacy is too important to be reduced to a set of skills. The distorting focus on skills privileges classed and raced versions of what literacy is; it perpetuates and shores up future inequalities. Instead, with Street (1993a), we argue that literacy is ideologically situated within power and discourses. Typically circulating within autonomous top-down models of literacy and curricula, however, the reductionist definitions of literacy in Western schooling, based on book learning, are held as the gold standard for literacy success to this day.

The difficulty with such thinking is that it takes no account of contexts and the idiosyncratic nature of people's lives and stories. And, more

important, its autonomous models of literacy, rooted in white, middle-class belief systems about success and achievement, marginalize the rich and varied lived literacies that we foreground in these chapters. The research we present concentrates on literacies as historically situated sets of social practices that are highly dependent on what people *do* with literacy. Rendered without its lived dimensions, literacy continues to support positions of power and rhetoric about “the average student” (i.e., middle class and white). Our work acknowledges and challenges the implicit bias that treats students who do not speak or write standardized versions of literacy and language as “other,” and we argue that public renderings of literacy are inextricably linked to power relations that need unpacking.

A foremost thinker on the role of texts in the everyday is Mary Hamilton, who talks about texts as “woven into everyday patterns of social practice in locally specific ways” (Hamilton 2012, 2), and who finds that the textual patterns people develop over time are dependent on linguistic and cultural contexts and the availability of materials and technologies. Although there is a dynamism about these interwoven patterns, there are also disparities and power issues to consider. Hamilton (2012) pushes for examining narratives that circulate in texts as the politics of representation. Such work demands that literacy researchers analyze how public narratives emerge in media and social domains and how people mobilize them. Extending this further, researchers need to locate these public narratives within the broader cultural narratives that feed into what is thought of as literacy. Hamilton points to connections between the “social imaginary” of Charles Taylor and the role of literacy in society: “The social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (Taylor 2004, 23).

The concept of a social imaginary, namely, work that engages with communities and common cultural lives, has emerged in literacy studies through ethnographic research (Barton and Hamilton 2000; Bloome and Green 2015; Larson and Moses 2018; Pahl 2014a). Ethnography enables researchers to successfully couple more official, institutional approaches to literacy with more informal and vernacular types of literacy. This more expansive vantage point allows them not only to uncover the ebb and flow of agendas and discourses, but also to foreground what Deborah Brandt (2001) calls the “sponsors of literacy.” In *Literacy in American*

Lives (2001), Brandt finds that these sponsors play a critical role in the infrastructure of support for literacy, lending their resources to people to promote their literacy development, but also benefiting themselves because the “sponsored” carry the ideological weight of the learning that accompanies that development (Brandt 2001, 17–21). Brandt and Katie Clinton (2002) have identified the ways that texts carry links that can reach beyond local contexts; within the idea of literacy sponsors lies their argument about the inextricable relationship between the local and the global in texts, namely, that literacy has to be regarded within a larger global framework so that people can exist in the local but communicate across global spaces (Brandt and Clinton 2002; see also Kell 2006).

In *Living Literacies*, we consider the relationship between local spaces, where, for example, the voices of girls and women are sometimes lost within more global arenas of power. We argue that, to create equitable structures, we also need to reconstitute how knowledge structures are developed. Ways of knowing that do not honor people’s crafted understandings risk undercutting and disempowering their knowledge. In our scholarship, we recognize the need to realign with those who are not listened to and, standing together with them, to articulate their concerns.

METHODOLOGY MATTERS

Our book rests on the argument that, to see literacy as lived, researchers need to capture the process of living literacy. We argue that a living literacies approach rests on a reflexively alive mode of researching, in which the process of “coming to know” is entangled within the research ideas. As Cheryl McLean (2019, 105) explains: “It is through the coming together of the social, cultural, and material worlds, and our collective *experiencing* of these worlds, that we fully come to know our research in the field.”

A living literacies approach is generated through the sites and spaces of the literacy projects undertaken. Collaborative and interdisciplinary by nature, it enables artists, community partners, and researchers to work together in a more entangled way while acknowledging and foregrounding expertise that comes from different spaces. This might entail facilitating discussions around research approaches that lead to multiple outputs, such as exhibitions, artworks, and cocreated books. It means focusing less on research

articles that are inaccessible to people with no access to university libraries—and that may be written in language unfamiliar to them. Ideas for living literacies projects are determined and built up with communities. Outputs include exhibitions, coauthored books, and artistic products such as poetry. Grounded in emergence, a living literacies approach to research is also relational. Its research processes are embodied and involve people's affect and stories and seeing literacy events through new eyes. The visions research projects give rise to can fracture and disrupt settled ways of knowing.

In our studies, we engaged with coproduction and collaboration in interdisciplinary contexts (Facer and Pahl 2017) to create an expansive view of literacy that draws from the social sciences as well as from the arts and humanities—and specifically from collaborative ethnography (Campbell and Lassiter 2010, 2015) together with co-inquiry and dialogic co-analysis (Banks and Armstrong et al. 2014). We recognize the situated nature of knowledge being built up within projects, and we appreciate that people are differently positioned in terms of their expertise, drawing on a communities-of-practice approach (Hart et al. 2013). We have worked with community practitioners, historians, and artists and have used arts methodologies to develop a way of thinking not contained within university disciplinary structures (Pente et al. 2015; Facer and Pahl 2017). Our research projects are lived and have their own synergy; those involved in them are not objects of study but colleagues, students, artists, and practitioners who cocreate our thinking. Our more grounded approach to research emphasizes the local, the relational, and the situated.

We have seen how researchers such as Shirley Brice Heath and Brian Street positioned literacy in a new way, within the lives of participants. The understandings of these researchers rest on a reflective understanding of who they were in the field (Grenfell and Pahl 2019). Literacy research becomes a process of coming to know, inflected by the self and its own stories:

The field of literacy and language ethnographical research in general needs not only to understand what knowledge is produced but also who is producing it, and how it is framed and presented. It is here that the tensions around issues of identity/voice, of story/storyteller, speaker/listener, insider/outsider and producer/product, bring into focus the power, the politics and the ethics of our various identities and positionalities and the struggles involved in navigating the patterns and normative practices of our sociocultural contexts (McLean 2019, 104).

One of the key contributions of *Living Literacies* is to produce a coauthored account of literacy developed with co-researchers who have long experience with communities. This has altered our understanding of literacy as a practice both of writing and of knowing. In our previous coauthored books (e.g., Campbell et al. 2018), coauthorship came to the fore as an affirmation of joint scholarship rooted in communities: “Co-production across this book takes many forms—it is enacted in exhibitions, books, discussions, projects, ideas and this book. It offers a way of expanding what ‘counts’ as knowledge, beyond that which is produced in universities” (Campbell et al. 2018, 207).

Our joint voices emerge from our work on *Living Literacies* and entwine with literacy theory to produce new theories of what literacy could be. Although this creates ripples in the smoothness of our writing, it also expands our definitions and understandings of what literacy could be, in the writing and making of the projects, and in the writing of this book.

WRITERS OF THE BOOK

Our work in schools and communities increasingly rests on collaborations between artists, mental health practitioners, teachers, young people, and diverse groups of scholars and activists. No longer thinking that we “know” how to do literacy research, we live our research projects alongside our collaborators. Our work is dispersed across teams and across sites. As a result, this book is a team effort, and we wish to acknowledge the following partners in our thinking:

Julianne Burgess has taught English as an “additional language” for more than twenty years in settlement and academic settings. A doctoral student at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, and an emerging scholar in literacy and language education, Julianne has conducted four research studies with Jennifer and copublished several pieces with her.

Diane Collier is a scholar who conducts research in the areas of multimodalities and literacies with a special interest in connections across home and school. Using qualitative and ethnographic case studies, Diane interprets how children use everyday resources drawn from popular culture and transmedia worlds to produce multimodal texts. Imbued with ethics and an account of backgrounds and social class, her work has

deepened understandings about children and their capacity for creativity and agentic play (see glossary). In chapter 5, on knowing, Diane and Jennifer consider a six-month research study in an elementary school classroom in the Niagara region of Ontario exploring the complicated but important sharing and production of photography as children's contemporary visual literacy practice.

Kate Pahl has worked since 2006 as an ethnographic researcher in Rotherham, a small Yorkshire town outside Sheffield that has experienced the devastation of deindustrialization. She now works in Manchester. She has undertaken a number of collaborative projects funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Connected Communities program that have explored literacy and language in everyday life (Pahl 2014a). Her work has connected to everyday ways of seeing and knowing, particularly in relation to coproduction as a methodology. Her most recent projects include the five-year "Imagine" project, which explored the cultural context of civic engagement, and the "Taking Yourself Seriously" project that explored arts methodologies for social cohesion.

Steve Pool is an artist whose practice adjusts to sites and situations, working fluidly within each site to watch and grow with the situation (Pool and Pahl 2015). His work has been created in parks, schools, playgrounds, community halls, and with children, young people, and practitioners to reconstitute the ways in which meanings can be articulated within communities (Pahl and Pool 2011). Steve is currently working on a doctorate on residency as method.

Zanib Rasool is a scholar and activist who has developed her own understandings of community collaborative research (Rasool 2017), using poetic inquiry to look at the lived literacies of young women living with racism in Rotherham. Her work has taught us that literacies are lived, across generations, and within people's stories and poems (Rasool 2019).

Jennifer Rowsell has conducted research in communities in Australia (Nichols, Rowsell, et al. 2012), Canada (Rowsell and McQueen-Fuentes 2017; Rowsell and Vietgen 2017), and the United States (Pahl and Rowsell 2010; Rowsell 2013), applying multimodal approaches to meaning making across a spectrum of modes from photography, to film, to movement. Working closely with professionals in the creative and media arts industries alongside educators, Jennifer researches across age groups from

children to adults to observe people's ways of knowing as they engage in compositional practices through arts, digital methodologies, and multi-modal approaches to sense making.

Terry Trzepak is an emerging scholar who has developed a methodological approach to data collection that she calls "conscious photography as embodied reflective practice." She has applied this approach across her research and uses it with soldiers in her current doctoral research. Jennifer and Terry applied conscious photography with a group of adults with mental health issues as a part of a six-week research study in the Niagara region that they feature in chapter 2.

With these collaborations in mind, we express our agency in different ways, which allows us to also recognize the multiplicity of perspectives that a living literacies approach entails.

ABOUT THE BOOK

We have conceptualized *Living Literacies* as an active space, with seeing, disrupting, hoping, knowing, creating, and making as key lenses through which we describe and structure our living literacies approach. These lenses are derived from our research projects and, taken together, develop an ontological perspective on literacy as entwined with the world and active within it. Our work is located in people's own ways of knowing.

SEEING

We begin in chapter 2 with seeing, which is where we enter the world, with apprehensions of the visual. We understand seeing as a form of sensory engagement with the world that can reflexively resituate literacies within a wider framework (Pink 2009). Seeing involves memory and the imagination. We see the world through many different kinds of optics. In this chapter, taking photographs becomes a way of seeing the world in a different way—almost like seeing the local from a reimagined perspective. It is about seeing the accretions in layers of ourselves and others in sites. It is the stickiness of seeing that informs our understanding (Ahmed 2004). Seeing starts the journey into living literacies as a practice of reimagining meaning making.

DISRUPTING

In chapter 3, we introduce the literacies of activism, drawing on a community development approach to coproduction that sees collaborative work as a kernel for activist discourses to be nurtured and developed (Banks et al. 2019). The literacies of disrupting involve a focus on moments of dissensus (Rancière 2010) where it is not possible to agree, and they recognize the ways in which activist stances are not always resolvable. Chantal Mouffe (2007) argued that disagreement was important and that there were issues surfacing that could not be resolved within communities. Mouffe called the process of engaged, purposeful disagreement “agonism” (see also glossary) and argued for a politics that incorporated differences as well as similarities. This involved a process of recognizing what differences are. Our work in Rotherham had this quality and acknowledged the ways in which difference can be brought to bear on living literacies (Campbell et al. 2018).

HOPING

In chapter 4, we see our work as being held in the moment, with a sense of what “could be” immanent within that moment. Recognizing coproduction as a utopian vision (Bell and Pahl 2018), we are also mindful of the ways in which a coproduced approach can let in new kinds of knowledges, discourses, and practices that can lead us forward. Hope is part of the process of creating a living literacies approach to research. In this chapter we look at examples where “forward dreaming” (Bloch [1954] 1986) creates new possibilities for literacy and how community narratives can be reconfigured.

KNOWING

In chapter 5, knowledge work by children is seen through their mediations and remixing of images. It is based on a family photos research study that involved reconstituting and reframing family photographs to map out knowledge work. The argument put forth in this chapter is that children make meaning naturally across print and digital spaces, and, in doing so, they enter an imaginative state that allows for making and for new ways of knowing. Using arts and crafts, online and digital tools, children created multimodal compositions and collages from family photos to tell particular stories. Co-researchers Diane and Jennifer note how

semiotic resources and recurrent motifs traveled across the group through their arts-based practices.

CREATING

In chapter 6, we consider “What if ... ?”—What if the literacy event could be understood differently? What would happen if we viewed the literacy event as a creative act? Drawing on the work of Christian Ehret (2018b), we expand the idea of the event to include coming into being, taking in emotion, affect, and experience. Creation is storied and brings in new stories. In this chapter, the transformative aspect of creativity is considered by Zanib Rasool in her exploration of how artists can shape and be shaped by communities.

MAKING

In chapter 7, Jennifer looks at research studies that were part of a larger project in the Niagara region entitled “Maker Literacies,” as well as research with adult refugees engaged in maker work. Examining scholarship on the maker movement and maker approaches, she provides an alternative framing to making by incorporating work on affect and posthumanism. This chapter foregrounds posthuman and new materialist approaches to the ways in which individuals become through materialities and the stickiness (Ahmed 2004) that results from film work. The chapter explores making to know and knowing how to make to illustrate the ways that making and designing are central to a living literacies approach.

LITERACY AS A VERB AND A NOUN

Fundamental to applying living literacies is enacting what we describe and illustrate in chapters 2 and 5, which explore the ideas of “seeing” and “knowing,” which involve apprehending, being, and thinking within physical spaces such as streets, art galleries, and classrooms, as well as imagined spaces. Experience is both with and without space and time, so it can be seen as similar to finding part of yourself or your sense of agency in a still-life photograph. In this way, the notion of identity and place are intuitive ideas that can be drawn out with multimodal, digital, and

arts-based methodologies. There is a constant flow of material and immaterial influences on our lives that play out in the compositions we make and think through, whether on pages or screens, which have helped us to have conversations with participants and to analyze texts.

Planning material engagements in formal and informal spaces facilitates a moving in and out of material and immaterial worlds. In figure 1.1, the visual presents the idea of literacies both as lived and active but also as a theoretical construct. We see the ideas of “seeing,” “knowing,” and “making” as offering new theoretical positions on literacy. Literacy is seen in these chapters as woven in with the mode of seeing; it encompasses both the visual and the oral, and the storied. In the “Knowing” chapter (chapter 5), ideas of knowing emerge from an engagement with the visual that produce varied literacy practices. In the “Making” chapter (chapter 7), felt and embodied experiences of wonder and aesthetics combine with a craft approach to produce a maker literacies perspective. Braiding ideas together, these chapters, which position literacy differently, make it possible to “see” literate activities in things that might not appear to be about literacy.

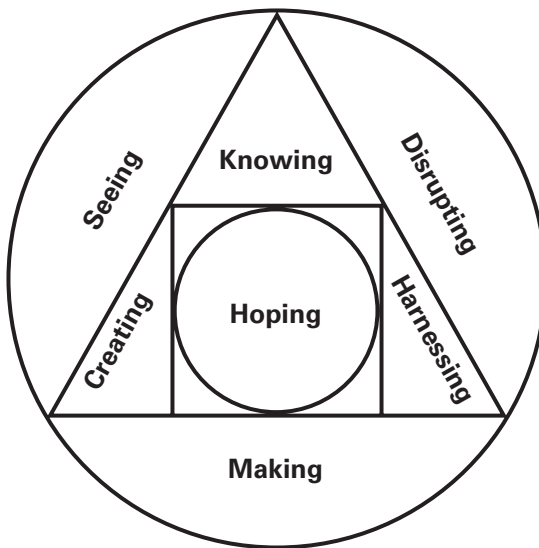


Figure 1.1

Visual for living literacies approach. *Image credit:* Steve Pool

In the “Disrupting,” “Hoping,” and “Creating” chapters (chapters 3, 4, and 6), the emphasis is on action. By disrupting and activism, literacy can be changed to include a wider array of practices that include exchanging information at a school gate or decorating a Union Jack. By contrast, creating offers a vision of literacy as disruption—by seeing the literacy event as a point of interruption, its creative power comes into play. Hoping is a stance that offers a forward-looking view of literacy, as “not yet” and resting in what is to come. We see these chapters as verbs or as methodological waymarks guiding the route to a living literacies approach. Our vision is encoded in the visual of figure 1.1, which shows how the core ideas of “seeing,” “making,” and “knowing” are amplified by the doing and thinking of “hoping” and “creating.” Within chapters 2 through 7 lie the practice and methodological shifts that are required for a living literacies approach.

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