Socializing the Digital: Taking Emic Perspectives on Digital Domains

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There is a tendency in scholarship on new and digital literacies to disassociate subjectivities and contexts from analyses and to generalize practices. This *Language and Literacy* special issue redresses such a tendency by exploring digital domains from agentive positions and from contextual perspectives. With submissions from scholars around the world, we have come together to socialize, even personalize, the digital to locate technologies in place (Prinsloo & Rowsell, 2012). For us, literacy teaching is most powerful when digital technologies and new media in formal and informal contexts are viewed as placed and as agentive.

Traditionally literacy has been viewed as a repertoire of skills that individuals use to do something. Often seen as an inventory of skills such as speaking, listening, communicating, reading, and writing, literacy was cast for some time as a set of autonomous schooling practices (Street, 1984). When the social turn in literacy took place (Gee, 1996), literacy became viewed as shaped by contexts in which they occur. Brian Street describes this socializing of literacy as an *ideological* model of literacy, that is, literacy is shaped by context, power and history (Street, 1984). For example, literacy practices in school are one kind of literacy, but they are not the only one. Thinking about literacy in homes, in the communities, in faith settings, and in everyday contexts more generally opens up definitions of literacy.

With such an opening up of literacy, everyday practices such as using a mobile phone or sending an email are examined as ideological practices that are shaped by context, power, and history. This led to a theorizing of technologies as placed resources. Mastin Prinsloo (2005) theorizes how the notions of new and digital literacies have a tendency to be regarded as placeless and he confronted this challenge by locating perspectives: "What is not settled is how these new literacies are to be understood from the perspectives of how they work, how they are distributed, and how they are best engaged with, including in educational contexts" (p. 2). Thinking about the concept of placed resources, we came together to develop a collection for *Language and Literacy* that elucidates the local and the emic in global contexts.

The concept of 'emic' sits beneath all of the papers featured in the special issue. A linguistic anthropologist, Kenneth Pike (1954), introduces the terms *emic* and *etic* as descriptors for two perspectives that anthropologists can adopt in their research. An emic approach researches from local perspectives, from intrinsic cultural understandings of a context. An etic approach, researches from an outsider, external perspective on cultural

understandings of a context. Scholars in this special issue present agentive and contextual digital praxis and, in so doing, they analyze identity mediation through devices such as iPhones (Carrington, this issue), or, through online texts (Nichols, Maynard, & Brown, this issue), or, through moving-image productions (Toohey & Dagenais, this issue). To present emic perspectives, these researchers explore how devices function as artifacts (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) and how multimodality represents ways of personalizing resources--- local and global--- that we access on a daily basis.

To introduce the papers, Kedrick James's paper traces the social history of public correspondence networks in Britain and America from the 17th to the 20th century. James documents the changing trajectories of public correspondence networks in terms of literacy modalities, physical systems, conceptual frameworks, and user-network relationships. Equally important, James interrogates the relevant ethical basis of diverse mobile literacies.

Victoria Carrington's article focuses on a European young girl Roxie's textual practices that are enabled by the features of her iPhone. Using object ethnography, Carrington's study maps the local/global connections played out by 3G-enabled phones and unpacks the social history of user-artifact interactions in creating, distributing, and receiving textual resources.

Focusing on university students in South Africa, Cheryl Brown's article presents students' emic perspectives of the affordances and constraints of Information and communication technologies (ICTs) literacy. Brown's findings capture well the complexity and contradictions of students' perceived Discourses of ICTs as marginalized migrants to the digital world as contrasted with the Digital natives.

Exploring literacy teachers' digital practices and identities, Sue Nichols, Amy Maynard, and Christopher Brown's case studies of four online resource networks (TeacherTube, UK-based TES, US-based TWRC Tank, and Australian Teacher Toolbox) showcase the affordances of digital technology to expand teachers' "bricolage" (Nichols et al., this issue, p. 10) in creating digital resources and connect teacher communities in diverse locations. Nichols et al.'s study hence foregrounds contemporary literacy teachers' agency in producing and circulating new digital literacies.

Kelleen Toohey, Diane Dagenais, and Elizabeth Schulze's videomaking projects in Canada, India, and Mexico showcase the affordances and constraints of videomaking as a multimodal literacy practice. Students' reworking of various local and global linguistic and cultural resources in their videomaking let in students' artistic, textual, and sociocultural knowledge. The authors thus appraise the potentials of videomaking in connecting students' in- and outside-school literacy practices and expanding students' identity options and agentive roles in meaning making.

What makes multimodal literacy real, authentic, and placed is bringing together multimodality with an account of material, physical qualities of texts with an additional account of how texts come into being, or are used, through ethnography (e.g., Kell 2006, Stein, 2004). A subtheme in the special issue is the notion of artifactual literacy (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010), which acknowledges the fact that everyone has a story to tell and that these stories become embedded in objects. This approach is tied to the everyday, and to the 'flow' of communication that exists with people in community settings.

One impetus for us in compiling this special issue is to address questions around the social dimensions of new media, how they are positioned in relation to dynamics of

power and inequality. The papers vary in focus but they all examine how engagements with media resources and artifacts are also engagements with subjectivity and identity practices. The papers present differing examples of individuals and groups of people engaging with questions of social identity and subjectivity, under simultaneous conditions of both constraint and social mobility. They act as authors and subjects of their own conduct, engaging with media resources in personalized ways while being subject to a play of forces that impinge on their social lives and shape their choices and actions. For example, media resources carry coded algorithms and operate as social artifacts, that both assert the design intentions of their makers while also offering opportunities for 'remix'. These dynamics are shown in detail in Carrington's paper, which explores a young girl's relationship to her iPhone. Carrington examines the complex ways in which the young girl both personalizes her phone but does so in ways that are socially shaped and reflect her own social positioning. At the simplest level, her phone carries no personalized stickers, unlike her earlier phones, because it is an iPhone and has been socially constructed through marketing and public opinion, as an object of status and display, which is best left unadorned. Power, in this example, does not simply restrain individuals, it works from the inside and produces, through networked relations and individual agency. It structures the possible fields of engagement of individuals and allows for constrained creativity (Bourdieu, 1990). Thus, in the example from university students in South Africa who are engaging with digital media resources for almost the first time (Brown, this issue), they have to adopt varied but socially shaped relationships with these media objects and practices---they relate as 'aliens', ill at ease in the domain and hovering around the fringes; or as 'escapees', only too delighted to leave their everyday worlds behind them and embrace the digital, almost to excess; or 'converts' who embrace the medium and hope no-one notices their relative inexperience in the domain. How we orientate to media artifacts and semiotic resources creates ongoing, placed, and volatile cultural practices and produces common objects of identification and desire. In the case of the university students here, how they engage with the objects and resources of networked media contributes to the on-going production of categories like success and failure.

Media products such as teachers' on-line resource sites (Nichols et al., this issue), mass produced email (James, this issue), children's video films, student online learning activities (Brown, this issue), as well as media artifacts like smartphones, are each a mosaic of quotations, much in the way that new versions of cell phones are mosaics, echoing earlier phone models and other devices (computers, clocks, iPods, notebooks) as they copy and merge their own and competing older models. As placed, situated actors we engage with media products and semiotics through processes of intertextuality, where what we take from such mosaics of quotations is shaped by what we bring, by way of narratives, images, memories, imagined identities, aspirations, interests and commitments. The resources and objects we use to write ourselves into the social text are also the resources that the social world of power and inequalities uses to act upon us (Donald, 1992).

It is the network, or the 'figured world' (indeed, as James [this issue] argues, that produces the particular categories of producers, consumers, and artifacts, who write confessional texts or address non-intimates in mass-mailings, using the historically shaped resources for expressing intimacy, distance or identification that come to seem

natural and inevitable, their history forgotten, or black-boxed. It is thus not surprising but still revealing, that Tibetan-speaking children in India in and Punjabi-speaking children in Canada should signal the Jonas brothers to each other, as a statement of shared interests, a sign of solidarity in their imagined communion in networked global youth culture. Youths in India, Canada, and Spain (in the Toohey & Dagenais example, this issue) utilise particular sets of media resources or cultural artefacts, some of them global icons, that are recognized and allocated local significance in networks of relations. In these socially figured worlds, signs and objects provide the identifiable resources that constitute stable, shared, and imagined realms that are placed and particular, in their geography and history, but these signs also provide the resources for mobility and movement across social space, because of their global translatability.

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