

# Teenagers, Literacy and School

Researching in multilingual contexts

**Ken Cruickshank**



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This unique and timely book discusses reading and writing in daily life in the home and community, and contrasts these with literacy in the schools. The author engages in debates about the educational outcomes of ethnic minority youth, and the challenge of literacy and educational research in multilingual contexts. In particular, he focuses on a number of key questions, such as:

- What counts as reading at home and school, and why has reading for enjoyment become such a problem?
- How has technology impacted on reading and writing in the home?
- How do literacy and language practices in the home language and English give meaning and a sense of identity?
- How does difference become deficit in the school context?

Based on a ten year ethnographic study of twenty Arabic speaking teenagers in Sydney, Australia, the book explores issues of home/school language and cultural differences, identity, conflict and prejudice. The study is subsequently contextualized in terms of global developments in the UK, US and Canada. The problem of underachievement in ethnic minority communities is examined, and potential solutions suggested. This book also argues for the centrality of research in multilingual contexts, and proposes how educationalists can address the issues presented by cultural and linguistic diversity. Also discussed is the impact of developments since 9/11 on education in an increasingly divided world.

*Teenagers, Literacy and School* takes a fresh approach to the topic of literacy, and does not hesitate to challenge hitherto accepted myths. Students of TESOL, literacy and education, teachers, teacher educators and research students will all find this study and its conclusions fascinating reading.

**Ken Cruickshank** is a lecturer in TESOL and Languages in the Faculty of Education, University of Sydney, Australia. He has previously worked in primary and secondary schools and within the department of education in Australia.



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# Contents

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<i>Figures</i>	viii
<i>Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>Prologue</i>	xi

## **PART I**

### **Parallel lines: home and school literacy** **I**

#### *Introduction* 1

#### **1 Patterns of community literacy** **5**

##### *Urban myths* 5

##### *Home literacy practices* 7

##### *Themes in home practices* 25

#### **2 Pathway(s) to literacy** **31**

##### *Approaches to the development of reading and writing* 32

##### *What counts as reading and writing in the school* 34

##### *Talk about texts* 37

##### *What counts as reading and writing at home* 38

##### *Literacy acquisition* 41

##### *What counts as literacy in Arabic* 44

##### *Implications of the differences* 48

##### *Conclusions* 51

#### **3 Change and literacy practices: teenagers and technology** **52**

##### *Changes in the schools* 52

##### *Developments in teenagers' literacy practices* 54

##### *Features of the changes* 60

##### *Discussion* 61

<b>4</b>	<b>Mediation in community and school literacy</b>	<b>64</b>
	<i>Mediation in the Elkheir family</i>	64
	<i>Literacy networks and roles in Arabic-speaking families</i>	67
	<i>Vignettes of literacy in school contexts</i>	69
	<i>The registers of school-based language</i>	72
	<i>Classroom mediation</i>	73
	<i>Summary</i>	81
<b>5</b>	<b>Conflict and control: literacy as management</b>	<b>83</b>
	<i>Types of reading and writing in school</i>	85
	<i>Literacy materials</i>	86
	<i>Literacy in beginning lessons</i>	88
	<i>Interactions around teacher materials</i>	89
	<i>Textbooks and control</i>	93
	<i>Classroom episodes</i>	97
	<i>What happens to change: the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) programme</i>	98
<b>6</b>	<b>Identity, place and literacy</b>	<b>105</b>
	<i>The participants</i>	105
	<i>Places, spaces and identity</i>	109
	<i>Aspects of identity</i>	119
<b>PART II</b>		
	<b>Making sense of literacy research</b>	<b>129</b>
	<i>Introduction</i>	129
<b>7</b>	<b>No single factor: literacy and disadvantage</b>	<b>131</b>
	<i>Background</i>	131
	<i>Educational outcomes</i>	134
	<i>Factors explaining outcomes</i>	136
	<i>Language and literacy</i>	139
	<i>Implications</i>	143
	<i>Discourses of disadvantage</i>	148
	<i>The problem with individual problems</i>	152
<b>8</b>	<b>No single answer: what schools can and can't do</b>	<b>157</b>
	<i>System-level change and response</i>	157
	<i>School-level change</i>	163
	<i>Classroom-level change</i>	166

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<b>9 Researching in multilingual/multicultural contexts</b>	<b>171</b>
<i>The challenge of multilingual contexts</i>	171
<i>Staging research</i>	172
<i>The researcher in multilingual contexts</i>	175
<i>Interviewing in bilingual/bicultural contexts</i>	180
<i>Collaborative ethnography</i>	185
<i>Summary</i>	187
<b>10 A harbourful of yachts: making sense of literacy research</b>	<b>188</b>
<i>Introduction</i>	188
<i>Themes in literacy research</i>	189
<i>Mixed-method approaches</i>	198
<b>11 Researching reading and writing in homes and schools</b>	<b>200</b>
<i>Literacy as social practice</i>	200
<i>Context and related issues</i>	203
<i>Levels of linguistic analysis</i>	205
<i>Research strategies in the comparison of contexts</i>	206
<b>Epilogue</b>	<b>207</b>
<i>Generational differences</i>	207
<i>Segmentation and its effects</i>	208
<i>Self-concept, ethnicity and prejudice</i>	209
<i>Finding a third space: rap and religion</i>	211
<i>Gender differences</i>	212
<i>Possibilities</i>	213
<i>References</i>	217
<i>Index</i>	239



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# Figures

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4.1	Ben’s classroom	74
4.2	Sophie’s classroom	78
6.1	Muslim girls’ soccer team	123
6.2	After the game	123
6.3	Playground at Kotara High School	124
8.1	Cummins’s framework for intervention	164
9.1	Plan for initial stage of research	173
10.1	Partnerships in the study of literacy	190

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# Tables

---

1.1	Types of reading and writing	9
4.1	Classroom talk	79
4.2	Classroom talk	80
5.1	Types and uses of literacy in school	87
7.1	The discourses of advantage/disadvantage	150

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# Prologue

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Not another book on literacy! There has been such a publishing boom since the 1990s with dozens of new books each year devoted to literacy. Literacy has become the subject of every debate about the outcomes of schooling. It is the focus of the explosion in standardized testing, and the supposed crisis in literacy has become the metaphor for a crisis in education. Governments have literacy policies; universities have literacy departments; education systems have literacy specialists, consultants and sections. What more can be said?

This book describes a group of bilingual Arabic-/English-speaking teenagers and their families. It looks at the educational experiences and outcomes of these teenagers and the roles that reading and writing play in their daily lives. Part II of the book places what is happening in the lives of the teenagers in the context of broader global changes in education, in literacy research, in migration and in technology. If there is any one ‘argument’ in the book it is that we take another look at what is occurring in the home and school lives of ethnic minority youth and rethink the educational experiences and outcomes that they are being offered.

The book works from several different perspectives. Firstly, it takes migration and multilingual contexts as the norm. Some 50 per cent to 60 per cent of the world’s population is bilingual, using two or more languages on a daily basis (Grosjean 1982). Migration, one of the factors in bilingualism, is now a world-wide phenomenon more than ever it was in the past. Traditional countries of emigration such as Greece, Italy, Portugal and Korea are becoming countries of immigration. In Australia 40 per cent of the population are migrants or the children of migrants and one in four Australians have a bilingual and/or bicultural background. Some 120 languages are spoken on a daily basis. In the United States there were around 10 million language-minority students in 1994 and it is estimated that by 2050 one-quarter of Americans will have Spanish as their first language (Boyd and Brock 2004). Similar linguistic and cultural diversity exists in the UK, Canada, New Zealand and other OECD countries.

Immigration and changes in patterns of work and settlement have meant that it is becoming the norm for families to have members in different countries and to move between these locations. Greek, Italian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese and

Chinese background parents and their children in Australia regularly visit relatives in their countries of origin, as do Punjabi, Indian and Bangladeshi background families in the UK. In the US many Hispanic families are bilocal, moving between homes in California, New York or Texas and elsewhere. James Clifford in *Routes* writes of this travel and the making of homes away from home as being the norm (Clifford 1997).

Technology is also linked with migration in bringing about another change. Global communications which spread American culture and English language across the world are also fostering local diversity. In Australia, households now have 24-hour cable television beamed in Greek, Arabic, Chinese and other languages. There is easy access to the 30 per cent (and growing) of the Internet in languages other than English. There are local radio stations and print media in different languages. An Arabic speaker in Australia can contact a relative in the US by email or SMS in a few seconds. Spanish speakers in the United States or Australia can access up-to-date print or visual media over the Internet. This book takes the multilingual world of technology-mediated literacy as its starting point.

The second perspective of the book is to frame literacy research in the context of this diversity. Traditionally, the field of literacy research has been seen as fragmented and divided by 'disciplinary insularity' (Hakuta 1986; Langer 1988; Dubin 1989; Hornberger 1989). It can be likened to a harbourful of yachts on a sunny day, with sails going in opposite directions and with races taking place often in blissful ignorance of each other. Researching literacy in multilingual contexts can seem to be setting up another competing direction. After all, the study of bilingualism is only a subsection within the fields of psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and linguistics, and the overwhelming preponderance of literacy research has concentrated on the reading process in English in educational settings in the United States and Europe (Ferguson 1978; Romaine 1991).

This book argues that diversity is a strength since literacy research is by necessity cross-disciplinary with a strong tradition of mixed-method research dating back to the work of Luria and Vygotsky in the 1920s (Vygotsky 1978). It also argues that issues of linguistic and cultural diversity are central, not marginal, to the study of literacy: issues such as the importance of mediation, the interplay of spoken and written language(s), the relation of researcher and researched and notions of community. Such issues have relevance for all literacy research (Barton 2000).

The first chapter explores and explodes some of the myths about family literacy in multilingual contexts:

- that literacy and education are not valued in the home;
- that parents' lack of education hinders children's learning;
- that children are caught between two worlds.

The themes that emerge from this account are:

- how the patternings of written and spoken language in English and Arabic in

- the homes are linked with social practices in logical and coherent ways;
- how many of the family practices that differ from schools' ways in culture and language become marginalized.

Reading for pleasure is the basis of much secondary school English, and the lack of it in homes is seen as a disadvantage. In the UK and US there is concern about how teenage boys are not 'reading'. Chapter 2 discusses the differences in how 'reading' is defined at school in the context of class and cultural differences. The focus is on Ali and his attitudes to 'reading' in school and at home. The chapter argues that basing school reading primarily on the reading of novels for enjoyment is problematic and that schools need to consider alternative pathways to wide reading.

Ethnic minority families are often characterized as traditional, conservative and stuck in some 'time warp', making the work of progressive educators in the schools more difficult. Chapter 3 documents the rapid change in literacy relating to migration and technological development and the impacts on local communities. It examines the widening gaps between community and schools in this area.

In the family situation, especially bilingual families, children act as 'mediators' of literacy for adults and other siblings (Gregory and Williams 2000). In the school context, it is the teachers who act as 'mediators' of literacy. Chapter 4 examines the different roles that teachers can take. The first example is an English lesson in which the teacher is the interpreter of the language and knowledge; the second is a technology lesson in which the teacher shifts roles. The analysis moves beyond consideration of discourse to analysing how different teacher expectations affect learning; the focus is not just on teacher 'scripts' but how these scripts embed expectations which can provide or deny student access to valued education discourse and knowledge. The chapter compares the school with home situations in which ethnic minority teenagers are the mediators of literacy for their parents and siblings.

In situations of conflict, literacy becomes implicated as a means of resistance and control, and practices become ritualized. Chapter 5 considers the role of literacy as control in classes through the eyes of Ahmed and his experiences of trying to succeed at school after periods of suspension. Through an examination of the uses of literacy materials and the literacy episodes in lessons, the chapter considers how literacy can become the site of conflict in working-class/multicultural schools. The consequence is the narrowing of curriculum to one focused on literacy and basic skills. The chapter argues for a broadening of curriculum and methodologies in working-class schools.

Issues of language, culture and identities are complex and dynamic. Bilingual/bicultural teenagers are often defined by 'otherness' at school and in the community: at school as non-readers, non-academic, non-Anglo. For teenagers the resultant space can be defined by a globalized youth culture, but one that is redefined at local level by specific linguistic and cultural experiences. The final

chapter in Part I, Chapter 6, considers the role of literacy in helping to define identities. It also examines the ways in which place is constructed at school and at home, particularly in terms of gender differences and the notion of 'the street' for teenage boys.

Part II places the experiences of the teenagers in the broader context of research into educational outcomes. It examines the implications for literacy research, educational policy and practice. Chapter 7 examines the role that literacy has come to play in the construction and location of disadvantage from the 1970s to the present: how the reasons for unsatisfactory educational outcomes have been attributed to home or school and have been framed in terms of language, culture or literacy. The chapter then explores recent research into educational outcomes for ethnic minority students, arguing for an approach which considers the intersection of ethnicity, gender and other factors. It examines the language/cultural aspect to the segmentation of schooling in Australia, the United States and other countries. The chapter also examines recent policy changes in these countries and their implications for bilingual/bicultural students.

The main thrust of educational reform in recent years has been school improvement, focusing on the factors that improve outcomes in individual schools and school systems. The concentration on school change and effective pedagogies can mean that features such as segmentation and system-wide issues of equity receive less attention. It can also give less prominence to classroom teaching and localized contextual factors. Chapter 8 discusses possible solutions at three different but interrelated levels. At the system level it examines ways in which the new inequalities of class and language/ethnic backgrounds can be addressed. It also considers school change in terms of language and cultural diversity. Finally, it analyses ways in which higher expectations and engagement of students can be realized in classroom teaching. Examples are given from schools in which the specific strengths and needs of the bilingual/bicultural students are taken into account.

The study of literacy has often been seen as fragmented and split across disciplines. Chapter 9 argues to the contrary that literacy research has a history of cross-disciplinarity and discusses recent American and British research that continues this tradition.

Chapter 10 draws together some of the concepts underlying this study of literacy. It links the study to recent work in literacy as social practice, the New Literacy Studies and other work researching literacy in multilingual contexts. This chapter argues for the centrality of such concerns from the situated study of literacy: key issues are foregrounded in multilingual/multicultural contexts. It also examines the ways in which teachers and students can use the study of literacy as social practice as part of language study. The chapter also makes suggestions for those interested in research in this area.

The intersections of literacy with class, gender, language and cultural issues are key ones. Chapter 11 draws from interviews and conversations with teachers and community workers who took part in the original study. They discuss changes in the communities, issues in literacy and learning in Arabic and English

and issues surrounding prejudice, racism, ethnicity and identity. Several themes are developed:

- The way that multiculturalism and anti-racism have been ‘double-edged swords’ in marginalizing ethnic minority groups and taking a static view of culture. Issues relating to multiculturalism have still not been addressed.
- Ethnic youth cultures are framed in oppositional ways to school and parent/community norms. Far from being marginal, the experiences of ethnic minority youth, however, are central to global changes in technology and cultural developments.
- The growing disparity and segmentation in Western societies have an ethnic dimension, with some ethnic groups and subgroups having higher-than-average outcomes and others experiencing intergenerational disadvantage.
- Travel and developing links of ethnic groups across continents are having enormous implications for issues of work, family and identity.

## The study

In 1979 I first began working with immigrant and refugee teenagers, teaching English as a second or other language. My teacher training was typical, acquired on the job. I had no background in understanding how to teach literacy apart from some help in my study of other languages. It was two months into my teaching of one class that I realized that one of my students could not read or write. His friends had been covering up for him, and I, to my eternal shame, had not picked this up. My stumbling efforts with Ali, aided by advice from colleagues and frantic reading outside class, did not achieve much in that year. What I gained from Ali, however, was that his not knowing how to read and write was logical in terms of his situation and experiences. He had come from Lebanon where schooling had been disrupted and almost impossible during the civil war. He lived in a village where the fact that one of his uncles was literate was enough to fulfil the needs of the extended family. Support networks established in Lebanon also worked in Australia. There was help with official correspondence, with gaining driving licences when needed. The only problem was that Ali had entered a school system at Grade 9 in which certain levels of literacy were assumed. Not having these skills counted as a deficit, something to be covered up.

In 1993, after many years teaching, then working in education departments and finally tertiary teacher education, I returned to work with Arabic-speaking families. Arabic and Chinese are the main languages, after English, spoken in the state of New South Wales. The two groups, however, couldn’t have more contrasting profiles. Students of Chinese-speaking backgrounds have higher-than-average schooling outcomes and higher-than-average participation in tertiary study. Students of Arabic-speaking backgrounds have low high school completion rates and lower-than-average educational outcomes on most indicators. Arabic background youth are overrepresented in unemployment and



underrepresented in further study. Behind such a thumbnail sketch, however, lies a much more complex picture. There is such religious, class and cultural diversity within the community: there are more differences within the community than there are between Arabic-speakers and the wider community. The same picture is true of Hispanic students in the US or Indian-subcontinent students in the UK. The assumptions made from aggregated data in the 1970s about generalized 'ethnic' disadvantage just do not hold true.

In 1993 and 1994 I interviewed some 60 community workers and members, finding out about their own experiences in two languages and literacies. I also spent some two years trying unsuccessfully to gain fluency in Arabic. From 1995 to 1997 I worked with some 20 Arabic-speaking families, interviewing parents and their children, participating in different events. I also visited and carried out research in community schools. From 1997 to 2001 I worked more closely with five of the families and followed the teenagers from these families in their local schools. Apart from carrying out observations and interviews with school staff over the four years I also worked with teachers, teaching several classes. I followed each of the teenagers through several days of classes, recording lessons and out-of-school activities.

I returned in 2005 and carried out surveys and interviews with groups of students, documenting uses of technology. My focus was very much on the rapid changes in language, literacy and technology use amongst the teenagers. I also met again and interviewed some of the teachers and community workers involved in the original study. The events of September 11th, the London and Madrid bombings, and media coverage of these had had an enormous effect on the communities.

# Part I

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## Parallel lines

### Home and school literacy

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#### Introduction

Parallel lines are lines that never cross. The practices of reading and writing at home and at school seemed at times to be parts of two different worlds, not meeting, not crossing and not clashing, but both going along in predetermined tracks.

The six chapters in Part I draw on data collected from community workers and members, from 20 Arabic-speaking families and their children, and from staff in the schools the children attended. The families lived in the inner western suburbs of Sydney, which have been traditional destinations of postwar migrants. They all had Arabic and English as two of their languages. Whereas the parents had migrated from countries in the Middle East, the majority of the children were Australian-born. There were children in each family attending local secondary schools. The following accounts give details of the families and teenagers who are referred to most in the chapters. The first five families figure in Chapter 1.

Hassan and Siham Karam have four children, three boys and one girl, attending primary and secondary schools in the Punchbowl area. Their youngest son, Mohamad, is autistic and attends a special school. Tariq and Hussein attend the local boys' secondary school, and Leila, the only girl, is in Year 5 at primary school. Hassan and Siham and their two oldest children came to Australia in 1984 from Lebanon. Siham, who was only 18 at the time, started work in a factory the day after her arrival and continued there until Mohamad was born. Most of her time and energy are directed towards caring for Mohamad, but she is also involved in her other children's schools. Hassan works as a taxi driver and teaches Arabic in the community schools after hours. He is also doing a technical college course in interpreting and translating. The family is of Shi'ite Muslim background but 'not strict' according to Hassan.

John and Marie Issa have four girls. Josephine works in a jewellery shop, Rita is in Year 10, Donna is in Year 9 and Stephanie has still to start school. The girls attend the Maronite College. Their father, John, came to Australia when he was 18, in 1975. He completed some technical college courses in Australia and worked in factories for years. Two years ago he started up his own Arabic newspaper and has been working hard to make the business profitable.

Hala and Bilal Bashir came to Australia in 1979 from Lebanon where Bilal was in the Lebanese army. Hala had finished five years of school in Lebanon and like many of the mothers worked in a local factory when she came to Australia. Her five children are aged from 5 to 14 and her main job is running the household. She takes pride in running all the family finances since Bilal, who works in Bondi as a security guard, is 'not very good with money'. Fayez, the oldest boy, is in Year 9 at the local Islamic college.

Hanna Tabber came to Australia from Syria 23 years ago. Abdul Tabber came in 1983 to marry her. They have four children, two in secondary school and a girl in primary school. Bachar, their elder boy, works in a local coffee shop. Abdul Tabber had to give up working in a factory five years ago because of an industrial accident. Hanna now works part time. Susan is in Year 9 and Ahmed in Year 8 at local secondary schools.

Abdullah and Raida Raja have been in Australia for 19 years, coming originally from the north of Lebanon. Abdullah had just returned from a four-month visit to Lebanon. His two older girls, Suzy and Nadia, were engaged. The third daughter, Khadijah, had just finished Year 12, Waleed is in Year 11 and Ramsi in Year 9 at Bellevue Boys' High School.

Fadya Ibrahim came to Australia with her parents 26 years ago when she was 12. At the beginning of the study she was spending most of her time running her family of seven children, five of whom were still at school. Her husband had been unemployed for several years and by the end of the study Fadya was working in a local retail shop. Her eldest son is an electronics technician and her eldest daughter is married with her own children. Her third daughter, Mahassan, is in Year 9 at the local girls' secondary school. The children form a close-knit group, often going shopping or to the pictures together.

Ibrahim and Hanade Tannous migrated from southern Lebanon in 1980. Ibrahim works part-time in a local grocery shop. His eldest son, Tariq, is an electronics technician. Zeina is studying at university. Lamise and her brother Ali are attending Kotara High School. Ali appears in Chapter 3, and much data in Chapter 6 is drawn from conversations with Lamise.

Mohamad Zohair came to Australia in 1971 and worked for 18 years on the railways. Basma came in 1980 to marry him. Mohamad has not worked since an industrial accident several years ago. Their five children attend local primary and secondary schools. Ahmad Zohair is a key figure in Chapter 5.

Karima Al Said was a dressmaker in Lebanon and also an accomplished musician. In Australia she worked in a factory for some years but stopped when her children were young. Her eldest son, Tariq, is a panelbeater, and Usman and Wafa are in local secondary schools. Her sister and aunt from Lebanon were staying with her for an extended visit since her husband had left her and the children.

Mohamed and Hoda Suliman are of Palestinian background but had worked in Kuwait for many years, Mohamed as a court interpreter and Hoda as an English teacher. They came to Australia four years ago with their five children who were

all born in Kuwait. Ali, the eldest son, finished Year 12 in Kuwait and is now studying engineering at university. Amina is in Year 9 at Wilson Park Girls' High School.

Rabieh Shoukr operates a successful pastry business in Punchbowl. His nine children range in age from 31 to 4. Hala, Sarah and Eman all attend an Islamic College. The boys attend Bellevue Boys' High School where Omar is the school captain. Rabieh had four years of school in Lebanon before he went out to work in the fields. He came to Australia in 1976 with an older brother and considers himself very much a self-made man. His shop is a social centre in the suburb and his pastries and sorbets have a good reputation.

Hanna and Belal Mougraby have been in Australia for 20 years. They both came from very poor families in the north of Lebanon, upbringings which made both politically aligned as socialists. Belal only had four years of school and is self-educated. He had to give up his factory work five years before because of health problems. Of their six children, the eldest girl, Diana, works in a local supermarket; Lena, Ahmed and Sadia are in secondary school; and Samar and Hussein are in the local primary school. All the children are keen on karate and have won many prizes. They are of Sunni Muslim background.

Joseph Moussa was a primary teacher in Lebanon but has done mainly factory work since he arrived in Australia in 1978. He did several technical college courses and worked his way up to supervisor at the factory before health problems stopped him working three years before. Amyra Moussa is of Muslim background while her husband is Christian. She came to Australia with her family at the age of 17 and met her husband in the factory. Three of their daughters, Helen, Marie and Catherine, attend Wilson Park Girls' High School. Peter, the youngest, goes to primary school.

Ahmed and Fatima Elkheir have six children. Ali and Eman left school two years ago and have done a few courses but are now looking for work. Suzy is in Year 11, Muhamad in Year 10 and Sahar in Year 9 at the local state coeducational school. The oldest girl, Maryam, was recently married. Ahmed has worked as a taxi driver for many years. Ahmed and Fatima came from the south of Lebanon, from tobacco farms, in 1983. Chapter 4 draws heavily on conversations with Suzy and Sahar.

Hashem Al Talib has been out of work for seven years since his factory closed down. Jimmy, the eldest, works as a panelbeater. The twins, Alex and Sam, left school the year before. Sam is doing a graphic design course through a private college. Alex is looking for work. Danny, the youngest, is in Year 9.

Houda Khoury has been married to Mohamed for four years. She has three children from a previous marriage to an Egyptian businessman. Mohamed has been in Australia for 26 years and works in a local garage. They have two young children together. Ali, the oldest boy, is in Year 9 at Bellevue Boys' High School.



# Patterns of community literacy

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Among all the different literacies practised in the community, the home, and the workplace, how is it that the variety associated with schooling has come to be the defining type, not only to set the standard for other varieties but to marginalize them, to rule them off the agenda of the literacy debate? Non-school literacies have come to be seen as inferior attempts at the real thing, to be compensated for by enhanced schooling.

(Street and Street 1991)

The word ‘literacy’ was first recorded in 1883 in the *New England Journal of Education* and all uses of the word around that time are to do with education (OED 1971). Other terms such as ‘reading’, ‘writing’, ‘literate’ and ‘illiterate’ are much older and pre-date the introduction of compulsory education in English-speaking countries. ‘Literacy’, however, became identified with schooling and has subsumed all the older words. With all its currency and connotations in English, it is still a very culturally specific term and has no direct equivalent in most other languages. Despite the wealth of recent historical, anthropological, philosophical, linguistic and other work focusing on literacy in the broader society and its development and use outside school, it is the norm of school literacy by which everything is judged. This chapter questions the ways in which the uses of literacy in domains outside schooling have been seen only through the lens of school-based literacy and the ways in which divergence from this has been judged as deficit. It is not an argument of value – that literacy in home and community contexts is any better or worse than school literacy – just that it is natural that reading and writing vary in logically patterned ways according to context. Such variation is greater when there are language, cultural, class or other differences at play. A fundamental need is that there is mutual understanding of the uses of literacy between school and homes.

## Urban myths

The presumed absence of (school) literacy in homes has come to be seen as a factor in the low schooling outcomes of students from some ethnic minority

backgrounds. Negative comments have regularly been made in press coverage, by politicians and other commentators on education. Similar statements were made about different groups in the early 1900s and then in the successive waves of postwar migration and have always been made about indigenous students. The statements below were taken from the media reports or from interviewee comments in the study.

The parents don't value education. They have low aspirations for their children.

There are many variations on this type of statement, which basically attributes low outcomes and problems at school to lack of parental interest and motivation. When parents do not attend school functions it is put down to their supposed lack of interest. Parental aspirations for children are said to be limited to teenagers becoming car mechanics or hairdressers and teachers say that it will take another generation for the students to achieve in schools.

In fact, every study of parental aspirations shows that migrant ethnic minority parents have higher-than-average educational aspirations for their children. This is only to be expected since many families migrate because of greater educational opportunities for their children. Many come from countries where access to education firmly decided children's and their families' economic and social futures. There are many studies that show that parents maintain high aspirations for their children often in the face of contrary evidence or advice from schools. In my study I found that all parents expected education to provide a pathway for their children to better opportunities than they themselves had been given. Parents often quoted to me a saying translated from Arabic, 'We give you the body; just give us back the bones.' In other words, they were giving their children to the schools for education, something to be gained at whatever the cost!

They study Arabic and it interferes with their English. The problem is that they have no language: they have kitchen-sink Arabic and kitchen-sink English.

These statements frame bilingualism as a problem and Arabic as interfering with the learning of English. There is a large body of research evidence showing the cognitive benefits of bilingualism for children. Literacy skills from one language transfer to and support learning in the second. There is an equal amount of evidence indicating that bilingual children do not often perform well in education systems where the majority group is monolingual. The reasons perhaps lie not in bilingualism itself but in the ways bilingualism is treated in educational contexts.

There are no books in the home. The parents can't read or write in their own language, let alone English. They don't read to their children. It's not a reading culture.

There is a widespread belief in schools that ethnic minority parents have a lack of reading material in the home and hence do not value education (Delgado-Gaitan 1990; Vincent 1996; Blackledge 2000). Many studies into literacy in the homes, in fact, indicate that reading and writing play a wide and significant role in the lives of ethnic minority families. The problem has more often been with research that defines reading only as 'books' and, even more narrowly, as novels in English which are read for enjoyment. This excludes the evidence of the interaction with a wide range of reading materials in a range of languages in the homes (Saxena 1994; Taylor 1997). The idea that the only pathway to literacy is through school-sanctioned notions of parents reading to children ignores the range of ways literacy is achieved in different languages and cultures (Gregory and Williams 2000; Gregory *et al.* 2004). Much of the literacy in the home is not seen as 'reading' or 'writing' but still involves high levels of skills and understandings in literacy. When community literacy is viewed through the lens of the school, much of it becomes invisible.

The parents can't control the boys. There is no respect for teachers.

Many statements relate to class background and parents' socio-economic status and the supposed absence of parental responsibility. In Australia, the key government policy, Australia's Language: An Australian Language and Literacy Policy, states that:

Schools . . . will not be successful unless there is a willingness to learn on the part of children and unless families accept their responsibility to provide an environment that is conducive to learning.

(DEET 1990)

Socio-economic status has been found to be a relatively minor factor in explaining educational outcomes of ethnic minority students, accounting for as little as 5 per cent of variance (White 1982; Fejgin 1995; Rumbaut 1995). Parental concern about their children's behaviour, reputation and showing of respect was a constant theme in the study. One reason that parents were positive about the Australian education system was that they believed it offered opportunities to their children regardless of family background.

## Home literacy practices

This section gives an account of reading and writing in five families: Siham and Hassan Karam and their children; Hala and Bilal Bashir and their children; Abdullah and Raida Raja and their children; Hanna Tabber and her children; and John and Marie Issa and their daughters.

It was the case with the teenagers and their families that reading and writing played such an integral role in daily life that it was difficult to spend time without



taking notice of print. From the early morning (reading the time, noticing labels on jars, glancing at junk mail, jotting down notes) to travelling to school and back (looking at graffiti or advertising) and in community places (reading shopping signs, discussing events, news and notices in community associations) or back at home (checking email, reading credits on television shows), literacy literally filled every gap. There was a wide variation in the uses made of reading and writing between family members depending on factors such as their role in the family, their interests and involvements, and their fluency in the different spoken and written languages. Reading and writing also varied in prominence in the different activities of the day, sometimes being the main focus of conscious activity and at other times being incidental and not part of consciousness. This was because reading and writing, being social practices, tended to be linked to regular times and places.

Six main areas of reading and writing emerged from the data. News and entertainment (recreational) includes the uses of television, computers, radio and newspapers. In terms of reading they include reading magazines, newspapers, junk mail, advertising, and books for enjoyment or information. In terms of writing it includes writing poems or keeping diaries. The second area could be defined as reading and writing to maintain daily life, to keep the household and individual activities going. Daily life/instrumental refers to all the uses of literacy related to keeping the household functioning: official correspondence, notes and messages, reading and writing for getting things done at home. Activities where the literacy was a key focus would be keeping financial records, filling in tax forms, reading bills, writing cheques and reading instructions. Activities where literacy in this area is incidental would be choosing videos to watch and choosing jars or packets from the kitchen. The area of communication includes reading and writing for keeping in touch with others outside the household. In this area reading and writing has a social purpose, to establish and maintain relationships with others. Study (educational) emerged as a large area of literacy in the household: reading for homework or study, looking for project information on the internet, writing exercises, memorizing, and writing diaries for school. The area of study is generally seen as the presence of work from the mainstream day schools in the households but in this study two other categories of significance emerged. Many parents were involved in study at technical college, university or local adult education classes. Most of the children were at some time also enrolled in community-run Arabic-language schools. A related area was work and community involvement. Many of the teenagers and their parents were involved in part- and full-time work. There was also involvement in community issues and activities such as sports and interest groups. These two are grouped together because they represent ways in which other domains impinge on the household and concerns of family members outside the household. Activities include writing letters, reading payslips, reading protocols or manuals from work, and checking road directories. Religion emerged as an important category consisting of reading religious texts, reciting and learning from texts. It was not seen as an outside

literacy, by Muslim and Christian families alike, but part of the daily practices of the household. Although religion played little role in some households such as those of the Bashirs or the Karams, it was important enough in most households to demand an area for itself. No system of such categories can be discrete or final. It was sometimes difficult to assign examples to specific areas. For example, completing homework for the community schools could be categorized as either study or religion. This area covered reading and writing centred around the texts of the Qur'an and the Bible and related texts. The participants also categorized activities differently. For example, parents, teenagers and teachers had different views of which activities constituted homework!

This account of household practices takes as its starting point a focus on the texts and the technology. Such a focus is valuable as the same text can be used in different ways at different times depending on the frames or approaches to the acts of reading or writing (Barton and Hamilton 1998). A magazine can be flipped through with a group of friends talking. It can be read avidly for a new article on cars by a group. It can frame a conversation where someone will read aloud something from the magazine to engage others in talk.

*Table 1.1 Types of reading and writing*

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*Types of reading and writing in English:*

Recreational/informational	Reading for temporary entertainment – reading magazines, novels; reading local newspaper; reading TV guide; reading <i>Sydney Morning Herald</i> or <i>Mirror</i> .
Instrumental	Reading to gain information for practical needs of daily life – notes, bills, labels, school messages, labels on products; completing forms, entering competitions, completing tax returns.
Educational	Reading books or texts from school; doing homework or projects; writing notes or diary as memory aid.
Religious	Reading Qur'an or religious books.

*Types of reading and writing in Arabic:*

Instrumental	Reading for information needs of daily life – notes, labels, school messages; writing shopping lists or notes.
Communication	Correspondence with relatives overseas.
Recreational	Reading for entertainment, novels.
Religious/educational	Reading Qur'an or religious books; reading and often memorizing Arabic school texts; copying Arabic, completing sentences.

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### **Notes and messages**

Reading and writing in both Arabic and English were important for the daily running of the households. All the teenagers and most of the parents left notes and messages for other members of the family. These would be messages about where they would be and what time they would be home or who had called to leave a message. Hanna Tabber, like most parents, wrote messages for her children in English as this was the language she reported the children would understand better. Ramsi Raja, like most teenagers, generally left messages in English though his parents were dominant in Arabic, because of his lack of written Arabic. Messages and notes were left most commonly on the refrigerator or on the kitchen table.

The organizing of daily life was in evidence everywhere in the houses. Josephine Issa's room had school notices pinned to her cupboard next to pictures of the pop group Bardot. Her homework diary was on the desk. In the kitchen Marie Issa had a box of cards for contacts such as dentists and the local doctor. There were some notes from school on the kitchen bench. Bills to pay were next to the refrigerator. On the lounge room table were membership cards for the local video shop. Important flyers were pinned by magnets on the fridge door. There was junk mail announcing shopping bargains in a pile on the kitchen bench.

Written messages and notes complemented the use of mobile telephones. Four of the parents in the 20 families of the larger study could not read in Arabic or English and another three could read in Arabic but not English and so there was also significant use of mobile telephones for messages and reminders.

### **Shopping**

Shopping tended to be done at the weekend and was an event involving often the father and children or the whole family. Hanna Tabber, like many mothers, wrote her shopping lists in Arabic (for her husband) or English (for her children). Several of the mothers reported that lists were given orally and mobile phones were used when the fathers were out shopping to check on purchases. Hala Bashir reported that she wrote her lists in both Arabic and English. When she was thinking of making a cake, for example, the word for flour was written in English. When she was making *laheem biajeem* (ladies' fingers) the word was written in Arabic. Hala said that she had written the word for flour in Arabic for the first time on a list because she had been speaking to an Arabic-speaker before writing the list and was still thinking in Arabic.

Both Arabic and English were used when shopping. Parents tended to buy fruit and specific groceries from local shops run by Arabic-speakers where signs and labels were often in Arabic and the shopping was reportedly more personal and interactive. Kotara and nearby shopping areas have visible Arabic presences. Many of the teenagers reported helping their parents with the shopping.

I help my mum with the shopping, you know with some of the signs – I read them for her.

(Khadijah Raja)

More important purchases such as white goods and cars were usually a family affair when one or both parents got the details (from speaking with friends and relatives or using local newspapers) and then went shopping. Tariq Karam and his parents, like most of the families, reported shopping on Saturdays as a common event. The local shopping malls were also places where the teenagers would go during the week to spend time. About a third of the teenagers reported hanging out in the shopping malls without their parents, something which emerged as a source of conflict within the families.

### ***Financial management***

Responsibility for the financial management varied household by household and was often a shared responsibility. Hassan Karam reported that he dealt with most of the bills but relied on his eldest son when he had difficulties understanding the English. Hala Bashir was proud of her management of the family finances which she had taken over from her husband several years previously. She reported that because of her careful management they had come through difficult times. She had made meals stretch a long way and had ensured that the children were dressed properly on very little money. Now the family had their new house and each of her children ‘had their own room’.

My husband gives me the money and I fix everything, pay the bills. I take care of everything because he’s busy working. My mother says I was born like this.

(Hala Bashir)

Hala, like many of the other parents and teenagers, helped relatives in the wider family in dealing with financial matters and formal correspondence. Likewise, when some of the parents had difficulties they called on children or other relatives. These networks of literacy played an important role.

My father-in-law can’t read. He calls me up when he gets a letter – ‘Look, we’ve got this letter’ – and some of them he recognizes. He knows the phone bill and he can read numbers, but only when there’s an unusual letter he calls me up and I go and read it and tell him what it says. There’s a sort of dependency, always someone there.

(Hala Bashir)

As part of the study, Waleed Raja and teenagers in the other families kept literacy diaries. Waleed, like many of the teenagers, reported dealing regularly with official

correspondence, bills and letters such as electricity bills and cable television and telephone accounts.

### **Cooking**

Meals were an important family occasion and cooking was a key daily event for the mothers (and one or two fathers). All mothers reported teaching their daughters to cook and expecting them to help out with the preparation of meals. The teaching was done by watching, the way they had learned from their own mothers. Only Hanna Tabber reported ever using a recipe book for cooking and this was when she was trying to cook some French dishes. Three of the girls reported cookbooks in the bedrooms in their literacy inventories. Sophie, a technics and applied science teacher from the local girls' school, explained why recipe books were not needed (see Chapter 6).

I try and use recipes as the basis for all my classes because the girls have to get used to them. You don't need recipes when you make Greek or Lebanese dishes because they are in the family; they're traditional. You only need recipes when you are going beyond what you know and that's what I want them to do.

(Sophie Tsoulakidis)

Siham Karam told a story about when the parents' and citizens' group at Leila's primary school were trying to publish a book of recipes to raise money. She and Leila were writing it together but she had had enormous difficulty explaining to Leila what to write. Leila kept asking how much of each ingredient to put in. Siham kept replying in vague terms such as 'this much' or 'that much' and saying that the amount depended on the taste. Eventually they got something down on paper but then Siham complained that it was nothing like the way she cooked and that following the recipe would not work in practice.

### **Keeping in touch**

Mobile telephones were in every household. All parents reported that these were the most common way they kept in touch with friends and relatives. Hanna Tabber talked with her sister every day and Hala Bashir rang her mother every day. The mobile phone was often found on one of the tables in the living room. Five of the parents reported that they limited their teenagers' use of the phone. Abdullah Raja complained that many children think they can ring anyone they want from the home, which was not right. His children had to ask and give details of whom they wanted to ring before he gave permission. Many parents, however, lent children mobile phones to keep in touch with them when they were outside the home.

The pattern of calls seemed to reflect the pattern that conversation took in

visits by family and friends. June Khoury, a teacher whose husband was an Arabic-speaker, reported that she was initially surprised by the pattern of telephone calls from her husband's friends and relatives. Generally the caller would ask after the children and the family's health. There was no identification of the caller and it often took her several minutes to work out who was calling. She said that callers from her Anglo side of the family would identify themselves and ask after her but not the children.

Nearly every family had family members overseas with whom they kept in contact on a regular basis. All of the parents reported using the telephone as the most common means of communication. Raida Raja contacted her mother via the next-door neighbour in Lebanon. Parents reported sending audio or video cassettes on a regular basis to relatives, especially when someone they knew was going to Lebanon. Four of the parents reported sending letters. Abdullah Raja, like many parents, said that he preferred talking to letters. Several of the teenagers also reported keeping in touch with relatives overseas. Most households were in the habit of sending a letter at least once a year but these were becoming less common with the availability of mobile phones. Letters were most used for individual and personal contact.

Computer use was initially limited to the younger generation in the households. The most dramatic change was the increase in the use of chat rooms by the teenagers. By 1998 nearly all teenagers reported spending up to two hours each day using chat rooms. Most used computers in their bedrooms or in friends' or relatives' places. Two of the teachers in the local schools commented on the students' use of chat rooms and how it had effected an improvement in their writing in English.

### **Watching television**

Most entertainment in the households was based on free-to-air television, cable television, videos, radio and computers, and around these forms of technology there was much related literacy. Apart from the reading of text when it appeared on the screens there was also magazine reading associated with the technology, such as the television and cable television programmes and magazines of stories about the stars and programmes. The choice of tool or text reflected individual or group-oriented preferences for entertainment. Books, radio, newspaper or computers generally involved individual interactions with texts. Free-to-air television, videos and cable pay television generally involved more social activities. Magazines, newspaper and television were used both individually and in groups.

Television in the living room often served as background to the daily interaction going on. Most parents reported that they had several television sets also for the children, often 'to avoid arguments'. Generally there was one in the boys' bedroom and one in the girls' bedroom. The teenagers reported watching television for between four and 30 hours a week, boys averaging around 20 hours per week and girls six hours per week. Such figures are difficult to interpret because they do

not indicate the level of engagement in the television or the role it was playing. The gender difference could perhaps indicate the different roles of the girls in household chores. Television played several different roles: Siham and other parents reported with horror how children studied in their bedrooms with their television switched on without sound and the radio playing music. In many cases television was the visual background to other activities.

My youngest, he wanted to watch cartoons but Tariq wanted to study so I told Mohamad [the youngest], no TV. Then Tariq, he started to study. He had the radio going and the TV on at the same time and he was studying at his desk. I don't know how he can work with that noise.

(Siham Karam)

Tariq Karam and many of the teenagers reported watching morning cartoons when they got up on schooldays and weekends. They reported watching programmes with other family members from about 5 p.m. onwards. Generally the parents would join them after dinner. Homework was also done in front of the television. At weekends video clip television programmes were popular, especially amongst the girls. Parents reported that teenagers watched sports programmes and documentaries. Teenagers reported their main viewing as sports programmes and shows such as *Friends*, *Neighbours*, *Home and Away* and *South Park*. The majority of households watched news programmes around dinner time.

More than half of the parents raised the issue of viewing habits. Most were concerned with the amount of sex and violence on the television and the effects on their children. Raida Raja complained about the burping and farting on shows such as *The Simpsons* and *Wonder Years*. Abdullah complained that television was 'the worst disease' and that many unsuitable programmes were advertised during children's viewing times. He said that he regularly sat down with his children and went through the television guide to make sure the programmes were suitable. Raida rolled her eyes in mock irony and confirmed this.

With TV we pick the most suitable film. Sometimes it is embarrassing to watch things in front of the children. Film violence makes children aggressive.

(Abdullah Raja)

On the other hand, many of the parents stated that they felt their children to be responsible enough to monitor their own viewing. There were literacy activities associated with television. Specialist television magazines and programmes from newspapers were evident in the living rooms of most households. These were consulted regularly when deciding on programmes at night but were mainly used for light reading.

By 1997 nearly every household had acquired the cable TV which gave 24-hour access to Arabic programmes from all over the Middle East. Several parents

reported that they had bought access to this because it gave them more control over the children's viewing habits. Most reported the benefits of up-to-date and less biased news from the Middle East and the value of documentaries. About half of the teenagers reported watching Arabic programmes regularly. Seven of the teenagers reported reading the pay TV guide in their literacy diaries and many of the teenagers listed this magazine in their bedrooms as part of their literacy inventory. Hassan, the Arabic-language teacher at Bellevue Boys', also commented on how the teenagers' understanding and speaking of Arabic had improved since the advent of cable TV.

### **Watching videos**

The families watched videos and DVDs in English and Arabic on a regular basis. On average they would take out between seven and ten of these a week with family members each having a choice. The most popular videos in Arabic were from Lebanon and Syria. Lena Tabber reported staying up every night for a week watching Syrian videos with her mother.

We stayed up until 2 a.m. They were so corny. I was too embarrassed to tell my friends, but after the first one I just couldn't stop watching them.

(Lena Tabber)

Videos often presented problems in understanding for the teenagers. Hala Bashir reported that her daughter had asked her what language the actors were speaking when she and her husband were watching a video from Egypt. Other parents reported having to translate what was said during the action because of the differences in spoken dialects and in some cases because of the children's lack of fluency in spoken Arabic. Every household had video/DVD facilities and most had several videos in both English and Arabic lying around. Teenagers reported watching Arabic videos with their families mainly at the weekend. They also reported 'action' videos such as the *Terminator* series being watched with relatives at the weekend. Videos/DVDs were watched in every household at least once a week.

### **Listening to radio**

Radio listening was different for parents and children. For the teenagers music on the radio was the background to many activities when combined with television or computers. For the parents, particularly mothers, the radio played a more personal and direct role usually when other activities were taking place. Generally there was the radio on in the kitchen whilst the chores were being done. Most parents reported listening at some time each week to programmes in Arabic on AM or to one of the three FM stations. FM Arabic-language stations began in 1995 and were based in the local area. Talkback sessions in Arabic and English were



popular. Hanna Tabber reported listening only to radio in English, to talkback programmes, late at night. She had been in Australia for more than 23 years and considered herself dominant in English. During Ramadan many of the Muslim households tuned into Radio Ramadan, a 24-hour station with talks and readings. Two parents reported that radio news had replaced their reading of Arabic-language newspapers. For the parents, listening to radio was more an individual activity during the day or late at night and there was generally no role for texts in this activity.

### **Reading newspapers**

Half of the households had local English-language newspapers. Some mothers, especially, reported reading the local papers for information about shopping and specials. Three parents and several of the teenagers reported that they read national papers such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*, especially for the sports and employment sections.

Parents also reported reading newspapers in Arabic such as *El Telegraph* and *Al Nahar*. Mention of Arabic-language newspapers, however, was often accompanied with comments on bias by Muslim families. Abdullah Raja recounted a story of an article in one of the Arabic papers that reported Muslim parents denying access to others at the local swimming pool. In actual fact, he said that the Muslim community had hired the pool for the day so that the women could go swimming without others making racist comments. This was reported in the Arabic newspaper as Muslims excluding Christians.

The second issue raised about Arabic-language newspapers was their not catering for the shift to English in the younger readership. This was confirmed in interviews when only two teenagers reported reading Arabic papers on a regular basis. John Issa had started his own community newspaper in 1992 and was publishing in both Arabic and English so that it could gain a younger generation of readers. He reported that he was just 'breaking even' and that one of the problems was that newspaper reading in general in the community was declining and no paper had tried to attract the younger readers. The declining readership of community-language press is confirmed by other studies.

### **Reading magazines**

All households reported buying and reading magazines. Magazines were more popular with the teenagers than with the parents. All the girls reported that they read every issue of *TV Hits*, *Smash Hits* and *Dolly*. Other magazines were *Girlfriend*, *The Source*, *TV Week* and *Start*. Boys read the comics *Batman* and *Spiderman*, and computer, car and sports magazines. All the teenagers reported magazines in their bedrooms in their literacy inventories and all reported reading magazines at least twice a week. About half of this reading was done individually, often whilst watching TV or doing homework. It was also common for magazines

to be read with friends at home, at school or on the way to school. During one interview I observed Lena Mougrabay and her sisters.

Lena and Diana were sitting on the lounge with their *Dolly* magazine. Lena would read bits out to Diana and they would point out clothes and different things. Every now and then Diana would lose interest and go back to the TV or the conversation going on.

(Fieldwork journal)

Several parents supervised the buying and reading of magazines. Abdullah Raja, for example, said:

I buy my daughters *Woman's Day*, *TV Week*, *New Idea*, sometimes *Dolly*, but never *Girlfriend*. Even these papers when I get them I have a look first. If I don't like the subject I tear out the paper. I want them to be educated.

(Abdullah Raja)

The literacy diaries kept by the teenagers showed much less of a gender division than reported. Nearly all the boys reported reading magazines such as *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* and many of the girls were interested in and bought soccer and karate magazines. Computer magazines such as *PlayStation* were mainly read by boys. Susan Tabber and her mother regularly entered magazine competitions.

### Reading books

Families varied much in their reported reading of books. In several households the reading of a novel was reported as something unusual. Ferial, an Arabic-speaking teacher from the local school, explained that in the Elkheir family reading a novel would be seen as trying to get out of household work or as a sign that you didn't have to do homework. Maryam, the eldest daughter, had just returned from her honeymoon. In response to a question in Arabic, from Ferial, asking if anyone in the family had read a book, Mrs Elkheir replied:

*Mrs Elkheir:* Maryam has read a book.

*Maryam:* Yes, I bought that book . . . John Grisham . . . *Time to Kill*.

*Ferial:* Yes, I've read that . . . did you like it?

*Maryam:* It was wonderful . . . I lay in bed reading.

*Ferial:* Will you buy some more?

*Maryam:* Not really. That was my honeymoon.

Three other mothers (and no fathers) reported enjoying reading. Marie Issa and Hanna Tabber both belonged to book clubs. Marie liked reading romance novels in English although she preferred her other reading such as the Bible to be

in Arabic. Hanna reported enjoying reading books in both Arabic and English equally.

In English I'm reading one from the book club on religions of the world. I just wanted to find out. I've also got some by that Egyptian writer . . . I forget his name.

(Hanna Tabber)

Teenagers' actual reading practices were different from reported practices. For example, teachers and parents reported little reading of books amongst the teenagers. Boys generally and many of the girls self-reported as hating reading. The literacy diaries and inventories showed a different picture. Half of the girls and 10 per cent of the boys read novels on a weekly basis. The most popular were Goosebumps, the Baby Sitters Club, horror stories and books by R.L. Stine and Virginia Andrews. Several teenagers reported reading before they went to sleep at night or at the weekend and many of the girls reported books in their bedrooms in their literacy inventories. Time spent reading (generally novels) was up to four hours per week. The implications of the differences between actual and reported reading are taken up in the next chapter.

Only one of the teenagers reported borrowing books from either the school or the local library. This was confirmed by school and local librarians who had built up Arabic-language books only to see them not used. Parents who read in Arabic bought books from local Arabic-language bookshops or lent and borrowed them. Teenagers also reported buying their books. Book buying was also reported for younger children, several parents reporting that they regularly bought Golden Books and the like for their younger children.

### **Using computers**

By 1996 many of the families had computers. These were often placed in the living room or an area of general access. The main uses reported were computer games played mainly by the boys aged 14 or under. From 1997 to 1999 new computers tended to be placed in bedrooms and teenagers reported much greater use of the Internet and of chat rooms. Many of the parents reported at least one of their children (a son usually) who was interested in computers, something that was generally viewed positively because of employment prospects and study uses. In 1997 half of the students reported regularly using computers. Those who had computers spent between one and five hours each week using them. In 1997 the most common use was computer games and PlayStation and Nintendo. By 1998 and 1999 teenagers were using mostly the Internet and chat rooms. Computer games were seen as being for younger children. The teenagers would use the computers on week nights in their bedrooms and also at the weekend and would also visit relatives' or friends' places to use the computers.

Although the computer games did not involve large amounts of texts, many of

the teenagers relied on magazines for information about games. There was also much incidental reading associated with these games. Computer magazines were regularly shared and swapped at school. Text was much more important in the use of the Internet.

### ***Writing for personal reasons***

Of the parents, only Hanna Tabber reported personal writing. She said that she had begun writing poems in English several years previously. She shared these with her daughter but no one else. Most recently the Bosnian crisis had motivated her to write. Even though she considered Arabic 'closer to her heart' she found it easier to express her ideas in poetry in English. Susan Tabber and some of the other girls reported writing poems, something that one of their English teachers had encouraged. Although journal writing was a mandatory part of English in three of the schools, not many of the students reported keeping a diary. Journal writing, when it occurred, was counted by the teenagers as part of school homework.

When the students come to the after-school tutoring classes I generally ask them what they find most difficult at school. One boy answered, 'Journal writing.' I said, 'What do you mean, journal writing? You've just got to write down what you do and what you think.' 'Yeah, that's it. I hate it. I never know what to write. I can't do it.'

(Rona, community worker)

### ***Reading related to other interests***

Sport and computers were the main interests for the boys, and music, fashion and sport for the girls. Teenagers reported many items in their literacy inventories relating to these interests. Music magazines, CDs, posters and pencil case graffiti were among the things that reflected an interest in music. Lena Mougraby and her sisters were keen on karate. They had trophies in their bedroom from various competitions, sports magazines, notices from the club they belonged to, and notes and dates pinned to a board on the wall. Lena had an article that was written about her in the school magazine and had mementoes of her soccer prowess. She had been in the school team for three years and had pennants on her wall. She had posters on her wall and soccer magazines on the shelves. On her school bag and pencil case were more pictures and some slogans. Faye Bashir and his friends kept birds. They had collected notes and articles from various books and magazines. Faye had photographs and a video of his birds and also corresponded with a cousin in Lebanon who shared his interest. Tariq Karam was keen on computers and bought and swapped computer magazines. A rich collection of literacy materials and a range of reported literacy activities reflected the teenagers' wide and changing interests.

### **Day school study**

Study was done mainly in living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms, with the difference that most homework in junior years was done in communal areas and study for exams or homework in senior years was done more in bedrooms. Most of the teenagers had shared bedrooms and so individual study was difficult. Several parents also stated that they were not happy with the teenagers 'locking themselves up' in their rooms. Raida Raja said that it was only okay for big exams or for praying. Siham Karam was suspicious that working in the bedroom was a way for the boys to do nothing. On the other hand several parents, such as Hala Bashir, took it as a source of pride that each of their children had their own bedroom in which to study.

Teenagers reported spending between 40 minutes and 20 hours per week on homework. The reasons for such a range was because the term 'homework' had several meanings. It could include also the study of Arabic in the community schools or with private tutors, which took up to ten hours of homework/study each week. In general, homework from the day school took up to 40 minutes per week and was largely spent doing mathematics and English. Less regular was work for history and other subjects, generally projects. Homework was most commonly done after school and before dinner. More important homework and study continued after the evening meal and last-minute homework was done in the morning before school. Sunday was also a common time when study was done. Hanna Tabber and many parents reported being involved in and helping teenagers with their homework such as with projects and large assignments. Parental involvement was strongest with primary-aged children and tended to drop off as the children progressed through the secondary school. Raida Raja had arranged for mathematics tutoring for her boys so that they would improve their marks at school but home tutoring was generally uncommon. This contrasts strongly with findings from studies of other communities and the rise of out-of-school tutoring.

Nearly every parent expressed dissatisfaction with the amount and nature of their children's homework and study. Many reported that only a few minutes each day was spent at most doing homework, complaining that most homework was done at school and nothing was left for the home. Two alternative opinions came from the parents who had been in Australia the longest and the shortest times. Hoda Suliman was quite happy with the work her children did at home and Hanna Tabber preferred the Australian system to that in Syria where she said there was 'too much memorizing and not enough understanding'.

In many studies of home literacy, reading and writing for study are defined solely in terms of homework seen as an extension of school literacy (Breen *et al.* 1994; Freebody *et al.* 1995; Cairney and Ruge 1997). Reading and writing relating to school are then judged according to the extent to which they mirror school practices. There are several problems with this way of seeing study. Firstly, it is inevitable that reading and writing are defined and reconstructed in the everyday life of the household, just as it is natural for literacy demands from work, school

and other domains to impinge on reading and writing in the home. The ways of engaging with print in different domains, however, will vary according to factors such as the organization of space and time, and the practices of people in the domains. Describing study as a literacy external to the homes is not that useful. Study and homework are just as much home practices as any function of reading and writing. The second problem in the definition of study is that it generally only includes day school study, whereas in the families the study came from many sources. Teenagers' study of Arabic in the community schools had an important place in the homes, as did the parents' own study.

### **Arabic study**

The main area of reading and writing by teenagers in Arabic found in this study related to homework from the community schools. Children in every household were attending or had attended classes at community Arabic schools. Those still attending the Arabic schools usually went two days per week or at the weekend, for about four hours. This homework generally meant memorizing and preparing texts for reading/reciting in class, translating and writing sentences and exercises or learning passages from the Qur'an and other texts.

My teacher [in Arabic school] went mad at me today. He said I hadn't done my homework because I couldn't read out the passage. I told him that I had gone through it but the writing was very difficult.

(Hussein Karam)

In this case reading meant preparing the text and being able to read the Arabic aloud and translate. Reading in Arabic was generally prepared at home. Students attending the community classes or Saturday schools generally had textbooks, and the completion of exercises and writing practice from these was common. Attendance at the community schools petered off when the children reached Year 8 or 9 in secondary school, and only 10 per cent of teenagers studied Arabic in the secondary day school. The issues relating to the study of Arabic are explored further in later chapters.

### **Parental study**

Many parents were studying through local schools, colleges or university. Hassan Karam was doing an apprenticeship through technical college. He had decided to return to study even though he thought he was too old. Hassan had been a printer in Lebanon but had been unable to find anything apart from factory work in Australia. He had tried community welfare work for a while, but could not rely on secure and continuing employment. After several months on unemployment benefits, his case worker at the employment service had managed to secure a mature-age apprenticeship in carpentry. Hanna Tabber, Raida Raja and several

other parents were taking part in classes at the local schools doing Year 11 English and computer studies. Both had recently written their stories for a school publication for International Women's Day.

Mrs Raja had been in Australia for some 20 years, but because of the demands of working in the beginning and then of raising her family she had never had the opportunity to study. When the local secondary school began parents' classes offering some Year 11 and 12 subjects she was convinced by Hoda, the Arabic-speaking community worker at Bellevue Boys', to give the classes a go. Raida, like most of the mothers, had not had much access to school in Lebanon and she was nervous about attending.

I didn't want my children to know. I am too old to study. But then Maryam, she was going and so we went together . . . Sue [one of the other students] came to Australia when she was only four and she grew up here, but the rest of us came later. We have a lot in common. We laugh a lot but we also learn.

The classes for contemporary English focused on the development of literacy through the study of social issues and were conducted in both Arabic and English. Raida had had one of her pieces of writing printed in the end-of-term booklet.

I belong to the Muslim religion. Like most Muslim women, I cook and take care of the children while my husband goes to work. I like cooking soup, chicken, lamb and tabouli and enjoy sitting with the family for dinner and discussing events of the day. I study part-time and hope that one day to have enough skills to start a career. I want to maintain the values of my religion and pass them down to my children.

(Gianni 1999)

Two parents were studying for a degree in interpreting and translating at university. Several were studying in technical college and there were groups of parents who were participating in classes run through local schools. The extent of parental study was quite striking.

### **Religion**

Many of the Muslim background parents and teenagers reported reading and discussing their religious books, especially during the month of Ramadan. Abdullah Raja used to sit down with his children and read them the Qur'an in Arabic and then translate it into English and explain. This pattern was a common one for fathers. Seven of the parents were keen to report that one or more of their children could read the Qur'an in Arabic. In interviews with the teenagers from Muslim households, almost half of the girls and one-third of the boys reported reading the Qur'an regularly. Of the girls who read the Qur'an regularly most reported that they did so in Arabic. Most of the boys, on the other hand, reported

using bilingual or English versions. This level of religious reading supports other findings (Chafic 1994). It needs to be pointed out here that what counts as reading included memorization and recitation of suras. *Qur'aa* in Arabic means both reciting and reading from text, analogous to the Old English verb *raedan*, which included giving advice and counsel orally. This issue of what counts as reading is discussed later. For the Issa family the reading of the Bible was also important. Both John and Marie Issa preferred reading the Bible in Arabic, even though they had switched to English for most of their daily reading, but Josephine and her sisters preferred to read the Bible in English.

Copies of the Qur'an, the Bible and the books of the prophets were treasured and in many households were kept in bookcases in the lounge or living room. Several parents recounted how they had managed to get their collection of books. Abdullah Raja explained that, for Muslims, the book was so important that nothing was allowed to be placed on top of it as this would be disrespect. Fayez Bashir and several of the teenagers had copies of the Qur'an or the Bible in English and/or Arabic in their bedrooms. Several households had more ambivalent attitudes where children did not read the Qur'an or the Bible although they observed religious occasions to different degrees.

Even though religion-related literacy did not occur in every household, the function emerged as an important one. In Muslim households religious observance was seen as part of the daily activities. Religious practice in the home was not reflected always in attendance at mosque or church. About 20 per cent of the boys and very few of the girls reported visiting the mosque more than once a month although attendance rose during Ramadan and Eid times. Although the mosque was a place of worship and centre for welfare activities, attendance was not obligatory, especially for women (Humphrey and Hausfeld 1984; Chafic 1994). The Issas attended church every Sunday and the girls also had a church service once a week at their school. Donna and Rita switched between attending English and Arabic services, the Arabic being at 11 a.m. and the English at 7 p.m. on Sundays. In contrast, everything was conducted in formal Arabic at the mosque where Abdullah Raja took his son on some Fridays. At times the sheikh came over later and explained to Ramsi and the other boys in language they could understand.

### ***Outside involvement and home literacy***

There were many examples of literacy in the house stemming from involvement in work and outside organizations. Siham Karam's youngest son, Mohamad, was autistic and required constant attention and care. Because of this Siham was closely involved with the community services and social workers. She had a white-board in the living room on which she wrote the routine for the day for her son. She also kept a diary of her interactions with her son. She said that she wrote the diary in English because she discussed it with the social worker who visited once a week. Siham had learned to read and write in English by necessity and not through



formal classes. She had left school in Lebanon in Year 10 to get married. She then migrated to Australia and had started work in a factory on her first day in Sydney. Then when she and Hassan started their family she had had no time for English classes. Siham had taken on a role in her community and beyond in making people aware of the issues of children with autism. Her family had been the subject of a segment on the television programme *Sixty Minutes*, and she had also been interviewed by the Arabic-language media. Siham said that she prepared for the interviews for this with the social worker. Together they had written notes in English and with her husband she wrote these in Arabic. She didn't use the notes for the talk, but writing the notes first helped her remember and give her confidence.

Abdullah Raja had been closely involved in community campaigns: one against the proposed freeway through the suburb and another to get approval for a Muslim primary school. Abdullah was a key person in the preparation of this proposal for the primary school even though he reported in an interview that he felt he could not write Arabic well because he had only been at school for four years. By this he meant formal Arabic. It took several proposals for the establishment of the primary school to be accepted by the Board of Studies. Through his work in these campaigns Abdullah reported that he developed his literacy skills in both English and Arabic.

Many parents were involved in school organizations. Hanna Tabber was president of the Wilson Park parents' and citizens' group for two years, a position which involved the keeping of minutes and correspondence in both English and Arabic. She had become involved in the school so that she could help her children more and also because she felt the school was trying to involve the community more. In her second year, a new principal arrived at the school and was enthusiastic about involving more parents of Arabic and Pacific Island backgrounds, the majority of the school population. Contacts were made by telephone and home visits, and interpreters were organized for parent meetings. The principal asked Hanna to find out the issues that concerned parents. Hanna recounted the story of how she had then organized special meetings about the situation of the girls before and after school. Hanna and some other parents had become concerned about the safety of the girls getting to the train station and getting home when there were reports of girls being approached by strangers. The parents' and citizens' group became more politically active and had made several suggestions for supervision after and before school. Hanna reported that the principal showed some interest but ultimately had just let the issue lapse because it involved more of a workload for teachers. Hanna then had other parents blaming her for having built up false expectations. She left the position disappointed in what she called the empty promises of the school principal and her deputy. The following year Hanna put her energies into her children's primary school, involvement which she said was much more practical. She used to go up to the school to listen to children reading and help out in the classroom. Many of the parents had been involved in school organizations especially when the schools had employed Arabic-speaking community liaison workers.

Tariq Karam was a part-time manager at McDonald's and regularly brought home manuals and policy documents that he had to be familiar with. One night when I visited the Issa household, Josephine was showing her sisters brochures of the different jewellery on sale. She needed to become familiar with a new range. Many of the teenagers had found work in local retail outlets and their home reading entailed payslips and other official forms. Work-related literacy was a feature of most households for parents as well as teenagers. When Hala Bashir began work at a relative's shop in the local shopping complex, she had to bring the accounts home to work on. She laughed that, when her children brought home their work from school, they were all doing their homework together. The employment patterns of the families reflected the recent workforce changes. Many of the fathers were unemployed: only seven of the 20 households in the study had one of the adults in full-time employment, and six households had children in full-time employment. The majority of the families had adults or children working in some form of casual or part-time employment, and five of the households had government benefits as the sole income.

The teenagers' involvement in outside organizations was much less than that of their parents, something confirmed in other studies (Humphrey and Hausfeld 1984; Chafic 1994). Although quite a few of the teenagers attended sports groups such as soccer clubs or martial arts groups, none were involved in village, mosque or other associations. The impact of outside literacy on the home was more in terms of their personal interests.

## **Themes in home practices**

You know what they are thinking, what they are feeling when you hear their voices.

(Abdullah Raja)

### ***Choice of mode***

This chapter has described not only the reading and writing in the homes, but also the use of technology and the use of spoken language associated with the various functions of literacy. The reason for this is that we need to take into account the range of choices that the teenagers and their parents make in order to understand the logic of the reading and writing practices. Amanda, a teacher at Islamic College, complained about a comment from Faye Bashir in one of her classes. She had set the class a task to write a letter to a friend overseas about their impressions of school, following on from their study of a class text. Faye complained that writing letters was stupid. 'Why not ring?' He was presenting a challenge to Amanda, but at the same time he was also challenging the assumption that the main form of communication is through letters, not mobile phone or chat room or email.

The choice of mode, spoken, written or computer-mediated versions of these, was based on three factors: the first was the preference for immediacy or distance in personal contact or time; the second related to the features of the mode itself, its cost, and ease of use and access; the third factor was the level of language, literacy or technology knowledge of family members. None of these were discrete and static factors. Parents initially, for example, were reluctant to use email and it was the teenagers who were experts. By the time of the end of the study, email had become another means of communication and was being used by parents as much as children.

'You know what they are thinking, what they are feeling when you hear their voices.' Abdullah and Raida Raja were explaining why they preferred to keep in touch with relatives in Lebanon by mobile phone or by an audio cassette recorded with their family rather than by letter. The importance of the close contact afforded by voice was in evidence in the prevalence of mobile phones and phones for all sorts of communication. In keeping in touch with relatives overseas, telephones were for important or urgent contact or for catching up when the extended family was together. Problems of telephones were the cost and also (for many Shi'ite households) the belief that phones to southern Lebanon were tapped. Cassettes were more formal and family group oriented. When it was known that someone was going to Lebanon, the household collaborated in preparing an audio or video cassette to send. Letters, on the other hand, offered privacy and intimacy, often being between individual family members. Writing was less expensive and more private.

With notes and messages, both oral and written modes were chosen. In several households there had been a shift to the use of mobile phones to aid or replace memory when one member was out shopping. For Hanna Tabber notes and messages and mobile phones became more common when she began working outside the home. When she was at home she would manage things through face-to-face contact. When she began managing in a local grocery shop she needed to keep tabs on her children by leaving and receiving messages on the refrigerator or on her ever present mobile phone. The mobile phone was for more urgent matters such as if one of her daughters wanted permission to go out before Hanna got home. The refrigerator was used for telephone messages, lists and requests that were not as important.

Literacy events often involved several modalities such as the common study pattern for the teenagers reading and/or writing for study and homework and at the same time having a CD or radio playing music in the background and the television on without sound. Several teenagers reported studying the Qur'an with an audio cassette. They would listen to the cassette and follow the passage in the Qur'an. Then they would reread and repeat or listen to the tape and memorize before checking and reading the text again. This was followed later by a lesson with parent or tutor in which reading would be checked.

The use of memory or the use of recipe books in cooking would be understood as a logical choice by anyone aware of traditional cooking. The ways in which

homework was carried out make sense when you consider the use of space and the attitudes to study in the home. The choices between telephone, letter, audio tape and video tape for keeping in touch also make sense when the urgency of content of the communication is considered. This is not to claim that the choice of mode is determined by pre-existing social practices. The adoption of technology-mediated forms of communication obviously had a huge impact on the families. Not only did email and mobile phone fit into existing preferences for personal and quick contact, but they also in many ways changed and restructured perceptions, practices and attitudes. These tools also structure and change consciousness. This issue is explored further in the next chapter.

Finally, the picture of a community drawing from oral rather than literate traditions is inaccurate. The balance of written and oral modes depends on very real factors such as access to education (in Australia and overseas), present life circumstances and needs. It relates to the complex ways in which culture and language are constructed in everyday interactions. The shift to technology-mediated communication reflects the changes in the society in general.

### ***Spoken and written Arabic in the home***

When Rita and Donna Issa filled in a survey for their school they reported that their language was English and that this was the language of communication in the home. The reality was different. Both sets of grandparents live in Australia and, when the girls contacted them or they came to stay, communication was mainly in Arabic. To each other, the girls generally spoke English but with Arabic words thrown in, their own version of code mixing. Donna generally spoke English with her parents. Marie Issa varied, sometimes talking in English and then lapsing into Arabic. Donna studied Arabic at school and apart from her homework, which she did in Arabic, she had also taken to helping her father with the newspaper he had started. This newspaper was in both Arabic and English. Donna found that she could do the Arabic crosswords and also follow much of the news. She was the 'litmus test' for her father, as he wanted the paper to be accessible to the younger generation. Donna reported that when she really wanted her mother to understand something important she would use Arabic. When they had visitors the general conversation also switched between the two. The family often watched Arabic videos. Donna and her sister could also read the Bible in Arabic. They sometimes attended the Arabic church services instead of the English, 'depending on when we wake up on Sundays'. Their older sister, Josephine, had little interest in Arabic when at school, according to her parents. Then she started work in the jewellery business and most of her customers were Arabic-speaking and much of the importing was from the Middle East. Josephine became much more fluent in spoken Arabic and was getting help from her mother with written Arabic.

The profile of the use of Arabic in home and community domains in macro-sociolinguistic studies based on surveys and census data is one of maintenance of

spoken Arabic into the second generation but one of rapid loss of written Arabic and its replacement by English (Kipp *et al.* 1995). The patterns of Arabic language and literacy practices are much more complex than large-scale studies indicate (Chafic 1994).

The main presence of literacy in Arabic in the homes was related to study in day schools, community schools or Qur'anic schools. The teaching of Arabic has grown exponentially in the last decade as the communities have organized and gained greater government recognition. Teenagers from every household in the study had attended or were attending these classes. Six of the parents had taught or were teaching in the schools. There was also a system of private tutors in Qur'anic studies who visited the families to teach the children. When children in four of the households had stopped attending community schools, parents had organized religious tutors to come to the home or had taught the children themselves. Although in some cases parents also took on the role of teacher, most parents reported that they did not feel capable of taking on this role. Attitudes to the schools were very mixed. A majority of the parents made positive comments about what one or more of their children had learned from the community schools. Parents often brought out children's books to show how good their writing was and the difficulty of the work they had learned. Quite a few parents regretted their elder children not having had the opportunity to learn Arabic, as the schools had only become better established recently. On the other hand, many parents complained about the community schools, because of the lack of training of the teachers, the teaching methods and the use of older children as teachers. Other problems were the difficulty in getting children to classes and the interference with work from the day school. Several parents had stopped their children attending when they reported the workload getting too much. Many more parents stated that their teenage children decided not to go any more as they had lost interest and could not be induced to return, although parents reported that girls kept attending classes longer. Of the 43 Year 9 teenagers questioned in a later stage of the study, however, only six were still attending community schools, a high turnover confirmed in other studies (Courtenay 1994). Parental attitudes to the acquisition of literacy in Arabic gained outside the home was balanced with a realization of the difficulties involved. Many of the primary-aged children were studying Arabic in their day schools and several of the teenagers had chosen Arabic as a subject in their secondary schools. Parents often commented unfavourably on the lack of work covered in these classes. Despite the problems, Arabic literacy and learning had a place in most of the households. Parents who had children studying outside the home took pride in helping and supervising them in the home. When the topic arose, parents generally compared the work their children received from the day schools unfavourably with work from the Arabic classes.

My daughter in Year 5 goes to Arabic school four hours a week. She can read Arabic much better than English. She was born here. She's doing Arabic

more than she reads English. I went to the [day] school and said ‘Give her more work . . . just a bit’ . . . about five minutes’ work. Yes, Dad. I did it. If you see the books she’s got in Arabic. She got four or five books from Saturday to Sunday. From Saturday to next Sunday she must learn all of this, and learn them by heart.

(Bilal Bashir)

Literacy drawing from study in the community or day schools has been labelled ‘ritual literacy’ (Fishman 1985). The growth in the community schools and days schools, however, and the improvement in the curriculum and professional development could have some effect on the homes. The second main channel for formal Arabic and literacy was through the advent of the media, specifically through cable television and the Internet. The future impact of the growth of this domain will also be interesting, something explored in more depth in the next chapter. The use of written Arabic extended beyond the domains of religion and the media, with teenagers reporting the use of newspapers, advertising, letters, flyers and other texts in Arabic. Evidence from the teenagers’ literacy diaries indicated that reading and writing in Arabic occurred regularly for about one-third of the teenagers, data confirmed in other studies (Chafic 1994; Suliman 2003).

### ***Choice of language***

The choice of spoken language in teenagers’ interactions with texts is difficult to characterize without detailed and lengthy recordings. This is because of code mixing and code switching when English and Arabic are mixed in a range of ways. Speakers are often unaware of their code mixing when it is not a conscious strategy in conversation. A general picture would be that teenagers tended to use spoken Arabic or, less commonly, code mix in the presence of parents and also relatives and parental friends who were visiting. They tended to communicate with siblings in English or a code mix of Arabic and English. Parents predominantly used Arabic and, less commonly, code mix to children and nearly always Arabic to each other.

Behind this snapshot was a more complex picture which can be best understood in terms of Halliday’s (Halliday 1985) concept of register. The field of discourse, the topic or content of what is being communicated, affected the language choice. Teenagers and parents were more likely to use Arabic in personal topics or religion and English when referring to topics or texts outside the household. The tenor of discourse, the relationship between the participants, is influenced by their status, and affective relationship and the nature of contact. Teenagers would tend to use Arabic or code mix in interactions around texts with their parents, but English in interactions around text with their siblings.

The choice of written language depended on several factors. Parents generally reported leaving messages or notes for teenagers in English, as the children were more able to understand English. Teenagers generally reported leaving notes for

parents in English, because their own Arabic was not good enough. The abilities in writing Arabic varied greatly with teenagers between and within households. In several examples writers chose languages depending on what they were thinking, Hala Bashir, for example, writing her shopping list in both Arabic and English. Several writers chose the language based on the possibilities they felt the language afforded them. Hanna Tabber was equally conversant with English and Arabic script but she wrote poems in English because she felt she could express more what she wanted to say in English. The language of reading often depended on the language of the topic. For example, Susan Tabber had developed her interest in Arabic music when she had spent several months in Syria. She listened to CDs and was writing down the lyrics of her favourite songs. She asked her mother for help to decipher these songs because her Arabic was not good enough.

Attitudes and beliefs were also a key to the choice of language. It was always preferable for the Qur'an to be read in Arabic since, as Abdullah Raja said, 'the Qur'an is the word of Allah. It is not the word of God if it is in English.' For this reason many of the teenagers who were dominant in English were reading the Qur'an in Arabic or bilingual versions. For Marie and John Issa, reading the Bible in Arabic was important even though most of their other reading was in English. The Bible was 'closer to the heart in Arabic'. The choice of language foregrounded differences in beliefs and attitudes and factors relating to the writer and the recipient of the information.

### **Coda**

The picture of wide-ranging functions of literacy in ethnic minority communities is neither a new nor a startling revelation. In the families, reading and writing, as social practices, played important roles in daily life. Interactions involving text complemented interactions mediated by technology and interactions involving only spoken language in logically patterned ways. The choices of language and mode can be understood in terms of the features of the contexts in which they occurred. This is not to underestimate cognitive aspects of literacy acquisition and use. However, an understanding of the social functions of reading and writing in home contexts is the prerequisite for a proper understanding of literacy.

The task then, appears to be twofold; to challenge the dominant representations of literacy; and to develop collaborative research projects that look at the actual literacy practices of home and school, with a view, as Freebody (1995) states to 'effective mutual recognition of these practices in both sites'.  
(Street 1997: 56)

## Chapter 2

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# Pathway(s) to literacy

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I hate reading. I just look at the book in class. It's a waste of time.

(Ali Tannous)

I love to read. I never leave a book. This one [pointing to daughter] likes to study. She likes to read everything, like me. I remember when I was young, I loved magazines and stories, all the stories. I loved to read day and night. I slept with my book. She [pointing to daughter] wakes up and goes to sleep reading a book. I always used to read, but the boys [rolling her eyes] . . .

(Hanade, Ali's mother)

Out of 100 students there would be ten readers, and not avid readers at that.

(Joanne, librarian at Kotara High School)

Reading? In Lebanon I had a lawyer's bag full of books. Here the children don't have books. They don't read.

(Ibrahim, Ali's father)

Teenagers, especially boys, often report that they don't like reading; only one or two of the teenagers in this study said that they liked reading. Despite the teenagers being classed as non-readers by both the school and their parents, their accounts of reading each week in their literacy diaries told a different story. In a typical week Ali Tannous read magazines at school with friends during breaks and also at home. He read factual information in books and on the Internet for his homework and for interest. He also recorded reading books or magazines several times a week before going to sleep. How can these different accounts of reading be explained? Ibrahim's comment also raises questions. Like many of the fathers he complained about the lack of books at home and therefore the lack of reading the children were doing. What did he mean by *books* and *reading*?

This chapter explores what counts as *reading* and as *books*. The educational policy and syllabus definition is often the individual and silent reading of texts, wide reading of novels and critical reading. How does this relate to the everyday practice of school reading and writing? Parents such as Ibrahim Tannous in this study saw reading as the study of information and factual texts. Teenagers



like Ali had a range of views, but were united in their resentment of the school-imposed novels they were expected to read. The chapter explores these differences and their implications for the teaching of reading, writing and literature.

## **Approaches to the development of reading and writing**

Research in the 1970s into how young children learned to read and write in naturalistic settings led to dramatic changes in the way literacy was taught in the early years of schooling. Coming under the rubric of emergent literacy, the research showed that young children develop many understandings and concepts about print and reading behaviours from their environment that enable the later development of reading. Typically, children recognize signs and print in their surroundings. They act as readers, imitating parents and others in trying to make sense from newspapers and books. They negotiate meaning and relate books to real life. Learning to read is an active process in which parents and caregivers play key roles (Smith 1978; Clay 1979; Goodman and Goodman 1979; Holdaway 1979; Clay 1982; Smith 1982; Calkins 1983; Harste *et al.* 1984; Clay 1985, 1986; Teale and Sulzby 1986; Wells 1986; Cambourne 1988; Clay 1989, 1991).

This research led to the introduction of naturalistic teaching approaches such as the Language Experience and Whole Language which aimed to build on the development of the language and literacy skills the children brought to school. The teaching of graphophonic skills and phonemic awareness was embedded within these broader frameworks. These approaches were also intended to provide literacy experiences for children who had not had these outside the school.

The second foundation underpinning the changes in school literacy in the 1970s was the understanding of how children's literacy development can mirror psychological and cognitive development. Writers such as Dixon, O'Malley and Thompson drew on Piaget, seeing response to literature as the cumulative development in stages in which there is progressive decentring from focus on self to the social world. Reading developed from empathy, analogizing to an understanding of the reading process, personal identity and the textual ideology; readers' increasing sophistication and maturity were reflected in response to myth, legend and fantasy, science fiction, realism and finally satire (Watson *et al.* 1994). Dixon and others also took from Leavis an approach to literature which was based not on traditional heritage and historical approaches but on a more holistic study and appreciation, working from the text and the readers. The Dartmouth Conference (1966) brought together educationists from Britain and North America and marked a shift in the teaching of English in schools away from the study of English as a set of disparate skills. The new approach focused on the social, affective and cognitive development of teenagers through the use of talk, drama and response to literature (Dixon 1967; Watson *et al.* 1998). The goal of English syllabuses and programmes became wide reading both in and beyond the classroom based on 'a considered exploration of experience, permitting . . . more

individual, personal growth' (Dixon 1967: 112). Wide reading programmes such as Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) or Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), starting in the United States, were introduced into primary and secondary schools everywhere. The aim of such programmes was to develop the habit of reading for enjoyment and 'to join the literacy club' (Smith 1978). The research basis for the programmes was evidence for links between student reading for pleasure and levels of general reading proficiency and educational achievement.

Although many of the studies investigated literacy acquisition in children from different class, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the classroom applications have been criticized for setting up middle-class Anglocentric behaviours as the norm. The past three decades have seen the development of a wealth of evidence about the cultural, historical, social and linguistic contexts of literacy which questions many basic assumptions of the earlier approaches. Much of this research indicates that literacy and critical reading are developed by different pathways in different languages and cultures (Scribner and Cole 1981; Heath 1983; Graff 1987; Au 1993; Street 1993; Wagner 1993; Ferdman *et al.* 1994; Baynham 1995; Durgunoglu and Verhoeven 1998; Barton *et al.* 2000; Gregory and Williams 2000; Martin-Jones and Jones 2000). Firstly, even in monolingual English-speaking societies there exist great class and regional differences in the ways children are inducted into language and literacy. Heath (1983), for example, studied the role of oral storytelling and the different ways in which children are taught to make meaning from print in homes according to black and white middle- and working-class English-speaking backgrounds in the US. In contexts of cultural and linguistic diversity these differences are greater. The 'natural' age at which children learn to read varies across languages and cultures between 3 and 7 or 8 (Downing 1973; Durgunoglu and Verhoeven 1998). The skills prized in learning to read differ across cultural groups, with memorization, imitation and play varying in importance (Field and Aebbersold 1990; Wagner 1993; Gregory 1997). The language of literacy makes a difference as there is evidence that fluent readers of Chinese and other scripts read in a different way to fluent readers of English and that they develop different perceptual and cognitive skills (Scribner and Cole 1981; Verhoeven 1994; Durgunoglu and Verhoeven 1998). The relative roles of home and school in the development of literacy differ across languages and cultures. In some countries and cultural groups it is the role of the family to teach reading and writing before school; in others it is the role of the school only. The functions and purposes of reading and the ways in which interactions around texts take place also differ. The roles of peers, grandparents, relatives and family friends in early literacy development has also been underestimated (Gregory *et al.* 2004). Reading occurs in many ways in different languages. Chinese and Arabic traditions, for example, construct pathways to critical literacy through reading as study and not wide reading for pleasure. Reading practices such as individual silent reading, reading in bed and the reading of novels are comparatively recent historical occurrences.

The connection of parental reading to children and teenagers' wide home

reading to the achievement of academic outcomes and critical literacy remains unchallenged in most syllabus, curriculum and policy documents. Beginning with the Bullock, Plowden and Cox Reports in the UK, the notion of the mother reading to children, inducting them into literacy, is a powerful one that has stayed as the yardstick by which curriculum documents, schools and teachers construct the pathway to literacy. When such a pathway becomes institutionalized the result is that alternative practices are judged as divergent and even lacking. When there are issues in educational achievement, the lack of home reading or of reading for pleasure is seen as a causal factor. Teachers, parents and students internalize the expectations of this pathway and judge themselves as lacking. Ann, acting head teacher of English at Ali's school, was typical of many teachers, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

My background wasn't really the norm. I know what these students go through. I didn't learn to read and write before I went to school. My parents spoke Greek at home and they couldn't help me. I was embarrassed about speaking Greek. I didn't really read until I went to high school. It was Mills & Boon that started me. Before that I didn't read. You think that's bad, you should see my brothers. My older brother Steve, he's 29 and he's just started to read. He's become an Amway rep and he has to read all their blurbs. He keeps coming to me and saying 'Did you know such and such?' It's like he just realized that you can find out things from reading.

Many parents in the study voiced similar judgements. Mona, a parent and teacher's aide in Ali's school, was apologetic for the lack of reading in her own family background, despite the fact that her children had been academically successful.

My mother didn't read for me. Probably that's why I don't read. We didn't have it. It's not tradition. I'm sure these days some of them do read to their children, the very well-educated ones. I didn't read to my children because when they were little I didn't know the English and they didn't know the Arabic language. So I used to tell them stories and that was it . . . not reading.

### **What counts as reading and writing in the school**

To what extent was this ideal of literacy reflected in the daily experiences of reading and writing in the schools? What was the place of individual, silent reading and reading for pleasure? The school data come from classroom and school observations and from interviews with staff and students over a three-year period in six secondary schools attended by the teenagers. In addition, Ali and teenagers in five other schools were tracked for three days with lessons recorded and transcribed.

The realities of reading and writing in the secondary schools differed markedly

from the ideal. By far the most common form of reading was students or teachers reading aloud from the textbook, exercise book, worksheet or blackboard. Reading aloud was so common that students routinely expected it. On one occasion Ali's commerce teacher, a casual replacement, was asked when handing out a newspaper text with comprehension questions:

*Student:* Miss, are we going to read it aloud?

*Teacher:* No, you read it yourself. You're a bright class.

The teacher's assumption was that reading aloud was a stage in the development of silent reading. In many classes, reading aloud served to make the knowledge public and facilitate a teacher-led discussion. It also brought students together and served as a management tool. Silent reading occurred most in mathematics lessons, where students were often working their way through problems individually or in small groups.

The narrow range of lessons consisted mainly of teacher-led whole-class discussions combined in various ways with individual student desk work. Of the lessons observed over three days in each of the six schools, more than half consisted of just one episode or activity (Lemke 1990; Gibbons 1999). Individual student work on tasks or exercises was generally also followed by a reading-aloud session in which teachers marked and commented on the answers. Fewer than 15 per cent of lessons involved students interacting with texts in small groups. Every morning in Ali's school (and two of the other secondary schools) there were morning periods of about 20 minutes in which students were expected to bring along books to read for enjoyment (DEAR: Drop Everything and Read). The DEAR periods were intended to engender reading for pleasure, but were more often occasions for conflict between staff and students. Observations indicated that the periods involved anything but silent reading, and interviews with students and many teachers indicated that pleasure was also absent.

Ali was, however, positive about his English teacher, May, and also about the work they did in English. In the following example, Ali's English class is working through the book *Dancing in the Anzac Deli*, sitting in groups around six large tables and sharing books.

#### *Classroom talk*

*Teacher:* We're going to do a little bit of reading aloud. When the bell goes, we're going to stop and do a little bit of writing. Mahassan, you can start reading, please.

*Mahassan:* No one had realized yet but while Yaya had been talking S . . . [hesitates]

*Teacher:* Sean.

#### *Text*

No one had realized yet but while Yaya had been talking Sean Brooking had wandered off. He'd been playing with Costa at the edge of the path.

*Mahassan:* Sean Brooking had wandered off. He'd been playing with . . . [hesitates]

*Teacher:* Costa.

*Mahassan:* Costa at the edge of the path. Sean was all by himself in a ch . . .

*Teacher:* courtyard.

*Mahassan:* courtyard inside a square of tall buildings and . . .

*Teacher:* squat.

*Mahassan:* squat sheds. There were many people . . .

*Teacher:* weren't any.

Sean was all by himself in a courtyard inside a square of tall buildings and squat sheds. There weren't any people there.

Mahassan reads the text aloud and hesitates when she reaches an unknown word. May supplies the word and Mahassan repeats it and reads on. May interrupts to correct any mistakes and gives a short evaluation at the end of each turn. She expects all students to be following the text and uses reading turns to catch out students not attending.

*Teacher:* Bilal Mouwad?

*Bilal:* I'm not up to it.

*Teacher:* Why not? Because you're wasting time. Have you got a green card to fill out? You can't expect me to put 'Perfect' if you don't know where we're up to. [Another student shows Bilal and he begins reading.]

May also corrects students reading if they ignore punctuation. In a later part of the lesson May interrupts a student with 'Hold on, Hussein, you're reading very well, but you're not stopping at full stops. Even I can't keep up with you.' The class reading can also become a site of conflict such as when Bilal shows his resistance by not repeating the teacher's correction.

#### *Classroom talk*

*Bilal:* Sean was still . . .

*Teacher:* hesitant.

*Bilal:* but he gave her a little nod he could—

*Teacher:* No! Full stop after the word 'nod'. You've got to pause.

*Bilal:* He could mostly understand.

#### *Text*

Sean was still hesitant, but he gave a little nod. He could mostly understand Yaya, even though she spoke Greek. It was the way she said things, in the same voice his nanna up in Cairns used.

During the reading episode, which lasts 35 minutes, May interrupts to ask three questions: two relating to word meaning and one relating to more general comprehension. The episode ends with the teacher's comment, 'Good. Put your books away. With all the things to do we haven't got our reading done.' The expectations for reading in this classroom episode are that students decode words, known and unknown. They make an attempt or wait for the teacher's prompt, then repeat and keep reading. They must pay attention to punctuation and should try to respond to the teacher's questions on word meaning. Comprehension equates with understanding word meanings. Reading is reading aloud and for evaluation by the teacher. The expectations in this session differ from accounts in many studies of school reading episodes (Green and Wallat 1981; Baker and Freebody 1989; Green and Meyer 1991). This session also differs markedly from reading sessions observed in community schools and others reported in home contexts (Gregory 1998). The reality of reading in Ali's school also diverged widely from the ideal of the pathway as represented in syllabus and curriculum documents.

### **Talk about texts**

Talk around texts is another way in which ideas of reading are developed. There were many examples of classroom interactions in which critical attitudes to texts were discussed. Adam, Ali's technics and applied science teacher, compared the dynamic nature of talk and computer technology with the static nature of the written text.

*Teacher:* What's a positive thing about the Internet?

*John:* It's always being updated.

*Teacher:* So the Internet is constantly being updated. What's a negative thing?

*Student:* It might be a list of useless things.

*Teacher:* Right . . . for example, last night I keyed . . . I was looking for . . . and I keyed in two descriptors. I got 80,200 different items. I couldn't think of other things to add to make it more specific. So, you have to be quite skilled at knowing how to use it. You do still have to know, 'cause at times it is a resource. What's good about encyclopaedias?

*Student:* Like all the information is there.

*Teacher:* What's a bad thing?

*Student:* It's old.

*Teacher:* Yes, for example, if I look up Brett Whitely it tells me he was born in say 1930 and is still alive . . . whereas in fact he died three years ago.

At other times in the lesson he told students not to give textbook answers but to 'think for themselves'. In other classes, textbooks and exercise books were depicted much more as objects which students had to be taught to respect. In several classes texts remained in the staff rooms and were given out only for the

lesson or overnight for homework. Where the school distributed texts for periods of time, students were expected to cover and keep books in good condition. Teachers made much of care and respect for exercise books and textbooks. There was therefore a range of attitudes towards printed texts in the schools, from the book as revered source of knowledge to the book as commodity and one of many sources of information.

### **What counts as reading and writing at home**

For the majority of parents in the study, reading was study and writing primarily referred to handwriting. For the teenagers, what counted as reading was the reading of novels and what counted as writing was the writing of stories. There were major differences between home and school perceptions of reading and writing, differences which were a source of misunderstanding and conflict.

#### ***Reading as study***

Reading? In Lebanon I had a lawyer's bag full of books. Here the children don't have books.

Ibrahim Tannous's comparison of his schooling in Lebanon with Ali's schooling in Australia was echoed by many parents. When parents spoke of their children's reading, they were referring in the main to reading for study and homework. Despite high levels of satisfaction with the schools their children were attending, all parents were concerned with the lack of 'home reading'. The majority of parents felt the schools were not taking responsibility for children's home reading. All parents interviewed felt that their children did not have enough books at home. This was stated in several ways: since most work was done at school, teenagers had no homework to do and therefore did no reading or writing at home; secondly, the school did not have textbooks and, if they did, these were kept at school. Another issue was that, when projects were set, children were not given the information books and could not obtain books to complete the assignment. Ibrahim Tannous and other parents compared this situation of the schools in Australia with that in Lebanon when they did their schooling.

In Australia they do all the homework at school. There are no books at home. They read at school, but in Lebanon we read at home. You take home the books. Say for example I want to teach my child and he doesn't have a book. . . but how could I teach him? I might give him some exercises but he'll be sick of that in five minutes. I asked the school. They said all the books belong to the school and are not allowed to go outside the school. I noticed at X school all the books there. I noticed when I went there. There is one or two ways. Either they let the children buy the books or they give the books. In my situation I can't pay.

There should be more textbooks. There's problems with projects. There's no information books at home. No guidance on what to do, where to go. Why can't the school supply a good book? We had more dictation in Lebanon. In Lebanon we read at home. Here there's no home reading. When I finished school at 4 p.m. there was no time to waste on TV because of reading and writing. My son had a project on Madame Curie. We didn't have encyclopaedia so I took him to the library. In the library there was only one book and it had only two lines in it. If there's a project they should give the children a book to take home. Parents don't want the kids to go to the library by themselves.

Here the kids haven't got books on what they study. They do their practice at school. They don't have books for learning.

(Steve Khoury)

Reading included the completion of projects. Parents understood that information would be obtained from the one primary source and then memorized or rephrased in writing. This account of reading was reflected in the ways in which books were characterized. When the term 'book' was used in English or Arabic (*kitab*) it referred generally to a textbook or book for study. It was often in the context of parents stressing the importance of their children's education by showing how they would go to all lengths to buy books for them.

If I have only 12 dollars in my pocket I will spend 10 dollars to buy a book for my children.

(Ibrahim Tannous)

My daughter had a project on birds. They should have books about general information. You find one sentence in this book and one in that book – you go looking for information everywhere. It's like shopping in the supermarket.

(Ibrahim Tannous)

Books were seen as the repositories of important information. Several parents, such as Ibrahim above, likened school information skills to shopping in a supermarket, trying to find information amongst the shelves.

What lay outside parents' definitions of reading was areas such as functional reading. This was because, for parents such as Ibrahim, this skill was something that was acquired on the job when the need arose. Teachers, on the other hand, would include this area in their definition of literacy, since teaching functional literacy had become part of school syllabuses. Some parents and most of the teenagers included novels as books and reading, but this notion of reading was not generally seen as the role of the school.



***What counts as writing***

Parents' definitions of writing in English were of handwriting. There were comments on the children's exercise books and the ways in which the presentation aspects were ignored. The clash between parents' and the schools' definitions of writing was illustrated in the story of a parent-teacher night at Wilson Park Girls' High School.

We had an information night on the new writing programme because the parents were always complaining to us about their girls' writing. We went through the explanation of how we were teaching different genres such as procedures and more functional types of writing. One of the parents jumped up when we showed an overhead of a writing task, how to apply for a passport. He told us that it was rubbish writing, that we were teaching his girls how to leave the country, and why didn't we teach them proper writing. Then another parent stood up and showed his daughter's book. 'This is not writing,' he said, pointing at her handwriting. 'You should teach them how to write.' The night was a disaster.

(Christine, English teacher)

The difference was that the teachers included text types and functional writing in their definition of writing. The parents' accounts of writing could have been influenced by their own experiences of school in Australia or Lebanon, or by the influence of the role of handwriting in Arabic.

***What counts as reading for teenagers***

Nearly all of the teenagers reported that they hated reading, a fact confirmed by their teachers; many teenagers, especially the boys, were seen as 'non-readers'. The following quotes from Ali and his teacher were typical.

I hate reading. I just look at the book in class. It's a waste of time.

These students don't have a reading culture. We need to model this at school and show them the benefits of reading.

How does this report tally with the evidence that most of the teenagers did in fact read novels on a weekly basis, generally before going to bed? For the teenagers, the function of entertainment and enjoyment could be filled in many ways: by video, television, computers, reading magazines and books, and also the oral telling of stories. Reading, in fact, was defined as the reading of school-sanctioned novels at home and what the teenagers were doing did not, in their eyes, constitute reading. This finding is confirmed by other studies (Manuel and Robinson 2002). When students referred to reading they generally used the meaning dominant in the English subject area of reading for pleasure

or reading novels. Reading in other subject areas was referred to as ‘work’ or ‘study’.

Students also separated the reading and study of texts in English from their experiences in the early-morning DEAR reading-for-pleasure sessions. Ali saw the DEAR period as a waste of time and not the reason for being at school. In other words, it was not study or school learning.

It is interesting that Ali liked writing, which in terms of English he defined as writing stories. At other times writing also referred to handwriting. However, like all the boys and most of the girls, he defined himself as a non-reader.

## Literacy acquisition

There were important differences between school pathways to literacy and the parent and teenager accounts of their learning. Accounts were collected from teenagers and parents about themselves and others learning to read and write. There were also hypothetical questions of what they would do if they had to help teach a friend to read and write. The data indicated a generational change in the acquisition of reading. There was evidence of only one or two parents being taught to read at home, whereas nearly all of the teenagers had experiences of being read to.

Sometimes my father would tell me stories, but it was the school that taught you, not your parents.

(Tony, educated in Lebanon)

When my mum was small my grandmother taught her how to read. My grandmother was teaching her for months. My mum kept repeating the words, okay, but she never read any by herself and my grandmother was just about to quit when my mum read a word. After that she got better.

(Wafa, literacy diary)

There were, nevertheless, several important differences between teenagers’ accounts and constructions of learning to read and the school-sanctioned pathway. In the teenagers’ accounts, stories were also just as commonly told to them as read. Many of the teenagers mentioned being told stories in Arabic or English, often by fathers, grandparents and uncles. The stories often related to life in Lebanon and stories about family members. The role of oral storytelling was obviously very important. Television shows such as *Sesame Street* and *Play School* also played important roles in learning spoken and written English in the teenagers’ accounts.

The second difference was the role that siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents played in the early literacy memories. The role of siblings in early literacy is ignored in most of the literature (Gregory 1998). The third feature was the type of books that the teenagers remembered. Most mentioned books such as *The*

*Three Little Pigs, Bananas in Pyjamas* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. Most common were Golden Books or books whose primary aim was the teaching of reading. From comments made by parents and others, it seemed that the purpose of home reading was the instruction in basic literacy and word recognition, similar to Heath's (1983) Roadville children's experiences. Many parents saw the place of reading to children stopping when they began school and the role for literacy teaching passed to teachers. About 30 per cent of the teenagers' memories of initial reading were school-based.

The earliest memories of reading was when I was young my dad used to put me on his lap and read to me. Also at bedtime he used to tuck me in and read to me till I fell asleep. When I slept over at my uncle's place he used to do the same. My earliest time of writing was when my cousin used to do the ABC in dots and I used to trace them.

(Ali Tannous)

My sister's earliest memory of reading is Mum reading to her and she loved it. When she was 2 years old she loved the book *Little Red Riding Hood*. Every night before she went to sleep Mum used to read it to her. At night when she saw Mum and Dad reading she used to sit next to them and held *Little Red Riding Hood* and she started reading it. Her first book was *ABC 123* and mum helped her read it.

(Lamise Tannous)

My sister used to play schools with me. When I made a mistake reading, she'd hit me.

(Ali Tannous)

My brother held my hand with the pen and taught me how to write. He did this for a long time until one day he came back from his work and he saw me writing words.

(Ali Tannous)

Most memories of early writing were school related, either day school or Arabic school, although there were some home-related memories of early writing. Memories of writing from school were generally not pleasant and focused more on the mechanical aspects of handwriting and forming the letters. Those who had happy memories remembered being good and neat. This was true of memories from Lebanon and from both day and Arabic community schools in Australia.

I used to go to Arabic school when I was 8 and that was where I learned Arabic and how to write Arabic. My sister Rada learned to read and write from the teacher. She hated writing because she could never write straight and if you never wrote straight at Beirut boarding school you would get

caned. Reading was interesting to her because she had more choice. She loved the Lost Princess because she thought she was like that.

(Mohamad)

Teenagers in the study were questioned about how they would teach someone to read and write. Their responses to this question along with their own memories of learning to read and write developed a picture of the practices of literacy acquisition: how they learned to read and write and their perceptions of this process. The responses from teenagers and parents ranged from approaches that focused on the alphabet to an approach that involved more engagement with the text. Strategies such as listen and repeat, tandem reading and chained reading, reported by Gregory (1998), were described by many of the teenagers. The early reading seemed to owe much to Qur'anic reading in its structured development, what Gregory calls 'syncretic' literacy practices.

I would start with the alphabet and get him to read the alphabet off by heart and then make him read.

(Ali Tannous)

By reading the book with them and making them read an easy book first. Then make them write small words to bigger words and try and make them read and write things they are interested in and make it easy for them.

(Ahmed Tabber)

In general, accounts represented a structured approach, using reading aloud and repetition. Three parents reported that they had intervened to help children who were having difficulties at school with reading and writing in English. The fullest account was given by Fadya Ibrahim who had played a role in teaching her youngest boy to read in the face of what she saw as the day school not doing its job. Her method was giving her son a book to look through and then reading with him or getting him to read it aloud to her several times until he was reading 'correctly'. Fadya had completed most of her schooling in Australia.

I'm the one who taught him . . . reading and writing. I'm the one who gives him reading. If the teacher heard my son reading she should shake her head. I give him reading every day because he's poor in books. My other kids are okay. They read a lot at home. But I don't think they get enough reading or getting someone to listen to them. See, if the teachers give more time to listen to each student individually . . . maybe they could pick up what each student is losing and what he's not strong in. They probably get them to read. They have a look at this . . . 20 minutes' quiet . . . and then we'll read this. When I went to school we used to read the school magazine. We used to love them . . . and we used to every day . . . read a paragraph clearly . . . clearly, and if that student didn't . . . they would get him aside. She would go

over every word. There was more reading aloud and it had to be clear. My son swallows most of his words and he doesn't make sense of what he reads like I start him. I'm going back to the little stories so he can make sense. When there's a question mark, where the person is saying something, asking something. And now his writing has improved, because of me. I know and I said that to his teacher.

(Fadya Ibrahim)

The accounts of learning to write were focused on the learning of letters, tracing or being guided to make the shapes. Very few of the teenagers reported drawing at home. The connections between drawing and learning to write emerged as very much a school-based construction. In fact, several teenagers reported learning to draw at school. The evidence on learning to read indicates the key role played by siblings and also the importance of different ways of reading that were more scaffolded and placed a greater emphasis on reading the exact words of the story. Most of the reports of reading or being read to and of learning to write were from the pre-school ages. This indicates that reading and writing at home were viewed as preparations for the time when the school would take over.

### **What counts as literacy in Arabic**

Ahmed Elkheir complained that the skills of memorization were being lost. In other days, he commented, scholars could memorize the whole Qur'an. At their mosque the sheikh could read so well that he did not have to use the book as he could remember it by heart. For Mr Elkheir, literacy in Arabic was Qur'anic literacy involving memorization and the knowledge of the Qur'an (Wagner 1993). Ahmed had also achieved a level of Qur'anic literacy, knowing many of the suras by heart and being able to work through the Qur'an and books of the prophets with his children during Ramadan. Mr Elkheir was a taxi driver, a job that required a fairly high level of daily literacy and numeracy demands in English. He had taught himself how to read directories, complete job sheets and all the complex demands of his work even though in Lebanon he had only been able to complete three years of primary school. To his children's teachers, Ahmed would have been counted as having low levels of literacy and he would probably have been able to read Arabic at first sight only with difficulty. His limited education would have placed him as a low-level reader also in English literacy classes.

What it means to be literate in Arabic differs from literacy in English for several important reasons. Modern Standard Arabic is derived from classical Arabic and there are lexical, grammatical and phonetic differences between the spoken dialects of Arabic and formal, written Arabic. The gap between the formal al *fus'ha* and the spoken dialect in the homes is much greater than the differences between written and spoken English and has been likened to the differences between Latin and the vernaculars in medieval Europe. This linguistic situation has been referred to as diglossia, the co-existence of two forms of the language in differing domains.

Many adults in the community had had little access to the learning and use of the formal spoken and written language. Hussein, one of the community workers, reported that he could only understand about 20 per cent of any talk given in the formal Arabic at community meetings. Ahmed Elkheir, like many parents, came from a village where being literate was something of value, but not being literate was not a source of shame. Literacy was something that could be acquired at school but did not have the role in everyday life that it does today in Australia or Lebanon. Compounding this situation in Australia is the rapid replacement of the functions of written Arabic by English, leading to written Arabic having high status but only residual practical function in the domains of religion, school study and media.

My mother and father cannot read or write or distinguish one from two. I've got 12 uncles. Most of them are illiterate. It wasn't that important, education, in general.

(Ahmed Elkheir)

Another issue is the way in which Arabic is generally written without indicators of many of the vowels. The words for 'book', 'I read' and 'I have read' can all be represented in writing by the same word. This means that decoding in Arabic is much more difficult than in English and requires contextual knowledge and, in some cases, reading aloud.

The teenagers and their parents had a range of attitudes to and definitions of Arabic and literacy. Many of the teenagers defined Arabic as formal spoken and written Arabic as opposed to Lebanese, the dialect. Arabic was often equated with Qur'anic literacy but several parents and teenagers also perceived Arabic as the language, spoken and written, and saw it in 'functional' terms in Australia. There was, in fact, a range of ways that the function of literacy in Arabic was characterized. In those households where Arabic was seen as important, literacy in Arabic occupied much space. Within this space the roles of memorization in reading and calligraphy in writing were constants.

The majority of interviewees of Muslim background saw Arabic as Qur'anic literacy with a high status. Parents wanted the children to know how to read and write in Arabic. Teenagers' attitudes towards knowing Arabic were also favourable, with 20 per cent reporting that they wanted to learn formal Qur'anic Arabic or to know it better. The Elkheir household was typical in many ways. Suzy and her sisters set high store by Qur'anic literacy but, as her father explained, most of his children had been unsuccessful in gaining it.

My little cousin, she's about 12 and she can read it [the Qur'an]. My auntie teaches her. When I go to my auntie's place she has her daughter Fatima . . . she says [to Fatima] go and read the Qur'an and her mum goes . . . if you [to me] could go to Arabic school you could read it too.

(Suzy Elkheir)

I have to send them to the Arabic teacher after school. I sent them a couple of times. Suzy came back; she didn't like it. Now in the house she doesn't speak Arabic; she speaks English because it's easier. Even for me, it's easy to speak with them English. The problem is that she went a couple of times and if the teacher hit her she never wanted to go back. I tried to push her to learn because if you learn you read all the Arabic books, the books about the prophet, the religion, what the old imams say. We have to learn from the books.

(Ahmed Elkheir)

Many of the parents had multiple definitions of what constituted literacy in Arabic. Hanade Tannous linked literacy in Arabic with the skills acquired in school but also, like many of the Muslim parents, linked it with Qur'anic literacy.

My children can read and write in Arabic . . . maybe to first-class level in Lebanon. My daughter can read the Qur'an . . . not 100 per cent but then neither can I.

(Hanade Tannous)

The notion of Arabic as classical Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, meant for many parents that full literacy in Arabic remained an ideal and something in which they always considered themselves inadequate. Mona, the teacher's aide in Ali's school, had gone to university after many years in Australia to study Arabic. She counts herself a failure also in her children's decision not to learn Arabic.

I felt so left out not being able to read and write for the past 40 years [she was literate in French and English]. You're missing a lot . . . you're missing . . . I had a French Qur'an because I'm Muslim and I used to read it in French, but it's not the same, like . . . you hear the verses in Arabic. It's a different meaning. It's like poetry; it's different . . . In 1992 I started to read in Arabic. I'd been in Australia 25 years. I worked in the French bank. I did an accounting degree. I worked for 20 years and then I decided to do a BA and learn Arabic and other things.

(Mona)

It upsets me a lot . . . I feel Arabic's a rich language and they [her children] are missing something really important. I feel that I failed in something because I could not make them read and write.

(Mona)

Arabic is so complicated. You know, for example, lecturers at university, they say 'You know how much we know about the language?' We say, 'Probably 80, 90 per cent.' They have doctorates in Arabic and they say 'Believe us, we probably know 15 to 20 per cent of the Arabic language.' Can you imagine? It's very wide.

(Mona)

In several households Arabic was perceived as the spoken and written language unrelated to religion. In these cases it was often a reaction to the perceived attachment of the community to Qur'anic literacy and was simply characterized as the language of the parents but not so much the children. Parents such as Mohamed Suliman, Joseph Moussa and Hashem Al Talib and teenagers such as Sam Al Talib were ambivalent about Arabic in the Australian context. Mr Al Talib's attitude was that he and his wife were Arab because they'd been born in Syria and the children were Australian and had little need for Arabic. Hashem Al Talib had come from what he said was an educated family in Syria. All his brothers and sisters were university educated. He had come to Australia after leaving school in Year 9 and had made a conscious choice to separate from his background. He also kept his distance from the community in Sydney. Mr Suliman was highly educated in Arabic, having been a court translator in Kuwait. He had been in Australia for four years and, like Hashem Al Talib, was Muslim. He was not against the learning of Arabic in Australia, but was very critical of the reasons behind people choosing to learn it.

Why learn Arabic here? It's just as important to learn French or other languages. Most parents want their children to learn Arabic from nostalgia, from religion, for all the wrong reasons. If you study a language it is because you want to learn a language, a literature and to become educated . . . not just cultural reasons.

(Mohamed Suliman)

For me . . . we are in an English-speaking country. I'd like them to learn Arabic. To study a language as a language is good, but to study to maintain nationality, no. Just because we are Arabs, to pass it on to the next generation is no good.

(Joseph Moussa)

An understanding of what counts as literacy comes from an understanding of the ways it is interpreted in different contexts. Many parents and teenagers reported writing in Arabic, meaning that they could recognize and reproduce the alphabet. Many teenagers reported reading the Qur'an, having Qur'anic literacy. Raida Raja was proud of her girls' reading in Arabic in that they knew enough to work out the words. Her definition was based on the expectations of what was needed or called for in terms of reading. Several of the teenagers had achieved what would be called high levels of literacy through various means: in extended visits overseas or through concerted study in the community and day schools in Sydney. For teenagers, the construction of reading and writing in Arabic was generally the same as that of their parents. Teenagers who attended the Arabic community schools often compared their learning favourably with that of the day schools, reporting the pride parents took in teenagers' ability to read in Arabic, even if they themselves did not enjoy the learning.



I go to Arabic school. I've been going eight months and I know how to write and read. English school, I go all my life and I don't know it. They make us work more. Some of them in the Arabic school they have a bad attitude, but, me, I don't mind it.

(Ali Tannous)

Your parents get really proud. My mum gets really happy because she can't read it. I used to hate it. I did three years and I didn't learn anything. My brother is 7 and knows how to read. Before, my brother at 6, he didn't know. If you send them young, it's better.

(Eman)

## **Implications of the differences**

### ***Arabic and English literacy***

In contexts where different languages and literacies are used, there can be sharply contrasting constructions of reading and writing. What constituted literacy in Arabic in many of the families was based on the specific historical, social and linguistic features of Arabic. It also drew on the specific experiences of family members in the Middle East and in Australia and the social factors affecting Arabic in the different countries. There were differences between individual accounts: many of the parents of Muslim background who had had limited access to education in Arabic placed enormous value on literacy skills in Arabic. Parents with higher levels of fluency in Modern Standard Arabic tended to view Arabic literacy in more functional terms. It is inevitable that the attitudes to reading and writing in both languages affect each other and that the personal and institutional values attached to each literacy change over time.

### ***Values, beliefs and practices***

In both home and school contexts the beliefs about and attitudes to reading and writing seemed in conflict with the practices. The dominant school model of individual silent reading, wide reading for enjoyment and critical literacy sometimes became lost in classrooms where expectations had been lowered and management was an issue. This narrowing of the curriculum will be discussed in later chapters. In the home contexts, there was also a contrast between the stated attitudes about the importance of Arabic and the day-to-day practices. Beliefs and attitudes, however, are extremely important. The home literacy was being judged according to the dominant growth models of literacy that have informed the school curriculum since the 1970s. This school literacy was being judged by parents according to their own notions of reading and writing as study. The differences should not simply be ascribed to a 'lack' of understanding. At least 16 parents from the 20 households had been involved with school organizations,

three had been educated in Australian schools and another three of the parents were attending classes at their teenagers' schools. The focus on homework and study is not because of parental lack of knowledge about the school. The ways reading and writing are done are reinterpreted in different contexts. Study in the home takes on a role and fills a space that gives it meanings different from school-work. School practices, in fact, are subsumed and redefined in the home context.

Most of the parents complained at the lack of textbooks and that the teenagers seemed to use their exercise books as the main source of notes and information. Parents compared the organization and type of homework with that of their own schooling in Australia or in Lebanon. Several parents also criticized the reliance on exercise books as a substitute for memory and 'real learning'. Marie Issa felt that her children had too many notes and could not sort the important from less important information at exam time because they had not been taught to learn from textbooks.

Parents complained about the perceived added burden from the children having too much leisure time at home. Most saw the development of literacy at home and school as the responsibility of the teachers.

Parents' attitudes to the schools in general were very positive. There were frequent comments on the opportunities their children had in Australia compared with the parents' lack of opportunities in Lebanon. Many parents, particularly mothers, specifically commented on their preference for the teaching in Australian schools as it taught children to think more deeply and it gave them more choice. Many parents commented on the better training of the teachers in Australia. The differences or 'discontinuities' mentioned above were specific and based in different perceptions of reading and writing. Misunderstandings between home and school were common because many of the assumptions that each side was working from were unconscious ones.

For many parents, reading was study and the responsibility of the school to foster in terms of homework. Parents or siblings played some role before children started school. For the schools, reading was generally seen as broad reading for enjoyment that would foster study habits and school reading, and this was generally seen as a joint responsibility or the responsibility of the parents. Teenagers' descriptions of being read to or taught reading by siblings were much more directed to the learning of reading than the development of reading 'habits'. Very few of the teenagers, especially the boys, reported a continuation of the pre-school reading during primary school. The link that the schools envisaged between early reading and 'joining the club' of readers (Smith 1978) simply did not occur. On the other hand, the progression that the parents expected from learning to read to facility in the use of textbooks at home did not occur either.

Parents generally prized the skills of memorization and presentation, seeing the development of literacy and learning reflecting their beliefs also about the development of children. The schools tended to value autonomy in reading and learning and the earlier self-discipline in the development of the students. There did not seem to be a difference between home and school in terms of

goals. Several teachers commented on the traditional teaching in the community schools as working against the development of independent and critical thinking. Several parents had criticized the teaching in the day schools as expecting children to express their ideas before they knew the subject well. The differences in beliefs about literacy acquisition and their labelling as ‘traditional’ or ‘progressive’ may be more conjectural than real. Similarly, the parental ideas of the development of independent thinking through the initial acquisition of information paralleled the tradition of learning in several school disciplines.

How did the schools deal with these differences? Low literacy outcomes in the schools were linked with and attributed to the construction of the students as non-readers. These schools had the highest attrition rates in the state of students leaving before completing secondary school. The outcomes in standardized literacy tests and the final external exams were also amongst the lowest in the state.

Teachers reported that it was not ‘cool’ for students to read and they often just looked at the print. Carl, a science teacher, reported that his students took pride in not reading. ‘We’re Lebs, sir. We can’t do it.’ Pip, the drama teacher, linked the lack of home reading and the ‘limited life experiences’ of the students to their non-performance in school. Students, she said, lacked an understanding of metaphor.

Secondly, the differences were attributed to the narrow experiences of the students and to the lack of community acculturation to the mainstream. Teachers therefore tried to overcome differences by changing teenagers’ and home practices in reading, trying to develop reading for pleasure in the homes.

I really tried with Year 10 this year. I picked good action novels. I threw my heart into it and they really enjoyed the unit. I even bet them that they would love studying the books. At the end of term I did an evaluation. They all agreed that they had learned a lot and enjoyed the books. I then asked them, ‘Well, will you go and read more like this by yourselves now?’ ‘Why, miss, we can get the video.’

(Jane, English teacher)

Addressing the problem of the lack of wide reading was dealt with in two ways in the schools. The curriculum was slowed down and teachers covered fewer books; texts were chosen to link with students’ perceived levels of reading rather than their interests. In some classes the study of longer texts was avoided and teachers opted for a media approach, choosing short texts from popular media. Another approach was a stereotyped notion of relevance. In some curriculum documents, teachers were directed towards *multicultural* or *migrant* literature. Students were given texts which were accounts of growing up in ethnic minority families and stories about ethnic identity, isolation and being lost between cultures. One of Ali’s teachers complained that her students could go through the whole of their English study and never come across a text that was not written by an ethnic minority author. The effect was to deny students access to mainstream literature.

## Conclusions

In 1969 Roland Barthes (1986) addressed a conference of French teachers of literature. The main concern of the educators was that the generation of teenagers they were teaching were not readers and that the time had passed when it could be assumed that young people would be conversant with a wide range of written literature. Such a concern is even more evident these days. The functions of enjoyment and entertainment are filled by a panoply of technology-mediated modes: television, cable TV, computer games, Internet, videos, DVDs and mobile telephones. Technologies arrive and disappear or stay to complement existing ones with great rapidity. It is likely that reading for pleasure will remain as one of the options available to teenagers, but it is unlikely that it will ever gain the currency that it once had. The linking of psychological and social development with reading is also not appropriate for today's teenagers.

In his address Barthes had several suggestions. He recommended that the study of literature begin from the text itself and the readers and that it focus on drawing out polysemic readings of the text. Such an approach also accords with the work of Dixon and others in the 1970s. The notion of placing the readers and the text at the centre of the study of literature needs to be looked at again. This would mean keeping the same goal – the understanding of a range of key texts – whilst changing the pathway to this goal.

For students in Ali's school there would be several possibilities. What underpins all of these approaches is a recognition of the home construction of reading as study. There is also an understanding that teenagers access a range of modalities and technologies as part of their everyday lives.

- The study and enjoyment of texts in the classroom should be seen as a goal and achievement in themselves. Jane, the teacher quoted above, should recognize her achievement in teaching the texts successfully and enjoyably.
- There should be many ways into the study of texts. Students could compare video and book versions of texts. Texts could be approached through the study of issues in philosophy, anthropology, psychology or politics. Reading could follow writing: students could write about issues of importance and then progress to reading others' accounts of dealing with these issues.
- The study of texts could focus more on the creative arts. Drama, film and art could be integrated in various ways.

# Change and literacy practices

## Teenagers and technology

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Change is in fashion. We cope with change and manage change and sometimes are change agents in changing workplaces as part of global change. The rationale for many literacy and other educational policies is to equip students to meet the changing literacy demands of the workforce and broader society. Change is often depicted in economic terms: the needs of globalization and international trade. Ethnic minority students and their families tend to be seen as the opposite: traditional in terms of gender roles, religious beliefs and social attitudes. Cultural affiliations are interpreted as evidence of outdated links with the countries of origin. Change is characterized as a threat or problem in which parents are casualties of workforce change. Change is a force external to the families and communities, a force which schools need to mediate in order to provide ethnic minority students with access to the benefits of education. Such a position ignores the dramatic social and cultural changes that ethnic minority groups have undergone and are undergoing: the ‘tangled cultural experiences’ and complex sets of affiliations that typify migrant families in modern society (Clifford 1997; Inda and Rosaldo 2002).

How accurate is the portrayal of the home literacy as traditional and of the literacy practices as static? This chapter presents a different account of teenagers’ literacy practices: one of rapid change in response to the experiences of a diasporic community and one linked with global developments in media and technology. The data come from the main study (1993–2000) and a follow-up survey in the schools of the technology-mediated literacy practices of 220 Arabic background Year 9 students.

### Changes in the schools

The shopping centres in Kotara and Bellevue, clustering around railway lines to the centre of Sydney, bear witness to the waves of postwar migration. There are Shi’ite and Sunni mosques, Greek and Macedonian Orthodox churches, shop signs in English, Greek, Arabic, Korean and Chinese. Both suburbs have bookshops, food and produce shops, cafés and restaurants established by Arabic-speakers. Most businesses, banks and services in the suburbs are multilingual.

As you walk down the street in Bellevue you pass a Halal Arabic butchery, Greek and Vietnamese pastry shops, a Korean import business and Pacific Island food and clothing shops. From being mainly a working-class 'Anglo' suburb in the 1950s, Kotara changed to an area of Greek and Macedonian settlement in the 1970s. Shi'a Muslim migrants from the Beqa'a valley in Lebanon arrived in the 1980s. In the 1990s there was a wave of migrants from mainland China and from the Philippines. The area is now having a middle-class English-speaking background influx. After the Arabic-speaking migration from Lebanon in the 1980s, Bellevue had migrants from Samoa, Tonga and Korea in the 1990s. A photograph of Kotara and Bellevue shopping centres in 1975, 1985, 1995 and 2005 would show these changes. There have also been the inevitable shopping complexes and malls in neighbouring suburbs.

The schools attended by the teenagers have also undergone rapid changes, but in the opposite direction. The three government schools that the teenagers attend are comprehensives with more than 90 per cent of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Kotara and Bellevue High Schools more than halved in school population between 1993 and 1998 to around 300 students, with students from English and other non-English-speaking backgrounds shifting to other government and non-government schools. By 2004, 82 per cent of Bellevue's students were from Arabic-speaking backgrounds and there were only 14 students from English-speaking backgrounds remaining at the school. The educational outcomes were amongst the lowest in the state. Wilson Park maintained its enrolment of around 1,000 students, because of its single-sex girls' status, but its population became largely Arabic-speaking Muslim and Pacific Island background students. Government-funded private schools, such as Islamic College and Maronite College, were established and quickly grew to over 1,000 students. Local primary schools also reflected this segmentation, being known as predominantly Anglo, Chinese, Arabic or Macedonian backgrounds. The schools had become divided along lines of class, language, ethnic and religious backgrounds. These changes were neither inevitable nor representative of local demography, but reflected the shift in funding from government schooling and the growing disparity between rich and poor. The specific causes were the introduction of 'choice' in schools through dezoning and the government support for private schools.

### ***A snapshot of literacy practices***

For several weeks in 1999, when they were in Year 9, Mahassan, Suzy, Ali and Ahmad kept literacy diaries, documenting reading, writing and the uses they made of technology over a month. Ahmad estimated 28 hours of television viewing, four hours on computers, 30 hours of homework (mainly Arabic for community school) and three hours of 'reading' each week. In a typical week of keeping a diary Ahmad noted the following reading: science homework, an Arabic textbook and worksheets, history and English worksheets, mathematics

homework, an Optus guide, following computer instructions, messages from his father, a shopping list in Arabic and English, football and other magazines, Goosebumps books, environmental print such as street signs, and train timetables. The writing included copying for Arabic school, comprehension questions and mathematics problems, science textbook questions and answers, a history project, a letter to a friend in Lebanon, notes to his father left on the fridge, and a homework diary.

Much of the teenagers' literacy related to hobbies or interests. Sport and computers were important for Ahmad and Ali, sport, fashion and music for Suzy and Mahassan. They had music magazines in their rooms, CDs and posters. Mahassan and her sisters were keen on karate and she had trophies in her bedroom that she had won in various competitions. Suzy had written an article for her school magazine about her success in soccer, when she had made it to the state trials. She had been in the school team for three years and had pennants and posters on her bedroom wall and soccer magazines on her shelves. In the fortnight he kept his diary, Ali reported a letter he wrote to apply to attend a soccer training camp in the summer holidays. Mahassan had entered some magazine competitions with her mother: they were regular entrants for such competitions. All four teenagers regularly bought and read magazines: *TV Hits*, *TV Week*, *Smash Hits*, *Dolly* and *Girlfriend*, along with computer and sports magazines. There was little gender division, as Ali and Ahmad both reported reading their sisters' *Dolly* and *Girlfriend*.

All four teenagers (like nearly all of the boys and most of the girls in the wider study) reported that they hated reading. Their literacy diaries, however, indicated that they read 'young adult' fiction series such as Goosebumps and Baby Sitters Club, horror stories and books by authors such as R.L. Stine and Virginia Andrews.

Reading and writing are social practices and it is no wonder that this snapshot of the teenagers' literacy practices in their Year 9 at school show reading and writing playing a pervasive and integral role in their daily lives. Their patterns of literacy use were linked to the activities and needs in their daily routines: entertainment, communication, study and religion.

## **Developments in teenagers' literacy practices**

Between 1996 and 2005 the teenagers' and their parents' literacy practices underwent significant change. These changes related to global changes in technology, but they also reflected factors in social change: developments resulting from migration and settlement and the shifting relationships between the Arabic-speaking communities and the broader community.

## Computers

In 1997, Ali's was the only family of the four to have a computer. He used to play many of the computer games with his relatives and siblings, spending several hours each day with PlayStation. Ali and his friends would swap and talk about computer magazines regularly at school. By the time he was in Year 9, however, PlayStation was for 'kids'. By 1999, all four families had computers with games programs and Internet access. Ahmad and Mahassan also had a second computer in their bedrooms. All four teenagers reported using the Internet for obtaining information for school projects. Ali and Ahmad and, to a lesser extent, the girls were then using chat rooms for up to two hours every day with a sibling or relative of their own age. The language they used was English, although Ali claimed that they could pick up very quickly if the person they were chatting to was also an Arabic-speaker. This was when the chatter used common sayings in English, such as 'I swear to God', which are typical of Arabic-speaking teenagers. Ali had to go to his cousin's house because his own computer was not powerful enough, although the reason could have been that there was more privacy at his cousin's place.

- Ali:* I go to my cousin's. He's got one. We get on the chat rooms for hours. You can chat with anyone, in any country.
- Researcher:* How do you know they're not lying, or who you're talking to?
- Ali:* You know, you know after a while; like if they answer back straight away, you know they're not bullshitting.
- Researcher:* Do you tell the truth?
- Ali:* Sometimes.
- Researcher:* But doesn't your uncle get upset? Because, you know, some of the things you talk about.
- Ali:* No, he does it too. Anyway, my cousin, he's got his own computer now in his room, so they don't see it.

Between 1994 and 1996, ownership of computers in Australian households increased from 23 to 30 per cent, with 59 per cent of families with school-aged children having a computer. The figures for ethnic minority and working-class households were considerably lower (Downes and Reddcliff 1997). By 2005, 93 per cent of the Arabic background teenagers were reporting using computers outside school, with 34 per cent reporting frequent use. Eighty-eight per cent of Arabic-speaking families owned a computer and a third had two or more in the home. By 2005, the computers were used for a range of functions: games (28 per cent), Internet (27 per cent), email (18 per cent) and chat (17 per cent). Most families and teenagers also reported help with study as being the main reason for getting computers.

These developments had effects on text and visual aspects of literacy. In 1999, Ali's English teacher commented on the improvement in his school writing from



Year 8 to Year 9. He had been spending several hours each day participating in chat rooms. The development of a language through chat and emails that falls mid-way between speech and writing was interesting. The shift in technology use to increasing reliance on visual channels in Internet pages and interactive games has been explored by many researchers (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996; Abbott 2005).

### **Communication**

Between 1996 and 1999 there was a marked change in communication within the families and between the families and relatives: this was the advent of mobile telephones and messaging. Mobile phones were in every home. The parents reported that this was the most common way they kept in touch with their children and with friends and relatives. Fadya Ibrahim kept her phone on the coffee table when she had visitors. She kept in touch with her mother and sister every day by the phone. She lent it to Mahassan and her sisters when they went shopping so that Fadya would know when to pick them up. The mobile phone had in actual fact given the teenagers more freedom because parents knew that they could keep in touch when the teenagers were out of the home. Before the family had a mobile phone, the Zohair family relied much more on leaving messages for each other on the refrigerator in the kitchen.

By 1999 the phones were used for activities such as the Saturday shopping. Fadya Ibrahim used to give her husband the shopping list when he went out with some of the children to do the weekly shopping. He would keep in touch with Fadya by mobile phone to check if he was getting the right things and to be given additional things to buy.

In 1996 the teenagers and their parents used several means to keep in touch with relatives overseas. All of the families sent letters in Arabic once or twice a year. The Elkheir and Tannous families would send audio and video cassettes when they knew someone was visiting their village in Lebanon. Telephone contact was used for important news or events and, like the recording of cassettes, was often done in the family group. The mobile telephone made contact easier and more regular. It did not simply replace other modes of communication but complemented them. By 2005, 80 per cent of the teenagers were using mobile phones and 65 per cent were messaging/using SMS regularly.

### **Arabic and the domain of media**

Developments of Arabic-language media also brought about changes in the teenagers' literacy practices. By 2000 all four families were receiving Al Jazeera television through cable TV. By 2005, 75 per cent of the teenagers had cable or satellite television. The shift to cable TV was reported by parents as partly for up-to-date news but also to be able to control more their children's watching of programmes on free-to-air TV. Mahassan, Ali and Ahmad reported watching Al Jazeera regularly. Two Arabic teachers at the local school also commented on

how they perceived changes in the students' use of Arabic from their watching of documentaries and other programmes on the TV. The students' knowledge of formal Arabic and their vocabulary had increased.

The Internet had also given families access to the press from the Middle East. The establishment of one AM and three FM radio stations broadcasting locally in Arabic had accompanied a marked decline in readership of the local Arabic-language press. By 2000 there was also more access to Arabic-language videos from the Middle East with the development of more local businesses and video shops.

In 2005, 72 per cent of the teenagers reported watching television programmes in Arabic, mainly documentaries and movies. Fifty-three per cent reported watching DVDs or videos in Arabic. Another 32 per cent also reported accessing Arabic-language sites on the Internet and using Arabic on the computer, such as in word processing or participating in Arabic chat.

The increased access to and use of Arabic in the media domain is an interesting outcome of globalized media. The teenagers had access to news and reporting in Arabic and to the different regional spoken forms and Modern Standard Arabic. There is no evidence of this causing any language revival, and such an argument would be open to charges of promoting the 'melancholia of language shift' (Harris 2002). Interview data, however, suggest that the teenagers were developing hybrid versions or code mixes on the technologies and that they were being exposed to much more Arabic via the media.

### ***Other effects of the changes***

The use and placement of the new technology have effects on the ways in which teenagers and parents define space and interact with each other in the homes. The tensions between individual, private and public space are explored in Chapter 6. The introduction of computers, mobile phones and televisions all affected the balance of private and public. The first television was generally placed in the living or lounge room and involved viewing by family members together in the evenings and at the weekend. By 2005, most teenagers had television sets in their bedrooms and watched programmes by themselves or with their siblings. The first computer was generally placed in the living or lounge room for family use. By 2005, 60 per cent of teenagers had computers in their bedrooms and a further 16 per cent had computers in the games room or study. This placement was to help with study. Seventy per cent of teenagers reported using the computer mainly by themselves. The computer had created and enabled the creation of individual space for teenagers in the homes. Other technology such as cable and satellite television and videos, however, consolidated group/whole-family activities of interacting and viewing together. The parents, particularly the fathers, and the teenagers reported frequent family viewing of sports programmes on cable TV. The advent of Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera gave the parents more control over the language and content of shared viewing times.

Although the raft of changes in technology use had some effect on more traditional forms of entertainment such as free-to-air television, the new tools tended to complement more established modes.

Listening to and watching music and performance was still a major interest of teenagers in 2005. There remained gender differences, with 20 per cent of the boys reporting never listening to music. The modes of interacting had changed, with many more teenagers using the Internet and downloading music. By 2005, 70 per cent of teenagers still reported reading magazines regularly. The rejection of the reading of books remained, with 60 per cent of teenagers reporting that they did not read any books. The 15 per cent who read a lot reported books such as *Harry Potter* or *Goosebumps*, the young adult fiction. The only other books reported were novels that were part of school study for English. Television ownership had increased by 2005, with 82 per cent of families having two or more sets, but the watching of free-to-air television had decreased. One-third of teenagers reported watching less than five hours a week, and only 20 per cent were watching more than 20 hours per week.

### **Changes in mediation roles**

Mediation of literacy, in which people make their skills available to others to accomplish literacy tasks, is common in multilingual contexts, an issue explored in the next chapter (Baynham 1993, 1995; Baynham and Lobanga-Masing 2000; Baynham 2004). In the four families, parents and children had different strengths in areas of written and spoken Arabic and English and in technology-mediated literacy, and the teenagers would often act as mediators of literacy for their siblings or parents. The assumption would be that teenagers would act as mediators of English literacy and parents of Arabic literacy because of sociolinguistic evidence which points to a rapid loss of Arabic literacy and its replacement by English in the second generation (Kipp *et al.* 1995). The actual picture was much more complex as it was changing for several reasons. Roles of mediation in Arabic were developing as teenagers in some cases were attaining levels of fluency in formal Arabic. The burgeoning of Arabic-language media has already been mentioned; this has continued as parents make greater use of Internet and communication technologies in Arabic (Ayoub-Mouhanna 2003). The second factor has been the growth and consolidation of Arabic community schools. The third factor has been the improved communication with the Middle East and the amount of visiting the teenagers make to extended family there.

The teenagers' roles in mediating literacy in English, however, were changing as the parents moved into different types of study, employment or community involvement. In 1997 Mrs Elkheir began a course at a local college to develop her English, as her children were getting older and she was less able and willing to rely on their help in English. Fadya Ibrahim developed expertise in accounting through running a grocery shop. She took on the role in the extended family of helping out with tax and financial matters. Ibrahim Tannous had been active in

the local protest against the building of an underground freeway. He had developed skills in letter writing and lobbying in English. Mohamad Zohair had been president of the parents' and citizens' group at Bellevue Boys' High School. The changes in mediation depended on skills developed as well as language strengths. Ibrahim, for example, even though his English was good, came to rely on Tariq to help with tax forms and financial matters as Tariq gained his business experience.

### **Religious observance**

The theme of belief and religious practice was a key one in conversations with the four teenagers. The importance of the development of the mosques and mosque associations and of the churches was shown in the changes in the family literacy practices. Although there was some use of English at the mosques, the role of the parents as mediators of Qur'anic literacy in the homes increased dramatically over the study. Ali Tannous had attended the community school attached to the mosque for two years and had developed a level of Qur'anic literacy. Ibrahim Tannous took Ali to Qur'anic recitals and Tawihah prayers which were special evening prayers. Both Mr Elkheir and Mr Tannous had sessions with their children explaining the Qur'an and books of the prophets, especially during Ramadan. Ahmad Zohair's estimate of 30 hours per week spent on 'homework' included the times he spent praying and reciting. By 2005 many more of the girls had begun wearing the hijab outside the home. In talk about prejudice and racism, Mahassan generally identified religious racism as the main issue. Mahassan reported receiving many negative comments about her wearing of the hijab. Ali and Ahmad reported racism more against being seen as Lebanese, occurring mainly on public transport and in the local malls or when they were going out with friends or siblings.

The growth of Muslim and Christian day primary and secondary schools had also had an enormous effect on the community. Students at Maronite College and Islamic College attended prayers and church services as part of their weekly schedule. The reasons for the growing importance of religious observance and religious literacy are complex. The communities were better established and so organizations, schools and media outlets had all grown. Several community workers and teachers attributed the growth of religious observance to parental concerns about the weakening of links between themselves and their children, an issue taken up in Chapter 6.

They are worried about losing their children, especially the boys. Many of the parents feel that they get no help outside the home. The schools blame them; they see the government as giving money to the children and mothers and not the family. There is also the incredible antagonism in the media to Arabic-speakers and Muslims. It is like a fortress mentality.

(Ferial, interview)

## Features of the changes

The evidence of the literacy practices of the teenagers and their families shows a marked shift between modes: oral, written and technology-mediated. There were also consequent changes in the balances between written and spoken Arabic and English and also in the ways in which literacy events were accomplished: whether individually or in groups. The changes in the teenagers' literacy practices had several features:

- The new technologies mostly complemented rather than completely replaced other technologies. For example, the mobile telephone offered a communication option in addition to existing modes of letter and audio and video cassettes. They were adopted because they broadened the range of existing functions.
- The new technologies were subsumed into existing social practices in the families. For example, the Arabic-language FM radio talkback and information programmes became a support for the mothers to listen to during their daily cooking and chores. For the teenagers, the radio was played along with TV without sound to accompany homework. These technologies were adopted because they fitted into preferred ways of doing things.
- The new technologies also affected the ways things were being done in the homes. One example of this was the tension between family (public) and individual (private) space, which was an ongoing one for the teenagers. Mrs Ibrahim stated that she did not like her children spending time alone in their rooms, 'only for big tests or for prayers'. For the Ibrahims and the other families, the lounge room was the focus of family activities. The placement of a second computer or television in the teenagers' bedrooms meant that computer-related homework and entertainment took place more in a separate space.

Communication technologies also established networks which were distanced in space and time. The easy and regular contact between family members and friends locally and overseas built on and extended the notion of personal contact.

The roles of the teenagers and their parents in mediating reading and writing in Arabic and English were also changing. There were several features of the changes in mediation:

- The teenagers were generally the instigators or the excuse for the introduction of the new technologies in the homes. They also gained facility first and then took mediating roles with their parents and younger siblings.
- The expansion of the media domain in Arabic in the homes (FM/AM radio, cable TV and Arabic-language videos) was facilitated by the parents' oft-stated dislike of English-language media and its American influences. The

parents in many cases took on mediation roles in explaining formal spoken Arabic to the children.

- The establishment of Arabic community schools and the development of Arabic-language classes in day schools expanded the use of Arabic in the study domain. In some cases this led to teenagers taking on roles as mediators of literacy in Arabic.
- The establishment of mosques, churches and related community groups meant a greater role for religious and Qur'anic literacy in the homes, with many of the parents acting as mediators of this literacy.
- The role of siblings as mediators of English literacy for parents and younger siblings has been explored in the literature (Gregory 1993, 1996, 1997, 1998; Gregory and Williams 2000; Gregory *et al.* 2004). These mediation roles change as younger siblings move through school and parents have greater access to English through study and work.

## Discussion

The teenagers' literacy practices in this account are much more dynamic and complex than generally recognized, as global developments in technology are having the effect of extending and diversifying local literacy and language practices. It is not a situation in which minority literacy and language are stuck in a 'time warp', nor one in which they are being swamped by global developments or the majority culture. The finding that teenagers and children in ethnic minority contexts play an active role in mediating and negotiating languages and cultures is not a new one, and the notion of a tension between local and global developments is also common in the literature (Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1997; Appadurai 2002; Giddens 2002). The implications of these changes for the teenagers' sense of language, culture and identity in the future and for the schools they attend are worth exploring.

The most useful way to make sense of these changes is to take a standpoint that is local and very specific as well as global and involves a tension between the two. By 'local' I mean the way in which the changes keyed into very specific needs and tensions in everyday life. The teenagers have taken the new technologies and used them for very specific purposes: they use communication technologies such as email, chat rooms and messaging to create a network of friendships that is immediate but linked across space and time. Ali and his cousin would spend hours at the computer communicating through chat rooms. Such contact has put him in touch with Arabic-speaking teenagers all over the world in a way that few of his real-life involvements could do.

Such a view of change in social life and literacy practices also involves a shift in perceptions of culture. The teenagers in this study are growing up in suburbs with a very visible Arabic presence, but which are very different from the Lebanon of their parents: it is an environment that has been reconstructed in a totally different context. Appadurai (1996) uses the term 'deterritorialization' to describe this

re-enactment of practices outside their original homes. The cultural practices are relocalized in new specific cultural environments (Inda and Rosaldo 2002). Suzy and the other teenagers are part of an ethnic youth culture in their interests and preoccupations with rap and hip-hop. This culture, originally from black America, is mediated through global television and magazines and then reinterpreted by Muslim background teenagers in Sydney; Suzy has friends who are Muslim rappers. This view of culture is one of movement and interaction and 'entanglements' at local, regional and transnational levels (Clifford 1997).

These local changes are directly linked to global developments which encompass not just economics, but technology and culture (Giddens 2002). There is an inbuilt tension between the local and the global, what Brecher *et al.* (1993, in Clifford 1997) refer to as globalization from below paired with globalization from above. The same medium that purveys so much of American culture through the Internet and cable television also facilitates access to media from the Middle East and the establishment of bilingual and bicultural networking. The force of homogenization is also the instrument of diversity and heterogenization at the local level.

Understanding the changes in the teenagers' literacy practices in a local/global context has some very real advantages. Firstly, it places the changes in the context of developments taking place in communities world-wide. The experiences of these teenagers and their families are now common in a world where migration is increasing and an estimated 50 to 60 per cent of the population speaks more than one language (Grosjean 1982). This moves beyond the ways in which the 'minority' in ethnic minority is constructed as marginal. Taking account of literacy as social practice in the context of global social and technological change leads to a clearer understanding of the links between literacy, oracy and technology-mediated literacy.

What are the implications of these findings for the teenagers' schooling? It is inevitable that there exist differences in literacy practices between home and school. Different domains are characterized by different patternings of literacy. Discontinuities in themselves need not have explanatory value in terms of educational outcomes. The problem lies perhaps in the ways that home and school literacy practices are constructed, understood and interpreted. In the case of the four teenagers in this study there was not general awareness at the institutional level of the nature of family literacy practices. Admittedly there were teachers in each of the schools who did have this understanding and who used this knowledge in their teaching. However, the tendency in the schools was to hold a homogenized account of the teenagers and their families, as traditional and as lacking in literacy. In this way the home literacy practices assumed explanatory value for differential educational outcomes. One effect of this homogenizing of home literacy would be to set up a barrier between school literacy and home literacy. The teenagers could be constructed as non-readers and non-writers if they did not openly espouse the school-valued literacy practices. This could then lead to a situation of conflict in which school literacy would be implicated as a

means of control and management. Such conflict and tension would have the effect of limiting the ability of the school literacy itself to change and adapt. The tensions, which in the family context have the effect of facilitating change, in the school context have the effect of stifling change.



# Mediation in community and school literacy

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My uncle rings us and tells me, sometimes Sahar to go and read letters for him and tell him what they say. He can pick the bills, and the junk mail and even government letters but he hasn't got much idea what they say. He can't really read much.

Suzy's uncle was not able to deal with official correspondence in English and so he would ring the Elkheir household for Suzy, Sahar or one of the boys to help him. The situation of family members having networks to help each other to achieve reading and writing tasks was common. This chapter explores these networks of literacy, the many and changing roles that teenagers play and the ways in which literacy is mediated in the homes. It compares this with how literacy is mediated in the schools in two types of situation: one where teachers take on the role of transmitters of school discourse for students and can unconsciously deny students access to school literacy; the second where students and teachers share mediation roles. Networks, mediation and roles are key concepts in the New Literacy Studies. Although the term 'mediation' is generally linked with activity theory and sociocultural approaches to learning, the approach in this chapter is on mediation as a linguistic process, drawing on recent work on discourse roles taken in different literacy events (Baynham and Lobanga-Masing 2000; Gibbons 2003: 139).

## Mediation in the Elkheir family

Ahmed and Fatima Elkheir migrated to Australia from the south of Lebanon in 1982. Ahmed worked three jobs until he began work as a taxi driver in the 1990s. Fatima was 18 when she migrated to Australia. In her early years she felt quite isolated and it was only when the family returned to Lebanon in 1995 for an extended visit that she felt more settled in Australia.

When I came to Australia I was unhappy because I had to leave my family and relatives who were living in Lebanon. I was lonely and I knew no one here

except my husband. He was always working and I spent most of my time looking after my young children.

At the time of the study, Fatima's eldest daughter, Maryam, was married. Suzy, 16, and Sahar, 15, attended Kotara High School along with their brother Ali, 14; the youngest, Muhamad, 11, was attending a local primary school. Sahar and Suzy were involved in sport and music activities outside the home and Sahar and Muhamad were also studying at a local Arabic community language school. As in many bilingual families, different experiences and needs meant that children and parents and extended family members possessed different levels of expertise and knowledge in reading and writing in English and Arabic. Fatima Elkheir was only able to spend a short time in school in Lebanon because of the disruption of the war and also because of the need to help take care of her family and younger siblings. Although Fatima was fluent in spoken Arabic she could not read and write it. Ahmed Elkheir had developed English literacy through his work as a taxi driver. He had also developed Qur'anic literacy in Lebanon and had kept this up through his mosque attendance and study in Australia. Suzy, Sahar and their brothers were dominant in English and relied on reading and writing in English. Sahar, unlike most of the teenagers in the study, had developed literacy in Arabic from the time she had attended school in Lebanon during the family visit and from her continued study at the community school in Australia. Sahar described her stay in Lebanon five years before when she was forced to speak Arabic all the time and her 'jaw hurt' at the end of each day from making the sounds in Arabic.

Suzy, Sahar and Ali all helped their mother with literacy tasks in English. Sahar described how she read the signs and information when shopping with Fatima. Suzy and Sahar also accompanied their mother on visits to doctors and other public places. The teenagers played a role with official correspondence and dealing with bills. They acted as mediators between home and school, writing letters such as notes explaining school absence and signing permission notes for themselves or their siblings. This role was a constant cause of friction with the school, with teachers complaining that the girls intercepted mail home and mistranslated or destroyed letters and reports that were meant for the parents. Suzy had got into trouble for 'forging' a permission note to attend a school excursion. The Elkheir family was unusual in that Sahar also played a role in helping her mother with reading and writing in Arabic.

Sahar and her mother are sitting at the kitchen table going through the letter from Mrs Elkheir's mother in Lebanon. It is a Thursday afternoon after school. Sahar is reading the letter in Arabic while Fatima Elkheir is looking at the letter and nodding. Fatima throws in comments in Arabic about the news in the letter. Sahar says in English, 'Hang on. There's more to come. I can't read it when you're talking.' After they had read the letter Mrs Elkheir takes it and folds it up, puts it in her pocket to keep in safekeeping in her room. She asks Sahar to write a response and goes to the kitchen bench to get the pad

and pen. She then starts dictating slowly in Arabic, repeating sentences so that Sahar can get it down. The whole event finishes before Ahmed comes in from his shift.

(Fieldnotes)

Ahmed Elkheir helped his children with their school and community school homework. This happened more often when Suzy and Sahar were in primary school and petered out by the time the girls reached Year 9 in secondary school. Maryam, the eldest sister, had also played a key role, along with members of the extended family, in the development of literacy for Suzy, Sahar and their brothers. Sahar's early memories of learning to read and write were of Maryam and her mother teaching her.

My mum used to tell me stories but Maryam used to read them to me. Maryam had an ABC book and she taught me the alphabet and the numbers 1 to 100. She got me and Suzy to read the cereal boxes in the morning and she made us count the fruit when my father brought home boxes from the markets. When I was in first class, it was Maryam that taught me running writing. Mum used to speak to me always in Arabic because she's not that good in English. She used to tell me stories and teach me poems and all sorts of things.

Suzy, Sahar and Ali all gave accounts of other relatives telling and reading them stories and also showing them how to write. Sahar's memories of learning to read and write in Arabic, however, were school based.

When I went to Lebanon with my parents I learned how to read and write in Arabic. The teachers in Lebanon were a little strict and that's why I learned really well. Now I appreciate having the two languages.

Parental mediation in religious literacy was important. Both parents were Shi'a Muslim and Ahmed used to read the Qur'an and the books of the prophets to his children especially during the month of Ramadan. He would read in Arabic and then explain to them in English. On Fridays he sometimes took his children to prayers at the mosque. Ahmed used to give his children summaries in English of the Arabic proceedings. At times the sheikh would also come over and explain in English to Muhamad, Ali and others what was happening. Ahmed had organized for a local imam to come to his house and give his children religious instruction. Ahmed had taken on the role of mediator of Arabic/Qu'ranic literacy, accepting his children's decision not to attend the Arabic community schools.

*Suzy:* Me, Ali, Sahar and Muhamad, we went there for two years [to the community school].

*Ahmed:* The problem is, she went a couple of times and the teacher hit her. She never went back again, scared of the teacher. I tried to push her

because, if you learn, you read all the books in Arabic . . . now in the house we don't speak Arabic, speak English because it's easier. Even for me it's easier to speak English.

### **Literacy networks and roles in Arabic-speaking families**

The complex patterns of literacy roles, networks and mediation in the Elkheir family were mirrored in many of the 20 families in the study. The most striking feature was how the networks of literacy mediation involved extended family members: grandparents, uncles and aunts all figured in accounts of literacy events. Within the immediate family, older siblings played key roles in the development of literacy with younger siblings and in the reading and writing tasks of the household in general. In 11 of the households there were examples of teenagers acting as literacy mediators in English for parents, mainly mothers. Five of the mothers, for example, had had no access to education in Lebanon and needed help in both English and Arabic literacy tasks. Many parents relied on children for help when official correspondence arrived and teenagers dealt with correspondence as a matter of course. In one or two cases parents called on teenagers when the language demands were specialized, such as in tax returns. Although Hassan Karam had a high level of English, he relied on his son Tariq when completing his tax return because of the expertise Tariq had developed in his job as a manager at McDonald's.

In 12 of the households, parents on occasions acted as mediators in literacy for teenagers. Six parents reported explaining and helping with homework in English on a regular basis. In general, however, parents tended to help less with homework than reported in other studies (Freebody *et al.* 1995; Cairney and Ruge 1997; Barton and Hamilton 1998) and the help that was given was more in geography, Arabic study and projects rather than in mathematics and English.

Many of the teenagers were studying Arabic, but did not have the literacy skills of their parents. Nine parents reported helping teenagers with homework in Arabic, and in five households parents acted as literacy mediators in teaching the children about religion. Mediation was not limited to Arabic and English but to French and, in one case, sign language. Joanne, one of Sahar's classmates, was fluent in Auslan.

I learned sign language from my brother who is deaf and he taught me most of the signs. I also learned from the sheets my brothers and I got when we went to sign language classes. The good thing about learning sign language is that we can have a conversation with someone deaf or someone who knows sign language and no one knows what we are talking about. The bad thing about sign language is that I am the best in my family, and every time someone is talking to my brother I have to interpret and it's very annoying. I can read sign language but not really write from it yet.

Mediation could be mutual. Hanna Mougraby, for example, had literacy skills in Arabic but not in English. Her daughter Lena had literacy skills in English but not in Arabic. When Lena accompanied her mother to the local Arabic-speaking doctor, both literacies were required. Hanna was helped with the official government medical claim forms by Lena and the receptionist. Much of the medical information that the doctor had was in Arabic and so Hanna and the doctor would explain to Lena. Many of the teenagers and adults were part of interdependent relationships or social networks characterized by reciprocal exchange where individuals in the network had skills in different areas.

The roles in mediating literacy were based on previous experiences and present life circumstances rather than simply on age or gender. The mothers' (and sometimes fathers') lack of access to education meant that the teenagers often took on roles as mediators of English-language literacy. The labour market patterns in Australia of part-time low-paid employment also meant that teenagers and mothers tended to be those in employment. In many cases, it was the mothers such as Fadya Ibrahim or Hala Bashir who had responsibility for tasks involving financial and official literacy in English.

The patterns of literacy roles in the families were much more diverse and extensive than generally reported. The accepted account for mainstream families is the mother inducting children into literacy through bedtime stories, the mother dealing with personal correspondence, and the father writing cheques and taking care of financial literacy. Migrant families are additionally characterized in terms of the children being responsible for literacy tasks involving English. In practice, literacy roles extended beyond any notion of nuclear family to grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts. Older siblings played key roles in literacy development of younger siblings (Gregory 1997, 1998; Gregory and Williams 2000; Gregory *et al.* 2004). Both parents and children and other relatives played roles in mediating English- and Arabic-language literacy.

Literacy roles and mediation in the multilingual home contexts tended to be dynamic, reflecting the broader community and societal changes. One example of this was the parental role in fostering and mediating Arabic-language and religious literacy. Parents took pride in their roles as mediators of Arabic literacy, but also admitted the burden of this role. As Hanna Tabber stated, 'the home is not enough'. Many parents felt that this role was not valued by the children, reporting that the absence of effective educational support outside the home had meant that too much of this burden rested on them. In fact, several parents gave as one of the reasons for trips to Syria or Lebanon the development of the children's spoken and written Arabic. The widening gap between schools and home as children moved into secondary schools also led to changing parental roles in school-based literacy. Fadya Ibrahim and Mohamad Zohair reported problems in trying to help their children with school projects, when they had attempted to help children locate information in bookshops and libraries and had to give up when they were not able to find a main source. The schools had set the projects with multiple sources in mind and so the roles of the parents as mediators were

not successful because of the differing notions of what constituted information skills.

Fatima Elkheir began a basic literacy course at the local technical college when Suzy and Sahar were in secondary school because she was not comfortable relying on her children. Fatima had made Suzy and Sahar promise not to tell people about this. Like many of the parents, Fatima Elkheir had not attended much school in Lebanon. She had lived in a village in the south of Lebanon and had to work from an early age to help her parents in their tobacco farming. Although she had been in Australia for some 20 years, with the demands of raising the family had never really had the chance to learn English or to read and write.

Literacy roles were not static because family members attempted to change situations they were not happy with. The notions of network and roles in multi-lingual contexts need to go beyond a characterization simply as the sharing of skills, as they involve values, attitudes and different relationships of power (Malan 1996). Being the mediator of literacy may be both pleasurable and burdensome. Joanne Kairouz was proud of her Auslan skills but also resented the expectation that she would always carry out mediation tasks. Suzy and Sahar admitted that they did not tell others about the help they gave their mother in English literacy because they felt it would not be understood. The mediation of English-language literacy also brought them into conflict with the school. There was a sense of shame that some of the parents also expressed in not having English literacy skills, a sense of shame that was particular to the Australian context. Many parents described family situations in Lebanon where the possession of literacy skills was a source of pride, but the lack of this knowledge was commonplace.

The networks of literacy that operated in the community were largely invisible to the school. The roles that teenagers took on were generally not acknowledged or were seen as problematic. Steve, the year coordinator at Kotara, explained:

You know the Arabic translation for lazy, for truancy, for not doing homework is all 'good'. Whenever I sent letters home I know they would be intercepted. 'It's a letter from the school, Mum.' 'What does it say?' 'Oh, nothing much. I'm going good.'

## **Vignettes of literacy in school contexts**

### ***Language class in community school: Year 9 group of Arabic-speaking girls***

The students filed in and were greeted in Arabic followed by an English greeting by Mrs Karam, the teacher. Mrs Karam then asked the students to take out their books. This was said in Arabic and then repeated in English. The homework had been to write a dialogue in Arabic the night before. After a short discussion, Mrs Karam then started going through the homework,

constructing a dialogue on the board. ‘Okay, what do you say first in a restaurant?’ she asked in English. Students gave the Arabic phrase. Mrs Karam gave feedback to students in English: ‘Good.’ She then repeated the phrase in Arabic and in English as she wrote it on the board in Arabic. Once this was completed after 20 minutes, Mrs Karam got the girls to copy the dialogue into their books. Then she walked up the back of the room and sat next to a group of girls. From there she asked the girls to close their books. She borrowed an exercise book from the girls closest to her and read out the first sentence in Arabic. ‘Who can write this for me on the board?’ She nominated a student. Mrs Karam repeated words in Arabic for the student. She then asked in English if the sentence was correct. At times other students came up and added corrections. Once the sentence was written, each student had to translate into English. The girls enjoyed the lesson and she obviously had a good relationship with the students. There were side conversations and banter between Mrs Karam and the students during the class. Finally, Mrs Karam wrote some sentences in Arabic on the board for the students to copy and translate as homework. She gave instructions in English about what students had to do and then went through and read each sentence in Arabic followed by an English translation. This pattern of Arabic followed by English translation was adhered to throughout the lesson. Mrs Karam explained to me after the lesson that the students’ level of Arabic was low and she had to do most of her work in English. She also apologized that the lesson was difficult for me to follow because I had little Arabic. It wasn’t difficult because everything had been translated.

(Fieldnotes)

This pattern in Arabic-language lessons was very common, where teachers would rely mainly on English for classroom interaction and translate into English every sentence or phrase in Arabic. The effect for the students was that they could and did wait for any English translation of Arabic. The not-so-hidden curriculum was that students were not expected to develop and use Arabic in the classroom. There was a friendliness and openness between teacher and students. Despite the student control of the text during the lesson and the teacher being a participant in the interaction, the students had no direct role in using, initiating or controlling the use of the language of the text, Arabic. The negotiation of meaning was carried out entirely in English. Through translation of the Arabic into English it was assumed that the gap (supposed or real) between the students’ language and the school language would be bridged.

### ***School assembly: Bellevue High School***

Andrew, the principal, is addressing a school assembly, holding a letter from the Department of Education banning the possession of knives in schools.

This document was sent by the legal department [holds it up] . . . The possession of knives on Department of School Education premises. [Reading out letter] Summary Offences Act. It provides for a number of offences dealing with offensive weapons on or near school premises . . . Principals are reminded further that \$5,500 penalty will be applied. [Students whistle; principal breaks off and addresses students] That fellow whistling is an idiot but if he stops whistling no one will know he's an idiot. [Silence] Tewfik, just stand over there. [Student stands up and walks to side of hall; principal resumes reading] There are restrictions on the use of other instruments, for example cutlery. Teachers have the power to search bags . . . [When reading is completed, he holds letter down and addresses students] . . . So, boys, what that means is, if you have a lump of wood or sharpened object, as far as the law is concerned you have the responsibility to prove you would not use it for any offensive purposes.

Andrew relies on the power of the text and its formal language to make his point. The language is highly nominalized with much use of the passive voice and formal lexis, very much 'essayist literacy' (Gee 1996). Even when he gives a summary at the end, the language, apart from the noun 'lump', is still formal. He uses the address 'boys' to gain attention and then uses the personal 'you' to 'translate' the message. Andrew remains standing in the one position whilst students are seated on the ground in the school canteen. He keeps possession of the letter throughout and his role is one of translator or scribe. In this example, translation/transmission is operating across orders of discourse. The mediator, the principal, is using the text and its language to establish the authority of the department edict. Even though the relationships between mediator and participants in this event and in the Arabic-language class are complete opposites, the transmission aspect of the mediation is the same.

### ***Geography class in Islamic College***

In the following example, the students were working through a map and an accompanying bar graph of Sydney showing the demographic distribution of ethnic/language groups. Students each had a copy of the text and were answering a set of written questions with the teacher. The teacher, Iqbal, is of Pakistani Muslim background; the students were mostly Australian-born of Arabic-speaking Muslim backgrounds.

*Teacher:* Okay, look at question 4 . . . 'Based on what you have looked at so far, is there a general distribution pattern of migrants in Australia's capital cities? Write a short description of where people born overseas tend to locate, taking into account your answers to questions 1 and 3.' You tell me where migrants settle. [Walking from teacher's desk around the room]



*Student 1:* Where it's cheap and there's housing.

*Student 2:* Where they find work easily.

*Teacher:* Why do you think our population lives in Kotara? [Spoken from back of room]

*Student 3:* Religion.

*Student 4:* Most near the mosque.

*Student 5:* Shops.

*Teacher:* Support services, yes. [Waits for students to write answers; walks around to check]

Iqbal reads the question from the textbook, looking over a student's shoulder. The question is highly nominalized: two sentences contain two embedded clauses and two finite verbs, 'is' and 'write'. There is high lexical density and all the nouns are of Latinate origin. Iqbal then translates 'general distribution pattern of migrants' and 'where people born overseas tend to locate' into 'where migrants settle'. Student responses are short and elliptical, typical of spoken language. Iqbal's next question is foregrounded: 'Why do you think . . .?' He uses pronouns to indicate solidarity – '*our* population' – and relates it to knowledge of the Muslim community in Kotara that the students would have. He also uses the subject term 'population' instead of 'people' or 'they'. The student responses are then given a superordinate term, the subject-specific term 'support services'. Iqbal interprets the written text to students' language and then guides the response for writing.

He vacates his 'power spot' (McLaren 1986), the space in the room from which the lesson is normally delivered. His second question was delivered from the back of the room, leaving open the physical and linguistic space for students to participate. He then walked around helping students individually, indicating that individual responses were accepted instead of a single one delivered by the teacher. Students were the ones with control of the text, not the teacher. The relationship between the teacher and students in this class was what would be called traditional, with the teacher initiating and controlling most of the interaction. What is noticeable, however, is that there is a reworking of the text in which students play a key part. The students have the text; the teacher reads it out and turns it into more spoken language. The students answer and the teacher recasts the answers into more formal language and then the students rework this language into a written answer. The expectation is that students will and do have control over the formal discourse.

## **The registers of school-based language**

What is 'school discourse'? Any description is an idealization in the same way that descriptions of the language of speech and writing are. There is, however, a large body of evidence from corpora which characterize the grammatical and discourse features of the written and formal spoken language used in school contexts

(Horowitz and Samuels 1987; Halliday 1989; Halliday and Martin 1993; Schleppegrell 2001). The construct of the mode continuum has been used to describe the different orders of discourse in school between oral language expressing firsthand experience and written language describing academic knowledge. At one end of the continuum the language is contextualized and spoken, describing action taking place; at the other end is language that is formal and written, separated by time and place from what is being described. The usefulness of a linguistic-based characterization, such as the mode continuum, is that it goes beyond a simplistic dichotomy of speech and writing to account for the contextual basis of linguistic features. The language used in written communication (such as emails, messaging and notes) is often very informal and characteristic of speech. The language used in oral communication (such as speeches, and dialogue with a difference in power) is often very text-like. The features of school-based texts are as follows:

- a high lexical density with much specific and technical lexis;
- nominalization and the use of extended noun phrases through modifiers, relative clauses and prepositional phrases;
- fewer clauses with logical links indicated through nominal, verbal or adverbial expressions.

One problem in defining a reified school discourse is glossing over discipline-specific differences. In technics, for example, the subject-specific language is not just Latinate, but consists of many Anglo-Saxon origin terms such as ‘cook’, ‘stir’, ‘shred’ and ‘spoonful’, lexis which is equally difficult for second-language learners. Any generalization of subject discourse needs to draw, amongst other things, on the language of classroom texts, of school syllabus and curriculum documents and of classroom interaction. In this section the notion of the mode continuum is taken as a working model to describe the switching and translation from the formal end of the language continuum to the informal language of students’ everyday talk (Gibbons 2003).

## **Classroom mediation**

The lessons in this chapter were chosen from a data sample of 93 lessons in five secondary schools attended by the teenagers in the study. They were representative in terms of the lesson structures and lesson content and also of the different approaches to mediation. In the first lesson, an English class, Ben uses known-answer questions but does not provide structured guidance to develop understanding. His use of translation acts as a barrier. The second teacher, Sophie, a technics teacher, uses a range of written texts and oral strategies to reshape and structure student discourse and understanding. These analyses are not intended as a critique of any general ‘progressive’ or ‘traditional’ teaching methods. The same teachers use different strategies in different contexts. The argument is rather

for an exploration of the different discourse roles that mediation is realized by in the school context.

### **Teacher as translator**

Ben has been teaching English for 12 years and is the newly appointed head teacher at Bellevue Boys'. He has been trying to implement an outcomes-based approach at the school. The class is the top Year 9 English class and the lesson is a review lesson in creative writing leading up to the half-yearly exam. There are 23 students in the class, including Ahmad Zohair. In the front row sit Chinese-/Vietnamese- and some Arabic-speakers. The back two rows are mainly Arabic-speaking students.

Ben begins the lesson by calling the roll, settling the class down and making announcements. The tone is formal and the speech is measured and rhetorical.

*Ben:* Your attention, please, gentlemen. Ali Seifedine? [Looks around and pauses and then calls the roll]

...

*Student:* Sir, do we get our test results?

*Ben:* No, we're going to talk about that. [Then to class] Books out, bags off desk. Two things [holds up fingers; class settles]. First thing. Is there a boy named Sep here? [Students look around for Sep] No, because he's been suspended for two days. He insulted a female teacher. He said things he shouldn't have . . . things against the rules.

*Students:* Which teacher, sir? Miss McKenzie?

*Teacher:* I wasn't going to tell you but since you already know.

*Students:* What did he say?

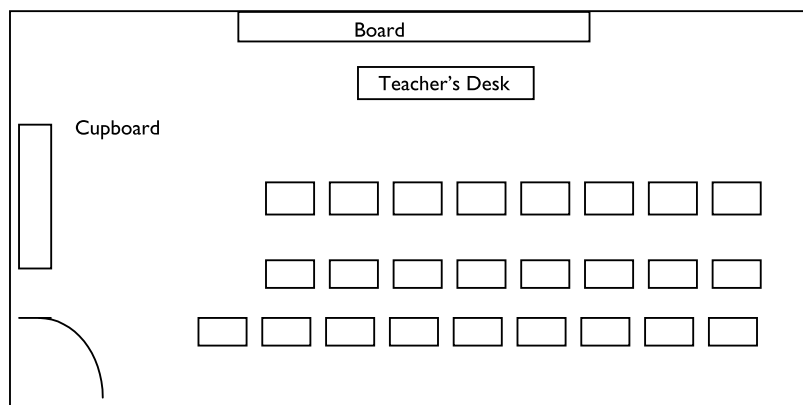


Figure 4.1 Ben's classroom.

- Teacher:* [ignoring question] [To class] Mr James has asked him to give a public apology after his two-day suspension.
- Student:* Will he get fined any money? I thought he'd get fined \$5,000. [Student had confused announcement made in assembly about knives]
- Teacher:* Next time he will apologize in front of everybody. Second thing. Mr James is inviting parents to follow their sons around the classes. The reason is because parents will become aware of when their son's behaviour is not good.

The talk is very one-way and is delivered from his power spot next to the teacher's desk. The teacher asks one question, a rhetorical one. He responds twice to student questions and ignores another question. He engages students first by the combination of ellipsis ('Two things') and the use of gesture and then by asking them about the student suspended. The message is implicit, that the boys should take the example as a lesson not to insult female teachers. The second point is also foregrounded. The behaviour issue is stated in terms of 'sons' generally, not the particular students in the class. The use of 'you' would be interpreted as a specific accusation that would need to be answered.

The language is formal. Students are addressed as 'gentlemen' and referred to in the third person: 'their sons', 'a boy named Sep'. The student's question using 'we' for the class is answered by the teacher using 'we' for teacher and class. There is evidence of nominalization ('public apology after his two-day suspension', 'The reason is'). The choice of lexis is also formal ('become aware of', 'inviting parents', 'public apology'). There is little modality ('should' and 'perhaps', 'will') and high polarity. The pattern of interaction is, as would be expected, one-sided and the effect of the language is to distance students. Ben then launches into the lesson proper in which he switches to a more conversational register in introducing the lesson.

- Teacher:* Righto, guys, last week I asked you blokes to write me a story. The story had to have eight words in it. [Looks around inviting answers]
- Students:* Submarine . . . stormy weather . . . radio.
- Student:* I know. I know . . . explosion.
- Students:* Cap, black cap.
- Teacher:* What about this? [Mimes a whistle]
- Student:* Blow . . .
- Teacher:* Whistle.
- Student:* Bearded man . . .
- Teacher:* What about something mysterious?
- Students:* Oh, yeah, package.
- Student:* [to other student] I reckon that's the best story I've written. [Starts recounting what he wrote]
- Students:* [quiet talk whilst Ben writes on whiteboard]

The tenor is more familiar. Ben uses colloquial terms of address, 'you blokes' and 'guys', and a colloquial form of requesting attention, 'Righto'. The interaction pattern is participatory. He acknowledges responses by nodding and writing suggestions on the whiteboard. Ben then writes the numbers 1 to 20 vertically on the board with the grades A, B and C to the left. He explains that the students' writing is B or C level, not A, and that he is going to show them how to attain an A grade. He then asks the students for the features of a good composition. He is planning to get answers which relate to ideas, style and structure and instead deals with the answers of punctuation and clichés.

*Ben:* Now, what are the major problems? What things stop you getting an A?

*Student:* Punctuation?

*Ben:* Yeah, punctuation. [Writes 'PUNCTUATION' on board] It's like the road rules. You can drive but if you don't know the rules it doesn't work. If you don't use standard punctuation . . . What's the function of the comma?

*Student:* It's a break . . . like you're going on to something else.

*Ben:* [nods] I had one student, he wrote me a sentence with 11 full stops. That's like with the road rules . . . you only know drive on the left-hand side. He didn't stop at road signs. He didn't stop at roundabouts. He just kept going because all he knew was drive on the left-hand side. [To talkers] Hey, guys! What else are we going to think about? How to write a story. We're going to think about complication . . . We're going to think about resolution . . . Remember those words. [Writes 'STYLE' and 'STRUCTURE' on board. Pause]

*Student:* Clitches.

*Ben:* [looking at student quizzically]

*Student:* Clitches.

*Ben:* How do you spell it?

*Student:* C-L-I-C-H-E-S.

*Ben:* Clichés [students laugh]. [To students laughing] You're so smart. Tell me what it is. Well, come on . . . at least he's heard of it. [To student] That's good but it's more Year 10 work . . . leave it till later. It's way down the track.

The questions follow the typical pattern of questioning in the lesson, one-word answers with definitions. Ben picks up on the student's answer and writes it on the board whilst asking for a definition. He then elaborates on the answer, giving an example to clarify for the class. He writes up the answers he wanted without explanation and then gives examples of structure, again without explanation. He clarifies and corrects a student's suggestion of clichés, and tells students it is work they will do in the next year. There is obviously at this stage a gap between the teacher's and the students' understanding of the lesson. The problem of the

features of a good composition has been framed in a context of formal, external assessment. Students answer in terms of their own understanding of assessment. When a student offers 'Punctuation', Ben elaborates with the road rule example. He translates the key term into what he perceives as the students' level of understanding. The language is informal with high solidarity. Students are referred to as 'guys' and 'you' and 'we'. Sentences are short, clauses frequent. Within the space of the short text, Ben introduces the terms 'resolution', 'complication', 'style', 'structure' and 'clichés', all without explanation, paraphrase or build-up. These Latin-/Greek-origin words are at odds with the rest of the language in the text. Their presence compounds the gap constructed between students' understanding and the language of the teacher. This pattern of interspersing the subject-specific terminology into a speech style marked by colloquialism and solidarity is repeated. Ben next goes on to discuss the role of ideas in writing.

*Ben:* I'll say there's one other thing. Here's something I can't teach you. [To students talking] If you're not interested take a hike. [Writes 'IDEAS' on board, circles word and points to it] [To class] Where do these come from?

*Students:* TV ... radio ... media ... other people ... you hear them. Newspapers.

*Ben:* [Ben writes up 'TV', 'radio', 'newspapers' in semantic map around 'IDEAS'] Hey, guys, you've forgotten one. You guys have no idea of getting in the A range until you read newspapers ... You make a decision consciously not to read and you consciously tell yourself not to get in the A range. [Points to board] You don't have a repertoire of ideas.

*Student:* What's that, sir?

*Teacher:* Repertoire ... it's a range, a bank of ideas. If ... put your hand up if you speak another language ... hand up if you read in that language ... if you speak to your parents about what you read ...

Ben introduces the notion of 'ideas' as part of the key feature of good writing. He accepts students' suggestions and adds 'books' and 'newspapers' and exhorts them to read newspapers. The assumption is that they are not newspaper readers but have to become readers to succeed in gaining ideas. The term 'repertoire' is introduced and then explained when a student asks the meaning. The language is still marked by solidarity. The student, however, addresses the teacher as 'sir'. The lesson continues in the same way, with terms such as 'an abstract', 'technique' and 'content' being similarly used and then passed over or explained.

In this lesson the teacher's discourse constructed a gap between student understanding and the discipline knowledge. The features of a good composition – style, structure, ideas, technique and content – framed the starting point for the lesson. These features were then translated in ways the students could understand. Language characteristic of writing was used to express the important

information. The role of the teacher was discipline knowledge for non-experts. The non-experts were constructed as outsiders gaining ownership of the subject-specific language and knowledge. The language was marked by solidarity and fairly high participation. On the surface it is a democratic, collaborative classroom. The role of the teacher can be characterized as making clear the expectations of what constitutes successful composition writing; translating these concepts and discourse into the students' language; and clarifying what students must do if they choose to assimilate the concepts and discourse. The actual text being referred to during the class is not evident. This text is the ideal essay. The unsuccessful versions of these, the students' own essays, remain in the control of the teacher during the lesson. The text-based language is used and translated by the teacher, and the students are exhorted to use it. At no time during the lesson are the students given any control or ownership of this discourse. This summary is not intended as a criticism. Ben is a popular teacher and is respected by both colleagues and students as professional and caring. In this lesson, he had planned an overview of the features of a good composition and was aware of the problems in this lesson.

### **Mediating text and talk**

Sophie is demonstrating the cooking of a hamburger to her Year 9 class. The students watch and take notes on the demonstration and, in the following lesson, work from their own recipes and notes to make hamburgers. Sophie has been at the school for six years. There are 14 girls seated around two benches. An overhead projector set up at the front displays the recipe. Sophie is next to this at the front with her ingredients and utensils, working at the stove. There is also a teacher's aide in the class for a deaf student. Only the students can see the overhead projection, and Sophie is relying on their giving her instructions from this. The reading aloud has a dual purpose of instructing her and also bringing the knowledge into the classroom arena.

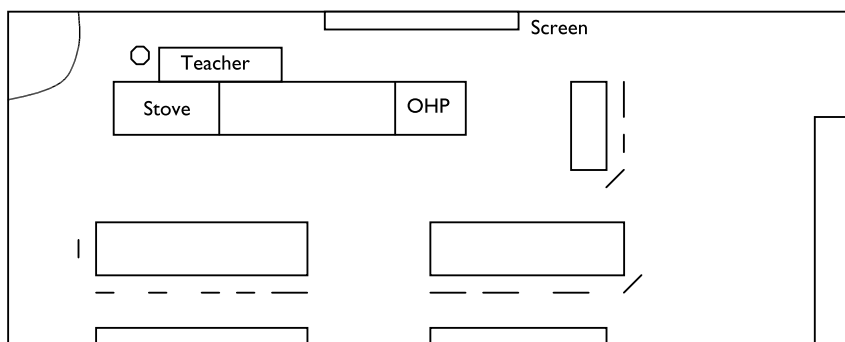


Figure 4.2 Sophie's classroom.

Table 4.1 Classroom talk

Spoken text	Written text – OHP
Teacher: I'll explain all as we go through. Who would like to read?	Cooking a hamburger
Student: [reading] Cooking a hamburger . . . ingredients . . . four slices of bread, three-quarters of a cup of evaporated milk, one kilogram of quality mince.	Ingredients Four slices bread 3/4 cup evaporated milk 1 kg quality mince
Teacher: [interrupting as she holds up each ingredient] Now, I'm only making one hamburger so you have to divide everything in half . . . so half a kilo of mince [nods to student].	[Students copy OHP] 2 tsp salt Pinch of mustard
Student: Two teaspoons of salt, pinch of mustard, two eggs, quarter of a teaspoon of . . . Wo –	2 eggs 1/4 tsp Worcestershire sauce
Teacher: Worcestershire sauce.	1 small onion
Student: One small onion.	
Teacher: I chose this recipe because it's quick, easy and nutritious . . . Let's read through the method or procedure . . . Angeline?	Procedure Chop onion finely. Lightly beat the egg.
Student: Chop the onion finely . . .	With wet hands make ingredients compact and shape into equal sized patties.
Teacher: I'm going to use half an onion . . . Okay, it tells us to chop the onion <i>finely</i> . . . It's important to wash your hands now.	Grill.
Student: Miss, what's the egg for?	
Students: Oh, it's ****.	
Teacher: Who can tell me? . . . Please, there's too much calling out.	
Student: It keeps everything together.	
Teacher: [nods] You'll have one egg between four of you, so write down measuring jug as a utensil . . .	
Student: Lightly beat the egg.	
Teacher: [repeating] Okay, lightly beat and then divide your egg. We'll only need a quarter of that. Now make sure . . . What did we say the role of the egg was?	
Student: Keeps together.	
Teacher: Yes, it binds the meat . . .	
. . .	
Student: [reading recipe] With wet hands make ingredients compact and shape into equal sized patties.	
Teacher: [repeating] With your hands make it into a ball. Make it compact. So that's a beef patty [showing students]. Put it on your metal plate. So what does the recipe say?	
Student: Grill.	
Teacher: We need to grill our meat under what?	



Sophie gets the students to prepare their exercise books in which they will be noting down under headings the ingredients, utensils and procedure for cooking their individual hamburgers. She then gets them to read out the instructions for her to follow.

The students instruct the teacher from the recipe. The teacher repeats the directives, giving the demonstration. There is structured turn taking with students completing the teacher's sentences. At the same time students fill in their own recipes in their exercise books. Sophie cleans up and puts the meat on to cook, and then directs the students to a set of questions on the overhead projector, under the recipe, asking students which food group the ingredients belong to. They read and answer the questions together. The final lesson episode is when students have to complete a cooking work plan which involves the timing of each step. The language is a mixture of text language and informal spoken. Even though the lexis is of Anglo-Saxon origin, it is very much the subject-specific language. It is marked by the use of imperatives, lists of ingredients, specific verbs such as 'grill' and 'slice', circumstances such as 'lightly' and 'finely', and terms such as 'procedure', 'utensils' and 'ingredients'. There are many examples of the teacher reframing students' answers and reinforcing the language. Sophie glosses 'procedure' with 'method' and redirects the student question about the egg as 'What did we say the role of the egg was?' She reinforces a student's 'keeps together' with 'binds' and gives visual explanations of 'compact' and 'chop finely'. In the example in Table 4.2, the teacher and class are jointly negotiating a work plan which involves writing out the instructions with suggested timing.

Students are composing their written texts with the teacher using the subject-specific lexis from the earlier parts of the lesson. In this lesson, the students were in charge of the text, giving instructions to the teacher. At the same time students were taking notes for their own cooking. The second episode involved students reading and answering questions on the recipe. The third episode involved the

Table 4.2 Classroom talk

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<i>Teacher:</i> So our first . . . Next to step 1, I just put 8.55. So how long do you think it would take us? So all the time it takes us.	Writes on work plan on board '8.55', on pro forma which is divided into steps.
<i>Students:</i> Five minutes, ten minutes.	Writes 'Prepare ingredients'.
<i>Teacher:</i> I'd say ten minutes for our ingredients so it takes us to . . .	Students copy.
<i>Student:</i> 9 o'clock.	Writes '9.00. Lightly mix ingredients and then stir in eggs with a fork.'
<i>Teacher:</i> So step 1 . . .	Students copy.
<i>Student:</i> Lightly mix ingredients together and then stir in eggs with a fork.	Writes '9.05'.
<i>Teacher:</i> How long would you say for that?	
<i>Student:</i> Five minutes, miss.	
<i>Teacher:</i> Mm . . .	

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joint negotiation of more detailed individual work plans. The teacher accepted students' non-discipline-discourse explanations but introduced and reinforced the subject-specific language. There was much talk around text and switching between text and talk. The use of the texts at all stages had a purpose clear to the students. Texts were foregrounded in different ways during the lesson. The role of the teacher in this lesson could be characterized as facilitator/explainer of the subject knowledge contained in the texts, making explicit the conventions/discourse of the discipline. Students were put in the position of having control over this content and language. In a conversation after the lesson Sophie justified her approach.

These girls don't use recipes at home. They learn from their mothers by watching . . . but they have to learn to use recipes. If they want to cook anything new, anything different, they have to learn different ways and that's what I'm teaching them.

## Summary

Although the mediation of literacy in school contexts was quite varied with teachers and students taking on different roles in different contexts and within interactions, several common features emerged. When teachers took on the role as translators of text, the real or supposed gap between the text and the students was reinforced. The role of translator of school discourse was independent of the teacher-student relationship, occurring in classrooms where there was both high solidarity and high distance between teacher and students. This is confirmed by two pictures emerging from studies of working-class classrooms: one marked by distance and conflict, another by high solidarity and close relationships between teacher and students, and yet both characterized by low student outcomes. Zevenbergen (1995) reported differences in middle-class and working-class mathematics classroom discourse. Middle-class discourse was characterized by distance and little student participation but high teacher expectations. Working-class classroom discourse was characterized by solidarity and turn taking, but low teacher expectations. The key difference was whether teacher expectations were that students gain control over the discourse in interactions with mode shifts and student control and reworking of school-based discourse.

## Contrast between home and school mediation

In home contexts, teenagers took roles in mediating texts for others. Such roles were complex and changing in response to the changes in daily life. These roles as mediators of English, technology and in some cases Arabic literacy were not acknowledged in school contexts. Gregory *et al.* (2004) in their studies of mediation involving young children in multilingual home, school and community

contexts described ‘children’s learning being expertly scaffolded and children expertly scaffolding the learning of others, in ways that are not typically recognized, understood or valued in schools’ (2004: 221).

In the school contexts the mediation role was vested in the teachers, and students rarely acted as mediators of literacy: peer tutoring and group work were not common. In Suzy and Sahar’s classes there were good student–teacher relationships. Classes in Ahmad Zohair’s school were characterized more often by conflict and resistance. In both schools, students saw themselves as not being academically successful or as having control of the school discourse.

### **What can be learned from mediation in out-of-school contexts**

Teaching *Macbeth* here is different to all my previous schools. We read it all through in class. The boys are going around the school reciting passages to each other . . . ‘when Birnam Wood to Dunsinane doth come’ . . . it is the first time I have read the whole play in class and also the first time the students have memorized so much of the text.

Eric, a teacher at Islamic College, echoed the responses of many teachers in day schools to practices observed in community and religious schools. In many classes there was little positive feedback to students; teachers relied on memorization and repetition. There was a strong initial focus on oral memory, and text often played the role of memory aid. Choral reading, listening to teacher reading and oral reading around the class were the ways in which meaning was taken from text. Such approaches could be called ‘traditional’ and there are many parallels with research into preferred teaching/learning styles in Qur’anic literacy and Arabic-speaking countries. One teacher explained his approach by saying that the students needed to know the work before they could discuss it.

Gregory and others have borrowed the term ‘syncretism’ from anthropology and applied it to literacy studies to describe the ways in which cultural practices are creatively transformed from different sources. Gregory studied siblings playing schools and analysed the ways they combined culturally different teaching routines from day and community schools into their games. The teenagers in this study were negotiating a range of language and literacy practices and roles, modes and registers outside the school.

Awareness of these roles and practices on the part of the schools would have several results:

- collaborative mediation in school literacy with more varied roles for students;
- greater inclusion of students’ linguistic and cultural knowledge;
- a focus on how to give access to and ownership of the discourses of learning.

## Chapter 5

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# Conflict and control

## Literacy as management

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*Steve:* Sir, why do we have to write this?

*Abmad:* I hate writing.

[Patrick jumps up, knocking over his chair]

*Teacher:* Patrick!

*Patrick:* He's farted, sir.

*Fouad:* Doesn't he stink, sir?

*Omar:* He's just farted, sir.

[Omar comes out to adjust the OHP. The top part of the second column is hidden. He places the OHP on a chair and moves it back and then adjusts the focus]

*Teacher:* Omar, sit down.

*Omar:* I can't see.

*Teacher:* Okay, get your work and sit down here at the front.

This classroom scene seems comical, a game students play in many lessons. Conflict like this was a constant event in the secondary schools attended by the teenagers in this study. Sometimes it was in good humour and often it was serious and intense. The week before I began working at Bellevue Boys', Margaret, the head teacher of social science, had been attacked by one of the boys in the playground. He grabbed her around the throat and tried to choke her until he was restrained by others. This was a dramatic instance, but every day teachers faced resistance and abuse in the classroom. Although the schools had discipline and student welfare policies and strategies, teaching in the schools was challenging and stressful and there was high staff turnover. Each school had a core of older, more experienced teachers and a group of younger ones. Both teaching and administrative staff were highly skilled and committed. Many teachers, however, felt isolated and frustrated; the inability to control the classes meant a loss of face. It was difficult to talk about these issues with colleagues who were often in similar situations. The issue was framed at school level in terms of the need for increased teacher management skills (placing the problem on the individual teacher) or as the problem of the students and their families (attributing it to 'cultural' differences).

Parents were also questioning why problems were arising. Their concern about their children with respect for parents and school was a constant in every conversation. On one visit to the Zohair family, Mohamad had a call from the school informing him that Ahmad had been suspended for insulting a teacher and asking Mohamad to attend a conference at the school.

In Lebanon, our parents would tell us if we didn't behave they would tell the teacher. Here the teachers say, 'If you don't behave we tell your parents.' Every week I get asked up to school. I do not know what to do. My son is a good boy. Why does he get into trouble all the time?

Near the end of the study I met with Margaret, the head teacher, after she had come back from a month-long holiday in the Middle East. We were talking about her experiences of visiting a school in Lebanon attended by children of families who had returned from Australia: pendulum migration.

You know, I visited schools there in Lebanon. The teachers came and asked me, 'What is going on in Australia? The Australian students here are so naughty. We cannot control them. They are not interested in study and their reading and writing is very poor.' These 'Australian' students were our 'Lebanese' students who had returned to Lebanon with their families. Now they had been born in Australia and had done all their schooling in Australia. It's funny: we blame 'Lebanese' culture; they blame 'Australian' culture.

I don't like school. I'm no good at it. Music, maybe, and maths and technics I don't mind. It's the teachers. They pick on you and you don't get a chance. It's a no-good school. We're all Lebs.

Ahmad is 16 and in Year 10 at the local secondary school. He has two sisters, Maha and Rabab, who attend the local girls' secondary school, and a younger brother and sister attend the local primary school. I met Ahmad when he was in Year 7 at school. He was fairly quiet, becoming animated when the talk shifted to cars or martial arts. He was attending martial arts classes regularly, something he started at his father's instigation when he was being 'picked on' at school. He had gained several awards at a local club. By the end of the study, when Ahmad was in Year 10, he was tall for his age and good looking. He had started to take much more time with his appearance, something which Maha and Rabab mercilessly commented on. He was studying Arabic through the community school run by the village association. Ahmad was seen as difficult by his parents and as a troublemaker at the school. His parents had hopes that he would go to university. Ahmad wanted to be a mechanic or car detailer like one of his cousins.

This chapter works from the school experiences of Ahmad and his friends and explores the nature of the conflict. This cycle of conflict and resistance has been well documented in many ethnographic studies (Ogbu 1974; Willis 1977; Oakes

1985; McLaren 1986, 1989). This chapter, however, takes a narrower focus in examining the ways in which literacy has become entwined in conflict as an instrument of control and how literacy practices have become ritualized ways of dealing with this conflict. The focus is on the physical aspects of reading and writing: the segmented nature of the schools as literacy environments and the role that artefacts such as books, texts and blackboards play in the literacy practices of the classrooms. The linguistic interactions are analysed to look at ownership of reading and writing and the effects of conflict over this ownership. The final part of the chapter explores how the conflict in schools stifles attempts at change and how literacy practices have, as a result, become ritualized. The chapter focuses on data from observation and talk with Ahmad through three days of school. It also draws on work over four years in the five secondary schools attended by the teenagers.

## Types of reading and writing in school

Most accounts of school literacy would categorize it as study. Such an account does not take into account the range of activities around text that occur in a school. There is, for example, the use of SMS and email, the passing of notes in class, the reading of magazines in the playground, what is referred to as vernacular literacy, non-school-related literacy or even covert literacy (Camitta 1993; Shuman 1993; Barton and Hamilton 1998). Such a category does not take into account the differences in the ways students, teachers or participant-observers would categorize different practices. In many instances practices could serve several purposes at once. At times reading and writing form part of rituals of order, and literacy can serve more as a control mechanism. In Bellevue Boys' High School, teachers wrote students' names on the board, generally without comment, as the first step in discipline procedures. If the name received a mark next to it this constituted a second warning and meant detention for the student. For the teachers, the writing of the name on the board was a warning for the student and a reminder for them. For the students, it was just a text of control which they needed to get cleaned off before the end of the lesson. The different ways of categorizing are most obvious in what teachers or the institution would class as reading for pleasure/self-development, such as the morning Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) sessions in which teenagers read books which they had brought into the lesson. The received versions written by each school about these programmes and statements by programme co-ordinators indicated the purpose of DEAR as the development of good reading habits and enjoyment of reading as a pastime. Students saw DEAR as a control mechanism or as something which did not fit into their conception of school and even the teachers were varied in their attitudes. Some saw the purpose as getting students to read. Others saw it as classroom management or as a means of 'socializing' students. The categories are provisional and overlapping.

Several categories emerged from the data. **Organizational/instrumental**

writing and reading was related to the daily running of the institution and of the teachers' and students' lives. Related to this is reading and writing for **communication**, which involved messages and notes to others in the school or outside and were often reinforcements or substitutes for oral messages. **Memory aid** refers to the role of writing to serve as a memory aid for the writer and others. **Management** refers to the use of writing or reading as control. This can also be seen as mid-way between an organizational mode, with its role in organizing the students, and an informational mode. Copying from the board, for example, could sometimes be for punishment and sometimes be to gain information. **Informational** covered all reading and writing to convey or to gain information and related mostly to text on worksheets, blackboards and textbooks. Informational support included the use of text to confirm or clarify oral explanations, and assessment refers to the writing and reading of comments and marks on student work. **Recreation** covers the reading of newspapers, books and magazines for enjoyment.

The major function of literacy for students was, of course, information and informational support and assessment. Literacy also had major functions in classroom management and school organization. The other function was the recreational function of literacy. It is the overlap between literacy as study and literacy as management that will be explored in the following sections.

## Literacy materials

Literacy implements affect and are affected by literacy practices. Where literacy is located in unequal social relationships, this inequality can be seen in the differential access to literacy artefacts and in the use of literacy materials. In this section the starting point for exploring school practices is the literacy materials themselves. Pens, pencils, textbooks, pencil cases, bags, overhead projectors and all the implements associated with literacy have been invisible in much of the research into classroom literacy. The same attention now given to computer technology, however, was once accorded to the individual innovations of literacy (Olson 1994). The invention of the printing press and the mass production of books, key technological developments in literacy in the West, made possible the growth of widespread literacy (Eisenstein 1993). Individual access to books has been linked with the development of the notion of private space and, in education, it has been linked with greater possibilities for approaches that cater for individual student needs and student autonomy. Similar histories can be traced in the development of pens and biros and of exercise books. Pens, pencils and rulers can take on a role even in the physical positioning and movement of the bodies of writers and readers. When students were being told to prepare for reading and writing they were often instructed in various ways to assume the position for the act. The behaviours around these implements could also be a means of resistance to school authority.

Table 5.1 Types and uses of literacy in school

<i>Writing by staff:</i>	
Organizational	Marking rolls, writing lesson plans, registers, signing notes and forms, writing reports, preparing materials.
Communication and memory aid	Taking telephone messages, sending notes to the office and other teachers, writing notes for self, making lists, writing in a diary.
Management	Writing names for detention on the board, writing notes for students to copy as punishment, signing behaviour cards.
Information and informational support and assessment	Preparing worksheets, writing notes on the board, writing on overhead transparencies, writing on the board whilst talking, writing comments and marks on a book or entering them in a mark book.
<i>Writing by students:</i>	
Information and informational support and assessment	Writing in an exercise book, filling in worksheets, writing on the board, copying from the blackboard into exercise books, working from textbooks.
Organizational	Filling in lunch orders, signing late notes, filling in excursion notes.
Communication and memory aid	Sending notes in class, messaging on mobile phones, writing in a homework diary, sending emails.
<i>Reading by staff:</i>	
Organizational	Marking rolls, lesson plans, registers, notes and forms, reports.
Information and informational support and assessment	Preparing worksheets, reading books, checking novels for teaching.
Communication and memory aid	Telephone messages, notes for self, lists, diaries, daily information sheets, clipboards of announcements.
Recreation	Newspapers and magazines during recess and lunch.
<i>Reading by students:</i>	
Information and informational support and assessment	Reading worksheets, the board, textbooks, teacher comments in exercise books, reading aloud or silently from textbooks, the blackboard or worksheets. Giving a prepared talk or reciting or summarizing from remembered text.
Organizational	Reading information or excursion notes.
Recreation	Magazines during recess and lunch.
Communication and memory aid	Notes from friends, homework diaries.



## Literacy in beginning lessons

Literacy materials played a key role in establishing control through the routines at the beginning of lessons. Routines in different classes were generally consistent for that class but varied across subjects. Each teacher and class seemed to have negotiated an initial routine even if this routine was a source of conflict. In the majority of lessons students would take out their exercise books, pens, pencils and sometimes a textbook at the beginning of each class, generally with talk going on. The time taken to 'set up' varied between three and ten minutes. In one or two classrooms the initial routine with the literacy materials was a source of conflict. In these lessons literacy materials were linked with instructions about talk and body position. Students were being instructed to prepare themselves as writers, to shape their body and writing implements accordingly. The following example from Ahmad's geography class was typical.

Class is being team-taught by Mike and Sal, the ESL teacher. Students enter the room after Mike unlocks the door. Mike gets the books from the cupboard while Sal sets up the overhead projector. Mike then stands at the front of the class silent, looking at the students. Ahmad comes in with a late note and gives it to Sal who is standing near the overhead projector. Sal directs him to a desk.

*Mike:* Sit up, please. You know that I'm not going to teach while there is noise. I'm taking the roll.

*Student:* [to others, ironically] Shut up!

*Mike:* [to student] That doesn't do anyone any good. [To class] Pens out. Books out. Settle down until I mark the roll. Mr Guardo will come around and check your homework. [Waits] Make it a quiet environment. Make it a learning environment. You should have your bags off, sitting up quietly, ready to learn.

One table is showing each other photographs and talking about them. One student is drawing in his book. Others are paying attention to the teacher. The teacher starts to call out the names and mark the roll.

Mike phrases the instructions in such a way as to minimize objections. Orders are given with polite requests ('please') or in statement mood ('I'm not going to teach while there is noise'). One of the students translates this into a congruent mood and speech act, 'Shut up', which is unacceptable in this situation. The body position, silence, prepared writing materials and passivity count as the 'learning environment'. In many lessons the routine of unpacking bags was a source of tension, with students delaying and then unpacking noisily. In many lessons there were routines such as marking the roll, checking homework or saying prayers which served to bring the class together. Resistance to these routines often centred

around students sharing and talking about photographs, mobile phones, magazines or letters: using their own literacy materials in opposition to the teacher's.

## Interactions around teacher materials

### *Blackboard as support for interaction*

The blackboard (or green board or whiteboard) was used in most lessons for a range of purposes. In many lessons, particularly English and geography, the board acted as a means of recording and consolidating student understanding. Key terms, usually printed in capital letters, were written up to confirm and provide signposts in the teacher's explanation. In one lesson, Adam, the technics and applied science (TAS) teacher, was reviewing the key points of the design process for students before their exam. He was leading a discussion on why to study TAS. He handed out a design problem, read it aloud to the students and then asked them what a design situation was.

#### *Spoken text*

*Teacher:* So, Frank, that is the design situation.  
Frank, tell me what is a design situation.

*Frank:* It's like what people need and why they want it.

*Charbel:* It's the purpose.

*Teacher:* Yes, Charbel, it's the purpose . . . purpose . . . purpose . . . the reason and the context. Now, tell me what you get given, Fadih?

*Fadih:* A design brief.

*Teacher:* A design brief. In TAS we're very exact. We give . . . What's a design brief, Sonia?

*Sonia:* It's sort of information.

[Teacher looks around]

#### *Written text*

Writes 'PURPOSE' on the board.  
Writes 'DESIGN SITUATION' on the board. Points to the text on the board.

Writes 'DESIGN BRIEF' on the board. Holds chalk pointing at the text.

The blackboard plays the role of recorder of what teacher and students say. It is interesting to note the use of 'we' as the teacher tries to introduce solidarity in the discussion and to see the board as a neutral record of this. Later in the lesson, he writes up three more terms, 'NEEDS', 'WANTS' and 'RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION'. He asks students about these:

#### *Spoken text*

*Teacher:* What do these three mean? Write it down so that you've got it. While you're writing it down, just listen.

#### *Written text*

Writes 'NEEDS'.  
Writes 'WANTS'.  
Writes 'RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION'.

The writing on the board is seen as a memory aid and visual support. The terms are obviously common ones that have been covered in class. The teacher, Adam, is trying to get the students to discuss these concepts using their own ideas and language. He's asking them to write down the terms in their books along with a definition of the terms. They transfer the writing from the board, the 'common space' controlled by the teacher, to their books. They then add their own definitions, which is a way to externalize their ideas and to imprint the terms in their memory. At another time the teacher speaks to a student who begins to answer one of his questions by reading his exercise book:

*Teacher:* Don't read it, John. We need to stop looking at books. Answer in speech. [To all] Don't just learn for the exam. Learn it for the task you're going to be doing.

In these excerpts, Adam was defining writing as a means of externalizing, clarifying and consolidating thinking processes. The board often served as a way for teachers to scaffold the talk from the 'everyday' language of the students to the 'text' language of the subject area and to make this knowledge public. In several lessons, the teachers used the board as a way to involve students in this type of discussion. Vanessa, an English teacher at Wilson Park, had written on the board a focus question, 'WHAT IS DRAMA?' She asked two volunteers to write their own answers to this question on the board and used these as the basis for comment and discussion. She then wrote her summary of a class definition and asked students to copy it into their books.

### **Blackboard as the site of lesson content**

The blackboard was also used as the space on which the content of the lesson was written. The text, in these cases, was foregrounded, and the interaction between teacher and students took place mediated by this text. Such mediation could involve solidarity or distance, individual or group relationships. In four of the five mathematics lessons and the lessons in the community school, teachers wrote the problems and all the work for the period on the blackboard. Students copied into their books as the teacher wrote. When students were copying, they asked the teacher individually for clarification of points, terms or unclear writing. The students then went on to answer the problems individually or in pairs. Once students had completed their answers, the mathematics teachers used the board in a variety of ways. Joanna, with Year 9 at St Maroun's, got the students to read out their solutions whilst she wrote what they said in symbolic language on the board.

*Teacher:* Okay . . . looking at the first one, Mira?

*Mira:* You take the 3 across the other side and then . . . and the minus 3m will equal minus 19 . . .

*Teacher:* [writing up workings] Okay, we multiply.

*Mira:* So you cross this out.

*Teacher:* Then?

*Mira:* Then 9 plus 6 and you say minus 24 equals minus 10 and so minus 24 equals . . . and then a equals minus 25 over minus 24 and equals . . .

*Teacher:* Anyone who disagrees with that question? Only if . . .

Joanna uses 'we' in her discussion of the solution instead of the impersonal 'you'. Although Joanna is the one with control of the board, the participation of students in the interchange is widespread, with most students participating and asking unsolicited questions.

Ali, the mathematics teacher to Year 9 at Islamic College, took the role of explainer during the working out of the problems, and the class was disruptive and uninterested, which may have been a result of his not involving the students. His attachment to control of the board could also have been because he was having problems controlling the class.

*Teacher:* The question asks you to find the value of  $x$  [pointing to board]. Any ideas?

*Student 1:* It must add up to 180 degrees.

*Teacher:* Why is that?

*Student 1:* Because it's a straight line.

*Teacher:* Or? . . . a supplementary angle. Okay,  $3x$  plus 8 plus  $7x$  plus 2 equals 180 degrees. Then you get  $10x$  plus 10 equals 180. After that you take the 10 from 180 so  $10x$  equals 170 or equals 17. So the first angle is 3 times 17 plus 8 from which is 59 degrees. Now look at this one. Can you factorize? We did this yesterday and we didn't finish it.  $12a$  squared minus  $3a$ . What's the number?

*Student 2:* What's that?

*Teacher:* The highest common factor . . . the highest common factor.

*Student 2:* I don't understand.

*Teacher:* First, the highest common factor for the numbers is 3, so you put 3 here and then the highest common factor for the pronumerals is  $a$ . So that gives you [writing up working out]  $3a$ . Then you divide  $12a$  squared over  $3a$  minus  $3a$  over  $3a$ . With the second one. So the numerator is the same as the denominator and that gives you 1. The result is  $3a$  in brackets  $4a$  minus 1. So to make sure you expand . . . [waits].

*Student 3:* Couldn't that have been  $4a$  squared minus 1?

*Teacher:* No, because you didn't factorize.

*Student 3:* No worries [rolling his eyes to others].

*Teacher:* Okay, another one [rubbing working off board].

Ali was talking to the class whilst writing up the workings. Only one or two students were following and the rest were talking, looking out the window or

otherwise engaged. A third mathematics teacher, Mr Chau at Wilson Park, also avoided class input at the working-out stage. After he had written the problems on the board he went around the class and spoke with students individually and did no overall solutions to the problems. The class was also disruptive and he tended to focus only on those girls sitting near the front. The others were left to work on what they wanted to.

In each of the above examples, the content of the lesson was explicit, written on the blackboard. In the first lesson this text formed the basis of interaction between Joanna and the class, characterized by high participation and solidarity (as far as the roles permitted). In the second lesson, Ali left little space for student participation. His interaction with the 'text' of the lesson at times excluded students. In the third lesson, the text on the board formed the basis of Mr Chau's individual interactions with students. In this way the responsibility of students who chose to ignore the 'text' of the lesson rested with those students themselves.

### ***Blackboard as authority and control***

There is a shared understanding that what is written on the board is the first step of a ritual leading to copying into books. In Ahmad's geography lesson, Mike gave up his planned lesson half-way through and started writing notes on the board for students to copy. Each student was given a sheet of yellow paper. In this situation the physical position of the teacher became the site of conflict, not the task of copying that students were engaged in. Ahmad and other students started using polite forms of address ('sir') and using broad irony in their comments in an attempt to raise the level of confrontation.

*Student 1:* Come on, sir, stop writing.

*Student 2:* Excuse me, sir, I can't see. You're in the way.

*Student 3:* Sir, you forgot him. He didn't write the time [points to friend, 'telling' on him and trying to set up further confrontations].

*Student 3:* Sir, can you move a little bit?

Writing on the board was also used as a control mechanism in schools: at Bellevue Boys', students whose names were written on the board were marked out for detention: at the community school a number placed next to a name indicated the number of times the student had to copy out lines. This writing on the board was not accompanied by talk since the act of writing itself was meant to silence the students being disruptive or talkative. In every school there was a discipline policy which generally asked teachers to give students two warnings before some form of further action. It is interesting that 'warnings' were normally given in writing on the board, which was more formal and involved the power of the institution and its 'policy'. A verbal reprimand would be more 'individual' and could involve conflict.

## Textbooks and control

Although the introduction of textbooks in education was linked with the notion of greater individual control over learning and access to text, textbook use in the schools was more as an alternative to the blackboard. Printed texts were most commonly used in whole-class discussions. Students were asked to take out texts and turn to a specific page, and then individuals were nominated to read aloud. The teacher would stop the reader to explain vocabulary items, to ask comprehension questions, to give detailed explanations or just to correct pronunciation or reading. Textbooks gave teachers more freedom in individualizing or grouping students and in bringing the text read aloud into the space of the classroom.

Teacher in science lesson at Islamic College. She interrupts a girl reading:

*Teacher:* Okay, so sound waves have some characteristics in common with water and light waves. They have some characteristics specifically to itself. What is the characteristic in common with light and water? (Waits; students raise hands] Yes, Roja?

Student answers by reading out from the text that has just been read aloud to the class.

In this episode the teacher questioned students on their factual understanding of the text, and the students repeated the text verbatim. The implicit message is that the text carried the meaning and that the aim of class questioning and discussion was to confirm the text in students' minds and memories. In other lessons, the teachers used the reading aloud of the text by students as a basis for explanation relating the text to everyday examples.

Geography lesson at Islamic College, students reading from the text:

*Student:* [reading from text] Migrants have settled into Australia . . .

*Teacher:* [interrupting] So what are some of the problems people have? [To class]

*Student:* Unemployment?

*Student:* Non-speaking English . . . can't speak English?

*Teacher:* Not able . . . yes.

*Student:* Housing.

*Teacher:* We brought them here and gave them a place to live. That was our duty. They have a duty also to learn English. This morning, did you hear on the radio, Bob Carr said that people . . . migrants have a responsibility to learn English?

This leads to a discussion of reactions to migration and Pauline Hanson.

*Student:* Sir, I was reading the *Sun Herald* and she [Pauline Hanson] goes, ‘I know Asians are hardworking people, but people here [Australian born] just stay on the dole and sit on their arses . . . on your butts’ . . . sorry to say this . . .

*Teacher:* So you find the fact is that migrants bring money to the country. Immigration has helped the economy.

The teacher then leads the discussion back to the text, asking a student to continue reading. In this and similar lessons the student reading of the text freed the teacher to run a whole-class discussion.

The other main use of printed texts was students using them to work from individually or in groups. Steve, in his mathematics lesson for Year 9 at Bellevue, had the room set up for groups. Students came in and took out their textbooks and exercise books. Steve worked his way around the tables checking homework, getting the class settled and explaining. Ahmad and other students worked through examples individually but compared with each other and chatted at times. Students read the problem in the textbook and then wrote the working out in their exercise books. When problems arose they asked each other or the teacher.

*Teacher:* [to student at Table 4] So it’s  $x$  plus four . . . hmm, it doesn’t look good does it? [To student at Table 5 singing] Hey, fellows, you doing your work or wasting time? [To student again] It’s 2 minus 9 . . . divide the 30 centimetres into five equal lengths [reading question in student’s textbook]. What’s ‘divide’ mean? . . . I want it cut into five pieces of string so it’s going to be 30 divided by 5.

In several of the classes the textbooks enabled student interaction with text assisted by teachers. Textbooks were also used as silent individual desk work. In one English lesson at Islamic College, students were expected to work their way through their textbook without talking. The teacher, remaining seated at the front of the class, promised a five-minute chatting time at the end if the class complied.

In most classes the textbooks were owned by the school. Texts were distributed at the beginning of lessons and collected at the end. This varied subject by subject. In mathematics, students generally worked from one textbook which they brought to class. In English, the teachers distributed books for a unit of work. In other subjects there was no single textbook and class sets were used as appropriate. Many parents expected that students work from a textbook in each subject which they also brought home to work on.

### **Worksheets**

Worksheets generally supplemented textbooks or were used for revision. Typically, students had individual worksheets which they completed by referring to the textbook. In other lessons the worksheets contained the whole problem or task

and students worked through them. In some cases, the worksheets had been completed for homework and the class time was spent marking the worksheet. When worksheets were being done as a whole class, the question or problem was usually read aloud by a nominated student. In an English lesson at St Maroun's, Penny worked through a series of revision worksheets for an exam. She would give a short introduction, get nominated students to read aloud the question, explain and then give students time to write their answers. The students would then be asked to read answers aloud with the teacher commenting.

*Teacher:* Today I want to revise paragraphs: when we do paragraphs and how. We've done it countless times before. I know you've done it before [hands out worksheets]. Now I want you to highlight three different reasons for starting a new paragraph. Highlight A, B and C. Highlight or underline. [She waits while students highlight or underline] Let's go through them. [Hands go up] Right, Terry, could you read A, please?

The use of pronominal reference and mood are interesting in this excerpt. Penny begins by stating the purpose as a personal wish in which 'you' is understood. She then uses the first person plural 'we', indicating solidarity. There is only one example of the speech act directive shown as imperative, 'Highlight or underline.' In the other cases directive speech acts are requests or statements, 'could you read?' or 'I want you to highlight'. Individual worksheets have the effect of individualizing student interaction with the teacher. Worksheets could also become a way of challenging teacher control. In the Arabic lesson at the ethnic school, the teacher handed out a series of worksheets for students to complete. The boys maintained a chorus of 'Miss, can you explain this?' When they completed a worksheet they would rush out to the front for the teacher to mark it. The individual teacher-student link that worksheets provided was in this instance used against the teacher.

Worksheets were often used in conjunction with textbooks. In several geography lessons students worked from atlases, answering questions on a teacher-prepared worksheet. The use of texts or worksheets involved only two examples of pre-reading or prediction activities. One was in a geography lesson when the teacher reviewed the topic whilst two students had gone to the staff room to fetch the atlases. In general, students were handed worksheets and textbooks and asked to read aloud or silently. More assistance was given with the completion of writing for short answer questions. Teachers would generally get the question read aloud and then discuss possible answers and finally give students time in which to write the answer.

### **Exercise books**

Exercise books or folders were used in all but two lessons. They were ostensibly the place to keep notes, where notes from the board are copied, and where



questions are answered, problems worked out, homework done, worksheets pasted, projects done and writing tasks completed. The exercise book, for most teachers, had the more formal role as the place where students re-created their understanding of the classroom teaching and as such was a document for teacher assessment and control. Most feedback to students on work done in exercise books focused on teacher marks and on neatness and tidiness, indicating the public nature of the exercise and the teacher as audience. May, the English teacher at Bellevue Boys', comments on both journal writing length and neatness.

*Teacher:* I've been going through your journals and they're disgusting. Listen to the marks [reads out names and marks out of ten]. Bilal, so far you've got a mark and a half. Donny, I found half of your English in your history book. Your book looks like a packet of poo tickets. Now if you want to keep on untidily, I will tear it up. Kylie, the same message goes for you.

*Kylie:* But, miss, I had mine in the right book.

*Teacher:* Your writing is messy. Ibrahim, I made it clear: one and a half pages a week, not one and a half lines a week. You haven't even started your journal this week.

Ownership or purpose of exercise books was at times contested. In the science lesson at Bellevue Boys', the rituals of tidying exercise books and borrowing glue sticks or liquid paper were always the excuse for being out of assigned seats. At the end of the lesson, the teacher circulated to collect exercise books to mark. One student had thrown his book away. He was boldly putting forward the view that the exercise book was a notebook for class work, not a record for the teacher.

*Teacher:* Where is your book?

*Student:* [inaudible]

*Teacher:* You threw it away?

*Student:* I finished my exercise book and I started a new one, miss. I threw the old one away.

The teacher's and the school's assumption is that the exercise book represents an accumulation of the knowledge gained throughout the school year. This student is challenging school authority by defining the exercise book as a notebook which becomes useless when it has been filled. Rituals relating to presentation in exercise books were a common topic for interaction. In Rita's science class at Islamic College, students asked about answering questions from the textbook in the exercise book.

*Student:* Full sentences, miss?

*Teacher:* Yes, full sentences, because otherwise how will you know what your answer is?

Rita viewed the answers as a reconstruction of the learning for future study, not just as a record of answers to questions in that lesson. Teachers treated mostly what was written in exercise books as formal and public with students needing to make headings and title pages. Students asked about writing dates and making margins and if exercise books were going to be marked. The question of what parts of the exercise book were for the teacher was always at the fore. When the social science teacher at Bellevue was punishing students by getting them to copy from the board he did not get them to write in their exercise books, but on separate yellow sheets of paper, giving the writing task less status and no permanence.

There were marked differences between subjects in what was written in the exercise books. In mathematics it was the working out of problems; in geography and commerce it was notes and short answer questions; in English it was longer pieces of writing, journal (in a separate book) and short answer questions. In only two English lessons and one commerce lesson was explicit reference made to the *form* or content of the writing.

### **Classroom episodes**

Three days of attending classes with Ahmad left me with a profound feeling of boredom and frustration. There was little of learning or enjoyment in learning that went on. The day referred to in this chapter consisted of Ahmad starting with a DEAR period in which he chatted with friends and looked out the window. He then spent his geography lesson stirring the teacher and copying from the board. This was followed by the technics lesson where he copied notes from an overhead projector. In English the period was spent in whole-class discussion about writing for exams. His mathematics lesson involved working in groups on problems and was the only time in the day that Ahmad became involved in any activity. In the afternoon his commerce teacher was absent and so he chatted with friends, with the class taken by a casual teacher. His last class was the science lesson where he answered questions from the textbook. Many of the lessons involved conflict with teachers; in most of the classes Ahmad was working mechanically with reading and writing but with no real engagement or interest.

Classes in Bellevue Boys' and the other schools followed predictable patterns, often a teacher-led presentation and discussion followed by individual student desk work. The physical arrangement of the classrooms was traditional, most commonly students sitting at desks or benches arranged in rows facing the board. In only three lessons recorded were students seated in groups, and in three smaller classes students were seated around one large table. The lessons lasted between 35 minutes and one hour. Just over half of the lessons consisted of one episode, or activity, and of these lessons seven consisted of teacher-led whole-class discussion. There was generally a discussion of worksheets which had been completed for homework or in class. These lessons followed a recurrent pattern of individual work and then teacher-led discussion and class feedback. Five of the

lessons consisted of students working on activities or exercises from a textbook, the board or a worksheet. In all but one of these lessons the teacher circulated, interacting with groups and individuals, and at times the teacher would break in and address the whole class. The lessons in which students sat in groups differed from the teacher-led ones in that students were working at different rates. In two lessons, students worked silently copying from an overhead projector or completing individual worksheets and there was no interaction or feedback. There were two classes which consisted totally of teacher-led whole-class discussions. In one, a technical and applied science teacher conducted a discussion of the key features of a design brief and in the other an English teacher led a discussion on the features of a good story.

There were lessons which involved two or three episodes or changes in the type of activity, but even these held little interest. The most common pattern was a teacher-led discussion or explanation (generally between 10 and 20 minutes in length). Five of these discussion or explanation episodes involved the teacher using the board to record and review student suggestions. One of the lessons involved an initial demonstration. The second episode generally consisted of students completing worksheets, answering questions and completing problems, and in one case there was a group reading of a play. In most cases the second episode involved individual work. There were two lessons in which the second episode (copying from the board) was chosen because of the level of classroom noise in the teacher-led discussion. The three lessons which involved a third episode had teacher-led discussion or feedback.

This narrow range of lesson types confirmed data from the days of observation in each school. The observation period was not long enough to observe the sequence of lessons in units of work, but the cross-section of lessons from different stages of units indicated that teachers tend to follow predictable patterns in their lessons: a teacher-led whole-class discussion or teacher explanation followed by desk work with students working on texts individually. The purpose of this account is not to lay blame on either teachers or students. The task of the teachers was difficult; in situations involving conflict it was inevitable that the range of teaching and curriculum became narrowed and that reading and writing became means of control. It was also inevitable that students resisted the constrictions of their classrooms. The problem is, however, that these patterns reproduce themselves with predictable monotony.

### **What happens to change: the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) programme**

On the outside, school practices are marked by change: changes in assessment practices, external exams and syllabus documents, initiatives to improve literacy and educational outcomes, changes in school staff and approaches. At Ahmad's school the new English syllabus led to a greater focus on spoken language outcomes. An external English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) in Years 7

and 8 was having significant effects across subject areas. There was a sense, however, that all these changes were subsumed and contextualized into existing discourses within the school culture. The policies and staff changes affected but were also affected by the existing school practices. This can be most clearly seen in the changes over time in the specialist school programmes. In Ahmad's school and two of the other high schools there were regular periods above and beyond the subject classes, generally called Drop Everything and Read periods. In all three schools these periods were combined with roll call and students were expected to bring along reading matter for silent, individual reading. The DEAR periods developed from the changes in the teaching of reading in the 1970s. The aims were to develop positive reading habits in students and to engender wide reading which would lead to the study habits and levels of understanding needed for academic success in school. The DEAR programme at Bellevue Boys' had been established in 1995 by Astrid, the head teacher of social science, and Josie, the head teacher of English. They had organized several staff workshops to discuss the aims and ideas behind the DEAR programme. As Astrid explained:

These boys don't have a reading culture. We need to model this at school and show them the benefits of reading for pleasure.

(Astrid, informal interview, 1995)

The period operated for 15 minutes every morning in cross-age groups. Students had to bring books to read. They were not allowed to do homework and talking was not allowed. The class teacher was expected to read with the boys. The DEAR programme was linked with a social skills training programme, 'Stop-Think-Do-Learn', which was run with all students in the junior school. This programme was 'based on the assumption that much of students' poor behaviour is a result of not knowing how to behave in different situations and contexts, and having few skills in being able to reflect on their lives or perceived alternative options' (taken from school brochure). 'The program was developed in response to the particular needs of the students of [Bellevue]. The school is over 90% NESB, with over 60% being from Arabic-speaking families' (ibid.). The implicit message in the training package, confirmed in teacher interviews, was that the management issues at the school were largely due to students' behavioural problems, which resulted from their lack of appropriate social skills. Both programmes shared a notion of teaching appropriate behaviours. DEAR was based on the idea of individual silent reading for enjoyment. Once students were readers and acted as readers, then they would take control of the literacy development and attain the higher levels of cognitive and psychological functioning.

By 1997 the DEAR programme was floundering. Teachers from subject areas other than English and history and a few in science had little commitment to or sympathy with the programme goals. The silent, individual reading behaviour had become an area of conflict and there were constant problems with noise, reading materials and class management. Data from student interviews revealed a general

resentment of the period. It was seen as a waste of time. Some teachers had attempted variations, such as Internet and computer access. Astrid, the social science head teacher, admitted the problems of the programme but claimed an 80 per cent success rate.

There's enough good coming out of it to justify its continuation. There is also peer tutoring going on. Older boys and younger boys, even Year 7 helping primary school children. Some students don't like the bonding.

(Informal interview)

The arrival of the new English head teacher and the new principal, who had an English subject background, led to the dropping of the DEAR programme. In late 1997 the school began a series of workshops funded by the federal government Disadvantaged Schools programme. The poor performance of the school in standardized literacy testing and the federal and state government policies in literacy had focused the school's attention on this area. Two Department of Education literacy consultants were invited to in-service all staff over several days on the teaching of writing based on the genre-/text-type model, and a full-time literacy consultant was appointed to the school. The explicit teaching of types of writing was seen as more culturally appropriate than the DEAR programme. Teachers were also trained in specific reading strategies such as three-level guides, previewing and brainstorming activities, vocabulary development and information skills. The English, history and languages faculties were the main instigators behind the programme and the school literacy committee. Teachers were given materials to use in daily periods in which they were to teach text types and literacy skills. The programme was based on year level. All Year 7, for example, would cover a unit on procedures based on a theme of car maintenance in the first two weeks. The classes ran for the duration of 1998. By the end of the year, evaluations showed that they were not successful. Several of the teachers on the committee had dropped out.

I came to this school so enthusiastic. I saw this committee and I thought, great – I can put into practice everything I learned at uni. But, you know, by the end of the year I felt ripped off. I put all this energy into it for nothing. First, they had only two workshops. You can't teach people what to do in that time. They went off half-cocked. It looked good on paper but . . .

(Hassan, interview)

The change was identified with the principal, head teacher of English and new literacy consultant, who were seen as trying to 'take over'. Teachers felt excluded from the programme. Materials were insufficient and inappropriate to subjects other than English. Students rebelled at what they saw as boring and irrelevant. Following formal evaluations in 1998, the programme was changed to an oracy

focus in 1999. The English head teacher felt that the programme had failed because literacy was:

too far down the track for the students. What they lack is spoken English. They don't have any skills in spoken English. Once they get that then maybe we can get on to reading and writing.

(Ben, interview)

Materials were developed which were based on a skills-based approach in the junior English syllabus. Units of work covering current affairs and news and topics of interest were developed. Students were prepared for outcomes such as giving formal talks, conducting debates and doing interviews.

There were common features in the three very different programmes. All three were based on the structure of separate classes outside the subject teaching. The assumption was one of remediation. Students needed additional work in order to be able to benefit from work in the subject disciplines. The disadvantage was located in students' lack of appropriate behaviours, then their lack of literacy and finally their lack of oral skills. All three programmes had some links with the English subject area and developments in the teaching of English.

### ***Literacy practices as rituals***

Ahmad came into the mathematics room with the others and sat at a group of tables up the front with four others. Steve was talking with students up the back. Ahmad chatted with Paul whilst taking out his mathematics textbook, exercise book and pencil case. He put his bag on the floor and opened the mathematics textbook at Chapter 7. He started on the problem and compared with Paul where he was up to. Steve then addressed the class.

There is something very predictable about many activities involving literacy. Ahmad was able to link what work they had covered with what he was going to do in that period with what he would perhaps be doing up until his yearly exam. In the same way, the conflict in the previous period when the class were having to copy from an overhead transparency was equally ritualized.

#### *OHP text:*

Because of its versatility, portability and relative cheapness the multiterster is the most widely used piece of electronic text equipment.

*Steve:* Sir, why do we have to write this?

*Ahmad:* I hate writing.

[Patrick jumps up and his chair falls over 'accidentally']

*Teacher:* Patrick!

*Patrick:* He's farted, sir.

*Student:* Doesn't he stink, sir?

*Student:* He's just farted, sir.

[A student comes out to adjust the OHP. The top part of the second column is hidden. He places the OHP on a chair and moves it back and then adjusts the focus]

*Teacher:* Omar, sit down.

*Omar:* I can't see.

*Teacher:* Okay, get your work and sit down here at the front.

I think one way to consider home and school literacy practices is as rituals, based on the work of McLaren (1986). I use the term as transmitted patterns of meaning in its anthropological sense. Rituals are framing devices; they communicate by classifying information in different contexts. Rituals provide the blueprint for both 'doing' and 'thinking'. Many literacy practices are rituals, and many literacy episodes and events contain ritualized elements in that the participants follow a familiar sequence of steps. Literacy practices are normally defined as ways of reading and writing to achieve a social purpose. Practices can become ritualized and the means and ends become interchangeable. Rituals are experienced as part of the 'natural' order of things and so it is difficult for students and teachers to perceive the relativity of the codes. Rituals establish taboos; they shore up the status quo; they neutralize conflict but also can effect change. Through rituals, meanings are created, but these meanings are subject to the constraints of the surrounding contexts. It is easy to consider much of what goes on in classroom literacy teaching as devoid of meaning, as skill-based or as the replacement of learning with doing, with activity. It is true that rituals of literacy in the classroom can become overdistanced from their messages. It is through rituals, however, that meaning is articulated and negotiated (McLaren 1986).

### **When practices become rituals**

Why do literacy practices become ritualized? The main reasons relate to the perceived distances between teachers and students and between students and learning tasks. The first factor that emerges from the data is the element of conflict. Literacy is often used as a feature of control. Each teacher has set routines and patterns of having students interact with the text. The more overdistanced the ritual, the greater the conflict over control. Teachers in many cases gave up on class discussions when noise levels were too high and got students to copy from the board. This procedure then became hotly contested. Many of the rituals revolved around making literacy public in the classroom. The reading aloud of text, questions and answers put the text into the public domain. May's comments and returning of student journals to Ali and his classmates was not an individual but a public response to the writing. The shift to a more public domain has the

effect of grouping students together and backing up the teacher authority with the authority of the subject discipline, the external assessment. May's response to the journals is phrased in very personal terms but presents judgements that are constructed as universally supportable.

In other instances, student needs were constructed and practices became ritualized to fulfil these needs. At Ahmad's school the students were variously constructed as behaviour problems, lacking self-discipline, lacking in reading for enjoyment, lacking literacy skills and finally lacking spoken English skills. In each case a routine was developed for the first 20 minutes of each day to address these.

Rituals are neither positive nor negative; they are neither enslaving nor liberating. They can invert the norms of the dominant social order or reify the world in which they are embedded. They have a performative element in them. Rituals become problematic in home or school contexts when the ways in which they codify reality and the meanings which they embody are not related to the achievement of any worthwhile goal or outcome. The oft-stated aim of school literacy was the achievement of discipline knowledge and critical thinking. The meanings of many of the rituals were to construct students as disadvantaged and to develop passivity not engagement with the text.

### **Conflict and tension**

Conflict in the schools had led to the ritualization of literacy practices. Literacy had become reified and abstract concepts had come to be treated as things. Pens, writing, exercise books and blackboards were taken as literal representations of the knowledge that they were originally vehicles for. The ritual practices of literacy which involved students becoming physically the representations of readers and writers meant that students accepted or rejected these roles through performance. For many students these routines provided security and they found a perverse enjoyment in copying from the board. The ritual itself took on the meaning. Having a neat book or preparing the desk for listening and writing was the moral aspect of being a reader and writer. If students did not perform these roles they did not gain access to literacy. For many of the students, reading *was* reading aloud for the teacher and writing *was* neat handwriting or writing creative stories.

The purpose of many of the literacy routines was control. Control was an end in itself. These rituals then became the focus of conflict and resistance also became ritualized. Students subverted rituals by taking longer times to prepare at the beginning of lessons or by getting out of their seats to get rubbers, liquid paper or pens. Resistance was also framed in terms of the rituals of literacy.

The ritualization of school practices needs to be examined, and literacy needs to be removed from the discourse of conflict and resistance. This would open up other possibilities for the role of literacy. It would also expand the role of spoken language in the development of ideas. The teaching could benefit from building



on and extending the students' expected learning styles. The role of subjects such as art, music and drama in making these links would be important. The breaking of the cycle of misunderstanding, of conflict and resistance, would lead to higher expectations by teachers, parents and the teenagers themselves. These issues will be explored further in Chapter 7.

# Identity, place and literacy

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The biggest problem would be a generation gap, there is a big backlash because of the generation gap and secondly you've got two cultures: like the parents have a culture and the kids have a part of their parents' culture and also taking on the Australian. So we've got new cultures coming up. And the kids are lost, and the problem is an identity crisis. They don't know who they are: are they Lebanese, are they Australian, are they Arabs, are they Turkish, are they Asians?

(Community worker, in Poynting 2004, Ch. 3: The lost boys)

The depiction of the children of migrants as 'lost between two worlds' is a common theme in descriptions of ethnic minority youth. Teenagers are seen as torn between a community in some nostalgic time warp which is promoting adherence to cultural norms of the country of origin, and on the other hand the wider host society to which teenagers must acculturate if they are to enjoy its benefits. Lack of academic success, participation in gangs and crimes of violence are attributed to this confusion of identities and lack of belonging to minority or majority cultural norms. A more recent version depicts ethnic minority teenagers adopting a globalized African-American youth culture in opposition to the pull of home and school. Teenagers are framed as either passive consumers or inventive reinterpreters of global capitalism. The problem with both descriptions is that they place ethnicity at the centre of identity and make identity simplistic and decontextualized (Heath and McLaughlin 1993).

## The participants

Identity is complex and dynamic, and any account of it must consider the everyday contexts and situations in which teenagers define themselves and are defined by others. This chapter takes a closer look at issues of identity through parent and teenager accounts. Lamise is an older sister of Ali Tannous in Chapter 3, and Mohamad and Basma Zohair are parents of Ahmad in Chapter 5. The chapter explores the contextual factors in identity construction and the role that literacy practices play in this process. It explores the notion of place and space in relation

to literacy and identity: the divisions between private and public space, between the home and the street and between school and community. Issues of racism, gender, religion and ethnicity are also discussed.

### ***Lamise Tannous***

Lamise lives in a three-bedroom house in Arncliffe with her two sisters and brothers. Her elder brother, Tariq, is a jeweller, one sister is studying at university and a younger sister is in primary school. Lamise likes school and has high aspirations, wanting to follow in the footsteps of her sister.

I want to go to uni, yeah, uni. You know after you get your marks, like, I want to be a doctor but you need 99. So if I turn out with 92, I can't become that. You can't really say until you know what marks you get. My friend, she got 92 TER [Tertiary Entrance Rank] and she's studying to be a teacher. My uncle's going to open a school in Lebanon in a few years' time and by then I would have graduated.

Lamise excels in sport and has represented the school in soccer; she likes music and shares magazines, CDs and DVDs with her siblings and friends. At the weekend she participates in family outings or visits her friends. Religion has become important to Lamise and she began wearing the hijab the previous year. She is forthright in her views and is against many of the traditions that are strong in the community. She did not agree with arranged marriage and was critical of parents taking their children to Lebanon for 'holidays' that were really betrothals. 'Why would I want to visit Lebanon? It's like living in a Lebanese village here,' she said, commenting on how she perceives the narrowness of parts of the community.

Lamise was in the school debating team that had won the previous year's district competition. She was friends with her English teacher, Mrs Tawil, who had initiated the idea of debating. Lamise together with her friends used to pore through the newspapers each night for current events and discuss these issues with their teacher the next day during recess and lunch breaks. In the school competition, the Kotara team beat five other district schools including the local selective school. Her debating trophy sits alongside sporting awards in the bedroom Lamise shares with her sisters.

### ***Ibrahim Tannous***

The Tannous family arrived in Australia in 1980 from a village in the south of Lebanon. Ibrahim Tannous was unemployed for several years until he found work in a grocery shop several suburbs away. Ibrahim was involved in the mosque and village association and also in his children's schools and was very involved in several local campaigns. His family were living in a suburb that was going to be affected by a proposed underground freeway, and several of the air vents were

going to be placed near their home. Ibrahim and other residents organized many community meetings and had written letters to the government, but to no avail. Ibrahim commented that if the suburb had been full of middle-class Anglo families the expressway might have been stopped. He kept files of letters that he had sent off to various government departments, form letters that had been written by the village association, and also a collection of articles from the local newspaper and the newsletters from the mosque and village association.

Ibrahim had also been involved in trying to establish a local Islamic primary school. The reason for his involvement was that he felt the local state primary school did not provide enough for children in terms of language and religion. He reported that, although there were several hours each week for music and dancing in the state primary school, there was only one hour for religion. Ibrahim was also concerned at the prejudice and general misunderstanding from government, the media and the general population that his family and community suffered from. He felt that his wife and the girls received prejudice because of wearing the hijab. Ibrahim saw himself as a spiritual teacher for his children. They had the Qur'an in Arabic and English and read it daily.

Both Ibrahim and his wife, Hanade, had had little access to schooling in Lebanon because of the war. Their decision to migrate and stay in Australia had much to do with their hopes for the children. Literacy played a different role in their lives to the role it played in their children's lives. They both saw Arabic as their main language because they were born in Lebanon. The literacy practices of both parents, however, reflected their involvements in Australia.

### ***Mohamad and Basma Zohair***

The Zohair family live in a three-bedroom brick home in a cul-de-sac in Bellevue next to the railway line. The yard was big enough for Mohamad Zohair to have a vegetable and herb garden. Mohamad was born in a village near Tripoli in the north of Lebanon. He attended the local primary school and then a year of secondary school, learning in French as well as Arabic. He said he was always interested in study and reading but left school to help support his family.

In Lebanon I loved geography. I had good general knowledge. I knew Australia before I came here . . . what the area was . . . what the population is. When I was working at State Rail we sometimes started talking on the job, about news, current affairs . . . you know, what was going on in the world. The others, they didn't know anything. I could tell them all about Africa, all about America.

In 1975 he migrated to Australia, sponsored by an uncle. He attended English classes, at first full time and then at night, finding the learning easy because of his background in French. He began work in State Rail as a labourer soon afterwards. After 16 years with State Rail, an industrial accident forced him to give up work.

He had been unemployed for six years. Mohamad's parents lived in Lebanon and he had been to visit them three times.

Mohamad attends the mosque every Friday and reads the Qur'an daily. He also reads booklets from the mosque in Arabic and English. He keeps up with the news on the TV, on the radio and in the newspapers. Once a week he buys the *Sydney Morning Herald* for the news and also to keep up his English reading. Mohamad belongs to the parents' and citizens' groups at his children's schools, which entails monthly meetings and keeping up with newsletters. Much of his reading and writing centre around helping his children. He helps all five with their homework as much as he can, even going to the extent of buying books for projects from the local bookshops and taking them to the library. His health problems have also meant that he had to learn to deal with much official correspondence. He has had a long history of dealings with government agencies, insurance companies and doctors. He keeps meticulous records of all the correspondence.

Basma Zohair came to Australia in 1982 to marry Mohamad. Her schooling in Lebanon was interrupted by the war and she was not able to gain literacy in Arabic. Her English also is limited, because she stayed at home in the early years in Australia to mind her children and could not attend English classes. She relies on her girls and her husband for most correspondence. She keeps up with what is happening through the Arabic radio stations and keeps in touch with her friends and family locally through telephone and family visits. In 1996 she started attending English classes for parents at the local school. With the help of teachers she had begun to write her own stories.

I belong to the Muslim religion. Like most Muslim women, I cook, clean and take care of the children. I like cooking soup, chicken, lamb and tabbouli and enjoy sitting with the family for dinner and discussing the day. I study part time and hope that one day I have enough skills to start a career. I hope to keep the traditional values of my religion and culture and pass them on to my children.

Teaching children respect and obedience was a key issue for both parents. Mohamad had tried to set an example for his children by giving up smoking. He spoke strongly about the need for children to learn honesty and not to steal. If children were in the 'wrong crowd' or got into trouble, the whole family was shamed. Religion was another recurring theme for Basma and Mohamad. Mohamad took his children to the mosque every Friday for lessons. The children learned respect for society and for old people. For Mohamad, respect and religion were connected. Mohamad was concerned about the difficulty of supporting his family on unemployment benefits. He had lost his job at a time when it was difficult to find another and was facing the prospect of not working again. Problems with money often surfaced. This issue was linked with comments about the general economic crisis and political problems. Mohamad thought

the government did not take care of working people and that there was little job security. He was very much against the influence of capitalist America on Australia. He linked this with political changes in Lebanon and US policy in the Middle East.

### **Places, spaces and identity**

'Good at playing soccer', 'sticks up for brother', 'hates boys who are sexist', 'religious', 'Australian', 'Lebanese', 'Arabic-speaker', 'leader in peer group', 'speaks out a lot': all of these labels or self-descriptions were used by Lamise Tannous at different times. Identity construction is dialogic, involving interaction with others in specific situations. Definitions of self occur through these interactions with others and with the environment in competition with and through definitions by others (Hall 1991).

Identity means or connotes the process of identification of saying that this here is the same as that or we are the same together, in this respect. But something we have learnt from the whole discussion of identification . . . is the degree to which the structure of identification is always constructed through ambivalence. Always constructed through splitting. Splitting between that which one is and that which is the Other.

(Hall 1991: 47)

All of us are composed of multiple social identities, not of one. We are all complexly constructed through different categories, of different antagonisms, and these have the effect of locating us socially in multiple positions of marginality and subordination, but which do not yet operate on us in exactly the same way.

(Hall 1991: 57)

(Grossberg 1993) described identity construction as first the production of subjectivity, a universally endowed value in that everyone experiences the world and as a consequence comes to knowledge about him- or herself and the world. Subjectivity in turn is closely associated with a second process which produces differentially valued subject positions which enable and constrain the possibilities of experience. The third process provides the parameters for where and when individuals can stop and place themselves. It maps out the sorts of places people can occupy and how they can occupy them. It 'maps out how much room people have to move and where and how they can move' (Grossberg 1993).

At the centre is the space occupied by the body and the perceptions and experiences of that space, what has been called 'embodied space'. There are the spaces within the home and how these are constructed and used in terms of male/female, parents/children or public/private. There is the way space is perceived between the home and outside the home, between home and school; and then

how spaces are constructed in the school. This notion of space must also include the societal changes in migration, communications and media. Although it has become so clichéd, the impact of the global on the daily lives of the teenagers must be taken into account. The differences in how space is perceived can be seen through the interactions that occur in these places; it is through the daily practices of reading and writing, for example, that such constructions become real. Where are literacy materials kept? Where do people read and write? With whom and how? What changes are occurring in these practices? The following sections look at how literacy practices reflect and give meaning to spaces and the ways in which Lamise and the teenagers and parents perceive themselves.

### ***Space in the home***

The living room in the Tannous household is the centre of the house. It is where the family entertains the regular stream of visitors at the weekend and where Hanade uses her mobile phone to keep in touch with her network of friends and relatives. It is where everyone watches TV or videos at night. It is where homework gets done, where family conversations take place. The living area is a combined lounge room, dining room and kitchen that takes up most of the back part of the house. It is entered through a hallway off which are the three bedrooms. In the lounge room are three double and some single lounges. In the corner is the television which is usually switched on accompanying the household events. Sometimes the sound is turned down when Hanade Tannous is listening to the Arabic radio programmes. Her radio is a portable set on one of the benches in the kitchen. On the left is the dining area and behind it the kitchen. There is a computer in another corner of the room. On low tables around the room are copies of local newspapers, TV guides, and some magazines and videos. There is a bookcase at the back of the lounge room. In it, in pride of place, are copies of the Qur'an and books of the prophets. Above one of the lounges are framed quotations from the Qur'an. In the afternoons, Ibrahim often sits on the lounge reading his paper. As the children get back from school they come and go, chatting with him. Hanade likes having the children in the lounge room where she can keep an eye on them.

When Lamise was in the early years of high school she and her brother and sister would do their homework on the floor of the lounge room watching TV or at the kitchen table. By the time Lamise was in Year 10 she had access to a computer shared with her siblings in their bedroom. She then tended to do most of her work in the bedroom. There had been quite a bit of debate in the family on where this computer was to be placed. It was finally agreed that it would be placed in the girls' room since Lamise was in Year 10 and her sister at university and they needed most to access the Internet for study. The tension between private and public space was not a conscious one for Lamise: she looked forward to family visits at the weekend and enjoyed time spent with her family and siblings. The presence of the computer in the bedroom, however, set up the interactions that

occurred using the computer as being separate from her parents. For Lamise, computer-mediated interactions created private space in the same way that the reading of novels can do. The dynamic of private space, public space that was played out in Lamise's literacy practices was an interactive one. The shift was perhaps a natural one for a teenager, but was also influenced by the technology and its demands and possibilities.

Lamise was one of the few teenagers in the broader study who liked reading novels. She often read in the lounge room in company with her sister and mother. Her reading was all in English, while her mother preferred books in Arabic. Lamise preferred love stories and novels to the novels she received from the school. Magazines were more of a group reading event. Lamise and her sisters would pore through *Dolly*, *Girlfriend* or fashion magazines in their bedroom or the lounge room. They sometimes listened to music in their bedroom. Apart from homework and study, however, most interactions with text occurred in the lounge room/living room area when Ibrahim Tannous was at home.

The use of language(s) also reflected interactions in different spaces. With her siblings, Lamise spoke mainly English with some Arabic words thrown in occasionally. The use of English between siblings, especially with younger brothers and sisters, was common in all families.

Lamise tended to speak with her mother in Arabic or a code mix of English and Arabic. Hanade Tannous was more likely to address Lamise in Arabic and sometimes code mix but rarely all in English. Hanade, for example, would start speaking to Lamise in Arabic. Lamise might answer with 'yes' or 'no' in Arabic, start a sentence in Arabic and then switch at clause break or sentence end into English. Hanade might then continue with a phrase in English and then switch back into Arabic. Hanade admitted that if she wanted Lamise really to understand something she would explain it in English.

Ibrahim Tannous had asked his children to use only Arabic in the house, and conversations between him and Lamise were more often in Arabic. He had been worried about his children losing their spoken Arabic. He had only noticed this problem when they were with relatives and he found himself starting to laugh at his children's mistakes. He had taken his oldest son and daughter to Lebanon for a holiday the previous year, he said, so that they would regain some fluency in Arabic. Even Ibrahim, however, sometimes slipped into mixing English and Arabic. He called this *Arabizi*, a mixture of *Inglizi* and *Arabiya*. Between Hanade and Ibrahim, conversation was generally in Arabic. Other studies indicate that parents communicate with children mainly in Arabic, but that children tend to use mixed code to parents. Communication between parents is generally in Arabic, but between siblings in English (Clyne 1991; Suliman 2003). This is despite evidence that the vast majority of parents and children consider the use of Arabic in the home to be important at all times (Suliman 2003). The public spaces in the home are therefore more for Arabic and code mix whereas the teenagers' bedrooms are more the spaces for English.

These tensions between public and private space were unconscious ones, but



are nevertheless visible through the literacy and language practices in the home. In the Tannous and Zohair homes there were tensions between private and public space and the ways in which literacy practices were structured, which was evident in practices related to the media, to religion, to study and to entertainment.

### **The street**

I was talking with my brother's son. 'After high school, what do you want to do in the future? Will you be on the street or will you be a gentleman?' I know many families who have been destroyed by their own kids. The father, he has two jobs. His kids go to Kings Cross. They are drug people. Everyone builds up his house. The family can destroy him.

(Mohamad Zohair)

After Mohamed Zohair's brother had died, he had taken on a paternal role with his brother's family of four children.

One of my nephews had the marks to go to university. He got a TER of 88, but he was interested in being a pilot for Qantas. This was too difficult and it costs a lot of money. He decided to go to college in Kotara where his friends were and he trained there to be a computer technician. All this time I was giving money to my brother's family. My nephew, he did two years of the course at TAFE and then left to work as a car painter in Parramatta with Bashir. When I found out I went to the garage to talk with him. He said he went there because he liked the job. He didn't want to change. 'But you can go to university,' I told him. You know he wanted to go with his friends. Three of them now, they hang around the streets, my nephew, one Greek boy and one Anglo. In Lebanon there were no clubs or girlfriends. You went to a job straight from school. Life is not easy to build up but it's easy to destroy.

'Hanging out' and 'on the street' were key issues for all parents. The street was a place where boys spent time if they were not under the control of their parents. The 'street' was associated with lack of respect for parents and for the values of religion, and was linked with drugs, stealing, loss or morals and crime. Terms linked with the 'street' were 'outside', 'Kings Cross' and 'the city'. Opposed to this were 'home', 'family' and 'parents'. The family was linked with the home and with the idea of building up through hard work and through example. The street was seen as destroying this in one blow. Terms linked with the street were 'forbidden', 'the easy way', 'destroy' and 'destruction'. Respect was linked with 'religion' and 'discipline'.

The physical manifestations of the street were shopping malls, local parks and some specific sites such as parks surrounding the local river to the north of where the families lived. These were the places where the peer groups were most free from adult control. In social terms, 'the street' meant staying out late at night and

going out to clubs with friends and being a member of gangs. 'Home' meant participating in family visiting and events. Lack of control on the street was contrasted with the respect and control of the home. It was on the street that the accepted rules for boy/girl contact were broken. Basma Zohair recounted one story in which she had put a stop to Ahmad being chased by a girl.

One girl kissed Ahmad on the way home, by force. She sent him letters. When I saw that and he came home, I smacked his face and gave him a good hiding. I said to him, 'If you so much as look at her, I'll fix you for good.' I sent Mohamad to her parents to tell them to keep their daughter away from my son. He's 15. He's handsome. She fancies him. What can you do?

Most interviews with the Zohairs, the Tannouses and other parents were spiced with stories of other people's children gone wrong. Stories were recounted of the shame that boys had brought to their parents. These stories revolved around teenager pregnancy, accounts of children threatening to report their parents to the police, parents who didn't supervise their children, and having children run away from home. Community workers and several other respondents reported the fear that parents have of losing their boys.

The concept of 'hanging out' tended to become homogenized, even though there was a range of behaviours included. Ali, Lamise's brother, used to 'hang out' with friends in the local park and shops. They were friends from school and one of his cousins. This had been the cause of big problems. He said he was always getting into trouble when it wasn't his fault. One incident was when his father found some magazines that his friends had stolen for him from a local newsagent. Ibrahim had taken Ali back to the shop and made him apologize to the shopkeeper for stealing. After that time he had changed friends at school and had switched weekend soccer clubs. In reality, only a minority of the boys in this study reported hanging out with friends. This confirms a similar finding that 38 per cent of boys and 24 per cent of girls reported 'hanging out' at a public place such as a shopping centre or mall (Chafic 1994). The figures for girls would be lower because parents would sometimes let the girls go shopping in family groups. At the weekend, for example, Basma would sometimes let Maha take her sisters window-shopping to Bellevue mall.

### ***Place and literacy practices***

The construction of the home and street dichotomy was intricately linked with ideas of literacy. The home was the place where learning in English for school and in Arabic was built. The street was antithetical to school and home study and to future careers which involved study. The home was linked with parents being able to help the children succeed in study. Mohamad helped his children with their homework, especially with geography and history. He drove his children to the library when they had projects to do. He often said that if he had \$10 in his

pocket he would spend \$8 on a book for his children. This was contrasted with other parents who gave money without strings to their children.

Here in Australia, the kids they take \$10 and go to Campsie. 'Where have you been, my son? What you do in Campsie?' Nobody ask him. I ask my son. 'I play snooker.' 'Snooker? No, this time is school time. You are not supposed to be there.' But some parents, their kids are there at night time; they are there at 10 p.m.

The home was the place in which there was a physical and important presence of books. Pride of place in both of these Muslim households was given to the Qur'an and books of the prophets. Mohamad had purchased the set of these the year before and brought them out to show me on several visits.

When I went to Lebanon I asked first. I couldn't find them. I sent to Egypt. I asked an Iraqi friend. One day I saw one man. He brought many books from Beirut. They were on display at Wilson Park. These were the last ones left. I was looking. I said to him, 'You have all these books? How much do you want?' 'Four hundred dollars.' 'Too much.' I was asking him, how much did it cost? He said, 'I will give them to you . . . how much can you pay? – \$375?' I said, 'I will give you \$350.' I bought from him all these books.

The books were elegantly bound volumes of the Qur'an and the prophets. The Qur'an was also in English, for his children. At other times Mohamad showed me pamphlets in English about different aspects of Islam. He got these from the mosque and would read them with his children.

The different perceptions of the places were paralleled by the differential perceptions of maturity and application to study. Study was perceived as not coming naturally to boys. It was something that had to be forced to happen in the home and at school. Only two parents commented on any of their boys being a 'reader' or liking study. For Ibrahim Tannous, the pressure and authority of the home were the key in getting Ali to study in Arabic and English.

If you leave children alone they will not turn out well. Ali, my son, doesn't like studying, and I make him do it. 'If you squeeze the olive it produces good oil.' When Ali was in Year 7 they called me up every week. There was a sort of discrimination. Some teachers, if they don't like the student they don't teach him. Your son, he says this; he does that. He's being cheeky to the teacher; he says bad words; he didn't do his homework. I told them, 'I know this. I try to teach him at home. I cannot be everywhere. You must teach him at school how to behave.' We have a saying. The first school is the school you learn in; the second school is the home, because he lives in the school more than he lives at home.

### ***Spaces in the village***

The Tannous and the Zohair families had both made three extended visits to their villages in Lebanon. Accounts of the visits by Ali and Ahmad indicated that the boys' space in the village was perceived as being outside the home. This was not seen, however, as a problem in the village. The parents compared the dangers of the street in Australia with the safety in Lebanon in the villages. In the village, children had to show respect and act properly outside the home because the villagers would chastise them or report misbehaviour to their parents. Ibrahim said that he would never have dared to be outside the house after school when he was a boy, because if his teacher saw him on the streets it meant that he wasn't at home doing his homework. He described the relative responsibilities of home and school.

When I was 12 in Lebanon, my father, he was a baker. I was sitting near the shop. My teacher, he came to buy bread one day. He shook hands with my father. 'How is he?' he said, looking at me. My father said to the teacher, 'I give you the body. You give me the bones.' It sounds cruel but what he meant was, 'You are the teacher. Do what you like with him. You can give him an education. I can't.'

Ibrahim, however, reported, as he got older, spending most time outside the home. The street was the place where boys spent most of their time from puberty onwards (Bourdieu 1973; Davis and Davis 1989).

The selves that jostle each other in the alleys gain their definition from associative relations they are imputed to have with the society that surrounds them. They are contextualized persons.

(Geertz 1983: 66)

Such a division of space had become problematic in Australia because, in the parents' eyes, the role and authority of the home were undermined by other institutions, such as the school, the media and the wider society. Mohamad reported that parents in Lebanon threatened misbehaviour at home with being reported to the teacher. In Australia, the teachers threaten children that they will tell their parents. When Ahmad was in trouble at school Mohamad was confused and could not understand what the school expected him to do as he could not control his son at school. He respected the opportunities the school could give his son but he felt that the school gave Ahmad too much freedom and no responsibility. The media were also a problem. Mohamad found that he was in conflict trying to supervise his children's television viewing of programmes that he did not think suitable. Hanade complained of the American influence on children's values.

In Lebanon the children had to hold their heads down out of respect. Here

they put their feet up; they don't care. There is no support outside the home for the boys learning this respect.

Ibrahim regularly checked and cut out sections from the magazines *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* that he bought his daughters. One of the reasons why most families had bought cable television was for the 24-hour Optus Arabic broadcasts. There was also the feeling of lack of support from the wider society. Like most parents, they were against the government study support Austudy, the government subsidy for students studying in Years 11 and 12, which was paid to the students. Mohamad said that children tended to spend it for themselves, buying clothes or spending it in the clubs, and that the money should go to the mother. His opinion was that children often thought they were independent before they were mature enough to handle it. He saw this as dividing families and giving children economic freedom from their parents. Their children pressure them when they see their friends getting pocket money to buy clothes and other things.

### **Gendered places**

You know, boys are harder than girls. With my daughters, I tell them once, they listen. With my boys I tell them five, six times.

(Ibrahim)

Ibrahim and Hanade, like many parents, drew distinctions constantly between sons and daughters. The girls were more mature. Davis and Davis 1989 report that Arabic-speaking girls are seen to acquire *'aql*, the considering of consequences of actions, many years before boys. Ibrahim Tannous compared the maturity and obedience of his daughters with that of his sons. This maturity of the girls was linked with the responsibilities that they were seen as having in terms of running the household. The home was seen more as the place of the girls and as the domain of the mothers and daughters and the place in which they commanded respect (Hassan *et al.* 1984; Davis and Davis 1989). The natural place of the boys was perceived as outside the home. Tariq, Ali's older brother, spent little time at home. This concerned Ibrahim, who said that in his day a boy of Tariq's age would have been married and have settled down with responsibilities. Ibrahim said that he had changed his approach with Ali and did not him allow the same freedom. Both Ali and Ahmad spent much time in organized activities outside the home after school and at the weekend. This gendered space created problems both ways. Since the parents did not want the boys to have free time 'on the street', they needed either to ensure their presence more in the home or to construct supervised activities outside the home. The construction of space outside the home as not for the girls was sometimes contentious. Lamise complained that when she was younger she had to walk an extra kilometre home to avoid the local park. The park was the place where local boys hung out in the afternoon and if she was seen even walking past where they were she was afraid that stories would

get back to her parents. These divisions and restrictions were seen as narrow by the teachers. Ali's teacher complained about the over-protectiveness of the parents bringing about conflict and a lack of options for the children. May said that girls were forced to choose between a restrictive lifestyle and a complete break from the family and community.

The community is so narrow. They don't know anything outside it. I get constantly surprised at the words they don't know, the experiences they can't relate to. All they have to talk about is visiting their relatives on the weekend. They call the suburb Yaroun after the name of the village in Lebanon. This is because you can live your whole life and never come across anyone or anything outside the community. It's so hard for the girls to break out. If they do the wrong thing they're ostracized by the community.

There were complaints from several of the girls about the perceived unfairness of this division. Lamise kept up a battle with her father and mother for several months before she was allowed to participate in martial arts classes at the local club. She also commented on disliking the division of tasks in the running of the household. Although her brothers did as much as her, their jobs were more enjoyable and related to tasks outside the house such as shopping. The division of space, however, should not be seen as simply repressive of the girls. Hanade and Ibrahim had supported her in most things to do with her involvement outside the home. Lamise was chosen as 'Youth of the Year' by the local Rotary Club. Ibrahim had attended the dinner in her honour with local businessmen. A teacher at Lamise's school said that Ibrahim had shown a lot of courage in attending this dinner because he had stood to lose much face because of his limited English. It was an entirely Anglo context. Hanade and Ibrahim also supported Lamise in her playing soccer in the school and district teams.

She played in the district team last year. You should have seen. Once this other team, they started making cracks about her. You know a girl in a scarf. She just went up to this guy. She tackled him and sat on him until he said he was sorry.

Lamise's involvement in sport was typical of the teenagers in the study. Most of the boys and almost half of the girls were involved in sports activities, particularly soccer and martial arts, at school and outside the home, a finding confirmed in other studies (Chafic 1994). The construction of the home as the place for literacy, the second place for learning, links with the ways in which the home/street divide was gendered. The links between this divide and the higher academic outcomes achieved by the girls and their maintenance of Arabic were noted by many respondents.

### ***Spaces in the school***

The divisions and conflict between staff and students in the schools, outlined in the previous chapter, reflected the ways in which language and aspects of identity were also constructed. The discourse of multiculturalism has been subsumed into prevailing school discourses. On the one hand, cultural sensitivity and community involvement were a feature of school plans and staff development. Students were regularly identified by their cultural, religious or language background as Lebanese, Muslim or Arabic-speaking. On the other hand, there was an oppositional discourse in which multiculturalism was seen as a problem in causing divisions in the society. Both approaches defined students by their Otherness, which was the ethnic, religious and linguistic difference from the majority. The principal of Kotara was interviewed in a major newspaper about the positives of the school considering its low achievement and high drop-out rates.

Kotara is multicultural. There are some 25 countries and languages represented in this school. Although the main group is Lebanese, there are also Chinese, Turkish, Macedonian students. The school is a real mixing pot and students learn to understand and appreciate each other's languages and cultures.

The discourse of 'them' and 'us' was a common one running alongside the official discourse. Hetty, the library assistant at Bellevue, echoed the comments from many of the long-serving administration staff.

The school used to be better. It was originally the Greeks. They weren't too bad. Then came the Christian Lebanese. Most of them have gone to St John's now [the local Catholic school]. Then the Muslims came. I don't want to sound prejudiced, but they're a problem. Pauline Hanson [a politician standing on an anti-immigration platform] wasn't very bright, but she was right to say that they are stirring up problems.

Ethnicity was constantly foregrounded: students were not called 'Australian' (since this would be seen as excluding their linguistic, cultural or religious background). Neither were double-barrelled terms such as 'Arabic-Australian' or 'Italian-Australian' used. There was only one occasion on which a teacher addressed students as 'Australian'. In Islamic College, Iqbal, a teacher of Hindi background, was conducting a class on government with his students, mainly of Arabic-speaking Muslim background. The discussion had been about racism and its effects on Muslims in Australia.

*Fouad:* We can't change it. It's the Australians.

*Iqbal:* But you're Australians.

*Fouad:* No, we're not, we're . . .

- Iqbal:* You were born here. You're Australians. You can get elected to parliament and you can change things.
- Fouad:* We're Lebs.
- Iqbal:* No, you're not. Your parents were born there. You're born in Australia.

Being Muslim, Arabic-speaking or Lebanese had become an oppositional discourse. Arabic was used in classrooms against the teacher. It was used on the sports field against the other teams, and it was used in the playgrounds as a sign of solidarity:

'cause on our hockey team we're all Lebanese and we say 'Pass it to me' in Lebanese. We tell each other what to do so the other team won't know. With teachers sometimes too. Like if he's picking on you, you might make a job in Lebanese.

The comment 'We're Lebs' was used in situations in which students were giving excuses not to do things. Being Leb was equated with not succeeding or trying at school. It was also drawing on ethnic-based humour in the media in which actors and writers from ethnic backgrounds have turned stereotyping and terms of abuse such as 'wogs' and 'Lebs' into humour that makes fun of mainstream Anglo ways and values. Lamise and several other students commented negatively on the way in which stereotyping assumptions were made. When there was particular concern at Kotara about the lack of respect that students were showing teachers, the principal asked in the imam from the local mosque to address the students about respect, which was a central tenet of Islam. The reaction from many students, including Lamise, was extremely negative.

What does he know? How dare he talk to us that way? He treated us like children. They think everyone here is Muslim and goes to the mosque.

Teenagers were also aware of the effects of being seen as the outsider. Mona, one of Lamise's friends, had been to Lebanon with her parents the previous year and commented on being always defined as Other, something that is now a common theme in studies of pendulum migration (Papademetre 1994).

In Australia they call me Lebanese. In Lebanon they call me Australian. Now I come back and I'm Lebanese again. Wherever I am, I'm the opposite.

## Aspects of identity

How important is ethnicity? Identity for ethnic minority youth is often defined in terms of ethnicity, language and religious background. Terms such as 'ethnicity' and 'bicultural identity', however, are problematic in that they represent definitions by others and simplify the complex nature of identity in multilingual



contexts. Some research into language and cultural identity strongly suggests that, in a society with large minority language groups, language use is considered by bilinguals as the most salient feature of bilingual group identity along with cultural saliences (Edwards 1985; Edwards and Chisholm 1987; Gudykunst 1988). Studies have shown various ways of identification. Some have found that teenagers identify in a double-barrelled way on the basis of parents' and children's countries of birth (e.g. Lebanese-Australian, Italian-American). Noble and Tabar (2002) found that teenagers used the hyphenated descriptor 'Australian-Lebanese' or 'Lebanese-Australian', with 'Lebanese' being the cultural or ethnic marker and 'Australian' indicating the state or nation where teenagers lived or were born. Affiliation was, however, very contextualized and hybrid, with teenagers emphasizing 'Lebanese-ness' or 'Australian-ness' at different times. Other studies show identification by religion first (e.g. Muslim or Muslim-Australian). This was the case with many of the Muslim girls (not boys) in the present study. Others have shown identification mainly by parents' country of origin (Chafic 1994; Parker-Jenkin 1996). The difficulty with such studies is that identity is often defined for respondents in the research questions themselves primarily in terms of ethnicity, and the data are obtained in contexts in which ethnicity is highlighted. Heath and McLaughlin (1993), in their five-year study of urban ethnic minority youth in the United States, found that ethnicity was more a government policy invention taken on by the middle classes.

Ethnicity seemed, from the youth perspective to be more often a label assigned to them by outsiders than an indication of their real sense of self. Many young people told us repeatedly, 'Ethnicity ain't what it's really all about.'

(Heath and McLaughlin 1993)

In contexts where ethnicity is constantly foregrounded in the school, it is inevitable that students will identify in terms of ethnicity. Government forms now require information on ethnic, religious or language background, and students become used to defining themselves in this way for official documents. In practice, Lamise used a range of terms to describe ethnicity. When recounting issues to do with racism outside the school, she used the term 'Lebanese' or 'Muslim' for herself and her friends and 'Australian' for the others. A few minutes later in the same conversation, in response to a direct question about ethnicity, she answered:

I guess Muslim first and Australian. Lebanese? Not really. My parents were born there, but I was born here.

### **Racism and identity**

The prejudice, it's religious and racial. Once I went to Cronulla. I was the only girl wearing a scarf. These guys yell out to me. 'Hey, Leb, take that tea towel off your head.' I started yelling back at them. They're so slack. They

don't respect you. The Greeks and the Italians, they're like us. They understand. When one of their family dies, they have to wear a scarf. They understand. It's just Australians. I've got nothing against them. Some of my closest friends are Australians. They just don't understand why we have to wear it. We cover up and they don't.

Lamise is giving an account of the racism she encounters when she wears the hijab, the headscarf, outside her home. Place was an important feature in teenagers' accounts of prejudice and racism. The divisions were primarily in terms of their schools and other schools, between their suburb and other areas, and between Lebanese/Muslim background, other ethnic background and Anglo-Australians. Many of the stories of incidents involved teenagers on excursions to other schools, on public transport and on trips outside their suburb. Lamise recounted the two following accounts from one week at school.

It's hard being Muslim, 'cause when I go out people make fun a lot. On Monday we had soccer knockouts. We were playing against an Australian school and that. My friend was wearing a scarf, and the referee and everyone goes, 'Take your headgear off, 'cause it might hurt someone. You're not allowed to wear anything on your head.' And she just looked at him and said, 'I'm not going to remove it.' And he goes, 'Yes, you are.' And my teacher goes, 'It's part of our religion' and stuff. 'Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know.' And at half-time there was half the school, six times bigger than ours, and they're all just sitting there watching us and they're calling out, 'Take that tea towel off your head!'

This Tuesday we played against Kengrove School and they go, 'Why do you have to wear a scarf?' We go, 'Cause we have to.' Then what happened, girls came up to me and punched me. And another came up and kicked me. I went off to cool down for about ten minutes and they still go, 'I hate Lebanese' and 'You are all wogs', and they started pushing. 'Come on. What are you going to do?' Then this boy with them, he says the 'f' word and he pushed me. I don't like fighting with boys, but I put him on the ground. That's what I did. I really got angry with that boy. I kicked their soccer ball over to the place next to us and I wouldn't go get it.

Girls reported more religious prejudice when wearing the hijab; boys reported more racial prejudice against their being of Lebanese background. The common factor in both cases was the most visible difference.

On the train they were all Lebanese. We were going home. This lady gets on the train. All the Lebanese guys were talking loud and then the lady goes and calls the guard. And the guard goes, 'Keep your voices down.' And she gets up and she goes, 'You stupid Lebanese. Go back to your own country.'

You've got no manners.' She was yelling at us. I got up and I said, 'You're no better, 'cause you came into this country with chains on your legs.' She turned around and slapped me.

(Lamise)

A common theme was prejudice in the wider community, the perceived difficulty of women finding work if they were veiled, and perceptions of bias in the media.

When the war was on, my dad and my sister were in Lebanon and we taped the news here so that they'd know what was going on. When he came back, he said, 'They're not showing what's going on on TV.' We got a video from Lebanon. It shows a baby, three days old, that they're selling at the mosque. I reckon they should show the truth. I reckon when it comes to Lebanese it's nothing the way they describe us, the Muslims. Let's just say an Australian man, he was Christian, he robbed a store. They say his name. They don't say he's Christian and that. But if he's Muslim, they say a Muslim man killed this guy. That's not fair. Just say names name and what he's done. They think that, because one of us is bad, then all of us are the same.

(Lamise)

The construction of prejudice was linked with that of place and space. Their own school was a supportive environment, whilst other schools were places of conflict.

I reckon the teachers at this school, none of them are racist – like, they understand us. They're used to us. Everything at the canteen is halal and that means we can eat it. They get it from our butcher. A lot of things are done for us 'cause we are the majority. But when we go to other schools . . .

One factor in this could have been the rapid segmentation in Australian schools along ethnic, class and language lines that has taken place in the past decade (an issue discussed in Chapter 7). Racism was also based on suburb and place outside the community. There were also perceived gradations in understanding in terms of other minority ethnic language groups and the majority. These findings confirm other studies showing growing divisions in Australian schools as children get older between groups of Anglo-Australian background, 'Asian' (Indian sub-continent, Vietnamese, Korean and Chinese backgrounds) and Middle East 'European' (Arabic, Turkish, Greek and Italian backgrounds).

### ***Religion and identity***

Much has been made of the growing importance of religion, both Christian and Muslim, in diasporic ethnic community groups such as Arabic-speakers in



*Figure 6.1* Muslim girls' soccer team.



*Figure 6.2* After the game.



Figure 6.3 Playground at Kotara High School.

Australia. In the past decade there have been 15 new private Muslim day schools established; mosques and related welfare groups have developed; there has also been the establishment of Islamic media. Lamise, like several of the girls and their mothers in the study, had begun wearing the hijab. Mohamad said that he had only begun attending the mosque each week since he had left work. Both Ibrahim and Hanade reported that they had come to see their religion as the main support in keeping their family strong and united only in the past few years. Religion figured prominently in many conversations with the teenagers, especially the girls. How can such a change be understood or explained in families which have been in Australia for several decades? Does it represent a return to tradition?

The phenomenon is a complex one that is in no way traditional. It is true that Arabic-speaking background students, both Christian and Muslim, practised their religion more frequently than other ethnic minority students (Suliman 2003). There are no comparative data to indicate whether this is a factor related to migration or one that existed in the parents' countries of origin. Many of the community workers, like Ferial, linked the growing importance of religion in Australia to the parents' fears and need for support for the family.

What scares them the most is losing their boys. They worry less about the girls. Parents feel that they don't get support from the schools or the government. It is only the mosques and churches which are helping them.

Girls commonly stated that the decision to wear the hijab was a personal one,

but that it was a decision which they felt gave respect to their parents and also afforded them more freedom in the community; their parents were less worried about letting them go out with friends and siblings. The wearing of the hijab was not accompanied by the girls espousing what could be called traditional attitudes. Lamise and others were involved in sport, participated in school activities in leadership roles and were keenly aware of sexism and its effects. Research into the return to wearing the hijab in Middle Eastern countries has been called 'retraditionalization'. It is partly a reaction to changes in modern society but one that occurs within the context of greater rights and freedom for women. One study in Egypt found that veiled and non-veiled women both showed strong support for women's access to work and education (Abu-Lughud 2002). The role of religion in the construction of the teenagers' identity can perhaps be best understood in the context of changes in the ethnic minority groups and the wider society, rather than as a simple return to traditions of the countries of origin.

### **Another way of explaining identity**

The international movement of capital and labour, the globalization of media and trade and the increase in migration have made deterritorialization an inevitable and common feature of modern societies, where communities reconstruct affiliations and attachments away from their original contexts (Appadurai 1996, 2002). The reproduction of the gendered division of space, of spaces in the home and of home/street divisions can be seen as examples of this. Such transpositions can be productive and liberatory and can also lead to isolation and be problematic.

The process of globalization of culture and hence of literacy practices involves a tension of heterogenization as well as homogenization. These disjunctures of fragmentation and homogenization have been characterized by Appadurai (1996) in five dimensions: *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *technoscapes*, *financscapes* and *ideoscapes*. By *ethnoscapes*, Appadurai means the dynamic nature of communities and networks, of kinship, friendship and work, that is being caused by world-wide migration and international travel. The diaspora of the Tannous and Zohair families from Lebanon is one tiny facet in the history of the sociology of displacement. The development of international travel has facilitated the families moving between Lebanon and Australia. By *technoscapes* is meant the global configuration of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, moves at high speeds across boundaries. The developments in technology and the media have facilitated, on the one hand, the centralization of power and control to media empires and, on the other hand, the explosion of media and technological options at the local level. Appadurai uses the term '*financscapes*' to describe the development of currency markets and the movement of capital. *Ideoscapes* are images but also have to do with state ideologies and the counter-ideologies of movements. The concatenation of terms such as 'repression', 'imperialism', 'democracy', 'religion' and 'freedom', terms that were mentioned in conversations with Mohamad Zohair, is an example of

this. These are five dimensions of disjunctures, tensions that are resulting from global changes. What happens is that global instruments of homogenization, such as advertising, clothing styles and the hegemony of English, are subsumed into the very local political and cultural economies. The female rappers in Ali's class, for example, wear the hijab. In families such as the Tannous and the Zohair families, who have multiple affiliations in terms of religion, language, culture and senses of belonging, these tensions are played out. They are families from the diaspora of Lebanon brought into the labouring population of a relatively wealthy, relatively monocultural society (in power if not in demography). It is to be expected that the literacy practices in the families reflect the complexity of conflicting influences, forces and allegiances.

Two important changes have occurred since the parents migrated in the late 1970s. The first is the rise of ethnicity and multiculturalism, a government response to the growing linguistic and cultural diversity in schools and the community. The second change has been the growth in religious affiliation in the families and community. As the communities became better established, mosques were built, providing families with the support that they felt neither government nor their own and the wider communities were able to offer.

### ***Frames for identity***

A youth's sense of personhood, self, and future results from the interplay of the multiple contexts in which he or she moves: community, neighbourhood, family, peer group, social institutions, and labels of ethnic membership defined by the larger society. These give multiple dimensions – son, Latino, student, Baptist, younger sister, gangbanger, athlete, immigrant – and situate meaning and circumstance.

(Heath and McLaughlin 1993)

In many of the community and school contexts in which they operated, Lamise and Ahmad were faced with identities defined by others, situations in which ethnicity and other differences were foregrounded. However, to see them as being 'lost between cultures' is totally inappropriate: both teenagers made sense of the linguistic and cultural features of their daily lives, as shown by the ways they defined, described and negotiated these aspects. Lamise was more limited in the number of contexts in which she operated but her school experiences were more positive. Like a number of the girls in the study, she was academically successful. Ahmad had had less positive school experiences. Both teenagers actively negotiated across the divisions of space and identities. Their experiences both in Australia and in visits to their parents' countries of origin and their experiences in home and school contexts led to them recognizing that identification has as much to do with how they see themselves as it does with how others label them. Tsolidis (1986, 2001) calls this the framing of a third space, a diasporic identity. In her study of ethnic minority girls she found that the girls 'chose actively not to

assimilate, both because they liked aspects of their minority cultures and because they did not like aspects of mainstream culture as it was understood by them' (Tsolidis 2001).

This is not to downplay the effect of the divisions between themselves and the wider society. The schools which Lamise and Ahmad attend have become 'ghettoized', with the vast majority of students from Arabic backgrounds. Both schools have amongst the highest attrition rates and the lowest academic outcomes in the state. Although they may at times call themselves Australian, they perceive a barrier between themselves and the dominant Anglo-Australian society. The government policies of multiculturalism and fostering of cultural pluralism have in school-level interpretations worked to confirm this division. The growing divisions have foregrounded issues such as ethnicity and religious difference. These are 'other-defined' aspects of identity and narrow the scope for self-defined identities. The irony of all of this is that 'Australian-ness', 'English-ness' and 'American-ness' are just as complicated and nearly as deterritorialized notions as being of Arabic-speaking, Muslim or Lebanese background. The problems lie not in the ways the teenagers' identities are constructed: these are simply ways of dealing with the unequal access to what the society has to offer.





## Part II

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# Making sense of literacy research

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### Introduction

Part II of the book explores the contexts of the issues raised in Part I. The educational experiences and outcomes of many of the teenagers in the schools were unsatisfactory. There were patterns of failure, of early school leaving and of not achieving potential. Chapter 7 addresses the recent evidence and debates about disadvantage and ethnic minority youth. It also looks at the discourses of disadvantage: the ways it has been described and where disadvantage has been located. The chapter argues for a more complex understanding of the ways in which difference becomes deficit in the contexts of education.

The dominant paradigm in improving educational outcomes in the 1990s was the school change movement. The focus has been on programmes which are designed to bring about improvements in all areas of management, staffing and pedagogy in schools and school systems. Chapter 8 addresses the question of how the educational experiences and outcomes of the teenagers in this study could be more satisfactory. It questions the decontextualized nature of much of the school reform movement in two ways: firstly, that it underestimates the impact of wider social and political forces and, secondly, that it does not take into account factors particular to local schools and communities. This chapter examines possible solutions for systems or districts, individual schools and classroom teachers.

Much educational research in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand takes place in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. Chapter 9 addresses some of the issues which education researchers face in such contexts and the implications of these issues for research.

The field of literacy research has become polarized over the past decade and has been criticized for ‘disciplinary insularity’, being locked into narrow approaches. Chapter 10 presents an overview of literacy research, drawing out the common threads with a focus on the tradition of mixed-method research. Chapter 11 explores some of the concepts of literacy as social practice that inform the development of literacy research and data analysis.



# No single factor

## Literacy and disadvantage

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### Background

A thumbnail sketch of the teenagers and their families in terms of the social and educational outcomes would give a picture of an ethnic community which had its main migration during the economic recession of the 1970s and early 1980s and which is characterized by disadvantage on most indicators. Such a picture would be misleading. This chapter traces the move from generalized notions of ethnic disadvantage in the 1970s through reactions to the use of aggregated data to recent use of fine-grained data addressing specific factors and groups of factors. It also examines the discourses of disadvantage and the role literacy has come to play in these discourses.

### Thumbnail sketch

The population of Arabic-speakers grew rapidly in Australia from 50,000 in 1976 to 120,000 in 1986 to 163,000 in 1991. In New South Wales, the largest state, there were 125,000 Arabic-speakers by 1996 and it had become the main language, after English, of New South Wales school students (Clyne 1991: vii; DET 1996). The 1991 census indicated there were 80,000 people born in the Middle East, 60 per cent of whom came from Lebanon. The population is young, with 68 per cent aged under 35 (Kipp *et al.* 1995). It is therefore one of the fastest-growing immigrant communities, paralleling the United States, where the Arabic background population now exceeds 6 million.

On all indicators the overall profile is one of disadvantage (Young *et al.* 1980; Meade 1983; Humphrey and Hausfeld 1984; Horvath 1986; Strickland 1986; Taft and Cahill 1989; Campbell *et al.* 1993; Kipp *et al.* 1995; Suliman 2003). Only 19.5 per cent of the Arabic-speakers in Australia have a formal qualification, and several studies indicate that 10 per cent of adults had no formal education. The main areas of employment are labouring and factory work (70 per cent). Employment levels are low, 40 per cent for those between 15 and 65, and unemployment rates for youth are unacceptably high, between 50 per cent and 60 per cent. Income levels are low, with 43 per cent earning less than A\$20,000 per

year. Literacy levels in Arabic are low and attrition rates of literacy in Arabic are rapid; spoken Arabic is maintained into the second generation but is lost rapidly in the third. School outcomes for Arabic-speaking background youth are lower than average even though tests of non-verbal performance show the same results as for other ethnic groups. School retention rates are lower than average and students of Lebanese backgrounds tend to be placed in lower-stream classes in schools. The Year 10 and Year 12 secondary school tests show that Arabic-speaking students have lower outcomes than the average for ethnic minority, and much lower than those for English-speaking, background students.

Such a picture reflects that of Hispanic students in the United States and Afro-Caribbean and some Asian background groups in the UK. Hispanic Americans and African-Americans consistently perform below other groups in test results and have lower school retention rates (Cummins 1984, 1994; Thomas and Collier 1997). The achievement gap between white pupils and their Pakistani and Afro-Caribbean classmates in the UK has doubled since the 1980s, and the relative achievement of Afro-Caribbean students declines at each key stage of schooling.

### ***The problems with ethnic disadvantage***

There are many problems with the above sketch. Researchers since the 1970s have used aggregated data to make generalized claims for 'ethnic disadvantage' but findings have been very contradictory.

- At an aggregate level, ethnic minority students have higher-than-average participation rates in post-compulsory education (Dobson *et al.* 1996).
- Ethnic minority parents have higher-than-average educational aspirations for their children (Kao and Tienda 1995; Venez and Abrahamse 1996; Rumbaut 1997; Sturman 1997).
- First- and second-generation ethnic minority students in the US (apart from Latinos) attain higher-than-average grades (Kao and Tienda 1995; Rumbaut 1997).
- Ethnic minority students generally have more positive views of their schooling experience (Ainley *et al.* 1986; Ainley 1995; Sturman 1997).
- Many studies have found, in fact, that there are more differences within and between ethnic groups than there are between ethnic minority and majority groups as a whole.

Findings from research into the second children of migrants, the second generation, have also been contradictory. A significant number of second-generation students in some ethnic groups have higher achievable aspirations and motivation than many Anglo-Australians (Bullivant 1988). One recent report concluded that any disadvantage is short-term and minimal and that 'the second generation as a group are doing or had done better than their peers who are at least third

generation in terms of educational attainment and occupational status' (Khoo *et al.* 2002: vii). Press releases and newspapers heralded this report with the statement that there is 'a remarkable leap up the social ladder in only one generation' and that that 'most second-generation children are proficient in English by age ten irrespective of their parents' language skills' (Jopson 2002).

Contradictory findings led many researchers to reject notions of ethnic disadvantage and to argue, in fact, that ethnic minority students were achieving at or above the average (Williams *et al.* 1981; Sturman 1985; Birrell and Seitz 1986; Clifton *et al.* 1987; Etziona-Halevy 1987; Bullivant 1988; Birrell and Khoo 1995; Dobson *et al.* 1996). The argument that there is no such phenomenon as ethnic youth disadvantage, that any differences are due only to length of residence (they are temporary learning difficulties due to poor English proficiency) and that by the second generation outcomes are above average has continued as received wisdom in many reports since the 1980s (ANAO 1992; Khoo *et al.* 2002). Findings from such research have been linked to the withdrawal of government funding from ESL and bilingual and multicultural programmes and the attrition of structures that had supported these programmes (Slonieć 1992; Cahill 1996).

Arguments for or against generalized notions of ethnic disadvantage have several flaws in common. The main problem has been the reliance on aggregated data treating ethnic minority and majority groups as coherent and homogeneous entities. Australian research, for example, has tended to combine immigrant background students into three broad categories: Australian-born students, students born overseas in non-English-speaking countries, and students born overseas in English-speaking countries. These categorizations gloss over the fact that differences within groups are often greater than the differences between groups (Meade 1983; Sturman 1997). Studies which consider variables tend to focus on status variables (such as socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, household income, parental occupation and levels of qualifications) over process variables (such as family and school environmental factors) which might have more of an explanatory value. The lack of qualitative data or mixed-method research has meant that not enough has been done to identify causal variables which could explain contradictory findings (Kalantzis and Cope 1988; Slonieć 1992).

The major issue has been the confusion and lack of agreement in key terms and their definitions, terms such as 'ethnicity', 'ethnic minority', 'bilingual'/'bicultural', 'non-English-speaking background' and 'Asian'/'Afro-Caribbean'/'Arabic'. 'Ethnicity', for example, has been defined variously by country of birth (of students, parents and/or grandparents), language use, cultural identification and affiliation (both self- and other-defined). Most of the terms are problematic since the affiliations and links that people from ethnic minority backgrounds have with each other and with the wider society are multifarious and dynamic. Religion, country of origin, language(s) spoken, length of residence, class background, gender and employment are only some of the factors that affect identities, behaviours and outcomes. The notion of community is particularly

problematic for diasporic groups because of the interweaving thread of religious, linguistic, cultural and geographic (village) affiliations and the ways in which these have been reconstituted in the process of migration. Internal and external forces are changed, with the effect that individuals can completely redefine their group memberships and identities.

Many of the terms used in research are borrowed from categories used in the collection of census and other data and then promoted by governments. Terms referring to group and community imply a homogeneity and set of boundaries and identifying factors which can be counterproductive in research (Heath and McLaughlin 1993; Barton and Hamilton 1998). Many also establish dichotomies in negative or deficit ways: non-English-speaking background, limited English proficiency, ethnic minority, Asian-American/-Australian. Several studies have tracked the history of the term 'ethnicity' used by governments as a replacement for the rhetoric of 'race' in constructing difference (de Lepervanche 1980; Heath and McLaughlin 1993; Tsolidis 2001).

### **Educational outcomes**

After some 30 years of research evidence in OECD countries examining the relationship between immigration, ethnic/language background and school achievement, it should be possible to answer the question, 'What are the educational outcomes of ethnic minority students?'

The lived experience of the Arabic-speaking teenagers, their families and teachers in the local schools is that the hoped-for educational outcomes are not eventuating. The schools attended by the teenagers in the study had the lowest school exam results in the state. The high school completion rate was around 40 per cent compared with the average 70 per cent. There were differences within the schools themselves. Arabic-speaking students were generally placed in low-stream classes and scored lower on all tests than other students in the schools (Suliman 2003).

In the past decade meta-analyses of previous research and large-scale studies combining quantitative and qualitative approaches have been able to provide much more sophisticated models and findings. This research indicates that in all OECD countries students from particular ethnic/language backgrounds have unsatisfactory educational outcomes which cannot be explained simply in terms of socio-economic status or length of residence and that the patterns of these outcomes continue into the second and third generation.

- Students of Vietnamese, Chinese and Korean backgrounds in the US have higher-than-average results whilst Cambodian, African-American and Spanish-speaking students have below-average outcomes (Portes and Zhou 1993; Ogbu and Simons 1998).
- The school drop-out rate of Latino youth is 30 per cent compared with 8 per cent for whites (MacMillan *et al.* 1997).

- Unemployment rates among people of Afro-Caribbean and south Asian origin in the UK are twice the average and are nearly 50 per cent among Afro-Caribbeans aged 16–19 (Brown 1984).
- Children of Afro-Caribbean and Asian (Indian subcontinent) backgrounds fall behind white children during primary school. On entry to secondary school, Afro-Caribbean and Asian background students are achieving at a lower level even when socio-economic status is taken into account. Afro-Caribbean background students tend to fall behind further in secondary school. Asian background students catch up during secondary school and obtain similar examination results to white students (Maugham and Rutter 1986; Smith and Tomlinson 1989).
- There are differences between different language/ethnic backgrounds with students of Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds constantly having lower outcomes than students of Indian or African backgrounds (Haque and Bell 2001).
- Students from Maltese, Arabic-speaking, Turkish, Filipino and Oceanic language backgrounds in Australia have unacceptably low educational outcomes. Students of Maltese background have low school retention rates and significantly lower-than-average school outcomes (Meade 1983; Terry *et al.* 1993; Sultana 1994; Khoo *et al.* 2002).
- Although Arabic background students constitute 3.5 per cent of students in government schools, they make up only 2.5 per cent of students at technical college and 0.9 per cent of university students (Iredale and Fox 1994). Both first- and second-generation Arabic background students have lower school retention rates, low levels of post-secondary qualifications and higher unemployment rates (Humphrey and Hausfeld 1984; Khoo *et al.* 2002).
- There are also significant differences within specific ethnic/language groups. Although Chinese background students have higher-than-average educational outcomes, there are many differences between specific subgroups. Students of refugee background occupy the bottom 25 per cent whilst international students occupy the top 17 per cent. Higher outcomes are associated with factors such as non-refugee status and short residency in Australia (Chan 1987). Such bipolar distribution exists in many of the groups studied, with higher-than-average participation in tertiary study and higher-than-average unemployment figures (Birrell and Khoo 1995; Cahill 1996).

Increasing research attention has been given to the educational outcomes of the children of immigrants and ESL students who entered the schooling system in late primary or early secondary years. The students are called ‘Generation 1.5’ and there is growing evidence that these children are performing less well in post-secondary study than those who have completed their education overseas (Harklau *et al.* 1999; Schmid 2001). Research also points to intergenerational changes. Participation by students of Turkish background in tertiary education was alarmingly low until the mid-1980s. The gap narrowed in the 1990s although



Turkish young people are still underrepresented in all areas of post-secondary education (Inglis *et al.* 1992; Inglis *et al.* 1993; Dobson *et al.* 1996). The position of the second generation of Greek-, Italian-, Yugoslav- and Lebanese-born parents was better than the first generation (Hugo 1987; Brooks 1996; Khoo *et al.* 2002). A major American study found a 'segmented' picture of outcomes, with one pattern being upward mobility combined with loss of first language and culture, a second pattern being continuation of low outcomes between generations and the third being 'rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity' (Portes and Zhou 1993: 82). Those fitting the first pattern of upward mobility and language loss would be the children of Cuban exiles in Miami. Those fitting the third category of upward mobility and language and cultural maintenance would be Vietnamese in California and New Orleans, Punjabi Sikhs in the UK and the Greek community in Australia (Rumbaut 1997; Zhou and Bankston 1998).

There is unequivocal evidence that in Australia, the US, Canada and the UK the educational outcomes of some ethnic language groups are unacceptably low and for other groups and subgroups higher than for English-speaking background students. Research is now becoming available for second-generation ethnic minority students which confirms to some extent the continuation of differential outcomes.

## Factors explaining outcomes

There is now a wealth of quantitative and qualitative research data on factors influencing minority ethnic student outcomes. Research evidence in this section is grouped into five areas: firstly, there are status factors, such as socio-economic status, class, ethnicity and gender; the second area is variables relating to language and literacy; the third area is the research into literacy in social contexts; the fourth is research into home/school differences; the final area is variables relating to whole-school contexts, which has been termed the 'school' effect.

### **How important is socio-economic status?**

Socio-economic status has been a constant variable identified in the research. The differential outcomes of Asian-American students (Chinese, Korean and Japanese backgrounds) and Latino students have been attributed to their relatively high and low socio-economic status (Kao 1995; Portes and Macleod 1996; Blair and Legazpi 1999; Schmid 2001). Many studies also indicate correlations between outcomes and family factors such as household income, parental levels of education, parental occupational backgrounds and housing tenure (Khoo *et al.* 2002). However, even when differences such as in English ability and socio-economic status are controlled, there still remain unexplained differences in outcomes (Fejgin 1995; Rumbaut 1995). A meta-analysis of more than 200 studies from the late 1970s and early 1980s found that socio-economic status accounts for

only about 5 per cent of variance in performance of ethnic minority students (White 1982). Clearly, socio-economic status by itself is a relatively minor factor in being able to explain differential outcomes.

### ***Do ethnic minority students have lower educational aspirations?***

Every study since the 1970s has indicated that students from all ethnic/language minority groups have higher-than-average educational aspirations, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Taft 1975; Meade 1983; Myhill *et al.* 1994; Marjoribanks 2002). A recent study found that 83 per cent of Arabic-speaking parents wanted their children to complete Year 12 (Suliman 2003). There is greater-than-average congruence in children's and parents' aspirations in ethnic minority families and there is evidence that students succeed despite school expectations which are often lower than parents' expectations (Meade 1983). The fact that aspirations have not always been realized has been attributed to a range of factors (Marjoribanks 1980, 2002).

### ***How important is ethnicity?***

Ethnicity is notoriously difficult to define and more a product of interaction between the host society and immigrant groups than a variable which can be easily defined in terms of a parent's country of origin, language spoken at home, self-identification or one of the host of definitions used by governments (Heath and McLaughlin 1993; Papademetre 1994). Although many studies work from country of birth rather than ethnicity there is still a body of research examining the ethnicity variable.

A major US study of 77 ethnic/language groups found that the influence of cultural background remained and could not be disaggregated by key demographic, socio-economic status, and socio-psychological factors (Portes 1999). The study focused particularly on the high outcomes of Cuban- and Vietnamese-Americans and the low outcomes of Haitian- and Mexican-Americans. The differential outcomes relate not just to cultural differences but the ways in which the wider society understands and constructs these differences. These differential outcomes which are evident in the first generation can be continued in the second and third generation (Perlmann 1988; Portes 1999).

... the factors that account for the significant differences among these groups have to do with the human capital that immigrants bring with them from their countries of origin and the social context that receives them and shapes their adaptation.

(Portes and MacLeod 1996: 271)

The second major finding has been that the stronger the children's ethnic

identity, or attachment to their families' culture, the better the academic outcomes (Fejgin 1995; Gibson 1998; Zhou and Bankston 1998). High-achieving groups in the US such as US-born children of Punjabi, Jewish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Filipino backgrounds combined a higher attachment to their parents' culture with high levels of competence in the dominant culture.

The children of immigrants who remain strongly anchored in their ethnic cultures and communities and acquire fluency in both the ethnic and English languages are, in many instances, able to surpass the third generation who are usually dominant in English.

(Schmid 2001: 85)

One study of Mexican-born youth in the United States and Mexico found that underachievement in the US is not a cultural phenomenon but a result of the students' experiences in the US and of their status in American society (Carola and Marcelo, 1996, in Portes 1996). Cultural factors seem to play a role in differential outcomes, but this role is a complex one. It includes the ways in which the dominant culture constructs the minority culture and the related level of identification with and attachment to the minority culture that ethnic minority students have.

### ***Is gender an issue?***

Gender is emerging as an ambiguous issue in recent studies. Females are more likely than males to maintain the parents' language in the second generation (Gibson 1998; Portes and Hao 1998; Valenzuela 1999). The higher levels of fluency in Spanish of Mexican-American girls were linked with their higher academic outcomes and lower drop-out rates. Girls from Asian (Indian subcontinent) backgrounds are outperforming boys in the UK (Haque and Bell 2001). Girls from bilingual backgrounds tend to have higher educational aspirations than boys, although boys have higher occupational aspirations (Marjoribanks 2002). Earlier studies challenged stereotypes of ethnic minority girls as victims in a community/school clash of cultures and attributed the paucity of research to the relationship between mainstream and multicultural feminism (Kalantzis and Cope 1987; Martin 1991; Pallotta-Chiarolli 1993; Tsolidis 1993, 2001). The importance of gender varies according to different ethnic/language groups (Khoo *et al.* 2002).

### ***How status factors interrelate***

There is no simple answer to the question of why students of Chinese backgrounds, for example, have higher educational outcomes than students of Arabic-speaking backgrounds. Most recent research has focused on the interaction between factors that are internal and external to the ethnic/language groups

(Zhou 1997; Marjoribanks 2002). External factors identified in studies include economic opportunities, racial stratification and neighbourhood segregation. Internal factors include the financial and human capital that the groups have available to them, family structure, organization of the community and cultural patterns of social relations. Recent studies have criticized the emphasis on status variables because of their static nature, giving evidence of environmental forces rather than explaining the forces themselves (Cahill 1996). Social status variables are less predictive of academic achievement than are family and school environmental factors (Goodnow and Cashmore 1985).

Although status characteristics of the family or home correlate positively with school achievement, they are of limited utility in explaining how homes actually operate to provide either effective or ineffective educational settings for children.

(Kifer 1987, in Cahill 1996: 38)

## **Language and literacy**

### ***Length of time to acquire literacy in English***

Cummins (1981a, 1981b) and Collier (1987, 1989), in analyses of large-scale test data, found that it takes between one and two years for second-language learners to acquire peer-appropriate levels in conversational aspects of English proficiency. They found that a period of five to seven years is required, on average, for ethnic minority students to attain grade norms in academic aspects of spoken and written English.

### ***Literacy in the first language***

The possession of a level of literacy in the first language has been the major factor identified in studies over the past decade in affecting academic outcomes in the second language. The level of fluency (both spoken and written) in the first language is the key predictor of the acquisition of spoken and written English. Collier (1989) found that young children with no schooling or literacy in their first language took between seven and ten years to reach the national average performance of native speakers in standardized tests. This finding applied to students of varying ages and language backgrounds. Cummins (1981a, 1981b), Collier (1989) and Verhoeven (1990), among others, have found that ESL students who are literate in their first language acquire English in between four and seven years. Collier even concluded that their performance 'may reach national norms in as little as two years in tests using English in mathematics and language arts' (1989: 526). She identified continued development in the first language as the main factor facilitating cognitive and linguistic development in English. These findings have been confirmed by numerous studies in the US. Second-generation

Vietnamese-Americans who can read and write Vietnamese well are much more likely (47 per cent) to report receiving high grades than those who were less fluent (Bankston 1997; Bankston and Zhou 1995). The implication is that children best learn to read in the language they know best and have their first language developed through the education system. There is now a strong body of research supporting bilingual programmes (Cummins 1984; Bialystok and Ryan 1985; Willig 1985; Hakuta 1986; Thomas and Collier 1997).

Verhoeven (1991) compares three models of literacy acquisition for their effectiveness: submersion, in which children are taught reading and writing in their second language; simultaneous, in which first- and second-language literacies are taught at the same time; and successive, in which first-language literacy begins prior to second-language literacy teaching. He also finds that literacy is best acquired in the language in which the children have the best oral skills: simultaneous and successive first- and second-language learning were most effective. There is a research gap in the area of first-language literacy as there is little data on the numbers of students from specific ethnic/language groups, first or second generation, who have literacy skills in their first language.

### **Recent studies**

The most important study internationally has been the review of provisions in the United States, 'School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students', by Thomas and Collier (1997). This study was based on a series of investigations of more than 700,000 students in five large school systems between 1982 and 1996. It was based on individual student-level data and findings from quantitative data on student achievement across the curriculum. The researchers investigated all types of ESL programme delivery and compared these with control groups who received other forms of provision such as remedial or literacy intervention. The report defined 'success' as 'ESL students reaching full educational parity with native English speakers in all school content subjects (not just in English proficiency) after a period of at least 5–6 years' (1997: 7).

The researchers found three key predictors of academic success to be more important than any other set of variables, predictors which were more important than socio-economic status or gender variables. The first predictor of long-term success is 'cognitively complex academic instruction through the students' first language for as long as possible' and 'cognitively complex academic instruction through English for part of the school day'. In other words, first-language support combined with good ESL programmes was the only way ESL students could reach grade norms after six years.

The second predictor of long-term success is the use of current approaches to teaching the curriculum through two languages: in other words, the use of interactive and communicative teaching/learning strategies and the teaching of language through content. The third predictor is the sociocultural context of the school itself. Where the school staff were highly skilled, where the school

curriculum was inclusive of ESL students and their language and cultural backgrounds, and where the expectations of ESL student achievement was high, the school achieved high ESL student outcomes.

The report has been the centre of some controversy because of methodological problems (Rossell 1998), but its individual findings have been confirmed in other studies. The Thomas and Collier report found that, for ESL support to be effective, it had to be continued in different forms until the ESL students had acquired formal spoken and written English after five to seven years. This report has become the key international research informing ESL programmes in the US, Canada, the UK, New Zealand and Australia.

### ***Implications of findings***

There are two main implications of these findings. Firstly, children who begin their schooling with oral skills in their first language and have to acquire literacy in English will be behind their peers by one to two years because they have not acquired literacy in their first language. During their primary schooling, without specific intervention they may not achieve grade norms because they are 'chasing a moving target'. This picture is not entirely accurate because ethnic minority children are increasingly beginning school with oral skills in English. However, children who have developed some literacy in their first language or who develop these skills in the initial years of schooling will develop literacy skills in English more quickly.

The second implication is that students who enter the school system in primary or secondary school may not perform as well academically as those who arrive at the end of their formal secondary schooling. These findings are coming from American studies which report that international students have higher college and university outcomes than 'generation 1.5', students who have been in the US for five years or more. This is because generation 1.5 students did not receive sufficient support in the first or second language to continue their cognitive and linguistic development to the level of English-speaking background peers (Harklau *et al.* 1999).

### ***Literacy in social contexts***

Where more than one language is involved, there will be different attitudes to and beliefs about literacy. Reading and writing will have different values, functions and uses. People may read and write in different ways and the relative importance of the written and spoken word may vary. There is now a body of research focusing on these cultural differences in literacy in the US, UK, Australia, South Africa and elsewhere (Schieffelin and Gilmore 1986; Barton and Ivanic 1991; Street 1993; Prinsloo and Breier 1996; Durgunoglu and Verhoeven 1998; Martin-Jones and Jones 2000). It is inevitable that cultural values and practices are transferred to English. These factors will apply even in families and communities

where the first language, both spoken and written, has largely disappeared. Problems may arise when the schools and the communities have no mutual understanding of the different bases from which they are operating.

### **Literacy development**

The age of 'reading readiness' varies culturally, as do the ways in which children are taught to read and write at home. Korean parents, for example, have the responsibility to teach children basic reading and writing before they start school at age four. In eastern Europe and Switzerland, it is normal for children to begin to learn to read at age seven or eight. Many ethnic minority children will also begin school with literacy skills or emergent literacy in their first language, whilst others may have few concepts of print (Downing 1973, 1979, 1984). Many studies have found that parents from all backgrounds tend to have what is called a 'bottom-up' view of reading, working from letters and sounds to words with an emphasis on reading as reading aloud (Goldenberg *et al.* 1992; Gregory and Williams 2000). Parents also see literacy development as a school responsibility, with parents playing an important but not a leading role (Goldenberg 1987). Gregory (1998), in a study of the ways in which young British ethnic minority children are taught to read, found key differences between home and school. At home, siblings and parents used chaining and repetition much more and structured the reading development. She attributed this to the influence of ethnic community classes and traditional ways of learning in Arabic. In many communities such as Arabic-speaking and Pacific Island background, the role of memorization in learning to read is much more valued and integral to the process (Field and Aebersold 1990). Studies in Gujarati, Cantonese and other communities in the UK have documented the diversity in out-of-school literacy practices for young children, with siblings and grandparents rather than parents playing key roles in early literacy (Gregory *et al.* 2004). Contradicting the assumption of many family literacy programmes that early literacy is based on experience of written narratives, ethnographic studies of ethnic minority communities have highlighted the importance of other factors such as knowledge of the alphabet, ability to work out the rules of classroom reading sessions and the acquisition of Qur'anic literacy (Tizard *et al.* 1982; Wells 1986; Wagner 1993; Gregory *et al.* 2004).

### **Functions of literacy**

The functions and uses for literacy may vary in different ethnic/language communities. Many researchers have posited that differences relate to the different functions, traditions and values attached to the spoken and written language although this issue is much debated (Gee 1996; Kramsch 1998). In many of the countries and contexts, literacy may have a high status but not widespread usage, with communication and even education relying much more on the spoken word.

In Arabic and Pacific Island communities, for example, literacy in the first language has high value and status in terms of religious practice but the functions of enjoyment and communication could be filled more by the spoken rather than the written word.

The expected ways in which reading and writing occur will also vary culturally. In many languages, particularly Pacific Island languages, reading sub-vocally is the norm (Field and Aebersold 1990). In many cultures, reading in groups with one person decoding for group comments is also more common. The key project in addressing this area of cultural difference in reading in English has been the Hawaiian KEEP Project (Au and Jordan 1981; Au 1983; Au and Mason 1983; Au 1993). Their research was motivated by the low outcomes of native Hawaiian children in reading. In the community, a key speech event was the talk story in which stories were jointly constructed by the teller and the listeners in a group. Through the inclusion of varied teaching practices into early literacy programmes, the project schools have achieved and maintained literacy outcomes at or above the US average.

### **Confirming evidence**

Confirming evidence for the findings of ethnographic studies has come from research in the United States and elsewhere using mixed methods such as survey, questionnaires, interviews and standardized testing (Goldenberg *et al.* 1992; Gallimore *et al.* 1993; Wagner 1993; Reese and Gallimore 2000; Gallimore and Goldenberg 2001; Goldenberg *et al.* 2001). Family literacy practices are predicted by the grandparents' experiences in the home culture (Reese and Gallimore 2000). Family literacy practices predict first-language literacy development, which predicts Year 7 English reading scores (Reese and Gallimore 2000). Religious attendance is correlated with early reading development (Reese *et al.* 1995). The family/home cultural schemata have an important impact on schooling. Parents see a primary role of education as being children's moral development and see this as being the key to educational achievement (Reese *et al.* 1995). Parents see literacy development as beginning at school and have differing attitudes from the school on parental roles in education (Goldenberg 1987). Where specific home reading events occur, they focus on the reading aloud of letters and words, a 'bottom-up' approach (Goldenberg *et al.* 1992; Goldenberg *et al.* 2001).

### **Implications**

The differences reported above between home and school are also common between English-speaking background homes and the schools but are foregrounded in multilingual contexts (Barton 2000). It is inevitable that such differences exist, given the different class/cultural/language contexts between home and school. Problems may arise when schools do not understand the home



literacy practices and the assumptions underlying these practices and when parents do not understand the school-related literacy practices. Parental reading of books to children at home is seen by schools and educationists as a key factor in promoting children's literacy. Such practices have not emerged from the research as common home literacy events in many ethnic minority groups. Chinese-speaking parents in the UK did not read to their children, but the children had above-average school literacy results (Gregory 1998). In Australia, the supposed absence of parental reading to children is counted as a problem in Arabic-speaking homes but not in Chinese-speaking homes. Schools often judge community literacy practices through the lens of school reading and writing and it is then that differences become deficit in terms of community literacy practices.

### **Home and school**

The nature and extent of differences between homes, community and schools have been researched as the factor in lower educational outcomes for specific groups and subgroups of ethnic minority students. The concept of 'discontinuity' was developed to cover the differences in values of schooling and attitudes to education, in cultural practices and interactional styles between home and school (Spindler and Spindler 1987; Jacob and Jordan 1993; Ehimovich 1995). Schools reflect institutional and middle-class societal norms and so, the greater the class and cultural differences between the ethnic minority group and the mainstream, the greater the discontinuities between home and school. Heath's (1983) research into the literacy and communicative practices of three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas was triggered by the desegregation of schools in the southern United States and was an attempt to explain differential outcomes. Her six-year ethnographic study showed the great diversity in oral and literate uses of language in monolingual communities (black and white working and middle class) and how specific home practices created disadvantage in school contexts. There was a wealth of other confirming research showing how specific communicative and literacy practices in the homes disadvantaged children in schools. Moll (Moll *et al.* 1992) developed the notion of 'funds of knowledge' to describe the non-school linguistic and cultural knowledge that students and their families had developed. Where schools did not take into account the cultural discontinuities between home and school or excluded community 'funds of knowledge', they created disadvantage. The differences in outcomes between ethnic minority groups were also explained in terms of the power relationships between the group and the wider society. In the US, for example, students of African-American, Hispanic and Cambodian backgrounds have much lower outcomes than students of Vietnamese, Korean or Chinese backgrounds (Yee *et al.* 1995, in Ogbu and Simons 1998). Ogbu and Simons (1998) responded to the conflicting evidence from different ethnic groups in the development of the 'cultural-ecological theory' of school performance. This distinguished between voluntary and involuntary minorities as 'castelike' minorities being part of a rigid social stratification

system. Voluntary minorities migrated 'because of better opportunities' and 'do not experience long-lasting school performance difficulty and long-lasting cultural and language problems' (Ogbu and Simons 1998: 164). Involuntary minorities, defined in terms of their history, had no choice in becoming part of the wider society.

Recent studies have combined ethnographic, linguistic, sociocultural, quantitative and other research approaches in exploring literacy practices in and out of school in low socio-economic urban communities and the ways in which home and school practices impacted on and interacted with each other (Breen *et al.* 1994; Freebody *et al.* 1995; Cairney and Ruge 1997). All studies reported great diversity in home literacy practices with variations in home literacy events being attributed not so much to different families but to different purposes for particular events.

- In the home, literacy was rarely the main focus, but was embedded in other activities. There was greater emphasis on collaboration and negotiation. Parents' roles varied from expert to non-expert partner, and children played a wider range of roles than in school events and had more agency and participation rights, with turn-taking rights being more equally distributed. Home practices were often more challenging and suited to children's interests (Cairney and Ruge 1997).
- School literacy events often lacked focus, cohesion and visible purpose and emphasis was given to random real-world knowledge and classroom management. The main purposes for literacy in home contexts were instrumental and social/interactional, 'to establish and maintain relationships, and to meet practical needs in organizing everyday life' (Cairney and Ruge 1997: 151). The major purpose in schools was the use of literacy for developing literacy 'skills', with literacy being an end in itself. Control was largely vested in the children in home practices, but with the teachers in school practices.
- The studies found that teachers equated learning with the doing of activities; they equated teaching with the organization of strategies; and they equated learning outcomes with classroom interaction. The researchers link this construction of teaching and learning to the stated beliefs of combined skills and whole-language approaches. Although they show that such literacy practices have changed from traditional approaches, they have in common restrictive notions of childhood, literacy learning and 'disadvantage' (Cairney and Ruge 1997).

There were also key differences in the ways in which reading and writing occurred and therefore the ways in which reading and writing were constructed and defined. Freebody *et al.* (1995) reported marked differences between the schools designated as disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged. In non-disadvantaged classrooms, talk was more task-focused, directives were shorter and talk about behaviour was more related to learning outcomes. Cairney and Ruge

(1997) reported that school practices employed in the school with 25 per cent Aboriginal students differed from those in the other schools. Opportunities for learning were more limited as staff focused on issues of encouraging students' attendance. School literacy achievement/non-achievement was attributed by the schools to constructions of socio-economic status and ethnicity on the part of families. 'Educators often produced racially-based categories in their explanations [of children's literacy achievements]' (Cairney and Ruge 1997: 198).

Differences or discontinuities in themselves do not present a problem. Certain practices, however, have the potential to affect students' progress in schooling, especially when there is a lack of understanding or awareness of these practices. The implications of this research have been debated for many years: whether home practices can and need to adapt to school practices and the extent to which school practices can become more inclusive. This issue will be explored in later sections.

### ***The school factor***

There is a large body of evidence on the effect of schooling on the outcomes of students from bilingual backgrounds. Smith and Tomlinson (1989) followed the careers of children in 20 multi-racial comprehensives in the UK between 1981 and 1986. This large-scale study concluded that:

the differences in exam results attributable to every ethnic group are very much smaller than those attributable to the school. In other words, what school a child goes to makes far more differences (in terms of exam results) than what ethnic group he or she belongs to. The relative performance of different ethnic groups varies somewhat between schools, but such differences are trivial compared with the very large school differences across all ethnic groups. In other words, some schools are doing much better than others, and the ones that are good for white people tend to be equally good for black people.

(Smith and Tomlinson 1989: 305)

They also found that 'the same child would get a CSE Grade 3 in English at one school, but an O level grade B in English at another' (1989: 301). The researchers, however, admitted that they were not successful in explaining how and why these differences arose. There were indications that, in secondary schools, management and organizational factors at departmental level were just as important as school-level management factors.

The preparation of teachers for working with ethnic minority students has also emerged as a factor in some studies. Many teachers have students in need of ESL support in their classes but are inadequately prepared for these situations. Forty per cent of teachers in the US have ESL students in their classes but only 29 per cent had received any training in this area (Schmid 2001).

### ***What differences do classrooms make?***

There is strong evidence that classroom interaction and pedagogy are different in working-class ethnic minority classrooms and middle-class English-speaking background classrooms. The issues of resistance and management in working-class ethnic minority classrooms have been found to lead to classrooms reliant on teacher talk or individual desk work (McLaren 1986, 1989). Participation in joint activity can be so restricted that fundamental educational goals are subsumed within the goal of social order, producing an institution that values social order over educational outcomes (Gutierrez *et al.* 1995). Classrooms with ethnic minority students are characterized by next to no use of small group work, little exploratory talk and the use of literacy as a control mechanism with emphasis on copying from the board and completion of comprehension questions. There is evidence that ethnic minority students have fewer opportunities for extended language use with teachers (Au 1983; Cazden 1990; Biggs and Edwards 1991), receive less feedback, participate less often in class, are asked less cognitively demanding questions, generally have fewer opportunities to talk (Torr 1993), and use discourse structures which are evaluated less positively (Michaels 1981; Erikson 1984; Michaels and Cazden 1986).

Studies of mathematics classrooms in middle-class ESB and working-class ethnic minority schools found that the ethnic minority classrooms, in fact, were characterized by discourses of collaboration, social values and good citizenship (Zevenbergen 1992, 1994, 1995). There was more acceptance and less challenging of students' participation. Mathematics lessons in middle-class schools were heavily imbued with discourses of competition, meritocracy and middle-class cultural values. Students in these classrooms saw themselves as having access to the discourse of mathematics, whilst students in the ethnic minority classrooms saw the teacher as expert and themselves as non-achievers. Zevenbergen related the different patterns of classroom interaction to the teachers' perceptions of student ability and the ways in which the school culture constructed the students' outcomes.

There are two dominant themes emerging from studies of classroom interaction. The first is the ways in which conflict and issues of resistance narrow the amount and range of classroom interaction, with classrooms being characterized by the use of literacy as management or control. The second theme is that of classrooms marked by high teacher-student solidarity and participation in discourse, but other studies present contexts which are marked by high solidarity and participation but contexts in which ethnic minority students do not see themselves as gaining control over the subject discourse. Both types of classroom are marked by limited teacher expectations. The emerging picture is of differences in pedagogy and interaction between ESB middle-class classrooms and ethnic minority working-class classrooms.

## Discourses of disadvantage

It is not possible to ignore the discourses of disadvantage and the role that literacy has come to play in the media, in government policy and in public perceptions of education. Concerns about the supposed crisis in education have translated into concerns about levels of literacy. In the past ten years, the issue of literacy has subsumed other debates on the education of bilingual students. The differential schooling outcomes of bilingual students have been characterized, on the one hand, as due to the lack of literacy development and support in the homes and, on the other, to school structure and pedagogy which deny access to dominant literacy for these students. Researchers and writers from both sides of the educational debate have placed literacy at the centre of arguments relating to educational access or failure. The shift of literacy to centre stage in Australian education debates can be traced to the development and introduction of the federal government policy in the 1990s (DEET 1990). This policy was developed ostensibly to complement the National Policy on Languages (Lo Bianco 1987), which was the first national policy to address the development and maintenance of languages in Australia. The pluralist vision of the National Policy on Languages, however, was never implemented, in a political climate of recession and economic rationalism (Moore 1995, 1996). The release of a discussion paper and the Australian Language and Literacy Policy coincided with the International Year of Literacy and marked a policy volte-face. The discussion paper defined language as a part of literacy, and literacy as literacy in English. 'Australia's language' was singular.

The policy led to the subsuming of English as a second language (ESL) programmes into more generalized English literacy programmes, and the shift from community language and bilingual programmes to languages other than English (labelled as foreign languages) with an emphasis on the study of Asian languages for trade. Multicultural and anti-racism issues were beyond the scope of the policy and were seen to be addressed in other policy areas (Hammond and Derewianka 1999). The policy had an effect on the ways in which equity programmes were described, as, for example, the construction of disadvantage came to be made in terms of deficit in literacy preparedness because of home background and language. State educational policies and programmes followed the lead of the discussion paper and policy, and compensatory literacy programmes targeting ethnic and language groups were introduced. TESOL teachers were retrained in Reading Recovery and many parental literacy programmes were funded. System-wide literacy tests were introduced in Year 3, Year 5, Year 7 and Year 8 in all state and many non-government schools. Many educational bodies, university departments and government policies all added the term 'literacy' to 'language' in their titles. Assessment practices came to be focused on literacy outcomes in English (Moore 1996). Even non-participation in the compensatory programmes was seen as a problem located in the disadvantaged. The main barrier to participation in any of the programmes was 'an unwillingness by a person

with literacy problems acknowledging these problems' (Cavalier 1994, in Moore 1996: 16). The shift in programmes and policies paralleled changes in pedagogy used at primary, secondary and tertiary levels for the teaching of literacy.

The centrality of literacy to schooling outcomes has come to be accepted by both conservative and radical traditions in education. Literacy is now seen as an ability acquired through schooling, assessed and measured by school systems, and an ability linked with economic benefits for the individual and society.

I define literacy as the ability to read and write and compute in the form taught and expected in formal education . . . literacy is synonymous with academic performance.

(Ogbu 1990: 72)

The nature of school literacy as the means to access the benefits and power in society has not been questioned. Issues which figured in previous versions of this debate – cultural difference, first- and second-language use, and structural inequality in schooling – have all tended to be marginalized or subsumed into the debate over literacy outcomes. Non-school literacy has also come to be viewed only through the lens of the school.

### ***Two sides of the coin***

Despite the complexity of the research presented in the first half of this chapter, much of the debate and discourse around outcomes has remained resolutely singular in its focus. In the 1970s the argument was around whether ethnic minority students were disadvantaged in terms of language or intelligence. In the 1980s there was an emphasis on cultural issues and status or structural variables in home and school. Since the 1990s the focus has shifted to issues surrounding literacy. When each new discourse of disadvantage was introduced it was through the appropriation of the existing discourse. What has not changed has been the polarization over the location of where disadvantage is constructed: in the home, the community, the school or the wider society. The development of a research base and a theorization of educational outcomes which can adequately address the issues have not been reflected in a shift in the discourse. In fact, this development has been paralleled by a strong educational movement towards a single focus on literacy.

The earliest cause of minority student underachievement in schooling was that of cognitive deficit, a view which disappeared from the literature in the 1970s but which remained current in schools (Jensen 1968; Oakes 1985). A related issue which has persisted has been the resistance of minority children to schooling, shown in terms of behaviour problems at school, low motivation or high truancy rates. In the development of the Kamehameha Early Education Project (KEEP) in Hawaii, cognitive deficit and classroom control were both explored as factors in underachievement before cultural issues were considered (Au 1983; Au and

Table 7.1 The discourses of advantage/disadvantage

	<i>Location in home</i>	<i>Location in school</i>
Intelligence	Cognitive/IQ deficit. Poor educational background.	Placement of ESL students in low grades. Schools equate lack of English with lack of ability.
Language	Lack of English. Interference of LI.	Lack of support in school English. Exclusion of first language. Denial of language rights.
Structure	Low motivation. Poor behaviour. Lack of school orientation. Home background. Truancy.	Low expectations. Repression and exclusion. Middle-class exclusion of working class/minority. Streaming.
Culture	Parental lack of education. Culturally based sexism. Low aspirations. Oral culture. Village mentality.	Monocultural school environment. Ethnocentric environment. Monocultural teaching staff. Lack of inclusive curriculum.
Literacy	Lack of English literacy. Students come from oral society. No value for literacy.	Lack of explicit teaching of school literacy.

Mason 1983). The attribution of underachievement to psychological and behavioural factors has continued in the literature with Dunn (1987) stating that Hispanic pupils and their parents were responsible for educational failure on the grounds that they 'have not been motivated and dedicated enough to make the system work for them' (Dunn 1987).

Most considerations of barriers to educational equality have focused on characteristics of students themselves as the source of the problem. Seen as products of disorganized or deteriorating homes and family structures, poor and minority students have been thought of as unmotivated, noncompetitive and culturally disadvantaged.

(Oakes 1985: 4)

The oppositional framing of this issue has been the way in which schools excluded students of different class or ethnic/language background (Ogbu 1974; Willis 1977). Low teacher expectations and monocultural middle-class schools reproduce school cultures of academic failure. Larger historical, political, economic and social forces have shaped structural inequality. Ethnographic studies of schooling have been important in this area. McLaren (1986) examined how unequal power relationships in a school marginalized minority students.

Gutierrez *et al.* (1995) detailed how participation in joint activity was so restricted that fundamental educational goals were subsumed within the goal of social order, producing an institution that valued social order over educational outcomes. This research gave rise to the terms minority and majority groups as synonyms for subordinate and dominant groups in terms of power. Oakes (1985) and others documented the ways in which schools stream minority students into non-academic grades and programmes.

### **Language and educational failure**

The language factor has also been seen as a significant causal factor in underachievement, located in the school or home. The language issue was constructed in several ways. The early framing of the TESOL programme in Australia, begun in 1979 (for children) and 1949 (for adults), was in terms of lack of English language proficiency. Based on behaviourist notions of language learning, the programme viewed the first language as an impediment to the acquisition of English. The aim was subtractive bilingualism, and evaluations found the programme ethnocentric and deficient in nature (Martin 1978; Campbell *et al.* 1984). There was debate in the UK literature about the racism inherent in the framing of TESOL programmes.

The construction of language as deficit and its location in the home and community is one of long standing. Interpretations of Bernstein's (1971) model of restricted and elaborated codes and the debates over home versus school language socialization in Britain (Tizard *et al.* 1982) have marked this debate. From 1975 onwards the TESOL programme was framed in terms of multiculturalism and first-language programmes, with the introduction of government-funded bilingual and community language initiatives in 1979/80. There was also a dramatic shift in the organization of the TESOL programme towards 'mainstreaming' provision through team-teaching and language across the curriculum. By 1990, the majority of TESOL provision in the UK and Australia was delivered in mainstream classes through mainstream curricula (Levine 1990; Cahill 1996). The persistence of the view of lack of English as deficit can be seen in the terminology still in currency in the US and Australia: 'limited English proficiency' (LEP), 'non-English speaking background' (NESB), 'language background other than English' (LBOTE). Both countries have also seen the cutting of bilingual programmes and moves to 'English only'.

The oppositional discourse in the language debate came from the framing of language programmes, first and second, as equity programmes. Following legislation, lobbying and litigation in the late 1960s and 1970s, bilingual and community language programmes were established in Australia, the US and elsewhere. The rhetoric was one of language rights, and the assumption of the programmes was that schools created inequality by not educating students through their first language. The decade of language policy and planning from 1970 to 1980 in Australia has been called the 'rights-equality' phase (Djite 1994). There



was also much research evidence to indicate that development of higher-level first- and second-language skills depended on schools. The work of Cummins and Collier has been pivotal in this debate.

### **Culture and educational failure**

Notions of culture have played a key role in the discourse of disadvantage from the early 1970s. The initial research using categories of ethnic background itself enabled the problem of educational failure to be attributed to specific groups. In Australia, the children of Lebanese migrants were described as having 'village culture', a 'non-literate background' and 'few educational aspirations', and the literature abounds in examples of governments, schools and community organizations blaming ethnic groups for school failure because of cultural issues (Martin 1978).

The obverse of this discourse was that schools reflected the dominant culture and replicated inequality in their exclusion of cultural difference. In the United States, theories of cultural discontinuity played a role in explaining differential outcomes (Spindler and Spindler 1987; Jacob and Jordan 1993; Ehimovich 1995).

There was a burgeoning of multicultural and compensatory programmes in the 1970s and 1980s. These programmes were aimed at fostering diversity and changing attitudes and school cultures, and focused on the funding of a range of intervention and training programmes. Evaluations of the Australian programmes indicate that, although almost one-quarter of schools benefited from government project funding, there were few tangible benefits, as programmes focused on surface features of culture and were 'add-on' in nature (Cahill 1996). The focus on an Australian 'spaghetti and polka' or a British 'samosas and saris' brand of cultural pluralism was criticized as perpetuating inequality and marginalization of minority groups (Collins 1988; Kalantzis *et al.* 1991). By the mid-1980s the withdrawal of government funding, a focus on mainstreaming and the shift to issues of racism meant that the rhetoric of culture and multiculturalism became less visible in Australia (Cahill 1996).

### **The problem with individual problems**

The key issue in the oppositional discourse has been the location of 'problems' independent of the ways in which they were constructed. The location of disadvantage in the home and community legitimizes existing school structures and approaches to pedagogy and curriculum and deflects pressures for change (Cummins 1994; Cummins and Sayers 1995). 'We naturalize whiteness as a cultural marker against which Otherness is defined' (McLaren 1994: 114). Location of the creation of disadvantage in school contexts confirms a generalized and static nature of disadvantage which can confirm and therefore be subsumed into dominant discourses.

Much of the research and the attendant discourse were based on simplistic notions of class, culture and group. The notion of group category shifted the focus from the contextual factors to autonomous characteristics which could be attributed to a whole group.

The relationships between minority groups and schools are complex. The home and school contexts embed and reconstruct institutional values and reactions to these. The binary oppositions of single factors have not been sufficient in themselves to account for inequality. Au (1993), for example, suggests that neither discontinuity theories nor equality ones by themselves explain outcomes. The model of intervention programmes as effecting structural change which underpins much of the discourse has been problematic. Bernstein (1971) is critical of compensatory programmes, arguing that they distract attention from the deficiencies of the internal organization and the educational context of the school. Such a construction also disempowers the school and the teachers. Along with taking away responsibility it takes away their power to effect change. The paradox of educational debate since the 1990s has been that, whilst educational research has been increasingly sophisticated, continuing educational disadvantage debate surrounding literacy has been increasingly simplistic and vitriolic. How can the singular focus on the polarizations around literacy be explained? For this we need to consider the social, political and educational contexts of the literacy and disadvantage debate.

### ***Changing contexts and disadvantage***

The school used to be better. It was originally Greeks. They weren't too bad. Then came the Christian Lebanese. Most of them have gone to St John's now. Then the Muslims came. I don't want to sound prejudiced, but they're a problem.

Joy was the library assistant in Ahmad's school, Bellevue Boys'. In the 20 years she had worked at the school she had seen it change from a culturally diverse school of over 1,000 students to a school of around 300 students, 90 per cent of whom were of Arabic-speaking Muslim backgrounds.

In the 15 years between 1990 and 2005 the local schools had undergone dramatic changes. In 1989 the state government brought in de-zoning which meant that students no longer had to enrol in their closest local school but could choose any school to attend. Although the city suburbs were fairly culturally diverse, local schools rapidly became divided along class and ethnic/language group lines. At Lamise's school, Kotara High, Anglo-background students moved to Catholic schools or government schools out of the area. The state government then increased the numbers of academically selective schools, and the federal government encouraged and funded the establishment of private schools, many of them run by religious denominations. In New South Wales, for example, some 55 religious-/ethnic-based non-government day schools were established

between 1995 and 2005. The result has been that the teenagers attend schools which are not representative of the diversity in their local area nor of the diversity in the wider community.

The population of Kotara High School fell from around 1,000 to 300 from 1990 to 2005, and its population of Anglo background students from 200 to 30. One hundred metres away was an academic selective girls' school. Only 16 of its population of over 1,000 girls were Arabic-speakers. Its population was mainly of English-, Chinese- or Greek-speaking backgrounds. The high school completion rate at Kotara and Bellevue High Schools was around 40 per cent compared with the state average of over 70 per cent. The difference in the resourcing of the schools is also obvious. Bellevue has a gym but no school hall or the sporting facilities and library of government selective and non-government schools. This pattern is replicated in school districts across the country, with students segmented by class and ethnic background across government and non-government primary and secondary schools. This seems to be a trend in other OECD countries. The segmentation in American schools, for example, is now greater for Latino and African-American students than it was in 1971 when initiatives were first introduced to bring about more diverse school populations (Schmid 2001).

This segmentation has several consequences. The loss of diversity in schooling can mean that the development of social tolerance, understanding and cohesion becomes harder. Academic outcomes are also affected. Coleman's landmark study found that high-achieving students encouraged the performance of others (Coleman 1966). At both Bellevue and Kotara, the highest 20 per cent of students would be taken by selective or non-government schools. Kotara became very much a monocultural (Arabic background) school whose students were in the lowest 20 per cent on all indicators of educational outcomes and ability. The schools then come to be seen as problem schools in the community. The falling school reputation and educational outcomes have effects on school morale and teacher turnover and so on. A study of segmentation in New Zealand schools found that it led to 'a spiral of decline' in poorer schools (Lauder *et al.* 1994).

Why has this happened? The answer to this question lies in the application of the market economy to education. Many trace the introduction of marketization to the work of economists such as Hayek and the Chicago school such as Friedman (Marginson 1993, 1997). Their ideas were taken up by institutions such as the OECD and the International Monetary Fund in the 1980s. What has been called 'economic rationalism' is based on the belief that 'market forces produce better outcomes or more efficient allocation of resources than government intervention'. Economic rationalism has three components. Firstly, there is a pre-occupation with economic policy and economic objectives; education is seen as a branch of economic and trade theory. Secondly, public policy is taken over by Friedmanite concerns. There is an abandonment of universal public provision in social programmes, a shift in financing from government to private individuals and corporations and a change in the public/private balance in provision. Free

market competition is seen as the best stimulus to effective provision. Finally, education and public services are brought under direct political control with its emphasis on managerial efficiency, strong central control and devolved responsibility for operations. There is a separation of policy from implementation, a focus on maximizing output within resource limits and an emphasis on selling the product.

Many writers have documented the implementation of these policies in the UK under Thatcher and the US under Reagan and in Australia and New Zealand under Labour governments. The shape these reforms took in each country varied because of local political, historic and social differences. Australian reforms in the late 1980s led to tighter political control, *dezoning* in most states, cuts in funding, the reorganization of schools and the halving of central bureaucracies accompanied by the appointment of generic managers. At the same time local schools were given control over global budgets and school councils were encouraged. Accountability was enforced through standardized testing, which by 1995 had been adopted by most states.

Devolution has been made possible by a new emphasis on aggregate financial controls and the limits within which departments operate.

(OECD 1995: 11–12).

The policy of devolving responsibility and power to individual schools had several aspects. Schools were given control over how to spend set budgets whilst governments and education bureaucracy were able to control the amount of funding in these budgets and place the accountability for keeping within budgets on the individual schools. The administrative structure was flattened and drastically reduced. The educational bureaucracy which was responsible for curriculum development and implementation, assessment, staff development and induction was cut. Responsibilities were privatized in semi-government bodies or were devolved downwards to school principals. The resulting structure is one in which individual schools and school principals are much more directly answerable to government ministers and department directors than ever before: all in the name of increased local autonomy.

The shift in responsibility for equitable outcomes from the system to individual schools was paralleled by the research into school effectiveness and school improvement. Based on studies in the UK and US, the research focused on leadership, the role of teachers and the ethos and individual organization of schools. The major US study, discounting socio-economic background, gender and ethnicity, concluded that effective schools were marked by strong leadership, clear goals, high academic standards and high parental support. A key predictor of this was the level of autonomy that the school possessed. These original studies could not be replicated by researchers employing more rigorous controls for socio-economic status variables, and most research has not been able to attribute more than 7 to 10 per cent of variance in outcomes to school-level effects. Despite this,

the discourse of school autonomy and effectiveness has remained the dominant one in OECD countries.

Into this equation comes literacy. The standardized testing of literacy (and of reading more than writing) has provided the easiest and least expensive way for governments to define the 'market' output of schools and school systems. In New South Wales there is now basic skills testing in Years 3 and 5 and language and literacy testing in Years 7 and 8, along with the external exams of Years 10 and 12. Parents of children identified from Year 3 testing as in need of support are now given \$700 tutorial vouchers by the federal government. This support has been privatized, with organizations being asked to tender for it in each state.

The problem with such changes is that the initiatives and the discourse surrounding them in the schools which the teenagers attend become the norm, the only reality for the teachers and the students. Other ways of thinking, other possibilities, become closed off. Hassan, an English teacher at Bellevue Boys', is a second-generation Australian. He gained the education which his parents had never had the chance of in Lebanon. Hassan was talking about the students at Bellevue with other teachers in his staff room.

You look at the Greek community. The first generation were peasants from the villages. Their children, maybe they became mechanics or labourers or things. It's only *their* children now, they're accountants and lawyers and doctors. It will be the same for the Arabic community. These kids will settle for trades, you know, carpenters or mechanics. Their children will do better.

There are so many comments to make on this: Hassan did not see the possibility of his students following his own pathway; he assumed a hierarchy of professions above trades; he also saw no link between aspirations, talent and ability. What is most depressing is the unquestioning acceptance of an inevitable pathway for Australian children who undertake all their schooling in Australia. I remember listening to this conversation and thinking, 'It does not have to be like this.'

# No single answer

## What schools can and can't do

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In 2005 I returned to Kotara High School, which children from the Tannous, Elkheir and other families attended. Lamise was now attending university, Sahar was studying at technical college, and Suzy and Ali were working in retail. Kotara High School had undergone a transformation. The school population has risen from 300 to 800 and the school was no longer monocultural Arabic background but diverse. Student outcomes were at state average, and staff and student morale was high. Success stories similar to this one fill the educational literature as teachers and administrators look for answers to the inequities that again abound in OECD countries' education systems. The answer given by the principal and teachers at Kotara, and the theme of this chapter, is that there is no formula, no single answer. This chapter looks at the changes that could be made at system level, at school level and at classroom level for better educational outcomes.

### System-level change and response

The segmentation of schooling is the direct result of the application of market economy policies to education. The problem lies not just in the shift of government funding to non-government schools or away from education, but in the policy thinking that has accompanied or informed this shift. There is a need for a notion of societal responsibility for education. What type of education and what outcomes of education do we want for students by the time they complete secondary schooling? What knowledges, skills and understandings are important for all students and how can these be achieved?

Posing such questions would mean reframing the nexus between education and economics in government thinking and planning. It would mean reconnecting issues of funding, planning, control and responsibility. It would mean a change to the structure model of slimmed-down central bureaucracy and autonomous local schools, as systems would take on more responsibility for support in terms of professional and curriculum development.

It would mean a shift from the ways we describe schools and the community in terms of parents as consumers and schools as autonomous producers in competition. Issues of public and private would need to be re-examined, not as a simplistic

argument of private versus government, rich versus poor. Many of the religious-based Muslim and Christian schools are not wealthy, and students in many of the schools are not receiving the quality of education they deserve. The education of children in largely monocultural state or non-government schools where they are not exposed to the cultural, religious, class and linguistic diversity in the broader society is a problem. Segmentation of schools is linked with tracking or streaming within schools. There is clear evidence that students from certain ethnic/language backgrounds are concentrated in certain schools and that within schools they are placed in lower-stream classes. The question would be framed in terms of how tracking and segmenting of students along class, ethnic and religious lines between and within schools can be avoided. In other words, what does diversity mean in a modern society?

Some of the issues relating to segmentation in schools can be addressed. At present in Sydney, as in many cities, the school population does not represent the population in the local areas. Middle-class parents from English- and non-English-speaking backgrounds tend to take advantage of 'choice' in withdrawing their children from local schools and sending them to more prestigious state or non-government schools. This starts a cycle in local schools of falling enrolments, narrowing curriculum, falling educational outcomes, teacher burn-out and turnover. Reinstating zoning in Australia would be one way in which to make local schools more representative of their communities. It would not address issues of local communities being also highly segmented in terms of class or language/ethnic backgrounds. There need to be other initiatives to bring about more linguistic/cultural and class diversity in schools through the establishment, for example, of senior schools.

### **Accelerated Schools movement**

There have been many movements supported and promoted by education systems in the past decades aimed at improving outcomes in individual schools and groups of schools. In the following sections, some of the movements which have operated in schools with ethnic minority students are described and evaluated. The dramatic and controversial reforms in American education since the report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 have led to many movements espousing excellence and school restructuring. Movements such as the Coalition of Essential Schools (1984) and the Paideia Proposal (1982) were primarily aimed at improving teaching methods and the structuring of individual schools (Barcan 1999). The Accelerated Schools movement, established in 1986 in the US, aims for academic improvement through the use of pedagogy developed for the gifted and talented to replace remediation in urban working-class schools (Levin 1987, 1998). The programme focuses on an internal change in school culture based on three principles. The first is the 'unity of purpose', which requires a consensus of and commitment from 90 per cent of the staff, parents and students. The second is 'empowerment with responsibility', which refers to implementation of a range

of decision-making structures. The third is the 'building on strengths', which refers to the addressing of identified needs. The project involves intensive staff and community workshops and continued staff development support. Although the programme was developed in schools with large working-class ethnic minority populations, there is not a specific focus on language or culturally inclusive programmes. The pedagogical changes documented in the literature draw on constructivist approaches, with an emphasis on problem posing and solving (Lave and Wenger 1991). Its basic rationale is of providing enriched instructions, which helps disadvantaged students attain at or above national averages. The approach avoids remedial or low-/slow-track approaches, which it is argued lower expectations of student outcomes. The approach is characterized by high challenge and high expectations (not to be confused with the similarly named 'accelerated learning'). There is a wide range of documentation on individual school programmes on its website and in American educational journals (National Center for Accelerated Schools 2002).

The Accelerated Schools movement is the largest (1,000 schools in 2001) and most researched of such programmes. Evaluations have shown gains in student achievement of eight percentiles in a national evaluation and about 40 percentiles in an urban sample of six schools when compared with similar schools not undertaking reforms (Ross *et al.* 1999; Bloom *et al.* 2001).

### **Language Academy programme**

Some 122 Californian schools are part of the Language Academy programme which has aimed to move schools from a language deficit model to a 'language enrichment' model (Apodeca and Rojas 1997; Snow *et al.* 1998; Fern 1999). The charter of the Language Academy is specifically to promote quality programmes for culturally and linguistically diverse schools. The Academy is a unit in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), where more than 50 per cent of the 65,000 students have a home language other than English. The member schools adopt one of four models: total immersion; two-way bilingual programmes, dual language enrichment; content classes taught in L1 combined with content classes taught in English with ESL methods. The role of the Academy has been staff development, programme initiation and co-ordination and curriculum development. Schools follow a core curriculum in the first and second language. The requirements of schools belonging to the Academy go beyond bilingual programmes. Schools generally have decreased class sizes and a broader curriculum. Through a longer school day, students have greater access to art, music, language and technology. All school subjects must have guidebooks with the specified program and outcomes. Schools must also have programmes for outside classroom enrichment. Most importantly, all staff need to have CLAD/BLAD credentials, the specialist teacher qualifications in language and cultural understanding involving knowledge of second-language acquisition and language and literacy teaching methodology. The programme is similar to the Accelerated Schools



movement with a focus on 'strong instructional leadership promoting innovation', staff development and a range of accountability mechanisms.

Two indicators of programme outcomes have been the increases in standardized test scores and the rates of redesignation of students from ESL to mainstream classes when they attain specific levels on state-wide tests. African-American and Latino students in the district have increased scores on standardized tests to 'well above scores for comparable groups in other large urban school districts' (Fern 1999). SFUSD ESL students are generally achieving redesignation in 4.2 to 4.8 years and have been redesignated at a rate more than double the state average. The redesignated students in SFUSD have also been outscoring English-speaking background students. The programmes are also well documented on the Academy website (SFUSD 2002).

### ***Authentic Pedagogy***

Authentic Pedagogy was developed to promote high-quality learning and high achievement for all students but has a specific focus on students from disadvantaged groups. It requires a focus on four aspects of classroom instruction. The first is higher-order thinking, which their research indicates is less evident in lower than higher socio-economic status classrooms. The second is substantive conversation, or sustained interaction, between students and with the teacher. The third is 'deep knowledge' or the development of complex understandings in topics or discipline areas. The final aspect is the making of connections to the world beyond the classroom. The model also requires that the tasks students engage in involve the higher-level organization of information, the consideration of alternatives, elaborated written communication and the development of understanding of disciplinary content and processes. The key supporting study was the School Restructuring Study carried out by the University of Wisconsin's Center on the Organization of Restructuring of Schools. The study was based on data from 24 innovative schools which had adopted different organizational structures and reforms such as teacher teams with joint planning, non-streaming, small group teaching and specific needs-based programmes. The study found a strong relationship between their features of Authentic Pedagogy and high student outcomes although they could not establish a clear cause-and-effect link. The researchers also found that much of the teaching in these schools, especially for students of Hispanic and African-American background, was low in challenge.

Regardless of race or gender, an average student would move from the 30th to the 60th percentile if he or she received high Authentic Pedagogy instead of low Authentic Pedagogy (Newmann and Wehlage 1993).

### ***Productive Pedagogies***

Productive Pedagogies is a model for school change based on Authentic Pedagogy that was developed and implemented in Australian schools. Both approaches

work from a notion of classroom teaching which requires rigorous intellectual enquiry as the centrepiece for change in school curriculum, assessment and organization. Findings from a three-year School Reform Longitudinal Study (SRLS) replicating the Wisconsin study led to the development of three working hypotheses:

- that a supportive, student-centred classroom is necessary but not enough to improve student outcomes. The study found that the study schools rated high in 'supportiveness' of students but low in intellectual challenge of the teaching;
- that a basic skills and direct instruction approach was not sufficient to improve outcomes and such an approach risked oversimplifying the curriculum;
- that intellectual challenge with higher-order thinking, sustained conversation, critique, depth of knowledge and understanding was necessary to improve the outcomes of all students regardless of gender, class or ethnic/language background.

The approach starts from a broad notion of pedagogy defined as 'the inter-relationships between teacher practice and student outcomes, located within a particular socio-cultural environment' (Lingard *et al.* 2000). Linked to pedagogy are certain structural features of school organization, particular leadership practices, and changes in curriculum and assessment. Similarly to other approaches, classroom implementation is characterized by:

- widespread use of problem posing and solving that integrates different areas of the curriculum;
- reliance on intellectually challenging (rich) tasks and strategies that involve group work and sustained involvement and dialogue;
- use of tasks which work from students' knowledge and background, and which extend students beyond the classroom into a deeper and more critical understanding of the subject knowledge.

### **Problems with school improvement**

There has been a school reform boom in the United States, UK and other countries since the 1990s, with countless reform networks and thousands of systems, districts and schools implementing different models of school reform (Fullan 2000; Slavin 1996). The school reform movements grew from school effectiveness research in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, the Netherlands and Scandinavia which has consistently found that effective schools were characterized by strong leadership, responsible teachers, high academic expectations and requirements, high levels of parental and student involvement and clear goals (Marginson 1997; Teese and Polesol 2003). The research has been criticized because of its reliance on regression equations. These were used to discount the

effect of external factors such as resources, ethnicity and socio-economic status background, in order to isolate 'in-school' effects, thus separating school improvement from social background and local contextual influences. The research had the effect of individuating the school and its management, thus situating the research within arguments for marketization and corporate reform (Ball 1990; Chubb and Moe 1990). It provided the technology for 'blaming' the school (Ball 1990).

More recently, there have been questions about both school effectiveness research and the models of school reform based on this research. Studies in the UK, using more sophisticated measures in terms of intake characteristics and outcomes, have attributed only 7 to 10 per cent of variance in outcomes to school-level effects (Teese and Polesol 2003). School effectiveness research has also been criticized for its lack of clarity about whether characteristics of effective schools were surrogates for external characteristics which had been suppressed methodologically (Marginson 1997). The generic focus of school effectiveness research has been challenged by a body of work demonstrating the importance of local contextual factors showing the school organizational implications of poverty. Specific contextual issues exert negative pressures on school resources, relationships, and school practice in curriculum coverage and teachers' work (Gewirtz 1998; Thrupp 1999; OFSTED 2000; Lupton 2004). Models for school reform have been criticized for excluding language minority students from school reform efforts and for ignoring research into second-language development and teaching (Olsen 1994). The failure of so many attempts at whole-school reform and the lack of evidence for lasting benefits have been blamed on two main factors. The first is the focus of school improvement in individual schools and the lack of focus on system-level responsibility for support and funding. The second is that the characteristics of effective schools are vague and generic and difficult to operationalize because they do not take into account the ways factors such as ethnicity and socio-economic status operate in specific contexts. Local contextual factors such as ethnic/language backgrounds of school and community and perceptions of these vary greatly (Teese and Polesol 2003; Goldenberg 2004; Lupton 2004). The implication of recent research for school reform is that more sophisticated understandings of local context need to be achieved specifically in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity.

If school-level factors play a relatively minor part in the transmission of educational failure, this does not mean that they should be ignored, but rather that they should be viewed within a framework of inequality and that school effects and structural effects should be tackled together rather than separately or in isolation. Indeed, micro-sociological factors are so intimately tied up with macro-sociological factors that some of the most characteristic findings of school effectiveness research acquire meaning only once the implicit references to the broader culture and structures within schools' work are made explicit. Where there is a concentration of disadvantage, the tensions experienced by both teaching staff and students as they grapple with the curriculum may weaken cohesion

and shared sense of purpose, depress expectations, and lead to persistent behavioural problems (Teese and Polesol 2003).

## School-level change

Despite the wealth of research into school reform, there is little that documents the process of school change and even less that documents work in contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity (Goldenberg 2004). This section discusses the framework for school change in multicultural contexts developed by Cummins (2000), then the process of change documented in a Californian school (Goldenberg 2004) and finally the change that occurred in Kotara High School.

### ***Cummins's framework for intervention***

Jim Cummins, one of the key researchers in second-language teaching and learning, drew on his own and others' research findings in developing a model for the improvement of educational outcomes for language minority students (Cummins 1981a, 1981b, 1984, 1991, 1994; Cummins and Sayers 1995). The overarching factor is the status and role of the ethnic minority in the society. Where the ethnic/language group has a low status and the culture and language are rated lowly in the host culture, the group becomes a 'dominated' group with lower educational outcomes. This notion draws on a tradition of American research (Ogbu 1974, 1979, 1992; Ogbu and Simons 1998). The first component of Cummins's model is the extent to which students' language and culture are incorporated into the school programmes as a predictor of academic success. Schools that treated the acquiring of the mainstream language and culture as adding to the students' own language and culture would have better results than schools which saw the acquisition of English as replacing the students' language and culture. His notion of 'additive linguistic incorporation' referred to the ways in which the schools constructed and valued the students' languages (1984: 664). The additive/subtractive approach is shown in teacher-student classroom interaction and also in the status accorded to the students' languages and cultures in the curriculum and school organization. Community participation covered the range of ways in which parents and teachers interacted. He used the example of the Haringey project where schools brought about dramatic increases in reading achievement by getting second-language learners to read to parents or siblings at home (Tizard *et al.* 1982). Schools adopted a collaborative approach through the range of ways in which parents could collaborate in the education of their children.

The notion of pedagogy was not based on any specific methodology but on the tenet of 'reciprocal interaction' with 'genuine dialogue between student and teacher in both oral and written modalities, guidance and facilitation rather than control of student learning by the teacher, and the encouragement of student/

SOCIETAL CONTEXT		
	Dominant group	Dominated group
SCHOOL CONTEXT		
Educator Role Definitions		
Cultural/linguistic incorporation	Additive	Subtractive
Community participation	Collaborative	Exclusionary
Pedagogy	Reciprocal/interaction oriented	Transmission oriented
Assessment	Advocacy oriented	Legitimization oriented
	Empowered students	Disabled students

Figure 8.1 Cummins’s framework for intervention.

student talk in a collaborative learning context’ (Cummins 1984: 667). His focus on assessment was based on the problems of assessment being used to locate ‘problems’ in the students and particular minority groups rather than in systems which allowed differential learning outcomes. Cummins’s model has been influential in the Canadian and American school contexts, particularly in pedagogy with his Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) and in the Language Academy programmes (see p. 159). Confirming evidence for his model has come from the longitudinal research of Thomas and Collier (1997), referred to in Chapter 7. Their three predictors of long-term success of ethnic minority students were cognitively complex instruction in the first language and English for as long as possible, the use of interactive pedagogies teaching language through content, and an inclusive school context (where staff were skilled, expectations were high and there was an inclusive curriculum).

**School change in culturally diverse contexts**

The specific context of the school is a key factor in any attempt to improve the educational outcomes and experiences of the students. External curriculum, teaching and professional development initiatives and policies are re-contextualized differently in each school. Goldenberg (2004) gives one of the few accounts of how the settings for change in culturally diverse schools can be established. His account of the failure of initial attempts to improve outcomes at ‘Freeman’ elementary school with a large Hispanic population indicated the problem in adopting

generic models of change. The key concept for Goldenberg was that of agency or setting, defined as 'any instance in which two or more people come together in new relationships over a sustained period of time in order to achieve certain goals' (Sarason 1972, in Goldenberg 2004). The elements that helped create a school context that was supportive of working to improve student outcomes were:

- goals that were set and shared;
- indicators that would measure the success of these goals;
- regular assistance from peers or teachers; and
- leadership that supported and pressured.

These elements were used to influence teacher attitudes (such as their expectations for student learning) and classroom teaching (how and what they teach). Goldenberg and the school principal formed an academic expectations committee which developed common goals and indicators and linked with a set of other structures and initiatives in the school: teacher workgroups, and grade and whole-staff meetings. Over a five-year period, students' educational experiences improved and outcomes rose to be at or above state averages. The study ends, however, with a cautionary note: the change of personnel, funding cuts and new district priorities led to the lack of any sustained initiative. Goldenberg concluded:

the model did not work in the abstract nor disconnected from specific contexts . . . the model worked *in settings* – situations where people came together over a period of time to accomplish specific goals.

(Goldenberg 2004: 171)

### **Changes at Kotara High School**

In 2001 Kotara High School was a school of 300 students of whom 95 per cent were of Arabic-speaking backgrounds. The school had a retention rate of 40 per cent to Year 12 and on all tests the students were in the lowest 20 per cent band in the state. Staff morale was low, partly because declining enrolments meant that positions were being lost. In 2005 the school population had grown to 800 and was culturally and linguistically very diverse. Student outcomes in standardized tests were at or above state average. The curriculum had expanded with a greater range of school subjects and additional offerings such as debating, drama, chess and excursions. There was strong parental involvement and staff were participating in a range of committees. There was much more support for students in terms of developing English and their first language. How had this happened?

Fred Carosi, the new principal, came from an inner city boys' school which had implemented radical changes in school management and teaching. The school had a reputation for improvement.

There was no way I'd try here to do what happened at my previous school.

It's why I got the job here, but Kotara is a different ball game. The main thing I've learned is that there is no formula.

In the first year teachers were involved in developing policies. This involved them participating in deciding the type of school they wanted and how they would achieve this. Policies addressed issues such as resources, classroom teaching, and staff and student attitudes and behaviours. From this came several initiatives:

- Uniforms became compulsory (most Australian schools have student uniforms). Although seen as symbolic, the change led to a dramatic improvement in the way the students and the wider community viewed the school.
- A leadership team with direction and involvement developed. The executive also worked with head teachers to promote various school improvements.
- Teachers and students initiated debating, drama, chess, dance and performance groups.
- The curriculum was maintained and expanded, even with small student classes: senior chemistry and physics and advanced level mathematics were kept going.
- The dormant parents' and citizens' group re-established itself with the active involvement of growing numbers of parents.
- There were workshops on planning and teaching, with a focus on implementing a more challenging and more scaffolded curriculum. Each month teachers and executive would implement, trial and report on different classroom strategies such as jigsaw learning, alternative questioning techniques or the use of contracts. Successful strategies were continued.

The school initiated a programme of links with local primary schools. Students in Grades 4 and 5 took part in a ceramics programme at the secondary school. Grade 5 and 6 students spent days attending lessons in the high school. There were joint science programmes to enable the primary schools to access science expertise and materials. Parent and student open days were held. Management and morale were also issues which improved gradually, following a range of initiatives. Fred commented that it had been two years since he had heard a teacher use the phrase 'The kids at this school could never do that.'

## **Classroom-level change**

With the push for whole-school change it is too easy to ignore what can happen in the classroom and what teachers individually or in groups can achieve. In 2005 when I was talking about the findings described in the first half of this book, some of the teachers who were working in similar schools asked for ideas on what they could do to improve what was going on in their classrooms when they returned to school the next day. At the time I did not answer the question well. The following

section focuses on successful strategies being employed in the schools and communities.

### ***Group work and expectations***

Steve, the mathematics teacher at Bellevue Boys', had a reputation as a successful teacher. His classes were all based on students sitting in groups and working at their own pace. Students entered the room noisily but started work without many of the routines that occurred in other classes. Steve would move around helping students in different groups. Occasionally he would stop and address the whole class with an explanation about one of the questions. His students had a bipolar distribution of results: in the more challenging courses they achieved above the state average; in the less challenging courses the students' results were well below the state average. What was successful about his teaching?

- Students worked in groups at their own pace and had interaction between themselves and with the teacher.
- The teacher focused on the language of mathematics and made sure the students were confident in using the range of language to describe the terms and operations.
- The teacher expected student participation and achievement and engaged them in a programme which was linked with excursions and learning outside the classroom.

### ***Debating and expectations***

Zena was an English teacher at Kotara High School and had changed the teaching in her junior classes.

I found the expectations too low. I teach Shakespeare in Year 7 and it works. I think a lot of the teachers think the students can't cope, but they can. It just depends on how you do it.

Zena had started the school debating teams the year before. She gathered a group of interested students and quizzed them about their knowledge and reading of current affairs. When she found that none of them read newspapers she got them into the habit of reading every night. The next day they would walk around the playground with her (when she was on duty) and discuss what they had read. In her classes she also trained them in debating and focused more on oral presentations. Even though the school was in the bottom 20 per cent of results in English in the state, the Kotara debating teams that year won the local district competition, beating neighbouring selective and non-government schools. The effect on the students and staff was dramatic.



### **Support in English**

Wilson Park has four English as a second language teachers, who are additional to staff and appointed on the basis of student language needs. The ESL programme is adapted each year depending on the balance of new arrival students and those designated as third-phase learners (more than three years' exposure to English). Each year the ESL teachers consult with the primary schools to target students in need of language support. These students are then placed in a middle-stream Year 7 class with native speakers. In each grade there is a designated ESL class. ESL teachers then organize a parallel class in which the ESL specialist teaches subject content to the group of ESL students while the subject teacher works with the rest of the class. At Wilson Park the parallel class in Year 7 and 8 is for English, and in Year 9 and 10 for mathematics.

The ESL teachers then specialize in different subject areas and team-teach with subject teachers on classes of mixed native and non-native speakers of English. One teacher, Maria, focuses on maths and science and her colleague, Sen, on history and geography. Their role in team-teaching is usually as equals, taking joint responsibility for planning, classroom management, teaching and marking. The teaching role depends on the class: sometimes they take an initial ten minutes on language work; sometimes they plan and run group work activities. They find that they tend to be involved in the teaching of genres and writing. Students are pre- and post-tested with each unit. They find this gives them a good idea of how students are going and provides satisfaction at the pupils' progress. They also try to work on every period with the teacher for that subject, as otherwise they lose track of what is going on. The shortcomings of team-teaching are that they sometimes feel that some of the students need more assistance than can be given, especially students of Asian backgrounds in the areas of pronunciation and grammar. Joint planning is also a constant problem. Even though Maria and Sen get one period a fortnight for planning it does not coincide with that of classroom teachers and it is not sufficient. The benefits are being able to get to a wider range of students and providing the support in context.

In addition to the parallel classes and the team-teaching, Maria and Sen have also started a range of other courses. The ESL staff have responded to requests from the art head teacher to help students in the visual arts course. In Grades 7, 8 and 9 there have been special enrichment programmes: six-week courses in computers, careers, mathematics and English. ESL teachers have offered courses in 'word power', writing, grammar and other areas. ESL teachers also work on a supplementary English course in Year 11 in which parents have enrolled part time at the school. They find this an exciting innovation for parents, many of whom had only one to two years' schooling in the country of origin. The reasons for their success are:

- the level of expertise they have developed in language and content areas. All ESL teachers have Master's-level qualifications in TESOL;

- the flexibility of their programme, which is adapted according to needs and which combines separate provision of support and team-teaching through content areas.

### ***First-language support***

Rose is one of the two Arabic-language teachers at Maronite College. In the secondary school, Arabic was an elective subject taken by 20 per cent of students.

The parents want their children to study Arabic for religious or cultural reasons. For me Arabic is a world language and you study it because of the language itself, not for sentimental reasons. I want the students to study it for its own sake, like French or German, and to be fluent in reading, writing and speaking it.

Rose had a bilingual programme running in the early primary school. Her classes in the secondary school were genre-based and interactive with a focus on areas such as the media, technology and communication. She had tried to make the content relevant to the students' daily lives. Her older students had written children's books in Arabic which they then read to the younger children.

George is a teacher at the Saturday School of Community Languages, a government-funded and -run secondary school that runs on 17 different sites in the state every Saturday morning offering teaching up to Grade 12 in 30 different languages to some 7,000 students. Students attend these classes when there are not enough students in their day school for the language to be taught.

The government syllabus focuses on the spoken language. However, these students already have spoken Arabic, but not the formal written Arabic. There is no real use for this in Australia. Most students are taking the subject for Year 12 (university entrance) and so the problem is to teach the formal language they don't really need and make it interesting. George used communicative language teaching, focusing on reading and writing and also on the media. He taught Arabic film and music and built on the students' knowledge of spoken Arabic.

Maha teaches in the community school, where parents and community members teach Arabic four afternoons a week to children. The school had grown to 150 students, and classes were running from kindergarten to Year 9 from 4 p.m. until 7 p.m. Maha's kindergarten class was a hive of activity: one group of children were playing with polystyrene jigsaw pieces of letters in the Arabic alphabet; another group was reading through flashcards of words, led by one of the parents; a third group was listening to Maha introducing a big book in Arabic to them in a shared reading session.

We cannot teach the way we used to teach . . . you know, rote learning . . . we teach the way they teach in the day schools and the children learn better. Even though it's after school, they love coming. We cannot get them to

the standard they would be in Lebanon but we get close . . . the parents help a lot.

Maha's aim was for the students to be biliterate in English and Arabic in early primary school. Some of the teachers in the school also taught in the day schools and so there was co-operation between the schools.

# Researching in multilingual/ multicultural contexts

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This chapter provides the research background to the book and offers suggestions for researching literacy in multilingual contexts. It works from the central notion that literacy in multilingual contexts is now the norm and is something that should be reflected in the ways in which literacy research is framed and undertaken.

### **The challenge of multilingual contexts**

Much educational research now in Australia, the US, the UK, Canada and other countries takes place in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts. In Australia, one-fifth of the population are first-generation immigrants and another fifth are children of migrants. Sydney is typical of the modern city, having gone through global economic restructuring and global flows of people: the majority of citizens are from ethnic minority backgrounds from more than 180 different countries of origin. It also has a significant indigenous population. There is also the growing importance of research across countries, languages and cultures in the sociology of education and educational leadership.

Although many of the qualitative tools used in educational research derive from anthropology and ethnography and have a long history of use in culturally diverse contexts, the sheer complexity of localized urban communities and the effects of global changes in migration and media bring into question many of the assumptions underlying accepted practice in educational research. There is a body of cross-cultural research in areas such as communication studies (Bennet 1998) and business (Warner and Joynt 2003) but a reported dearth in education (Shah 2004).

The major issue in literacy research in multilingual contexts is ways in which the insider/outsider dilemma is played out. What are the implications for the research and the researcher of cultural and linguistic differences? Hornberger (1994a) summarizes the issue in several ways: as the familiar/strange dilemma and the problem of how to interpret; as the participant/observer dilemma and the role of the research; as the researcher/researched dilemma and the problem of change; and as the member/non-member dilemma and the question of identity. This

does not assume monolithic notions of language and cultural difference as the constructions of insider/outsider are always multidimensional and continuing (Shah 2004). The questions raised could be summarized as follows:

- How is the research to be organized? Does the sequencing of the research presume a dominant cultural frame? For literacy research, how can the researcher escape viewing community practices through the lens of school-based literacy?
- How can access best be gained to the community? In what role(s) does the researcher gain access?
- What knowledge and understanding does the researcher have of the language(s) and mixes of language(s) used in the community? How does this knowledge (or lack of it) facilitate or constrain research?
- How can cultural and linguistic differences be addressed in research? What are the implications of using interpreters, fieldworkers, etc.?
- How appropriate a genre is the interview? What are the issues in interviewing in cross-cultural and linguistic contexts?
- How useful is collaborative ethnography?
- What are the implications for data analysis of these questions?

### **Staging research**

One of the problems of literacy research is that so much of it has been school-based and that community literacy can be viewed through the lens of school literacy. Where researchers are teachers, this problem is compounded, as it becomes more difficult to question let alone articulate many of the assumptions we hold. The research into community practices was staged to address this problem. The research was designed to work from the families and community into the schools. The first two years of the study focused on interviewing community members and workers and then working with 20 families, carrying out interviews and observations. The third stage (1997–2000) involved working with five families, making regular visits, attending community functions, interviewing and participating in family occasions. The aim of this sequence was to make the familiar, the school context, as strange as possible. The trap for researchers is to choose the culturally familiar first.

Because the white children showed particular interest in my activities (a necessity for my interviewing strategy) and secondly because I judged the problem of the teacher-as-research role to be easier to resolve with the white children than with the Asians because of my greater awareness of their cultural norms.

(Pollard 1984, in Shah 2004: 559)

The researcher admitted to not being able to interview enough Asian background students because of lack of time.

### Entry to the community

This section, using Labov's (1972) title, could equally be titled 'Not gaining entry to the neighbourhood'. Much research characterizes gaining access as access to a defined geographical/demographic entity. Ethnic communities, however, are multilayered, with webs of economic, social and other ties with the surrounding society, and so the focus on entry may be through social relationships (Hornberger 1995). It was this circuitous process of establishing such social networks in the Arabic-speaking community that led to questioning how such networks are defined.

The Arabic-speaking communities in Sydney are multifaceted. Migration from Lebanon, the main source country, was chain migration involving specific villages and extended families. Settlement patterns of families in Sydney tend to be very localized in some neighbourhoods, because of factors such as the availability of affordable housing and the provision of appropriate services. With chain migration, it is the family not the neighbourhood that provides the focus. There are several levels of support and representation, with village associations playing an important role with their government-funded welfare projects and workers. At the next level there are religious organizations based around the mosques or churches. There exist also several umbrella community groups and, finally, workers in various government departments or units whose role it is to serve the community.

I had originally planned to gain entry through key informants, Arabic-speaking community workers, teachers, community members and teenagers. I wanted to identify local groups of teenagers with whom I could work and through the youth workers take on the role of participant observer.

In the first stage of the project I focused on village associations, on umbrella community groups and on associations attached to the churches and mosques. All

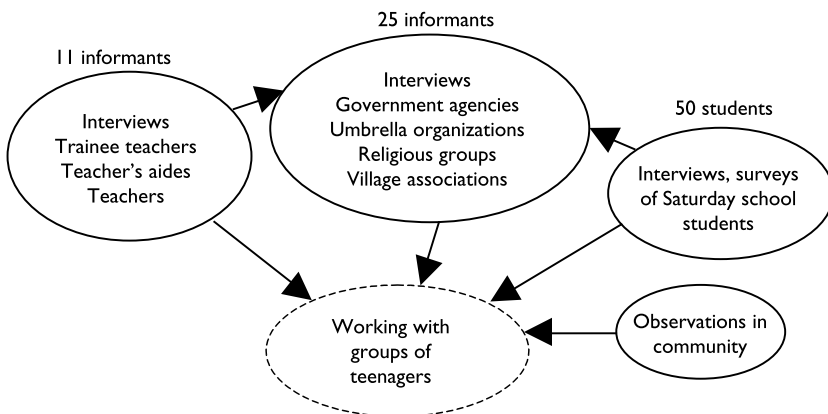


Figure 9.1 Plan for initial stage of research.

three approaches proved unsuccessful. Much of the Sunni Muslim community in the Bellevue area comes from a village in the north of Lebanon. The village association has been running for some 20 years, operating welfare groups and retirement homes. I had known the president, Ahmed, for several years and interviewed him in his office. At the end of an interview of some 90 minutes in which we discussed the issues facing the community and the problems of the youth, he told me:

The teenagers are a lost cause. We have given up on them. They are in between – not Lebanese, not Australian. We could put our money into that, but we get more by helping the parents and the old people. I know the parents are worried, but let the big groups take care of the kids. You know, the mosque and the welfare groups, they get all the government money. Believe me, it's a waste of time.

His response was typical of village associations, which tended to cater more for the older generation and the younger children. Umbrella community groups, established in the 1980s in response to government funding initiatives, were also offering little to youth. One interview at an umbrella Muslim organization with three funded workers lasted some three hours. I noted in my diary later that in that time there were neither phone calls nor clients in the office. The workers had been funded for a project involving Arabic-speaking parents in schools. In 1997 I found out that the local schools had co-operated in giving the organization access to parents and although the report had been used to obtain continuing funding no tangible outcomes had eventuated. This experience was repeated with several other groups.

I visited Naja (Migrant Resource Centre), Khalil (Community Health), Bilal (Commonwealth Employment Service). Basically, all of these workers reported that there were few activities or groups going for the youth in the area. Bilal said that mostly the boys hung around the Blakeville area and lived for cars and drugs. The girls were mainly kept at home. Naja and Khalil had run a youth seminar several weeks previously and had a good roll-up from schools. The teenagers in the area had little or no contact with Arabic-speaking workers or groups.

(Fieldnotes)

Mosque and church organizations were more recently established. They had had less time in which to establish youth groups, although research indicated that participation rates in religious activities and organizations were as minimal as youth participation in community groups.

To cut a long story short, I spent two years working fruitlessly trying to make contacts through village associations and umbrella community groups. In fact, most of these organizations had little or no contact with youth. The ways of

gaining entry to such a community are very particular and reflect the complex nature of links and allegiances between households, the Arabic-speaking community and the broader society. Firstly, although settlement patterns were focused on three or four suburbs in which families had lived for some 20 years, the geographical concept of neighbourhood did not have great purchase. Links with village associations were important for those of the older generation who identified with the village they came from. For the younger generation there was much less identification with language/cultural affiliations (despite the assumptions behind government funding). Teenagers attended language classes, although this was often an area of conflict between parents and children. There were few youth clubs in the area, and participation in these could also have been a source of conflict between parents and children. Boys (and very few girls) tended to take part in local sports clubs which were multi-ethnic in membership. The main two activities for boys outside the homes were in tension. On the one hand, there was participation in family events, outings with siblings and visiting. On the other hand, there was 'hanging out' in parks and shopping malls with the peer group. The identification with religion, Christian or Muslim, did not translate into activities other than some attendance at prayers and services (Humphrey and Hausfeld 1984). There would be no blueprint for gaining access to any language/ethnic group. The entry points depend so much on the complex and changing nature of identifications which the teenagers hold in terms of religious affiliation, language and culture, gender, family, interests and abilities.

## **The researcher in multilingual contexts**

### ***Researcher as language learner***

Researchers whose literacy practices are mainly monolingual are faced with the problem of approaching multilingual contexts with assumptions embedded in school-based dominant literacy practices. The values and meanings attached to these practices are framed in the dominant language contexts and even the language and vocabulary for describing bilingual practices can be inadequate (Bell 1995). I spent the first 18 months of the work with Arabic background teenagers learning Arabic through formal classes. The reason for this was not to gain fluency (which would not have been possible in such a short time) but to begin questioning assumptions about language and literacy and also to try to narrow the gap between myself and the families I was working with.

The notion of the researcher as language learner has been a feature of anthropology more than ethnography. Briggs (1984, 1986) acquired standard Spanish before beginning fieldwork in a Mexicano community but the community he was studying spoke a non-standard dialect with markedly different cultural rules. The process of his language learning, his 'learning how to ask', paralleled and informed his fieldwork, and the contexts of his learning, interviews with community members, became the focus of his study.



The researcher as language learner is also fairly common in the study of second-language and literacy development and teaching. In several studies the aim was to reflect and act upon the researchers' practice as language educators (Rivers 1983; Savignon 1983; Schmidt and Frota 1986; Lowe 1987; Green 1989). It has also been used as a hypothesis-generating research process (Schumann and Schumann 1977; Bailey and Ochsner 1983) and as an exercise in theory building (Jones 1995). Most of these studies were carried out over a relatively short time span, the exceptions being Bell (1995), which lasted for 12 months, and Jones (1995), over an 11-month period. The short length of language learning, perhaps, has led to the focus of most studies being oral competency or learner variables. Schumann and Schumann (1977) examined the role of learning to read as an aid to the development of oral competency but did not discuss the acquisition of writing. Only Bell (1995) had literacy as the major focus.

My language learning consisted of three semesters over a three-year period. The first was a series of lessons in Arabic with Tony, an Arabic/TESOL teacher trainee in one of my classes at Sydney University. Then I took a 14-week, two-hour-per-week course at an adult education college. Concurrently, I also worked my way through an Arabic coursebook. Finally, I audited a semester of tertiary-level introductory Arabic (two hours per week with an additional two hours in the language laboratory). From the three semesters I gained a level of basic understanding, beginner's-level lexis and reading and writing skills.

The types of questions addressed were: Which ways of teaching and learning Arabic are valued and privileged? Why are these valued? To what extent do the script and structure of the oral language affect the teaching/learning of literacy? What more can I understand/question about my first-language literacy from learning this second-language literacy? What 'universals' are in fact specific assumptions embedded in literacy practices in English?

I kept a research journal for each of the classes and in the first section of each book I kept notes after each session, describing what had happened and my reactions and observations. The second data source was the collection of documents: worksheets, study cards, and test results with comments. At the back of each research journal I kept reflective notes. These were written generally each weekend after reading the week's fieldnotes. The reflective notes also included comments that linked with the background reading I was doing and the early stages of the fieldwork. There were several methods of analysis. The first involved the reading and rereading of the fieldnotes, the reflective notes and other documents. From these rereadings, themes developed, changed and were amplified. Instances from the notes were coded and highlighted in different colours. Again there continued the cycling back and forth between the data, the themes and the theories. Another approach taken was the identification of key terms such as 'Arabic', 'educated' and 'Muslim'. Even words such as 'learn' and 'study' ended up with complex patterns of associated meanings.

The data from the language learning led to the questioning of several ideas about literacy that are assumed to be universal. The first was the role of decoding

and reading from context. Decoding Arabic (when vowel diacritics are not used) is much more difficult than English and is helped by reading aloud, prepared reading and even memorization. The historical and political values embedded in the notion of Modern Standard Arabic and its dialects were important in understanding the values embedded in classroom teaching and the attitudes in the community to the learning and maintenance of Arabic. The origin of Modern Standard Arabic in the language of the Qur'an gives meaning to the secular/religious arguments about learning Arabic. It also explains the arguments about diglossia and the primary focus on teaching Modern Standard Arabic through memorization and written text rather than through speaking and listening. The instructional methodology has been linked also with the oral mode of transmission used in the teaching of classical Arabic (Wallace 2000). The role of Modern Standard Arabic also places notions of correctness over appropriateness. The language learning led to a greater understanding of much of the literature on literacy in Arabic and informed the framing and analysis of interviews and observations.

The researcher as language learner in an ethnographic study of literacy has several benefits. There can be more flexibility in the role of the researcher. For example, the attempt to learn one of the interviewees' languages can lessen the distance between researcher and researched. At other times the researcher can be seen as someone who is not identified with the prejudice directed by the dominant to minority groups. The researcher is able to play more of a second-order participant role (Milroy 1980). Secondly, the data gained from the learning process and its analysis strengthen the collection and analysis of fieldwork data. The process of researcher as language learner goes some way to addressing the 'member/non-member' issue in research and with other strategies can provide a triangulation of sorts to the data.

### ***Interpreters or fieldworkers?***

How can research be carried out in multilingual contexts? It is no longer acceptable for interviews to be carried out only in English with bilingual interviewees. Important data can be excluded and the choice by the researcher of the language of communication can inhibit the interview. Where the researcher is both bilingual and bicultural most issues are overcome although being an insider has its own problems in that the researcher can ignore phenomena that are familiar and taken for granted: being an insider can 'blunt criticality' (Haw 1998; Shah 2004). Another option is the use of interpreters. Although offering linguistic mediation, the use of interpreters also has problems associated with it.

- Interpreters are trained as 'conduits' of language and not to be intrusive in the interpreting situation. Typically, interpreters should sit at an angle between interviewer and interviewee, not obscuring the direct eye contact between the two. In practice, few interviewees are used to this situation and tend to communicate directly with the interpreter and expect the interpreter

to be the main communicator, an explainer and supporter. They expect a more active role of the interpreter.

- A second issue is the position of the interpreter. Although trained in ethics and the importance of the neutral role of the interpreter, issues of gender/class/politics/community position take on a different importance. In small communities, interpreters are often known to interviewees and issues of disclosure and confidentiality become crucial.
- A final issue is that the use of an interpreter frames the interaction in terms of the community language. Interviewees may prefer to code-switch or to discuss certain topics in English. In the interview situation siblings may not be strong enough in the community language to participate fully in the talk. The focus on the one language may constrain the talk rather than facilitate it.

Goldstein (1995, 1997), in her work with Portuguese immigrant workers in Canada over a two-year period, advocated the use of fieldworkers, whom she described as 'cultural and linguistic interpreters' and who provided her with 'the sociocultural, sociolinguistic background knowledge necessary for understanding talk by Azorean workers' (1995: 589). In Goldstein's work, fieldworkers were more co-researchers and were able to play more flexible and active roles in interactions in the community.

Ferial was a young Arabic-speaking casual teacher in one of the local schools. Her family had arrived before the main migration from Lebanon and she had grown up as one of the few Lebanese background students in her school. She married and was raising her family. Amina had been an ethnic community aide for ten years, working part time in three schools. She had come to Australia from Lebanon via Mexico where she had married. She was raising her two sons alone. Although Amina was of Christian background, she had close Muslim friends.

The roles of Amina and Ferial were as linguistic and cultural interpreters and mediators in a broader sense. Before each interview we discussed the family and the proposed interview. Questions and topics were checked for their appropriateness. After each interview I recorded a discussion with Amina or Ferial about the visit with the family. In some cases the discussion was about specific questions I raised; at other times it was a general evaluation. The data from these discussions on cassette and in fieldnotes were valuable in strengthening the analysis. Ferial and Amina at times also did simultaneous or consecutive interpreting which enabled me to keep participating in the interviews despite my lack of Arabic. The cultural mediation also applied to the adaptation of the interview genre to make it more culturally appropriate. Some of this adaptation was conscious; most was unconscious.

The presence of the fieldworkers provided flexibility in language choice and thus gave interviewees more control over the situation. In most interviews Arabic and English were used, often by the same interlocutor. For example, if there was something that the interviewee did not want me to know, then it was told to Amina in Arabic. In one interview at which I was the only male, Mrs Abboud and

Amina began talking about a dinner they had both gone to and the jokes they had swapped. This led on to a retelling of the jokes (which were sexual in nature). The conversation switched to Arabic and I was excluded. The choice of language depended on many factors. In some cases the parents were more fluent in Arabic and chose to speak Arabic to Amina or Ferial. In other cases the children were stronger in English and spoke to us in English. The interlocutor also made a difference. Amina and Ferial both spoke in Arabic when they thought the interviewees would prefer Arabic. On the other hand, they sometimes chose English (especially with the fathers) if they suspected that the use of Arabic could be interpreted as a comment on the interviewees' levels of English. The level of solidarity between Ferial, Amina and the person to whom they were talking made a difference. A conversation in English would suddenly switch into Arabic as it speeded up and participants focused more on expressing what they felt to each other. The topic of conversation was a factor. Talk about the school was generally in English. A talk about the children and things more personal would be in Arabic. When consciousness of the tape recorder waned, conversation would drift into Arabic. Code mixing was also common. Fillers and feedback comments in Arabic framed English statements. Such switches in language levels are common in all interviews. The language choices in bilingual interviews foreground the features in the context that trigger these choices and switches. The choice of language in questions and answers and the code switching and code mixing provide important data about participants' attitudes to the interview and the ideas, values and information expressed in the interview. Interviews that occurred in only English or only Arabic would have missed the richness of the data. In situations where participants use their languages for different purposes and in different contexts, it is important to have this reflected in the interview.

The second benefit was the depth of data in relation to cultural understandings. Informal recorded chats before and after each family interview raised many issues. More importantly, the data from these talks also foregrounded my attitudes and understandings along with those of Ferial and Amina. In every interaction, participants construct and are constructed in allegiances and identities in terms of gender, religion and ethnicity. Such identities are both self-defined and other-defined. Amina, as a community worker in schools, was often positioned as mediator between the school and the families. Both she and Ferial were sometimes in an advocacy role for students and their families, often in roles conveying school decisions to parents. When we were discussing possible families who could participate in the study, both Ferial and Amina first suggested families who were members of the school organizations or students who were doing well at school. It was as if they were seeing their role as presenting the best face of their community. In many interactions, Amina took the role of explaining and justifying parents' and their children's attitudes and responses. Then after one interview Amina exploded:

I hate these Muslims. They come here with all their children. They go on

the dole and they don't get off their bums. They cheat the government and expect them to do everything for them. I know there are some nice ones but . . .

On other occasions both Amina and Ferial identified more with the school. In one interview with a family which Ferial saw as being less successful in Australia, she was quite shocked that no one in the family said that they read books. Much to my horror she asked the following question in Arabic.

*Ferial:* But haven't any of you read a book?

*Fatima:* Maryam has read a book.

*Maryam:* Yes, I bought that book . . . John Grisham . . . *Time to Kill*.

*Ferial:* Yes, I've read that . . . did you like it?

*Maryam:* It was wonderful . . . I lay in bed reading.

*Ferial:* Will you buy some more?

*Maryam:* Not really. That was my honeymoon.

(Translated from Arabic. Ferial was the fieldworker.)

What Maryam meant by reading in this interchange was that it was not a common occurrence, but something that happened on her honeymoon. Reading a book meant that she was freed from the responsibilities of housework. In this interview Ferial was identifying as a teacher. The discussion about this interaction after the interview was really productive. Ferial spoke about how her own upbringing was quite sheltered and she did not realize much about some of the families in her community. The use of the fieldworkers added another layer to the data and the analysis.

## Interviewing in bilingual/bicultural contexts

After lunch we went to Mrs Ibrahim's. Amina said she'd had guests all morning and that's why we'd had to go later. The visit was arranged in running mobile phone calls over the morning. In the Ibrahims' living room were five of Mrs Ibrahim's seven children. There was also a friend from Strathfield and two of Mrs Ibrahim's aunts. We were introduced and served cool drinks and cakes. Mrs Ibrahim had come to Australia when she was in fourth class and was quite expansive on her experiences. She managed a huge household. In between her memories of school, she managed to organize some of her children going shopping, answer two phone calls, receive two more visitors and farewell the woman from Strathfield. I chatted with Mrs Ibrahim. Amina was talking more with the aunts and the children, talking mainly in Arabic with switches to English. After five minutes I gave up on the cassette player because of the amount of talk going on at once. After ten minutes I gave up on any idea of Amina being interpreter: we were both too busy in conversations. In the car later I told Amina it was difficult getting to interview any of

the parents or teenagers individually. She told me to 'go with the flow'. 'They're busy, you know, with their kids and visitors. That's why I can't tell you the night before who we're going to see . . . it really depends on when they've got the time.'

This was my first interview with parents: I had planned for Amina to be the interpreter in my interviewing Mr and Mrs Ibrahim. Although Mrs Ibrahim was completely fluent in English, Mr Ibrahim was much stronger in Arabic. I realized very quickly that to use Amina simply as interpreter was not appropriate for her nor for the families and that plans for recording interviews would also not work in a situation of simultaneous conversations. How appropriate is the interview as a genre or communicative event in different cultural and linguistic contexts? How are issues of gender, age and status played out in cross-cultural situations? What are the implications for the collection and analysis of data?

Interviews, of course, are a key tool in educational research and there is a large body of literature on them in quantitative research as a tool for eliciting information and in qualitative approaches as more unstructured and in-depth. A common denominator in definitions of interviews is as a 'social event' (Hammersley 1992) and as 'a transaction that takes place between seeking information on the part of one and supplying information on the part of the other' (Cohen and Manion 1989: 307). The research interview is 'a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description or explanation' (Tuckman 1972, in Cohen and Manion 1989: 306). The literature typically provides information on types of interviews, interview processes and methods of analysis (Spradley 1979; Burgess 1984; Brenner *et al.* 1985; Powney and Watts 1987; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Minichiello *et al.* 1995; Gubrium and Holstein 2001; Silverman 2001).

There is also a body of research into the effects on interviewing of factors such as gender (Oakley 1981; Stanley and Wise 1990), class and ethnic background (Labov 1981; Shah 2004). It is in the tradition of anthropology and ethnographic research, however, that there is any discussion of the interview as a culturally constructed (meta)communicative event rather than a universal genre (Briggs 1984, 1986). Briggs argued that the nature of the interview genre itself worked against reflexivity and realization of its cultural specificity.

- The interviewer normally directs the interviewee away from the present time and place, leading to a 'false consciousness of objectivity' (1986: 120).
- It is assumed that what is said can be linguistically analysed and that the context is agreed upon rather than constructed by the participants.
- The interview focus can mask interviewees' metacommunicative patterns and the role of these in other routines and events.

There is an assumption that interviewees are familiar with the interview genre

from its presence in the media, marketing and daily life. Interviewees may, in fact, have had little dealing with interviews and may frame the interaction in terms of more familiar genres or metacommunicative events.

Amina had rung Mrs Abboud and arranged the interview with her and her two daughters. She had explained what everything was about and she told me it would be okay to record. When we arrived at the house it turned out that Mr Abboud had come off his taxi shift early and he was also part of the interview. He immediately began questioning Amina in Arabic about why she wanted to ask questions of his wife. When I brought out the tape recorder it was the final straw. He stormed off into the kitchen and refused to return. Mrs Abboud looked at the floor. Two of the girls giggled. Amina kept talking with Mr Abboud from the living room. He yelled from the kitchen that he didn't want what he said recorded. Amina finally coaxed him back after another 15 minutes on condition that we did not record anything.

Mr Abboud's experience of interviews had been interrogations by police or army or government officials. He was justifiably suspicious of any request for information. In the first example of Mr and Mrs Ibrahim, the interview was framed in the more familiar event of a visit. Like most interviews it took place in the living room; parents and children were present; friends, extended family and visitors arrived and left during the conversations; the television was on in the background; the visit was interspersed with conversations on mobile phones; Arabic, English and code mixing were used simultaneously in parallel conversations. The interview was framed in terms of a visit. This role of visiting in the social life of the households was stressed by many informants. Weekday visits would be from family or friends, generally women and children. At the weekend it was common for the whole family to receive visitors or to go visiting, often to more than one place in the day. Visits would be organized generally by phone, and normally an adult would welcome the visitor(s) and guide them into the lounge room. Cool drinks, coffee or sweets would be served, or often fruit or biscuits. Talk would normally start around the children. I discussed with field-workers about the project, how to explain it and how I could be introduced. Both Ferial and Amina simplified this and introduced me more in personal terms. Amina made much of my orchard where I was growing figs. She also introduced me in terms of my children. In fact, on several occasions when I had to take one of my daughters with me on interviews, Amina told me I should keep doing it. In this way Amina was locating me on a continuum between visiting acquaintance and friend.

Although the research literature on interviews addresses issues of cultural difference and the effect of these on interviewer/interviewee roles, there is little questioning of the genre itself. For example, there is scant acknowledgement that focus group interviews are not appropriate in some cultural contexts because of the ways in which factors of gender, class and status are played out. An awareness

of the cultural specificity of the interview genre, however, can lead to the documentation and analysis of oral genres or metacommunicative events in different contexts. Such an awareness also has implications for monocultural contexts.

Amina and I were shown into the living room. Mr Zohair welcomed us. The four children were sitting on the lounge in front of the window. Mrs Zohair went to fetch coffee and sweets. We had coffee over small talk about the children and the school and what I was doing. I switched on the tape recorder with permission and we then started chatting more about the school. Mr Zohair stood up with his cigarette in hand and began giving almost a public talk, on politics, on religion, on his work in State Rail and on the economy. He would stop every now and then to allow me to ask a question. During all of this Amina and Mrs Zohair carried on their own conversation. At times they would listen in to Mr Zohair and nod agreement saying 'Yes' or 'No'. The children sat quietly in their chair. After about 40 minutes of this Mr Zohair sat down and we continued our conversation less formally. The visit lasted two and a half hours. When we were debriefing in the car I asked Amina what had been going on. She seemed unperturbed and replied, 'Don't take him too seriously. He's a nice man. He was just trying to make a good impression.'

I could not understand why Mr Zohair was making a formal speech and also why Amina and Mrs Zohair were not being seen as rude in carrying on their own conversation, ignoring most of his speech. It seemed to me that cultural and other factors were interfering with the interview.

There were several occasions when interviews became much more formal. In the first interviews with Mr Zohair and Mr Tannous, both fathers began discoursing at length on various issues. Both spoke whilst standing, and turn taking became inappropriate. This was not an indication of their taking power in the interview but quite the opposite. After the first interview with Mr Tannous, Ferial reported that she had seen him down the street. He had asked her, 'Did I give Mr Ken the answers he wanted?' Ferial explained to me that Mr Tannous was grateful for the life he had achieved in Australia and would not say anything vaguely critical about the schools to me. The formal monologic talk in these initial interviews also occurred in many community events and community meetings. The reactions of listeners to these talks varied between attentive listening and complete ignorance. Tony explained that silence was a mark of respect but that not paying attention was not a sign of disrespect. The formal talk, therefore, had a performative function, one that was evaluated by other participants.

How accurate is the above conclusion, made after discussions with field-workers? Cross-cultural interviewing problematizes issues of gender, status and language. Was I mistaken in assuming that Mr Zohair's monologic talk was typical of certain cultural contexts rather than an individual reaction in a given circumstance? The problem in situations of cultural difference is that such



difference encourages the interviewer's perceptions of interviewees as 'a group representative rather than as a unique person' (Kim 1991).

Other features of the interviews seemed to reflect borrowings from conversation in Arabic. Examples were in the frequent use of sayings and the number of bits of gossip and stories about other families. In most interviews there were sayings such as 'If you don't beat/squeeze an olive you don't get the best oil' (referring to children and punishment) or 'Children are like the fingers on your hand' (treat children according to individual difference). Some were from the Qur'an. 'You must follow education even if you go to China.' Interviews were interspersed with anecdotes that had a moral to them and were often given as illustrations. Stories about other families were also common. Both Amina and Ferial stressed the role of gossip and stories. This was related to the importance of the family reputation and the sympathy and horror at children or parents in other families behaving in ways to damage or destroy this reputation.

Interviews also seemed to reflect conversational rules reported in Arabic. Conversational dyads or triads, 'co-operative simultaneous talk', often based along gender and age lines, were the norm (Tannen 1982, 1992). Conversations would flow into and separate from each other at different times. Issues of gender, who could talk to whom, were of great importance. Most of the women interviewed wore the hijab in the presence of a man from outside the family. Some women did not shake a man's hand but greeted him by placing their hand on their heart. It was generally more acceptable for myself, as a male outsider, to engage in conversation with the man, whilst Amina or Ferial spoke with the women in the house. When there were no men present it was generally more acceptable for Amina or Ferial to lead the conversation. Age was another factor. Teenagers and children generally played little part in family interviews, not participating unless invited.

How then do researchers approach interviews in educational research? Are they appropriate research tools? Briggs (1984, 1986) argues for using the interview itself as a source of data and analysis, as a way of learning 'how to ask' in different cultural contexts and of documenting different oral genres. His first stage was learning how to ask through an observation of who talks, who listens to whom, the role of silence and the ways in which people communicate. This involves an exploration of the range of social situations in relation to the types of speech events that can take place in each. The second step was designing an appropriate methodology. In-depth observation would suggest which topics can be explored in the course of interviews and which local situations are appropriate for interviewing. The third stage is reflexivity involving periodic checks on the effectiveness of the interview and in-depth analysis of specific interviews using a linguistic framework. The schematic structure of the interview should be analysed along with the communicative function of each stage. Individual utterances can then be analysed by considering metacommunicative features and contextualization. Metacommunicative features are particularly obvious when there are departures from the interviewer's expected norms. By 'contextualization', Briggs means the

features that signal how messages are to be read. Such features include non-verbal communication, fillers and comments by participants on what had been said.

The use of the interview itself as a source of data is beneficial not only in terms of schematic structure and linguistic and social features, but also in terms of the choice of language. Where interviewees have the choice of language and the freedom to use code switching, such choices reveal much about attitudes to the topic and other issues. Who spoke Arabic, when, to whom and about what? The answers to these questions reveal as much as the content of the answers. Researchers often interview in a language other than English, translate interviews into English for supervisors and then carry out analysis using computer software on the English translation. Such a process involves a loss of a valuable data source as well as bringing validity into question.

The issues discussed in this section about the use of interviews in multilingual contexts would also apply to monolingual contexts but are more visible in multilingual contexts.

## **Collaborative ethnography**

Literacy research with ethnic minority teenagers can be very problematic. There is often a power imbalance and a situation of conflict and resistance established in school contexts. Even where ethnic minority students are in a numerical majority, they are still often marginalized in the schools. Their home language and culture may not be valued in the school, and talking about these may be breaking the hidden rules. The second problem is a more general one: literacy practices are social practices embedded in daily life and are generally below the level of conscious activity. People are often unaware of their incidental uses of reading and writing. The third issue is that teenagers, especially ethnic minority youth, tend to be left out of research into their literacy as teachers and parents are more often involved.

Collaborative ethnography in literacy research can provide valuable data. This strategy of engaging students as ethnographers researching literacy in schools and the communities had benefits for the strength of the analysis of data from both contexts. The students' perceptions of school literacy practices are keys to understanding them. Because school literacy is often taken as the dominant literacy, only the perceptions of teachers, researchers and educationists are taken into account.

Collaborative ethnography also represents a way to address the insider/outsider dilemma of ethnography, particularly in its approach to the relationship of researcher and researched. It brings the researched into the process of collecting and interpreting the data. The tradition of research coming under the rubric of students as researchers was brought into focus by the work of Heath in which she combined the focus of students researching and gathering data from the community with the structure of ethnographic method (Heath 1982, 1983; Heath and Branscombe 1986; Heath 1995). The notion of legitimizing students'

ways of knowing from the community and using these as a bridge to school ways of learning and knowing was not new. In her work with graduate students/teachers, however, Heath introduced the idea of students learning ethnographic research methods. She also introduced a focus on the types of language and literacy use. For Heath, collaborative ethnography was a key one in challenging the disadvantage constructed by schools for black working-class students. Other studies focused more on ways of using community 'funds of knowledge' (Moll *et al.* 1992), linking school and community through student research (Curry and Bloome 1993; Torres 1998), and the development of student awareness of community language and literacy practices (Cheshire and Edwards 1998; Thomas and Maybin 1998). Other studies (based around the Santa Barbara Discourse Group, 1992) have focused more on the development of students' ethnographic tools to become ethnographers of their school learning across discipline areas (Floriani 1993; Lin 1993; Yeager *et al.* 1998).

I undertook two collaborative ethnography projects with Grade 9 groups at Kotara and Bellevue High Schools. At Kotara I worked with May, whose class of 24 was a 'mid-stream' group. I had originally suggested giving an explanation to students and then working with the class via letters (Heath and Branscombe 1986) but May preferred working together on a unit. At Bellevue I worked with Ben, the English head teacher, on a Grade 9 group of 22 boys. The 12-week units of work concentrated on students writing about and investigating their own language and literacy. The outcomes for the unit were for the students to interview and record teachers, friends and relatives and then write summaries of their interviews. The first part of the unit focused on students' unconscious knowledge about language, appropriateness, change, and what components make up language (Cheshire and Edwards 1998; Thomas and Maybin 1998). The unit included:

- discussion and mapping of the students' bilingualism and language use (LMP 1985). The student survey and interview data were categorized by domain and analysed;
- work on language acquisition and learning to read and write. Students collected and shared stories of siblings and parents;
- writing of autobiographies of literacy and language learning;
- interviewing bilingual teachers; interviewing bilingual family members or neighbours;
- guided interpretation of data;
- completion of literacy inventories;
- publication of a class literacy booklet.

The projects were successful in gaining valuable data on the students' and their families' acquisition of and use of literacy. Student evaluations were mixed. At Kotara some students reported enjoying the unit and different aspects of it. Several said that 'it was boring' and they 'couldn't see the point'. May and Ben

felt that the units were successful and both said that they would use the units with groups the following year. My own evaluation was less positive. The Kotara unit itself did not have a clear focus, did not engage students enough and tried to 'teach' too many issues. There was a conflict between the information I wanted to collect and the information focus that the students may have found interesting. I included interviews with parents, literacy inventories and language surveys. In the time available it would have been better to focus on their working on a language/literacy/learning autobiography. The Bellevue unit was too focused on skills and not enough on content, and the students therefore lacked a real purpose in completing the unit. The units were too brief to explore the understandings of ethnographic study properly. There was not enough working through 'translation' (Heath 1983) or the interpreting of the evidence to write ethnographic accounts. The main problem was the established patterns of teacher-student interaction and the culture of the schools. Without realizing it, I tried to change the patterns in May's classroom. She told me at the end of the unit that she normally only allowed students to work individually. Class discussions were kept short and controlled. Students normally worked by themselves at their own pace. All pedagogical tools are recontextualized in classroom situations.

Despite this being the least successful of the research strategies developed in this study, I would argue strongly for its use. The skills developed from ethnography can provide a bridge from contextualized knowledge to description, explanation and interpretation to decontextualized knowledge. Students can explore language and literacy in their everyday lives. Such exploration can foreground their bilingual, bicultural skills and knowledge. Quite apart from the educational advantages, collaborative ethnography has much to offer the researcher.

## Summary

This chapter is not making a case for literacy research in multilingual contexts to be recognized as a separate category of research. It is rather arguing that the centrality of such research be recognized. The issues of the framing and staging of research, the insider/outsider dilemma, the factors relating to interviews, the choice of research tools, and collaborative ethnography all relate to research in monolingual as much as multilingual contexts. Issues of cultural and linguistic difference, age, status and gender, however, are foregrounded in multilingual contexts. The findings from research in such contexts have many implications for all educational research.

# A harbourful of yachts

## Making sense of literacy research

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The field of literacy research has been something of a battlefield in the past decade. In many countries, government funding has been tied to ‘evidence-based’ research, favouring large-scale clinical studies. In OECD countries, vociferous debates have taken place between researchers favouring clinical psychometric quantitative approaches and those favouring qualitative approaches. Cross-disciplinarity, in fact, has been a feature of literacy research since its inception and continues to be the strength of the field. This chapter reviews the strands of literacy research and their relevance to literacy in multilingual contexts. There is also a focus on mixed-method approaches, which are proving most productive in the study of literacy in diverse contexts.

### Introduction

The area of literacy research might seem like a harbourful of yachts on a sunny day. At first sight there is utter confusion, with sails going in opposite directions for no apparent reason. Then various groups or races can be discerned, often running in complete ignorance of each other. At other times it seems they are avoiding or making allowances for each other. Within each race the competition is often fierce and some groups of yachts seem to be taking up enormous stretches of the harbour. Somehow, between the races, individual yachts are happily picking their way through the water. When gusts of policy blow through, the yachts speed up and scatter and then re-form, happy in their focus on their race. The diversity of approaches in literacy studies has often been constructed as a problem or a dichotomy which needs to be resolved. There have been continuing criticisms of ‘disciplinary insularity’ (Langer 1988) and of the ‘narrowness and fragmentation that beset so much of [literacy research] work’ (Hakuta 1986: x). The problem has been perceived as one of duplication and absence of common ground.

Literacy’s sprawl across several disciplines results in identical issues being discussed in quite separate contexts with different vocabularies.

(Levine 1986: 22)

Dubin (1989) wrote of the split between sociological and psychological traditions leading to a 'field that has problems in defining itself or at best one where practitioners are free to define it for themselves though not always agreeing with one another' (1989: 180). In the area of literacy in more than one language it has been stated that 'neither a complete theory of literacy nor a complete theory of bilingualism yet exists' (Hornberger 1989: 272). This is attributed to the 'complex and interdisciplinary nature of the field' where the interdependence between research policy and practice makes unity and coherence difficult. Many studies begin with sections outlining dichotomies or with a synthesis of dichotomous traditions (de Castell *et al.* 1986; Garton and Pratt 1989; Cope and Kalantzis 1993; Freebody *et al.* 1995).

The necessity of this cross-disciplinary nature of literacy has, in fact, been a constant theme, and the study of literacy has a tradition of 'principled' cross-disciplinarity (McCaffrey and Street 1988; Baynham 1995). The work of Vygotsky and Luria in the Caucasus in the 1920s (Vygotsky 1978) and of Scribner and Cole (1981) in the 1970s was labelled 'social-psychology', drawing on traditions of psychology and sociology. The body of work in the last two decades, such as that by Wagner in Morocco (Wagner *et al.* 1986), has followed in this tradition, using both quantitative and qualitative methods and drawing on a range of disciplines. This growth in research has been marked by researchers working across different traditions, combining psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and sociology (Cummins 1984; Olson *et al.* 1985; Olson 1994; Verhoeven 1994), linguistics and sociology (Kress 1989; Baynham 1995; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996), anthropology and sociology (Street 1984, 1993) and history and sociology (Graff 1986, 1987; Egan 1997). Barton and Ivanic (1988) refer to this as 'partnerships in the study of literacy'.

The cross-disciplinarity can be characterized as a strength of the field rather than a problem. Much research in the field of literacy study now identifies an approach which moves beyond dichotomies in the theorization of cross-disciplinarity. Barton (1994) refers to 'an ecology of written language', Street (1995) to the 'New Literacy Studies' and Baynham (1995) to literacy as a socio-political and linguistic construct. Diversity, in fact, has been evident since the earliest studies of literacy. The study of literacy draws together work from across a range of disciplines: anthropology, education, sociology, linguistics, psychology and history.

## Themes in literacy research

Studies of literacy in multilingual contexts can be characterized more by theme, or research focus, than by background discipline from which they draw. Although many of the themes derive from specific disciplines such as psychology or sociology, disciplinary divisions oversimplify the issues. In this section the main themes of literacy research will be reviewed, how they build on or critique each other and how they can inform the literacy research. These themes or strands of

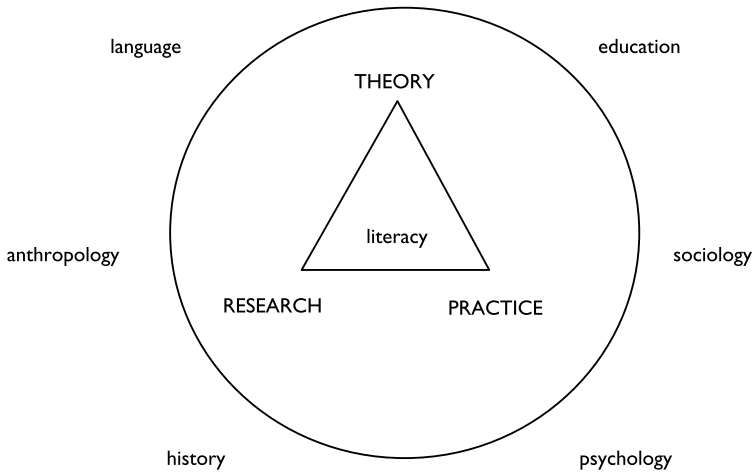


Figure 10.1 Partnerships in the study of literacy.

literacy research are the ‘boat races’ on the harbour. The dominant and most prevalent theme in the field of literacy research has been the study of individual readers and writers, the focus on the individual interaction with text and audience, and the processes of learning to read and write. The second theme has been the focus on the text in writing and analysis of the product. This has been linked to the third theme, critical literacy, which is generally seen as the analysis of the ways that texts and practices embed social and political forces. This understanding then enables action to change these forces. The fourth area, literacy in two or more languages, is one that has developed from various sub-fields in linguistics, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. The fifth area relates to the cognitive and historical effects of literacy and the differences between orality and literacy. It is more ephemeral and draws on work in anthropology, philosophy, history and sociology. The sixth theme is referred to as literacy as social practice and includes studies of the ethnography of literacy and work from sociology, anthropology and history. This work has a focus on reading and writing in context, as social practices. A related theme comes under the rubric of New Literacy Studies and is distinguished by its greater focus on the socio-political context of literacy. Within each theme there are many oppositional strands. These categories are not intended as exclusive but as a means to make sense of the strands of literacy research.

### ***Focus on the individual: psychology-based research***

The dominant strand in literacy research since the 1970s drawing from psychology and psycholinguistics has modelled reading and writing as primarily individual acts (Smith 1978; Clay 1979; Goodman 1986). The focus has been on

how individuals acquire and use the skills and abilities required for reading and writing. Within such a tradition there have been many and conflicting positions.

One major strand of psychology-based research into reading has been called the 'bottom-up' or skill-based approach, characterizing reading as the orchestration of perceptual and cognitive skills. The focus was on researching the decoding and encoding skills and processes of individual readers. There have been major reviews confirming research findings along with major intervention programmes, making the area one of continuing importance (Chall 1967; Stanovich 1980, 1986; Adams 1989). In the 1970s there was much research into reading as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game', focusing on the role of the background knowledge (semantic, syntactic and graphophonic cueing systems) that the reader brings to the text (Smith 1978; Goodman and Goodman 1979). Both approaches have been replicated in research into second-language learners (Carrell 1983; Carrell *et al.* 1988). The third strand, also drawing largely from cognitive psychology, developed models of reading as an interactive, non-linear process, calling simultaneously on 'higher'- and 'lower'-order skills and working from the reader's schemata and hypotheses about text (Stanovich 1980; Rumelhart 1982). The interactive model has been researched and theorized also in terms of bilingual language users (Verhoeven 1990, 1991, 1994), and the reconceptualization of this cognitive global model positing an active reader in a constructive relation with the text has subsumed earlier notions based on skills and drawing more from behaviourist psychology.

The psychological traditions in writing research have focused very much on issues of the act of writing, on acquisition and cognitive development drawing on Piaget (1959) and the process of progressive decentring. Researchers worked by analogy from natural approaches to the acquisition of spoken language and studied the process of children developing writing. Writing development was linked with the cognitive and psychological growth of children (Dixon 1967; Britton 1975; Wilkinson *et al.* 1980; Moffatt 1981; Smith 1982; Graves 1983). Britton (1975) modelled writing development as beginning from expressive writing focused on the self and based on the spoken language. Egocentric and personal writing developed into 'transactional' writing, in which 'the writer seeks . . . out-comes in the actual world: to inform or to persuade' (1975: 146), and also into 'poetic', more creative and literary writing. Other research into the processes of writing (Flowers and Hayes 1980, 1981; Calkins 1983; Graves 1983) identified how writers compose and revise their texts. In the 1980s this model was applied to research into second-language learners writing in English (Zamel 1982; Krashen 1984; Raimes 1985; Urzua 1987).

The main debate within this research area has been on reading, focusing on the relative roles of background knowledge and higher-order comprehension skills as opposed to decoding skills, phonemic awareness and automaticity of these skills. Much of this debate has centred around intervention programmes based on the research. Reading Recovery, for example, is the most researched compensatory reading programme and focuses on holistic skills but includes decoding skills



(Clay 1979, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1992, 1993). There have been evaluations and critiques of the programme as not focused enough on decoding skills and phonemic awareness (Center *et al.* 1995) and also as not integrated enough in its approach (Hiebert 1994). The terms of the polarized positions in this debate have shifted from phonics to phonemic awareness and from whole-language to interactive approaches, but the debate has continued (Goodman 1986; Meek 1991). In actual fact there are grounds on which both positions are open to criticism.

There has been major criticism of this research theme, primarily because of its focus on individual reader and writer interaction with text. 'The task is dissolving the stereotype of the isolated, individual reader showing that not only is reading socially embedded but that a great deal of reading is done in social groups' (Boyarin 1992). Many writers have also criticized the overreliance on psychology- and linguistic-based research paradigms as too narrow (Cook-Gumperz 1986; Heap 1991).

The second criticism has been on class, historical and cultural grounds in that the models have been claimed to presume middle-class Anglo norms of development, reading and writing (Collins 1993; Rothery 1996; Street 1997). The growing body of research into reading and writing in different languages and contexts has challenged many assumptions. Reading and writing processes are different for non-alphabet scripts (Lee *et al.* 1986; Coulmas 2003), and the acquisition of literacy varies according to the language and cultural background (Schieffelin and Gilmore 1986; Durgunoglu and Verhoeven 1998). The tendency to conflate literacy development with cognitive development has led to the equation of schooling, achievement and cognition. Many writers, however, contend that this linking of literacy and education is a historical and cultural development (de Castell *et al.* 1986; Graff 1986, 1987).

This research field has been the most influential in education. Debates in this area, however, have meant that other research themes in literacy research have tended to become obscured.

### **Focus on the text: literacy drawing on linguistic research**

The focus on the text has always been an important one in literacy teaching and research. Before the 1970s this focus was more on the mechanics of writing and sentence-level grammar but there is now a body of research addressing writing beyond the sentence level. Coming under the rubric of contrastive rhetoric, genre, composition studies or New Rhetoric, it drew originally from linguistics but had strong links with education, sociology and anthropology. There are several traditions of genre-based pedagogy: one drawing from the work in English for Academic Purposes, a second from the American genre studies/New Rhetoric and a third the more linguistically based Australian genre school (Swales 1990; Freedman and Medway 1994; Hyon 1996; Paltridge 2001; Johns 2002). The Australian approach has used systemic functional grammar as the central construct

for analysing language, defining genres as staged, 'goal-oriented social processes' (Martin 1985; Halliday and Martin 1993). The initial research and consequent developments have focused on writing and how writing pedagogy can give access or exclude students on the basis of diverse cultural/linguistic background, class or gender. The early research examined writing in primary and secondary schools (Martin and Rothery 1980, 1981) with a critique of so-called progressivist, whole-language approaches to the teaching of literacy (Cope 1986). A more explicit pedagogy was developed, as it was through an apprenticeship in the mastery of the genres that students gain control over the formal written language (Christie 1990; Macken and Rothery 1991; Cope and Kalantzis 1993).

Criticism came from researchers working from psycholinguistic and poststructuralist approaches (Sawyer and Watson 1987; Lee 1997). They criticized the pedagogy as transmission-based and for being uncritically oriented towards discursive reproduction of genres with an inadequate theorization of curriculum. The linguistic definition of context was said to ignore issues of discursive and institutional practice, which in many ways is out of step with research in the areas of philosophy and the cognitive and social sciences. More recent work has modified the concept of genre to a more dynamic process with flexible, overarching categories with a much more sophisticated pedagogy (Melrose 1995). There has also been work on genres in languages other than English, on writing in workplace and other contexts, on oral genres and discourse structures in specific disciplines and on visual representation and multimodalities (Caffarel 1996; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996; Christie and Martin 1997; Cope and Kalantzis 2000; Unsworth 2001). The work in critical literacy and the interface between the different genre schools indicate a developing complexity in the field (Cranny-Francis 1993; Wignell 1996; Muspratt *et al.* 1997; Martin 2000). The genre approach has been widely adopted by education systems in Australia and provides the framework for many of the syllabus and curriculum documents for ESL.

### **Critical literacy**

One of the main areas of writing and research in the past few years has been that called 'critical literacy' (Shor 1992; Fairclough 1992a, 1992b; Lankshear and McLaren 1993; Lankshear 1997; Muspratt *et al.* 1997). Critical literacy has a focus on social critique of dominant forms of educational knowledge drawing on cultural studies, feminist and poststructuralist theories and critical educational sociology (Lee 1997). The term covers a wide range of approaches but a common thread is that literacy and language use help to constitute and change knowledge and social relationships and identity. This discourse is 'shaped by relations of power and invested with ideologies' (Fairclough 1992b: 8) and in turn it affects the same relations of power. In fact, literacy and language use are sites where such power struggles are enacted, and the development of understanding means that social action can be effected. Critical discourse analysis tends to have several dimensions: the description of the text, the interpretation of the literacy practices

and an explanation of how these practices relate to social action, and a 'design' for social action. The term 'critical', then, means having a critical perspective on literacy and language use, being able to interpret texts and their worldview and also being able to analyse social practices as mediated and sustained through acts of reading (Lankshear 1997: 44). The critical literacy theorists also have in common several principles.

Firstly, literacy and other means of communication are constitutive of the relations of power. The second principle is that understanding the social contexts of texts enables social action for change. Social action in Fairclough's model (1992a) has the double meaning of action and change. Where the researchers of critical literacy differ is in the relative focus on individual and social and on political stance: the centrality of the institutions of schooling, government, the media and work in the social construction of literacy (Luke 1997: 1).

The field draws heavily on various forms of linguistic analyses, including systemic functional linguistics and social semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1988; Fairclough 1989), as well as poststructuralist theories of discourse (Hodge and Kress 1988; Fairclough 1989; Gilbert 1989; Lee 1997). The paradox of critical literacy is that, although much of its development was in the context of reactions to government moves to autonomous models of literacy, the same governments were quick to adopt critical literacy (albeit with a focus more on the individual ability to understand and critique texts). The main criticism of critical literacy has been its tendency to be limited to a deconstruction of discourse and the reading of text. The difficulty is how the theories of semiosis and the uses of the systems they describe can be ones of change and transformation rather than stability and status quo. The critique of polarizations in critical literacy can 'constrict' rather than 'construct' meaning in the endless deconstruction of binary oppositions. Politically, this can place critical literacy in a liberal-democratic politics of equality and ignore the dominant social formations which have brought about inequalities (Green 1997; Kress 2000). Kress (2000) argues that most theories describe the individual's *use* of existing semiotic systems. Interests in representation and communication are never readily matched by the existing resources. Individuals, therefore, transform and remake the linguistic and other resources.

In a semiotic (-linguistic) theory of transformation and remaking the action of the individual is that of the changing of resources; using existing resources as the guiding frame of the maker's interest.

(Kress 2000: 156)

All three strands of literacy research were concerned with the literacy outcomes of ethnic minority youth. The work of Barnes, Britton, Moffatt and Rosen was done in the context of changes in British schools with the migration from the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean. The work of the Australian genre movement began in disadvantaged schools with majority populations of ethnic minority students. There is also a body of research in the different psychology-based

literacy studies into second-language reading and writing. The genre-based research is also developing a base in second-language and literacy development. All three traditions, however, lack a coherent research base and theorization of literacy in cross-cultural and -linguistic contexts. The next section reviews the research specifically into literacy acquisition and development in more than one language and culture.

### **Biliteracy**

The term 'biliteracy', referring to communication in two or more languages in or around writing by individuals or groups, has become widely used in the past two decades (Hornberger 1989; Verhoeven 1990, 1991, 1994). The key issues of concern in this area have been the relationships between first and second language for the individual in acquisition and use along with literacy issues in situations of language contact, especially in educational contexts. The first strand has drawn more from psychology and psycholinguistics where a major research focus has been the development of bilingualism in children. The second strand of research has drawn more from sociolinguistics and has focused on issues such as the role of literacy in language maintenance and attrition and the role of function and contexts of use in literacy maintenance. Hornberger (1989, 1992) proposed a framework to integrate the divergent research bases in this area. She uses 'the notions of intersecting and nested continua to demonstrate both the multiple and complex interrelationships between bilingualism and literacy' (1994b: 237). Her continua of biliteracy, based on her own and other research, consist of configurations of three intersecting continua covering contexts of biliteracy, the development of biliteracy, and the content and media of biliteracy. The model is important because of the way it takes biliteracy as a starting point and includes monolingualism as one aspect of the continuum. The model also integrates the range of research strands and relates them in micro-individual or macro-societal contexts.

The early research focus on the relationships between first-language literacy, cognition and schooling outcomes broadened to an approach combining educational and sociological research in which biliteracy is only one variable. One key early research finding was the role of first-language literacy in second-language development. Although some researchers found no disadvantage in moving from first-language oracy to second-language literacy, there was strong evidence that first-language fluency was a key factor in second-language achievement (Lambert and Tucker 1972; Genesee 1984; Collier 1987, 1989; Verhoeven 1990; Bossers 1991; Wagner 1993; Cummins 1994; Thomas and Collier 1997; Rossell 2000). Verhoeven (1991) compares three models of literacy acquisition for their effectiveness: submersion, in which children are taught reading and writing in their second language; simultaneous, in which first- and second-language literacies are taught at the same time; and successive, in which first-language literacy begins prior to second-language literacy teaching. He finds that literacy is best acquired in the

language in which the children have best oral skills: simultaneous and successive L1–L2 were most effective. Orthographic evidence, although ambivalent, suggests, firstly, that literacy levels are more to do with sociocultural factors than script and, secondly, that there is transfer between logographic, alphabetic and syllabic scripts (Coulmas 2003). Cummins (1984) posited a common underlying proficiency between languages, predicting a positive transfer from L1 to L2 and also from L2 to L1. He also posited a threshold hypothesis, that below a certain level of fluency there would be no transfer and in fact interference between L1 and L2. His framework of BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency) was adduced to explain the difference in time in acquiring spoken/informal aspects of the L2 (one to two years) and the more formal/written aspects (five to seven years).

The meta-analysis of previous studies by Willig (1985) shows positive effects for reading skills in L1 and L2 for children who acquired reading skills in their first language. Cummins (1986) developed a framework to account for the ambivalent findings. This included factors such as the status of and attitudes to the language, the power relationships between the language group and the majority, levels of community involvement in schooling and the pedagogy used. His framework has been confirmed by large-scale research studies (Thomas and Collier 1997).

The early research into bilingualism and biliteracy was criticized on the grounds that it was programme-based and motivated by commitment to bilingual education (Edwards 1985). Several researchers have also criticized overreliance on the school domain for minority language maintenance, revival and development (Edwards 1985; Fishman 1985). Other problems were the various socio- and psycholinguistic definitions of the terms ‘biliteracy’ and ‘bilingualism’ themselves and the establishment of a binary opposition between literacy and biliteracy. The fact that biliteracy is a complex social phenomenon is now reflected in the complex and cross-disciplinary nature of the attendant research (Verhoeven 1994; Cummins and Sayers 1995; Thomas and Collier 1997). The inclusive nature of the model for biliteracy has also addressed the above criticisms.

### ***Literacy as social practice: ethnographic approaches***

Literacy as social practice derives from the traditions of anthropology and ethnography and has had as a key focus literacy in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. The constructs of practice, event, domain and network are adapted from work in sociolinguistics in the ethnography of communication and were used as tools for studying literacy practices in the early 1980s (Scribner and Cole 1981; Szwed 1981; Heath 1983). The focus has been on the study of reading and writing as social phenomena, on the ways people read and write differently for various purposes at different times. A perspective of literacy as ‘concrete human activity’ (Baynham 1995: 1) leads to an understanding of how people read and write, what they think about reading and writing, the values and attitudes to

literacy, and the ways in which literacy and speech are related. The interactions involving literacy also can show how the wider cultural, epistemological and societal understandings are construed, reflected and shaped.

Studies of literacy as social practice have in common several understandings. Firstly, literacy is a complex phenomenon and its shape is determined by the diverse aspects of the situations in which it is used. Secondly, the range and diversity of these aspects are characterized and related historically and socially and to other contexts of use. This is because it is through the interactions surrounding reading in everyday life that social structures and cultural constructs are reproduced and changed. The focus is very much on people and their actions as a way of understanding texts, social structures, thought, beliefs and knowledge. The tradition in American research tended to focus on literacy and schooling in culturally and linguistically diverse communities partly because of the greater interaction between anthropology and education (Spindler and Spindler 1987). British research traditionally drew more from sociology, with a greater focus on class differences and issues of social practice (Yates 1987). The influence of Street and critical anthropology, however, has been key to the developments in both traditions.

The 'New Literacy Studies' is the term used for researchers since the 1990s who have combined social and discourse analysis, embedding literacy in relations of power. They draw not only on sociology and anthropology, but on history, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and psychology (Street 1993; Baynham 1995; Prinsloo and Breier 1996; Barton *et al.* 2000; Gee 2000). Street (1984) developed the notion of literacy as ideological rather than autonomous from his research into literacy and language programmes in Iran. He used the term 'ideological' (from Bourdieu 1990) in the sense of ideology being the site of tension between authority and resistance: tension which is naturally played out in spoken and written modes of communication. Street argues that literacy is a sociocultural construct and literacy practices reproduce and affect structures of power and domination in society. Hence, literacy practices are mutually constructed and reflect institutions and less formal power relations.

The research into literacy as social practice has been criticized on two grounds: firstly, for particularism in focusing on single literacy events or practices, thus limiting the ability to generalize; and, secondly, for focusing on marginal societies or groups in which literacy and authority are not co-extensive (Brandt and Clinton 2002). The body of research into literacy as social practice is one part of an answer to this criticism. The argument underpinning the research of situated literacy practices, however, is that what are assumed to be universal literacy practices are localized in specific cultures and times (Baynham 1995, 2004). Research now addresses a wide range of aspects in multilingual contexts such as:

- children's literacy development (Durgunoglu and Verhoeven 1998; Gregory *et al.* 2004);
- technology-mediated literacy (Hawisher and Selfe 1999);

- literacy practices across languages and cultures (Shuman 1993; Street 1993; Besnier 1995);
- community literacy practices (Barton 1994; Prinsloo and Breier 1996; Martin-Jones and Jones 2000);
- multilingual workplace practices (Jones 2000; Scholtz and Prinsloo 2001);
- school/home practices (Moss 1994; Gregory 1996; Perez 1998);
- issues such as mediation, networks and community (Hornberger 1995; Baynham and Lobanga-Masing 2000; Jones 2000).

The achievement of the New Literacy Studies has been the bringing together of a range of research traditions.

The challenge that faces the study of literacy in its social context is to identify *which* aspects of context are most likely to affect and be affected by acts of reading and writing and *how* modes of communication are embedded in society and culture. Broader comparative questions must be addressed, and bridges established between the concerns of ethnography of literacy and other traditions of enquiry that have focused on related ethnographic problems.

(Street 1995: 15)

### Mixed-method approaches

A continuing theme in the review of research has been the issue of taking into account the contexts in which reading and writing occur. Such a consideration involves drawing upon different research traditions: literacy research is by necessity cross-disciplinary. This does not mean a supermarket approach to research but rather a coherent and principled drawing on and justification of different approaches and research strategies as appropriate. It is interesting that, in many of the research themes, recent studies have been cross-disciplinary. The terms 'mixed-method' and 'ecological' are used to describe many such approaches: multidisciplinary approaches, in fact, continue the earlier traditions of literacy research. Such approaches have adopted mixed methods to obtain results and interpretations across contexts, perspectives and cultural/linguistic groups. Mixed-method approaches can tease out conflicting assumptions, evaluate the convergence of findings and interpretations and reveal relationships, variables and effects that were not anticipated.

One group of researchers working with Latino communities in the United States has been using mixed methods and multiple samples over the past 15 years, working with broad ecocultural categories of contextual influences on literacy development (Goldenberg 1987; Goldenberg *et al.* 1992; Gallimore *et al.* 1993; Reese *et al.* 1995; Reese *et al.* 2000; Gallimore and Goldenberg 2001; Goldenberg 2001; Goldenberg *et al.* 2001; Goldenberg 2004):

- family cultural and literacy background;

- home literacy practices;
- neighbourhood context;
- job-related constraints and facilitators;
- daily home practices and roles;
- institutional connections and familiarity;
- cultural schemata such as beliefs and attitudes to literacy and schooling; and
- community homogeneity/population demography.

Their unit of analysis has been the daily routine or activity settings such as homework, watching TV or attending mass. These factors were used to conceptualize home contexts and so correlate them with variables such as reading achievement and socio-economic status. The researchers use survey questionnaires, interviews, observations, literacy testing, standardized test results, and teacher and parent ratings: quantitative and qualitative methods are complementary. Quantitative methods enable the testing of hypotheses. Qualitative methods allow detailed analysis of practices and the meanings implicit in these.

The purpose in discussing the harbourful of boats, the themes in literacy research in this chapter, has not been to present a detailed or definitive account of each strand of research but to highlight the key issues and the critiques of these issues. In this way the interrelationships between the themes can be shown. The aim has not been to establish a separate boat race named 'literacy in multilingual contexts' but rather to focus on the diversity within the field of literacy research.

Research on bilingualism raises many questions for the field of literacy studies to address. Crucially the research demonstrates that bilingualism is not something to be added on to literacy studies, creating some secondary area of research, something of marginal significance; rather it is central. Bilingualism research provides concepts, phenomena and ways of researching for all literacy research . . . There are phenomena which help us to understand monolingual and multilingual homes and communities equally, such as the role of grandparents and other family members, the importance of mediation and activities by others, how literate practices are not just to do with reading and writing, the relation of the researcher and researched . . . Many of the dynamics of minority communities apply to mainstream communities, and the dynamics of multilingual interaction throw light upon monolingual interaction.

(Barton 2000: xxiv–xxv)



# Researching reading and writing in homes and schools

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### **Literacy as social practice**

Literacy is not just a set of skills and nor is it simply text on a page or screen. Reading and writing are social activities, ‘located in the space between thought and text’ (Barton and Hamilton 1998: 3). They are activities that need to be understood in their contextual particularity rather than as a set of assumed universal properties (Heap 1991: 120). The key issues in literacy as social practice are the social contexts in which reading and writing are learned and used; the kind and character of the event; the ways and purposes for which literacy is used; the values and beliefs that are emphasized; how reading and writing are part of social and cultural life; how the participants and the observers interpret what is going on; and how the activities of reading and writing construct notions of social and cultural life.

This section explores the notion of literacy as social practice and its usefulness in comparing the dominant school literacy with literacy in multilingual community contexts. There are better descriptions of the constructs of literacy practice, domain and event in the key texts in the area of situated literacy (Baynham 1995; Prinsloo and Breier 1996; Barton and Hamilton 1998; Street 2001).

### ***Literacy practices***

The term ‘practice’ has a long history deriving from materialist philosophical approaches and is used in different ways in many disciplines (Hymes 1972b; Marx 1975; Bourdieu 1990). The base sense of the word is behaviour or activity involving some human agency. Practices are not just units of activity because they are determined by individuals and others’ attitudes to them, attitudes and feelings which cannot be separated from practices. Practices are not only what is observable but also include people’s awareness of literacy (Street 1993; Barton and Hamilton 1998). Barton and Padmore (1991) extend the notion to include values.

When people talked about writing, everything they said was imbued with

values and attitudes. They evaluated themselves and others and talked about the power of writing, its pleasure or difficulty.

(Barton and Padmore 1991: 71)

There is a range of moral and social values which people attach to literacy and that are attached by institutions within society. Literacy practices, in fact, are not neutral but reflect values inherent in the immediate context of situation. Street extends the notion again to include the ideological preconceptions that underlie practices.

The role of language, spoken and written, is also central to an understanding of practice. Language is not just the evidence of practice, but the means by which meanings, values and practices themselves are constructed. Literacy practices are closely related to concepts of communicative practices (Street 1993). This relating of the notion back to communicative practices has been a useful one in that it includes all the talk, the mediation and interpretation that surrounds the comprehension and production of text.

Practices also signify social relationships, shared understandings and social identities. For Hymes (1972b) the importance of the notion of practice was as the starting point for the study of language. The notion of practice allows the comparison of reading and writing across domains. Considering the practice of reading for pleasure, for example, and its role in the schools and the daily lives of the teenagers leads to a greater understanding of the range of institutional, cultural, religious and individual values attached to this practice.

## **Domains**

The term 'domain' is standard in the sociolinguistic study of bilingualism as structured, patterned contexts where identifiably different types and uses of literacy can be found (Fishman 1972; Barton and Hamilton 1998). Although the concept has been criticized because of its vagueness, it allows an initial mapping of where people use literacy in home, school and work situations (LMP 1985). It facilitates the identification of the differential use of practices and events in the different contexts and also enables an analysis of the particular institutions that support the distinct home, school and work domains. In traditional sociolinguistic research and in most literacy research, domain is conceptualized as something resembling sphere of activity or sets of cultural meaning (Spradley 1979).

Although school and home would inevitable emerge in any study as key domains, the mapping of domains can indicate the extent to which practices from one domain infiltrate another and can show the effects of the institution in structuring practices in specific domains. The concept of domain also avoids the danger of viewing home literacy practices as versions of school literacy.

### **Networks and mediators**

In the Arabic-speaking communities, networks of social relations were important in achieving tasks involving reading and writing. Literacy networks were first documented in studies of the literacy practices of non-literate adults (Fingeret 1983) and extended by Wagner (1993) to literacy in multilingual contexts. The concept is useful because it counterbalances school-based ideas of literacy as an individual's set of unitary skills with the notion of social relationships in which individuals with differing skills and expertise participate in interactions involving literacy. Within these networks, teenagers, their parents and others take on roles. Barton and Padmore (Barton 1991) in their study of community literacy practices in largely monolingual communities found that:

when people talked about the writing they did within the household and beyond it, it was often in terms of roles; they referred to themselves as parents, relatives, workers, neighbours, friends, each role making different literacy demands upon them. One clear role differentiation was between men and women. Usually this followed the common division of women writing in the personal sphere while men dealt with the official world . . . letter and card writing tended to be seen as the women's responsibility, while dealing with forms and bills was the man's.

(Barton 1991: 66)

Mediation is a key concept in two areas of current learning and literacy research, both of which derive from Marx via Hegel in referring to the role of tools as they affect the users of the tools and affect the relationship with the world acted upon (Marx 1975). Mediation is central to work on activity theory and Vygotskian sociocultural approaches to language and learning, which see learning coming from social mediation in interactions (Wertsch 1991; John-Steiner *et al.* 1994; Lantolf 2000). For Vygotsky, mediation 'refers to the tools, signs and practices that contribute to qualitative changes in development' (John-Steiner *et al.* 1994: 139). He extended mediation to include the role of sign systems such as language.

Mediation and mediators of literacy have also been key constructs in the New Literacy Studies, linked with concepts such as network and roles (Fingeret 1983; Barton 1991; Baynham 1993; Malan 1996; Baynham and Lobanga-Masing 2000). Wagner (1993), for example, described how in both contemporary and traditional Morocco literacy events were mediated by literate individuals and particular social institutions. In a country like Morocco with limited access to literacy there were traditional mediators such as public writers and Qur'anic specialists and scribes, people who made their skills available to others. Wagner extended this concept to include informal mediators in family or neighbourhood networks, a new intergenerational pattern of family literacy, with the child as literacy mediator for the parents (1993: 32). The emphasis was largely on literacy mediators and mediation as a sociocultural phenomenon.

Functional linguistics and mediation as a linguistic process have figured in recent work in the New Literacy Studies (Baynham 1993; Street 1999; Baynham and Lobanga-Masing 2000; Martin-Jones and Jones 2000; Gibbons 2003). For Baynham, mediation is necessary when 'there is a perception, actual or supposed, of distance between an utterance and its addressee' (Baynham and Lobanga-Masing 2000: 195). Such gaps can occur across languages, within languages and across registers or modes and between discourses.

A key aspect of mediation in such discourse is whether it leads to transformation or not. Bakhtin (1986) points to verbatim reproduction as characteristic of authoritative discourses where there is a recognition and acceptance of an authoritative discourse as well as, of course, potential manipulation. On the other hand, transformation of material involves the right to own and rework the words of others. Baynham and Lobanga-Masing (2000) distinguish between what they label as 'scribing' and mediation, scribing involving the reflection and faithful transmission of a message and mediation involving the recontextualization. Both roles imply different approaches to the authority of the text, the mediator and the participants and the right to reformulate powerful discourses. Such understandings are key to exploring mediation in community and school contexts.

### **Literacy events**

The common empirical concept linking all of the above is the notion of event. When Hymes developed his SPEAKING model (1972a) he chose a non-linguistic unit, the event, as the frame of reference for interpreting speech. By analogy, a literacy event is 'any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interaction and their interpretive processes' (Anderson *et al.* 1980, in Heath 1983: 23). The usefulness of the notion of literacy event lies in the way it accommodates the complex relationships between written and spoken language use in a variety of languages and does not assume that reading and writing are individuals' interactions with text. Barton (1994) added the notion of regular occurrence. Literacy events are the particular activities in which literacy has a role: they may be repeated regular activities. Street (1995) also brings in notions of culture, in that when people engage in literacy events they have culturally constructed models of the literacy event in mind. When participants take part in literacy events they interact in ways that construct and are constructed by the ways of using reading and writing. There is a dynamic relationship between practices and events; events contribute to and constitute the literacy practices.

### **Context and related issues**

All of these concepts can be understood in terms of context. Context cannot be defined simply as a set of variables such as language, place, culture or surroundings, but is much more dynamic and interactive (Duranti and Goodwin 1992). It

can be seen as the phenomena which surround and embed the event and which give meaning to the event. In this sense, the context is a frame that surrounds the event and provides information for its interpretation (Goffman 1974, in Duranti and Goodwin 1992). The word 'context' derives from the Latin meaning 'joined together' or 'connected' in the sense of weaving. The attributes of context can be characterized in terms of features such as the setting (which is the social and spatial framework in which encounters are situated) and the behavioural environment (the way that participants use their bodies and behaviour as a resource for framing and organizing talk). Language also constitutes context of situation. It invokes the context and provides the context for other talk, and so context and talk are mutually reflexive (Halliday 1985).

### **Episode**

Although the unit of analysis for home/community data was literacy event, the unit of analysis chosen for school data was 'episode', which refers to 'a bounded unit which roughly correlates with a single teaching activity' (Gibbons 1999). Episode was more appropriate for this analysis because of its primary focus on participant structure and time. The changes between episodes are marked by changes in participant structures and classroom organization, and different episodes also have different purposes or functions. Lemke (1990) saw episodes as units of discourse with an identifiable topic and purpose and functionally related to each other. They may be whole lessons or parts of lessons. The notion of episode had major advantages in terms of classroom study. It allows a comparison of the kinds of meaning created across episodes. It enables an analysis of different participant structures and thereby the links between different participants' structures and the use of and interactions around text. Thus, episodes provide the contextual frame for identifying literacy practices and verbal interactions and validate these as representative, typical, recurring and relevant.

Although several studies had used the literacy event for analysis of school data, using the notion to refer to a 'bounded activity around a particular topic on a given day (e.g. spelling, writing workshop, reading period, math)' (Santa Barbara Discourse Group 1992), there are problems with the boundedness of school literacy events. In one sense, the whole of a school day is a literacy event. At another level, a student entering the class with a late note for the teacher to sign during a reading lesson could also be counted as an event nested within an event. For this reason, episode was chosen.

### **Literacy texts and artefacts**

There was a focus in this study on the different forms that text can take in school: computers, whiteboard/blackboard, overhead projector and transparencies, exercise books, notes, worksheets, textbooks, reading books, environmental print, video and messaging. Many assumptions are made about schools as places

of literacy teaching and learning and so many basic decisions about the choice of text and the choice of language can be overlooked. The recent work on computer technology has foregrounded the ways in which the choice of mode affects and is affected by the social activity and the ways of thinking that relate to the mode. For example, email, telephone, telephone messaging, audio cassette, video cassette, letter and notes all have complementary roles in communication. Each choice has meaning in terms of the relationship of the participants and the purpose and topic of the interaction.

## Levels of linguistic analysis

A linguistic frame in the study of literacy practices is crucial for several reasons. The strongest argument is that literacy practices are social practices and are constructed by verbal and non-verbal language. Linguistic analysis can provide evidence for claims about literacy practices. The focus on language in the ethnography of literacy and of education has been primarily on forms of discourse analysis such as conversational analysis deriving from sociology (Pomerantz and Fehr 1997). Systemic functional grammar, however, is a grammar which derives from sociology and anthropology: from the work on the context of culture by Sapir, Whorf and Hymes; from notions of the context of situation from Malinowski and Firth; and from the linguistic work of the Prague School of Linguists (Halliday 1991). It accords with the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the study of literacy as social practice.

Systemic functional grammar can be useful in three areas of analysis. It informs the analysis of classroom language and explains language choice and code switching in data from home and school interviews. The concepts of 'genre' and 'register' provide a useful frame, integrating the analysis of the texts and the spoken language surrounding the use of the written text. The language use in any situation is realized in three dimensions of register: field, mode and tenor. The field of the discourse is the cultural activity, the social action that is involved. The tenor refers to the participants and their relationship in written or spoken language. Tenor can be influenced by many factors, including the relative status of the participants, their affective relationship and their type of contact. The mode refers to the choice of channel (in Hymes's terms, 1972a) and the role assigned to language in the event. Register accounts for the relationship between specific situations and the meaning choices that are most likely to be realized in the spoken and written texts constructed in relation to these situations. It positions grammar as having explanatory value in the interaction between text and context.

Two additional features of systemic functional grammar are useful in literacy as social practice. The concept of genre accounts for the sequential organizations of meanings as a text enacts a particular, culturally recognizable type of activity in a specific situation. Described as 'a staged, goal-oriented social process' (Martin 1985), a genre specifies the elements that constitute the process and sequence in which they occur.

There has been much debate on the differences in oral and written language (Tannen 1982; Ong 1990; Street 1990; Gee 1993; Olson 1994). Systemic functional grammar characterizes the different features in terms of a mode continuum (Martin 1984; Halliday 1985; Hammond 1990; Eggins 1994). In practice, the differences between these characterizations of written and spoken language are subtle and have become more so with the introduction of the new technologies. At the one end of the continuum would be placed interactions involving face-to-face dialogue in which the language accompanies the action, for example children playing a game. Further along the continuum would come situations in which the participants are distanced and resort to telephone, email or written communication. The notion of the mode continuum is important in the analysis of classroom language. It provides a frame for the stated goals of school in inducting students into subject disciplines and the formal language of the curriculum and of text.

### **Research strategies in the comparison of contexts**

The main issue in the study of literacy in community, home and school contexts has been the way in which a version of school literacy has become dominant. A direction for future study is the use of the constructs of situated literacy – practices, networks, mediation, roles, contexts and domains – in the study of literacy in school as well as in home and community contexts. The framework allows for a comparison of literacy across domains. The one exception to this framework was that episode was used as the unit of analysis for school data rather than event.

The constructs of practices, networks and mediators have been used in studies of school literacy (Street and Street 1991), especially in vernacular literacy in the schools (Camitta 1993; Shuman 1993; Moss 2001). This framework is most valuable in deconstructing school literacy. Institutional values and pressures on literacy become visible when similar practices can be compared across domains. The comparison of networks, roles and mediation is similarly enlightening.

A possible starting point for future studies is the moving from the households and the communities to the school instead of the other way around. Many studies of home–school literacy use the school practices as the starting point and view the community through the lens of the school. The assumptions underpinning school literacy are seen as universal, and non-school practices can be characterized as deficit. Taking household literacy strategies as the starting point also means that the whole range of practices can be described, not only those which have immediate links with the practices of the schools (Barton and Hamilton 1998).

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# Epilogue

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September 11th, the War on Terror and media and public focus on Islamic groups resulted in enormous changes after 2002. The effects were noticeable in schools and communities across OECD countries. This epilogue had been intended as a commentary on this book by those involved in the research. I met with Ramsey, Leila and Mouhammed for lunch in a local restaurant the day after the London bombings, planning to interview them about literacy issues. We did not get to discuss my questions but discussed instead reactions to the political situation. There was a mixture of feelings of anger and dismay at the events and their inevitable aftermath. The comments in this epilogue extend beyond the focus of literacy and educational outcomes to the effects of recent changes on teenagers. Leila, Sarwat, Zena and Mouhammed are all teachers of Arabic-speaking backgrounds. They grew up and were educated in Australia. Sarwat has studied, lived and worked in Lebanon; Leila and Mouhammed have spent time in Lebanon.

## Generational differences

*Ken:* One issue that came out in interviews was the differences between now and the 1980s. Many adults commented on how in the 1980s they were often the only Arabic-speaker in their school and were the object of curiosity and prejudice. You all work closely with schools now. What do you see as the differences?

*Sarwat:* As Arabic-speaking teenagers growing up now, I believe their opportunities outweigh mine. Today, teenagers live in a society that is more receptive to diverse cultural backgrounds. Walking through a high school irrespective of its location, the international make-up of the student body is quickly apparent. However, in my time, this wasn't the case for you were immediately labelled as 'wog' or a foreigner, particularly if you spoke with an accent other than the Australian (whatever that is). Personally, I believe this will help give Australia a more confident worldview and a more distinctive international voice. Being an Australian



born to a migrant family I was under immense pressure to perform and to do well in my studies. When I look back to my youth, I was subjected to unnecessary stress and anxiety from my family and community to perform and succeed. We thought it was unfair at the time and we didn't know what more we could do to please our parents. My parents, like many migrant parents, did not know anything of the school system. Their lack of English skills kept them away from the school and understanding how to help.

*Mouhammed:* My parents were living a village life where they used to work as farmers and labourers. When they came to Australia they saw the opportunities and wanted their children to have what they didn't have. They knew that a good education would guarantee them a good, respectable job and a good future.

Throughout their life they saw that money and wealth would give them security and a sense of belonging. They worked extremely hard and would work two and three jobs at a time to save money and feel more contented. They were all factory workers with little skills. My family had six children and wanted to have a house for us and wanted us to be educated. As much as people would like to blame the parents for the lack of achievements I would say that, just like in my experiences, they have good intentions with little knowledge of the system.

In our community there were limited role models. I only ever knew of taxi drivers, factory workers and builders. I only very rarely saw a doctor or a lawyer. I never looked at someone and said, 'I want to be like him when I grow up.' I truly believe that the Arabic-speaking youth need good role models to build their self-esteem and to give them a direction as to where they want to be in the future. Hazem El Masri [a local footballer] is a good role model.

*Zena:* The differences between my own upbringing and that of my children? It's class. Our children have educated parents. My daughter went to school already being able to read. She has classes to go to; she learns things outside the school.

## Segmentation and its effects

Many of the teenagers answered that they were in schools now with mostly Arabic background students. When I asked one teenager if she wanted to visit Lebanon, she answered, 'Why? It's like living in a Lebanese village here.' Many of the state schools seem to have become divided along class and/or ethnic lines.

*Zena:* Any monoculture especially when it is an ethnic minority is a

serious issue. People look at the behaviour of kids as being associated with their ethnic background. What do you expect? The kids are 'othernified'.

*Ken:* In recent news reports, many British commentators have been saying that state-funded religious or ethnic day schools may be an answer. In Australia there have been many Christian and Muslim day schools starting up in the past few years. What do you think about this?

*Mouhammed:* How ironic! I have two little sons and their education is extremely important to me. I would not want to send them to a school with a high portion of Arabic-speaking students. The religious schools to me usually have a lot of internal politics that affect the teaching so I'm not in favour of them.

### **Self-concept, ethnicity and prejudice**

*Ken:* I had many comments from Arabic background students that reflected a sense of exclusion and a lack of attachment to, I guess, education as a possible pathway for them.

*Mouhammed:* In a climate where they are constantly demonized by the mainstream press and mainstream politics, the last thing that we should allow to happen is excluding our students from Arabic and Muslim backgrounds.

I came across a young Year 9 student when I was working in a local high school. He was energetic and pleasant. I asked him how school was and spoke briefly about the importance of a good education. He cautiously interrupted me and said, 'Why should I study? I will never get a good job. I'm Lebanese.' It struck me then how a young guy can think this way at such an early stage of his career. He had given up. He spoke further and would mention all the media issues (rape and violence) and how some of the teachers did not like 'Lebs' and that they were racist. Whether what he said is true or not, he seemed genuine. He saw me as someone who cares and he just opened up to me.

There are many issues that have affected the male youth in schools. At the present time the media has given them a battering and is blaming them for the problems. The feeling of isolation from the greater society and the strong family bonds have kept these males in their little world. They lack confidence and lack good role models. The females have similar problems but at the same time they have more of a safe environment to work in and succeed. These are some of the issues based on my experiences and understandings.

*Ken:* In the schools the students were nearly always referred to as

'Lebanese' or more recently 'Muslim'. The teenagers referred to themselves as either 'Lebanese', 'Muslim' or sometimes 'Australian' depending on context. It always seems that ethnicity is the defining term.

*Mouhammed:* It is an interesting topic. I worked in a technical college in the south-west of Sydney. It offers many trades and has a large portion of Arabic-speaking youth. I conducted a survey and one of the questions asked was 'Do you consider yourself 1) Australian, 2) Lebanese or 3) Both?' Out of 48 students from Lebanese backgrounds, only five said 'Australian'. Sixteen said 'Lebanese' and 27 said 'Both'. It seems these youth are in their own little world and there seems to be a barrier stopping them from being Australian. It could be the media. In my experiences I found that the media is incredibly unfair, towards Islam and the Lebanese. The language used and the intentions are deliberate in isolating and degrading them. The veil issue have been blown out of proportion lately also. The saddest thing is, I believe, that the media hype is not going to get any better. There will always be a link between the Indonesian issue, 9/11, Al Qa'ida, the Iraq war and the Arabs in Australia.

*Zena:* Ethnicity! I am tired of it. The global climate is impacting on self-esteem. In the community there is no leadership and this is a worry. Some of the students are swayed by people they shouldn't be influenced by. Enemies are being created and some teenagers are susceptible to fundamentalist views. They feel isolated; they feel the finger is being pointed at them, pushed to the fringes of 'us' and 'them', and they end up embracing 'them'.

*Ken:* You think that the present situation is making ethnicity or religious affiliation the way teenagers define themselves.

Stories of prejudice came up in almost every conversation with teenagers. For girls it commonly related to the wearing of the hijab. Has it got worse? If so, why? Where does it come from?

*Leila:* The Australian-Arab Muslim community has in recent times been the subject of significant media attention. In the media today, the category of the 'Arab other' has emerged as the pre-eminent folk devil in contemporary Australian society. Racial vilification is on the rise particularly against Australian Muslims of Arab descent. A recent study found that one in eight people interviewed admitted they were prejudiced, particularly against Muslim Australians who are often of Arab background. An American study of social distance perceptions among college students found that Iranians closely followed by Lebanese (groups closely identified with Islam) were the groups whom most black and white respondents were least willing to accept,

out of a possible 31 categories. As early as 1991, research showed that Muslims were among the most vilified and racially attacked groups in Australia.

In this environment of constant vilification and prejudice, we wonder why our students of Arab background often perform so badly in the classroom.

### **Finding a third space: rap and religion**

*Ken:* One common thread coming from interviews was that for parents and also for many teenagers religious affiliation, both Christian and Muslim, was now more important. I wonder about the reasons for this.

*Sarwat:* As far as I can tell, both Christian and Muslim religions have become so important in the community as a result of global and local events that have occurred and continue to take place. You hear of various clichés such as ‘multiculturalism’, ‘anti-racism’, ‘living in harmony’ and ‘together we stand, divided we fall’, which are all very appealing. However, when the fabric of your identity is being scorned or abused, you cannot but take a stand. To my disappointment, religion has been used as a tool for political agendas by empowering nations that control the media and manipulate it for own interests. During the Lebanese civil war, sectarianism brought much division among the Lebanese and, sadly, Muslim and Christian communities continue to have their conflicts and differences. Very few have come to accept these differences. After September 11, Islam has become synonymous for terror, moulding Muslims into terrorists irrespective of their nationalities. This only divided the superficial Muslims and Christians even more. I use the term ‘superficial’ to describe these people for their shallow vision of events and their misconceptions of the true meaning of both religions. Consequently, both communities are found pulling that rope in a tug-of-war to prove their ground. Politics and religion have done nothing but destroy people and societies. At the heart of this division lies a superpower that has used terrorism as a means to combat it using distinct strategies and in the process sustain its tyranny over the world.

*Zena:* It’s true that a lot of the boys have reacted and they identify now much more as being Muslim. We were studying *The Crucible* in my class. It was my fault really; I should have predicted the problem ahead of time. There was a reference to God’s beard in the play. It referred to God’s attributes. Some of the students came up to me and complained that we shouldn’t be studying the

book because it was against Islam. I defused the problem easily and nipped it in the bud. These students didn't have the capacity to work through it themselves. Someone tells them, 'This is what the religion tells you to do', and they listen to it. I told them they have to go and seek out the truth and not believe it when some guy stands up and says 'You must do this.' I teach them to be wise consumers of the language; I teach them to question. There are some fringe groups who are influencing them. No one gave them any authority. They don't represent anyone. The others told me not to be so direct.

*Ken:* Along with this identification with religion there also seems to be a growth of American Latino and Afro-American youth culture.

*Sarwat:* On a social level, teenagers are under the influence of R & B, rap, hip hop music as well as Internet, which creates this youth culture from the impact of modern technology.

*Zena:* Rap culture? It's like Latino and African-American boys in the US. It's the in-between boys who take to this; it's the flip side of the coin to the religious influence.

## **Gender differences**

*Ken:* We're talking a lot about the boys. Where do the girls figure in all of this?

*Leila:* The girls, it seems, are performing better academically despite, at times, higher levels of racial discrimination for the girls who have adopted religious dress codes, the closer supervision and control by their families and the lower expectations from some families with traditional cultural values. I am aware that these circumstances will not apply to all Lebanese girls, and not all Lebanese Muslim girls for that matter, but for many of them this is real. For many of the Lebanese background boys who have found themselves in subordinate positions in society, their method of rebellion has been protest-masculinity, where they have rebelled against mainstream culture and institutions which reinforce this culture's codes. Many of the girls have adopted proactive femininity where they strategically adopt the values and practices of the mainstream and home culture which are closely aligned, particularly in relation to education. This has allowed them to outperform, in many instances, their male siblings, cousins and family friends. For many Muslim girls from very traditional culturally oriented families, academic success has been their method of rebellion against the repressive cultural attitudes which have little to do with their religious faith.

*Zena:* The boys are more influenced than the girls. It's the boys who

struggle with identity more than the girls. The girls are reinforced more by their peer group. For them it's often fashion. Boys are more susceptible. For girls, control and power are issues. They hang out until they can take control of their own lives. For them, moving to a traditional perspective is not finding freedom. They have dreams; for them study is the way. Don't get me wrong. With the girls there are plenty of resisters too. For the boys, freedom isn't the issue. They don't feel threatened in that way.

## Possibilities

*Ken:* What about solutions?

*Mouhammead:* I would get the parents a lot more involved in school meetings and gatherings. Give them a greater role and say in what happens in the schools. Get them to participate and empower them. They are the crucial link between their children's education and work prospects. Get the students involved in community events: lots of excursions and interacting with the people outside school. Get an energetic community worker who is understanding and 'with the times' to talk to the students, to build their confidence and keep them on track. Get the community groups involved with the school and build good contacts with them. Let them feel valued and give them a role in educating the children through developing the student's first-language skills or cultural and religious knowledge. The teachers as well as the principal need to get known by the community.

*Sarwat:* I solemnly believe that foreign languages, world literature and religious studies (every religion) need to be emphasized more and adopted into our curriculum to aid students draw on their own evaluation of material. I think a wider range of exposure to world literature will help overcome these problems. Foreign languages in primary schooling should be an entitlement of all children for it gives them an understanding which enhances and enriches their conceptions of themselves and their world as human beings. It provides them with a tool that is so very needed in a world that is encouraging bilingualism. Bilingualism is now the norm in this world; it is a necessity. Being a fluent bilingual is a bonus or, as one teacher commented, a bilingual can think and say twice as much.

*Leila:* Students don't enter the classroom and leave their ethnic and religious baggage at the door. Teachers need to explicitly recognize and incorporate these aspects of their students' identities in the classroom. Schools should facilitate the need for students to develop their identities. Cultural, linguistic and religious

heritages of the students that they serve should be recognized in the classroom. Ignoring these aspects of their identities sends a powerful message about what identities are valued by the school.

I studied in the Australian schools and I was never given the opportunity to see where Arabs and Muslims fit in the world's jigsaw puzzle. Muslims were only briefly mentioned in history classes when we learned about the crusades. And in the news, Islam was seemingly only ever associated with war and crime. So, with the entire world seemingly against you, and your cultural and religious background perceived highly unfavourably by the general public, my school should have been a place where I or any other child from a minority background should have been given a break. I'm not selfishly demanding that schools transform their syllabus and make it all Islamic. I am only saying that teachers need to learn more about their students and take the initiative to incorporate this knowledge in a positive manner in the classroom even if it is in a small way. By doing that they will send an empowering message to their students.

Teachers should understand the background of students, and not make the assumption that they are blank slates for us to etch on in the classroom. When students' cultural identities are recognized and validated in the classroom, there will be significant opportunities for students to improve on their performance.

Sometimes, as teachers, our lack of knowledge of particular cultural groups whom we teach limits our abilities to teach our students. A study of Muslim students in the UK state schools found that teachers were apprehensive about promoting gender equity issues to students of the Muslim faith because they were afraid that these messages would contradict what the students' parents wanted to promote. However, if these teachers had decided to learn about the Islamic faith and about the importance of a Muslim's quest for knowledge and the significance of working to assist the wider community, then these concerns would not have been a significant worry to them.

*Mouhammed:* As a teacher I have experienced first-hand the teachers and their attitudes to the students. At times there is resentment and they don't set their standards high enough. They usually think of these kids as drop-outs and that not much effort should be used to teach them.

*Ken:* So you think having higher expectations is an answer?

*Sarwat:* I think we must expect more of the students. Sometimes we accept less from Arabic background students and excuse this because of supposed deficits. We need to expect the same or better outcomes of them as for other students.

*Zena:* We had consultants in at our school. How sad! Consultants! We had to bring in consultants to work out how we could raise our expectations of the kids. But we have to acknowledge it. Teachers give mixed messages. We all know the buzz words. We can all use the metalanguage if we know what's going on. We all can say we cater for mixed ability, but most teachers, if we were honest, we would admit our insecurity: that often we don't know what to do. It is really hard if you have a class with three ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] kids and many kids who are struggling or average or behaviour problems. I am trying this year with Year 7 and have a consultant shadowing my class with me. We are going to put so much effort into that class, but it is not easy. There is no easy answer.

*Ken:* What can teachers do?

*Zena:* Teachers are bombarded with so many programmes and requirements, such as Quality Teaching, the Institute of Teachers, meeting key competencies. They struggle daily with classroom management and delivering the content and meeting the curriculum demands. There are the demands for outcomes-based learning, formative assessment, implementing literacy and numeracy programmes: it is all very hard and teachers are truly, truly not coping with these demands. We tend to find a good unit that has worked and stick to it again and again.

At my school there is no value added. The students' results do not increase beyond what they have when they come in. In our standardized results some kids even go down over the two or three years. At the moment we are 'backward mapping', working back from our test results and seeing what we can do to prepare the students better and increase the school averages. We want to have a significant impact on what goes on in the classroom but, for our students, things don't seem to be changing. I would like to know the answer. The real issue is that everyone is freaking out at how to get through the content. Maybe we can identify the skills that the students need to succeed and then ignore things that do not add to these and focus on what is important.

*Ken:* I see that there are now many more Arabic background principals and deputy principals.

*Zena:* The answer doesn't just lie in what the boss [the principal] does. Mary has been wonderful. She has got the parents up and has fixed up the finances of the school. In high schools the answers lie in what happens at faculty level, what resources we have. One of the problems, however, is resources. For example, we have only one ESL teacher and one specialist teacher for learning



difficulties. We just had a group of new arrivals come, but the ESL teacher is so busy she can't get to help them.

*Ken:* What positives can you see?

*Zena:* I was pleased with the professional development days on literacy. Seven teachers also attended a six-week course on ESL in the mainstream. I am pleased with the relationships across faculties in our school. I am pleased with how the debating teams have gone. But teachers are frustrated, and there is resistance in the classroom. There is no easy answer.

*Leila:* I had a Chinese-speaking student in my class, amongst a group of students who were all of Lebanese background. We did a unit of work on Chinese culture. He absolutely shone the whole time. Students wanted to see his jade necklace, and they asked him to write some words in the Chinese language. He loved it, and I found that it sent to him and to his peers a powerful message emphasizing he was in possession of a noteworthy cultural and ethnic heritage, which was both recognized and valued in the classroom.

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# Index

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- Abboud family 182  
Abu-Lughud, L. 125  
Accelerated Schools movement 158–9  
Aebersold, J. 143  
Al Said family 2  
Al Talib family 3, 47  
Amina (fieldworker) 178–81, 182, 183  
Appadurai, A. 61, 125  
Arabic language 44–5, 131, 132; books 18; code mixing 27, 29; community use 27; conversational rules 184; definitions 45, 46, 47; home use 27–9, 61; Internet 29, 57; literacy 42–3, 44–8, 56–7, 68, 132; newspapers 16, 57; radio 15–16, 57, 60; reasons for learning 46, 47; and religion 22–3, 30; in research study 176–7; in school 119, 169–70; socio-linguistic studies 27–8; study at home 8, 21, 28; television 14–15, 29, 56–7, 60, 116; videos 15, 60 *see also* community schools  
assessment 148, 164  
Au, K. 143, 153  
audio cassettes 13, 26  
Austudy 116  
Authentic Pedagogy 160  
autism 23–4  
  
Bakhtin, M. 203  
Ball, S. 162  
Bankston, C. 136  
Barthes, R. 51  
Barton, D. 189, 199, 200–1, 202, 203  
Bashir family 2, 7–8, 9; Bilal 2, 28–9; Faye 2, 19, 23, 25; Hala 2, 10, 11, 12, 15, 20, 25, 30  
Baynham, M. 189, 196, 203  
  
behaviour *see* management  
Bell, J. 135, 138, 176  
Bernstein, B. 151, 153  
bilingualism xi, xii; benefits 6; language teaching 151, 159, 169–70, 213; literacy acquisition 140, 141, 148; research 196, 199; treatment of 6, 140, 141–2, 146, 148, 151  
biliteracy 195–6  
Birrell, R. 135  
blackboards: as authority and control 92; as site of lesson content 90–2; as support for interaction 89–90  
books: access to books 86; Arabic books 18; definitions 31, 39; reading at home 6–7, 17–18, 58; textbooks 37–9, 49, 50, 93–4  
Boyarin, D. 192  
Briggs, C. 175, 181, 184  
Britton, J. 191  
Brooks, C. 136  
Brown, C. 135  
  
Cahill, D. 135, 139  
Cairney, T. 145–6  
CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach) 164  
Carosi, Fred 165–6  
Cashmore, J. 139  
Chan, H. 135  
change 52–63, 209–11; after September 11 207–16; communication xiii, 56, 61; in the community 52–3; ethnicity and prejudice 209–11; generational differences 207–8; language 56–7; marketization of education 154–5, 157; mediation roles 58–9, 60–1; possibilities 213–16; religious



- observance 59, 211–12; social action 194; space and interaction 57, 60; teaching of reading 99; technology 55–8, 60, 61; teenagers' literacy practices 54–7, 60, 62 *see also* classroom-level change; school reform; school-level change  
 chat rooms 13, 18, 55, 57, 61  
 classroom interaction 147, 161, 163 *see also* episodes  
 classroom mediation 73–81; mediating text and talk 78–81, 79*t*, 80*t*; teacher as translator 69–71, 74–8  
 classroom routines 88–9, 101–3  
 classroom-level change 166–70; debating and expectations 167; English support 168–9; first-language support 169–70; group work and expectations 167  
 Clifford, J. xii, 52, 62  
 Coalition of Essential Schools 158  
 code mixing 27, 29, 57, 111, 179  
 Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) 164  
 cognitive deficit 149  
 Cohen, I. 181  
 Cole, M. 189  
 Coleman, J. 154  
 collaborative ethnography 185–7  
 Collier, V. 139, 140–1, 152, 164  
 communication: home literacy practices 8, 9*t*, 12–13, 25–6, 56; with Middle East 58; reading for communication 8, 86; technology xiii, 56, 60, 61; writing for communication 8, 86  
 communicative practices 201  
 community (concept) 133–4  
 community involvement 8, 23–4, 25, 163, 174–5, 213  
 community organizations 173–5  
 community schools 21, 28, 47–8, 50, 58, 61, 169–70  
 computers: effects on literacy 55–6; home use 13, 18–19, 55–6, 57, 110–11; ownership 55  
 conflict xiii, 36, 83, 84–5, 102, 103–4, 147; beginning lessons 88–9  
 context 203–5, 206 *see also* school contexts; social contexts  
 control *see* management  
 cooking 12  
 critical literacy 193–5  
 cultural-ecological theory 144–5  
 culture 33, 61–2, 141–3, 144, 152, 163 *see also* ethnicity; identity  
 Cummins, J. 139, 152, 163, 164*f*, 196  
 curriculum xiii, 213–14  
 daily life 8, 10–12  
 Dartmouth Conference 32  
 Davis, D. 116  
 Davis, S. 116  
 DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) programme 33, 35, 41, 85, 99–100, 101–3  
 debating 106, 167  
 DEET (Department of Employment, Education and Training, Australia) 7, 148  
 deterritorialization 61–2  
 development of literacy 32–4  
 disadvantage *see* ethnic disadvantage  
 discontinuity 144, 146, 153  
 discourse 25–7, 29, 71, 72–3, 206  
 diversity xii, 154  
 Dixon, J. 32–3, 51  
 Djite, P. 151  
 Dobson, I. *et al.* 136  
 domains 201  
 drawing 44  
 Dubin, F. 189  
 Dunn, L. 150  
 economic rationalism 154–5  
 educational outcomes xiv, 50, 53, 129; changing contexts 153–6; classroom interaction 147; culture 152; and educational aspirations 137, 156; ethnic minority students 5–6, 7, 132, 134–9, 146, 148, 149; and ethnicity 137–8, 146; explanatory factors 62, 136–9, 149; gender 117, 138, 212; home–school differences 144, 145–6; language factor 151–2; predictors of success 140–1; school drop-out rates 50; school factor 146, 155–6; and socio-economic status 7, 136–7, 146 *see also* Accelerated Schools movement; Authentic Pedagogy; Language Academy programme; Productive Pedagogies  
 Elkheir family 3, 17, 56, 64–7; Ahmed 3, 44, 45, 46, 59, 64, 66–7; Fatima 58, 64–6, 69; Maryam 3, 17, 22, 66;

- Muhamad 3, 65; Sahar 3, 65–6, 157;  
 Suzy 3, 45, 46, 54, 62, 65, 66, 157
- email 25
- emergent literacy 32
- episodes 97–8, 145, 147, 163, 204
- ESL: support 140–1, 148, 151, 168–9;  
 teacher training 146, 159, 216
- ethnic disadvantage 131–4; changing  
 contexts 153–6; culture 152;  
 discourses 148–52, 150*t*, 152–3;  
 government policy 148–9; language  
 151–2; minority groups 153; research  
 findings 132–4, 145–6, 149–53;  
 second generation 132–3, 136;  
 terminology 133 *see also* educational  
 outcomes
- ethnic minority students xv; classroom  
 interaction 147; educational outcomes  
 5–6, 7, 132, 134–9, 146, 148, 149;  
 English language acquisition 139,  
 141; Generation 1.5 135, 141;  
 home–school differences 144; identity  
 105, 119–20, 213–14; literacy in first  
 language 139–40, 141; and prejudice  
 209–11; self-concept 209–11;  
 voluntary and involuntary minorities  
 144–5
- ethnicity 126; definitions 133, 134, 137;  
 and educational outcomes 137–8,  
 146; and the media 119; and prejudice  
 118, 120–2, 209–11; recognition  
 213–14, 216
- ethnographic studies 143, 144, 150,  
 177, 196–8; collaborative  
 ethnography 185–7
- exercise books 37, 40, 49, 95–7
- family literacy xii–xiii
- Ferial (fieldworker) 17, 59, 124, 178–80,  
 183
- Fern, V. 160
- Field, M. 143
- financial management 11–12
- first language: classroom support  
 169–70; literacy 139–40, 141
- Fox, C. 135
- Freebody, P. *et al.* 145
- functions of literacy 142–3
- funds of knowledge 144, 186
- Gallimore, R. *et al.* 143, 198
- Geertz, C. 115
- gender: behaviour 7; change 212–13;  
 conversation 184; cooking 12;  
 educational outcomes 117, 138, 212;  
 ‘hanging out’ 113; household chores  
 14; and identity 212–13; maturity and  
 obedience 116; music 58; places 115,  
 116–17; reading xiii, 17, 18, 31, 40,  
 114; religious observance 22–3;  
 studying 114; watching television  
 13–14
- Generation 1.5 135, 141
- generational differences 105, 207–8
- genre 192–3, 205
- Gianni, S. 22
- Gibbons, P. 204
- gifted and talented education 158
- globalization 62, 125–6
- Goldenberg, C. 164–5, 198
- Goldstein, T. 178
- Goodnow, J. 139
- government policy 148–9, 157
- Gregory, E. *et al.* 43, 81–2, 142, 144
- Grossberg, L. 109
- group work 35, 82, 97, 98, 147, 167
- Gutierrez, K. *et al.* 151
- Hakuta, K. 188
- Hall, S. 109
- Hamilton, M. 200
- Hammersley, M. 181
- handwriting 40, 42, 45
- ‘hanging out’ 112–13
- Haque, Z. 135, 138
- Harklau, L. *et al.* 135, 141
- Harris, R. 57
- Hausfeld, S. 135
- Heath, S.B. 33, 42, 120, 126, 144,  
 185–6, 203
- home literacy practices 7–30, 143–6;  
 Arabic study 8, 21, 28; Arabic use  
 27–9, 61; categories 8–9, 9*t*; choice of  
 language 29–30, 111; choice of mode  
 25–7; communication 8, 9*t*, 11,  
 12–13, 25–6, 56, 65; community  
 involvement 8, 23–4, 25; computer  
 use 13, 18–19, 55–6, 57, 110–11;  
 cooking 12; financial management  
 11–12; homework 8, 9, 14, 20–1,  
 38–9, 49, 67; instrumental uses 8, 9*t*,  
 10–12; listening to radio 15–16, 57,  
 60; notes and messages 10, 26, 56, 86;  
 parental study 8, 21–2; reading books

- 6–7, 17–18, 58; reading for other interests 19; reading magazines 13, 15, 16–17, 19, 58; reading newspapers 13, 16, 57; recreational uses 8, 9*t*, 13–19; religion 8–9, 9*t*, 22–3, 61; shopping 10–11, 16; watching television 13–15, 29, 41, 56–7, 58, 60, 115, 116; watching videos 15, 57, 60; work 8, 25; writing for personal reasons 8, 19
- home tutoring 20, 28
- home–school differences: educational outcomes 144, 145–6; literacy practices 143–6, 206; mediation of literacy 81–2
- homework 8, 9, 14, 20–1, 38–9, 49, 67
- Hornberger, N. 171, 173, 189, 195
- Hugo, C. 136
- Humphrey, M. 135
- Hymes, D. 203
- Ibrahim family 2, 180–1, 182; Fadya 2, 43–4, 56, 58, 60, 68; Mahassan 2, 54, 55, 56, 59
- identity xiii–xiv, 105–27; ethnicity 105, 119–20, 213–14; frames for identity 126–7; gender 212–13; generation gap 105, 207–8; globalization 125–6; Ibrahim Tannous 106–7, 110, 111, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117; identity construction 109, 115, 120, 126; Lamise Tannous 106, 109, 110–11, 116–17, 119, 120–2, 126; language use 47, 120; Mohamad and Basma Zohair 107–9, 112–14, 115; as Other 105, 119, 127, 209; and racism 118–19, 120–2; and reading texts 50; and religion 120, 122, 124–5 *see also* culture; ethnicity; place and identity
- informational reading and writing 86
- Inglis, C. *et al.* 136
- instrumental reading and writing 8, 9*t*, 85–6
- Internet xii, 18, 19, 29, 55, 57, 58
- interviewing in bilingual/bicultural contexts 180–5
- Iredale, R. 135
- Issa family 1, 7–8; Donna 1, 23, 27; John 1, 16, 23, 30; Josephine 1, 10, 23, 25, 27; Marie 1, 10, 17–18, 23, 27, 30, 49; Rita 1, 23, 27
- Ivanic, R. 189
- John-Steiner, V. *et al.* 202
- Jones, K. 176
- Jopson, T. 133
- journal writing 19
- Kairouz, Joanne 67, 69
- Kamehameha Early Education Project (KEEP) 143, 149
- Karam family 1, 7–8, 9; Hassan 1, 11, 21; Hussein 1, 21; Leila 1, 12; Mohamad 1, 23; Siham 1, 12, 14, 20, 23–4; Tariq 1, 11, 14, 19, 25
- Khoo, S. *et al.* 02 133, 135, 136, 138
- Khoury, June 13
- Khoury family 3, 39
- Kotara High School 153–4, 157, 165–6
- Kress, G. 194
- Labov, W. 173
- Langer, J. 188
- language: additive linguistic incorporation 163; choice at home 29–30, 111; code mixing 27, 29, 57, 111, 179; definition 148; language enrichment models 159; as oppositional discourse 119; role 201; status 163 *see also* Arabic language
- Language Academy programme 159–60, 164
- Language Experience 32
- language rights 151, 213
- Lauder, H. *et al.* 154
- Lemke, J. 204
- letters: reading 11, 65; writing 8, 13, 25, 26, 56, 86
- Levine, K. 188
- Lingard, B. *et al.* 161
- linguistic diversity 33
- literacy xi, xv; Arabic view 44–8; first language 139–40, 141; functions 142–3; home categories 8–9, 9*t*; home view 6–7, 38–41, 48–50; implications of different views 48–50, 51; school categories 85–6, 87*t*; school view 5, 34–8, 40, 48–50, 103, 145, 149; social contexts 141–2; students' views 31, 40–1, 50, 103; teaching approaches 32–4, 50, 51, 99, 100, 145;

- terminology 5, 148, 149; tests 148, 156
- literacy acquisition 41–4; Arabic 42, 45–6, 47–8; bilingualism 140, 141, 148; English 32–3, 139, 141; late readers 34; models 140, 195–6; reading readiness 33, 142; research 32–3, 176–7, 195–6; social contexts 141–2
- literacy as social practice 200–3; domains 201; ethnographic approaches 196–8; literacy events 203; literacy practices 200–1; networks and mediators 202–3
- literacy diaries 11–12, 17, 18, 31, 53
- literacy events 203
- literacy materials 204–5; access and use 86; blackboards 89–92; exercise books 35, 40, 49, 95–7; as means of resistance 86; rituals 103; routines for control 88–9; textbooks 37–9, 49, 50, 93–4; worksheets 94–5
- literacy practices 200–1; conflict and tension 103–4; as control 35, 36, 85, 86, 102–3, 147; home–school differences 143–6, 206; and place 113–14; as rituals 101–3 *see also* home literacy practices; teenagers' literacy practices
- literacy research xii, xiv, xv–xvi, 129; approaches 188–9; biliteracy 195–6; collaborative ethnography 185–7; comparison of contexts 206; context 203–5; critical literacy 193–5; cross-disciplinarity 189, 190*f*, 198; emergent literacy 32; entry to the community 173–5; episodes 204; ESL programmes 140–1; individual focus: psychology-based 190–2; interpreters or fieldworkers? 177–80; interviewing in bilingual/bicultural contexts 180–5; linguistic analysis 205–6; literacy acquisition 32–3, 176–7, 195–6; literacy as social practice 196–8, 200–3; mixed-method approaches 198–9; multilingual contexts 171–87; researcher as language learner 175–7; staging research 172–5; text: linguistic research 192–3; texts and artefacts 204–5; themes 189–99
- literature 50–1
- Lo Bianco, J. 148
- Lobanga-Masing, H. 203
- McLaren, P. 102, 150, 152
- McLaughlin, M. 120, 126
- MacLeod, D. 137
- MacMillan, M. *et al.* 134
- magazine reading 13, 15, 16–17, 19, 58
- management: beginning lessons 88–9, 103; blackboard as authority 92; class control 7, 48, 83–4, 147, 149, 151; lesson types 97–8; literacy as control 35, 36, 85, 86, 102–3, 147; school/departmental level 146; social skills 99, 146; textbooks and control 93–7
- Manion, L. 181
- Marjoribanks, K. 137, 138–9
- marketization of education 154–5, 157
- Martin, J. 205
- Maugham, T. 135
- Meade, P. 135, 137
- media: Arabic media 29, 56–7, 60–1; bias 16, 122, 209, 210; and ethnicity 119; racism 16, 59, 119, 210
- mediation: changing roles 58–9, 60–1; classroom mediation 73–81; concept 64, 202–3; Elkheir family 64–7; family networks and roles 67–9, 202; home–school contrast 81–2; learning from out-of-school contexts 82; mediators 202–3; parents as mediators 58, 59, 61, 66, 67–9, 107, 108, 114; siblings as mediators 41, 42, 44, 61, 66, 67, 142; teachers as mediators xiii, 69–71, 74–81; teenagers as mediators xiii, 58, 60, 61, 65, 67–8
- memorization 44, 45, 49, 82, 142
- memory aids 82, 86
- messages 10, 26, 56, 86
- migration xi–xii, 125–6, 145, 171; chain migration 173; pendulum migration 84, 119
- mobile phones 10, 12–13, 26, 56
- mode continuum 25–7, 73, 206
- Moll, L. *et al.* 144
- Moore, H. 149
- Mougraby family 3, 17, 19, 68
- Moussa family 3, 47
- multiculturalism xv, 52–3, 118, 126, 127, 148, 151, 152
- multilingualism *see* bilingualism
- music 58

- National Policy on Languages 148  
 networks 11, 60, 64, 67, 202–3  
 New Literacy Studies 64, 189, 197–8, 202, 203  
 New Rhetoric 192  
 newspaper reading 13, 16, 57  
 Noble, G. 120  
 notes and messages 10, 26, 56, 86
- Oakes, J. 150, 151  
 Ogbu, J. 134, 144–5, 149  
 oral skills 100–1, 103, 140, 141, 142–3, 167  
 organizational reading and writing 85–6
- Padmore, S. 200–1  
 Paideia Proposal 158  
 parents: aspirations for children 6, 137; attitudes towards school 48–9, 114, 115, 143; definitions of reading 6–7, 38–9, 142; definitions of writing 40; as mediators 58, 59, 61, 66, 67–9, 107, 108, 114; reading to children 33–4, 41, 42, 144; responsibility 7; and school organizations 24, 48–9, 163, 213; studying 8, 21–2; teaching children 43, 142  
 peer tutoring 82, 100  
 place and identity 109–19; embodied space 109; gendered places 115, 116–17; literacy practices 113–14; prejudice and racism 121–2; space in the home 57, 60, 110–12; spaces in the school 118–19, 122; spaces in the village 115–16; the street 112–13, 115  
 Portes, A. 134, 136, 137  
 power relations 150–1, 153, 193, 194, 197  
 Poynting, S. 105  
 Productive Pedagogies 160–1
- racism: and identity 118–19, 120–2; in the media 16, 59, 119, 210; policy 148; religion 59, 120–1; in TESOL programmes 151  
 radio 15–16, 57, 60  
 Raja family 2, 7–8; Abdullah 2, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30; Khadijah 2, 11; Raida 2, 13, 14, 20, 21–2, 26, 47; Ramsi 2, 10, 23; Walced 2, 11–12  
 rap 212
- reading: aloud 35–7, 43–4, 142; books at home 6–7, 17–18, 58; categories 85–6; for communication 8, 86; comprehension 37; cultural diversity 33; decoding 37; definitions xiii, 6–7, 31, 38–9, 40–1, 142; development 32–4, 41–3, 142; gender xiii, 17, 18, 31, 40, 114; informational reading 86; linguistic diversity 33; literature 50–1; magazines at home 13, 15, 16–17, 19, 58; as management 86; newspapers at home 13, 16, 57; organizational/instrumental reading 8, 85–6; for other interests 19; for pleasure xiii, 8, 16–18, 19, 33, 50, 51, 85, 86; psychology-based research 191–2; in school 34–7, 50, 85–6, 87*t*, 145–6; silent reading 33, 35; as study 8, 38–9; talk about texts 37–8; teaching approaches 32–4, 50, 51, 99, 100, 145; teenagers' views 31, 40–1, 50, 103 *see also* DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) programme; literacy diaries  
 reading readiness 33, 142  
 Reading Recovery 148, 191–2  
 recreation 8, 9*t*, 13–19, 86  
 Reese, L. *et al.* 143, 198  
 register 29, 72–3, 205  
 religion: home literacy practices 8–9, 9*t*, 22–3, 61; and identity 120, 122, 124–5; observance 59, 122, 124–5, 126, 143, 211–12; parents as mediators 66, 67, 107, 108, 114; racism 59, 120–1; wearing the hijab 59, 106, 107, 120–1, 122, 123–4*f*, 124–5, 184  
 respect 7, 84, 108, 112, 115–16, 119, 183  
 ritual literacy 29  
 Ruge, J. 145–6  
 Rumbaut, R. 136  
 Rutter, M. 135
- Santa Barbara Discourse Group 204  
 Schmid, C. 135, 138, 146  
 school contexts: classroom episodes 97–8, 145, 147, 163, 204; discourse 72–3; geography class 71–2; language class 69–70; school assembly 70–1; types of reading and writing 85–6 *see also* classroom mediation

- school reform: accountability 155;  
curriculum xiii, 213–14; devolution  
155; marketization of education  
154–5, 157; private schools 153–4,  
157–8, 209; school effectiveness  
research 161–3; segmentation xv, 122,  
154, 157, 158, 208–9; zoning 153,  
158 *see also* Accelerated Schools  
movement; Authentic Pedagogy;  
classroom-level change; Language  
Academy programme; Productive  
Pedagogies; school-level change
- school-level change 53, 63, 153–4,  
163–6; culturally diverse contexts  
164–5, 214–15; Cummins's  
framework for intervention 163–4,  
164*f*; diversity 154; Kotara High  
School 153–4, 157, 165–6; literacy  
programmes 98–101; resourcing 154,  
215–16 *see also* classroom-level change
- Schumann, F. 176  
Schumann, J. 176  
Scribner, S. 189  
segmentation of schools xv, 122, 154,  
157, 158, 208–9  
self-concept 209–11  
self-discipline 49  
Shah, S. 172  
shopping 10–11, 16  
Shoukr family 3, 48  
siblings as mediators 41, 42, 44, 61, 66,  
67, 142  
sign language 67  
silent reading 33, 35  
Simons, H. 134, 144–5  
Smith, D. 135, 146  
Smith, F. 33, 49  
social action 194  
social contexts 141–2 *see also* literacy as  
social practice  
social skills 99, 146  
socio-economic status 7, 136–7, 146  
space *see* place and identity  
sport 117, 123*f*  
storytelling 33, 34, 41, 143  
Street, B. 5, 30, 189, 197, 198, 201, 203  
Street, J. 5  
students: collaborative ethnography  
185–7; as mediators xiii, 58, 60, 61,  
65, 67–8; views on DEAR 85,  
99–100; views on literacy 31, 40–1,  
50, 103 *see also* ethnic minority  
students; teenagers' literacy practices  
the study xv–xvi, 1–3 *see also* literacy  
research  
studying 8, 9, 9*t*, 14, 20–1, 114  
Suliman, R. 137  
Suliman family 2–3, 20, 47  
Sultana, R. 135  
Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) 33  
systemic functional grammar 205–6
- Tabar, P. 120  
Tabber family 2, 7–8; Ahmed 2, 43;  
Hanna 2, 10, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20,  
21–2, 24, 26, 30, 68; Lena 15; Susan  
2, 17, 19, 30  
Tannen, D. 184  
Tannous family 2, 56, 110; Ali 2, 31, 35,  
42, 43, 48, 54, 55–6, 59, 113, 114,  
116, 157; Hanade 2, 31, 46, 110, 111,  
115–16; Ibrahim 2, 31, 38, 39, 58–9,  
106–7, 110, 111, 113, 114, 115, 116,  
117, 183; Lamise 2, 42, 105, 106,  
109, 110–11, 116–17, 119, 120–2,  
126, 157; Tariq 2, 59, 116  
teachers: demands on 215; ESL training  
146, 159, 216; expectations xiii, 81,  
147, 150, 165, 167, 214–15; learning  
and teaching 145; as mediators xiii,  
69–71, 74–81; team-teaching 168  
teaching approaches 32–4, 50, 51, 99,  
100, 145  
technology: choice of mode 205; effects  
of changes 55–8, 60–1; teenagers' use  
54–7 *see also* computers; Internet  
teenagers' literacy practices 53–7; change  
54–7, 60, 62; views on reading 31,  
40–1, 50, 103  
television 13–15, 29, 41, 56–7, 58, 60,  
115, 116  
Terry, L. *et al.* 135  
TESOL *see* ESL  
tests 148, 155, 156, 160  
textbooks 37–9, 49, 50, 93–4  
Thomas, W. 140–1, 164  
Tizard, J. *et al.* 163  
Tomlinson, S. 135, 146  
travel xv, 84, 119, 125  
Tsolidis, G. 126–7  
Tsoulakidis, Sophie 12, 73, 78–81
- UK: educational outcomes 132, 138,  
144, 146; ethnic disadvantage 135,

- 136; learning to read 142, 144;  
TESOL provision 151
- United States: educational outcomes  
134, 136, 137, 138, 144, 152; ESL  
programmes 140, 146, 151; ethnic  
minorities xi, xii, 131, 132; KEEP  
Project 143, 149; segmentation 154  
*see also* Accelerated Schools  
movement; Authentic Pedagogy;  
Language Academy programme
- urban myths 5–7
- Verhoeven, L. 139, 140, 195
- video: for communication 13, 26;  
watching 15, 57, 60
- visits 182
- Vygotsky, L. 189, 202
- Wagner, D. *et al.* 189, 202
- White, K. 136–7
- Whole Language 32
- Willig, A. 196
- work 8, 25
- worksheets 94–5
- writing: categories 85–6; for  
communication 8, 13, 25, 26, 56, 86;  
definitions 40, 41; development 32,  
42–3, 44; effects of computer use  
55–6; handwriting 40, 42, 45; at home  
8, 19; informational writing 86;  
journal writing 19; as management 86;  
memory aids 86;  
organizational/instrumental writing  
8, 85–6; for pleasure 8, 19;  
psychology-based research 191; in  
school 34–7, 85–6, 87*t*, 145–6; as  
study 8; teaching approaches 32–4,  
100 *see also* literacy diaries
- Zevenbergen, R. 81, 147
- Zhou, M. 134, 136, 139
- Zohair family 2, 56, 84, 183; Ahmad 2,  
53–4, 55, 59, 84, 97, 116, 126; Basma  
2, 105, 108, 113; Mohamad 2, 42–3,  
59, 68, 84, 105, 107–9, 112, 113–14,  
115; Rada 42–3

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