

Chapter 2 Dynamic literacies

This book is about the impact of digital media on education, as seen through a sociocultural and political lens; it examines critically some of the key themes and issues relating to media, technology and learning. We have chosen to begin by looking at the ways in which these issues are represented in recent definitions of ‘literacy’ which have been mobilised by a range of different theorists and interest groups. Each of these theories and definitions seeks in some way to respond to the changes brought about by the increasingly all-pervasive nature of digital media texts and artefacts in lived experience in the past few decades, in the developed world and, in different ways, in the majority world. We would like to suggest that the term ‘dynamic literacies’ is one way to think about an inclusive, umbrella term which is responsive and inclusive enough to describe the changing nature of meaning-making in the context of digital media and culture. ‘Dynamic literacies’, is, for us, a term which brings together the shifting and contested versions of literacies which have emerged out of semiotics and multimodality (Kress, 2003), media education (Buckingham, 2003), the new literacy studies (Gee, 2004, Gee, 2015a, Street, 2003, Heath, 1983) and many more, all of which in differing ways stand in contrast to the view of literacy as a static, narrow and autonomous set of codes and conventions, a view which is widely applied in educational institutions and contexts and which forms the basis of many neoliberal ‘reforms’ in systems all over the world.

Later in the book we will also make use at various points of the term ‘third space’ and position our use of it as part of an evolving semantic which takes in metaphorical, virtual and physical spaces which are all interstitially located between larger institutional organisations: home, school, work and so on. These spaces are locations for thinking, working, negotiating, playing and more, in the context of digital media, education and culture. They are all places in which ‘literacy events’ (Street, 2003) take place, in which meanings are shared and in which pedagogical framing of those meanings is a key determinant of action in education. In other words, we see ‘third spaces’ as connected to ‘dynamic literacies’ and existing as potential locations for learning in which hierarchies are themselves fluid; there is the potential to be more open to learners’ skills and dispositions arising out of practices which are representative of wider culture and lived experience. We will illustrate these concepts by reference to key writers in the field who have influenced us, but, importantly, also by reflecting on work in a range of research projects we have engaged with in recent years. We will suggest that employing both ‘dynamic literacies’ and ‘third spaces’ as terms offers useful frames of reference which can bring together a wide range of parallel but hitherto previously discrete contemporary discourses on digital media, education and culture.

Beginning, then with ‘dynamic literacies’, a key concern of this book is the changing nature of teaching and learning in response to the widespread consumption and production of digital media texts and artefacts in wider culture. We recognise, in turn, that this has a great deal to do with how we define ‘literacy’ because literacy is in some senses in a symbiotic relationship with ‘pedagogy’; our shared understanding of what it means to be literate determines not only *what* we learn but *how* we learn and even *what* it means to be a learner. In other words, a working definition of ‘literacy’ shapes the whole political and pedagogical discourse around formal education and establishes much of its content and many of its performative structures.

For some, including many people who work in education, literacy is an inarguable, uncontested, neutral set of skills and competencies around communicating and making meaning. For others, at the same time as recognising those skills and competencies should be developed and practised, literacy is nevertheless inherently contentious and contested, changing in response to wider social and economic conditions represented in new communicative modes and practices; for some, the codes and conventions of meaning-making themselves change in response to what Lievrouw and Livingstone describe as ‘the changed artefacts, social arrangements and practices’ (2006) in and around new media.

As media educators, we understand that whether or not an education system engages positively, negatively, or not at all with media texts and practices is framed by what is admissible in its formal structures and educational settings as ‘literacy’. We also know that the situation is varied across the developed world and the majority world. The case studies and vignettes we present from our research projects will help us to discuss recent and relevant developments in educational systems close to home, in England, whilst we will also include commentary and perspectives from other parts of the world. In any case, we will consider throughout what literacy actually *is* for those social actors involved in education; for teachers, parents, carers and students alike, who move daily across the boundary between institutional space and wider lived experience. One of our approaches in the book will be to look at projects in which participants exhibit apparent awareness of their own dynamic, their own movement between those spaces and the possibility for social action in each one. This will necessarily result in us suggesting that spaces between home and school are places in which conditions can be said to constitute a ‘third space’ for literacy and meaning-making (Gutierrez, 2008, Bhabha, 1994), as noted above, and that such spaces can be literally and physically located (e.g. in the after-school club) or metaphorically present (e.g. even accessible under certain conditions in formal settings for learning). There will be further discussion of this concept in chapter 3.

Finally, a key interest for us at the outset is finding ways to incorporate into our understanding of literacy some of the emergent ways of thinking about the materiality of literacy and classrooms, third spaces of learning and media (Dezuanni, 2015, Burnett and Merchant, 2014). We want to suggest that a working definition of literacy should be inclusive, not exclusive, and be one which gathers together a series of sub-categories, as suggested above, of *dynamic literacies*, all of which are components of the systems and elements in the spaces of learning. We will begin by outlining some of the ways in which definitions of literacy shape pedagogy and the thousands of interpersonal interactions in a school day. The sections which follow will each address some of the key ways of thinking about literacy with particular relevance for us, working in the enlarged definition which includes all forms of media in its scope and range.

Defining literacy, shaping pedagogy

For many organisations, institutions and countries around the world, *literacy*, by definition and by action, is an undeniable and constant force for good. The web pages for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) state that:

‘Literacy is a fundamental human right and the foundation for lifelong learning. It is fully essential to social and human development in its ability to transform lives. For individuals, families, and societies alike, it is an instrument of empowerment to improve one’s health, one’s income, and one’s relationship with the world.’ (UNESCO, 2016)

There is very little to disagree with here, particularly when that statement is elided with such obvious social good. In both the majority world and the developed world alike, concerns over literacy remain high on the agenda, routinely invoked by politicians as the basis for urgent, performative actions designed to act as simple and effective solutions to mutually agreed problems. However, the definition of ‘literacy’ itself remains both complex and highly contentious, not least because accepting it as an immutable and uncontested force for good disconnects it from cultural, political and social contexts and risks reducing it to a set of technical codes and conventions. By themselves, knowledge of these codes does not *guarantee* access to wealth and success in life, though, of course, they hardly impede it. However, factors such as higher economic, social and cultural capital, the background of parents and carers and the location and type of schooling, *alongside* a working knowledge of the technical codes *are* all, accounted for together, much more likely to have an impact on life chances.

For the majority of children and young people, from all classes and backgrounds, the definition of literacy and the operation of that definition remains of crucial importance because of the way it *includes* or *excludes* aspects of their wider social and cultural life. If a curriculum is narrow and exclusive of children and young people’s experience beyond school, they are likely to be interpellated into a system in which they mis-recognise themselves as learners in the prevailing pedagogy. They are likely to find themselves positioned in the narrowest terms of success and failure, judged against normative standards in a performative culture which runs the risk of introducing negative effects by focusing on a reductive set of measures which are portrayed as the only ones worth knowing about. Our argument is that, in addition, to being narrowly focused and quick to label the social actors in educational systems as failures (be they schools, children, students, parents and teacher) that this is simply not ambitious enough a design for learning for the challenging and changing times in which we live.

There is another way to view the impact of wider culture on pedagogy. The literature on ‘funds of knowledge’, for example, suggests, there are significant gains for learners where teaching and learning settings admit outside cultural life into classroom discourse and where the pedagogy is inclusive; in other words, where literacy is seen as contingent, culturally situated and bound in context (Moll et al., 1992). The codes and conventions of grammar, syntax, semantics and more can *still* be central in the curriculum experience but this view of pedagogy suggests that they should be located in learning which is inclusive of the outside culture, which values the knowledge and lifeworlds of children, parents and carers in the community and which takes note of differently held ‘ethnotheories’ about learning (Brooker, 2003). From the school side, a working knowledge of the cultural and literacy practices of those being taught is likely to benefit all social actors in the process. It remains a question of cultural capital and the ascribing of values to the detail and lived experience of the wider mass of children and young people in the care of the various systems (Alanen et al., 2015). For media itself, of course, where questions of value arise out of its exclusion in the formal life of the curriculum in our own country, there is an additional problem. The moving image, the precise location of much of children’s cultural knowledge and social capital is not necessarily present in a school, formally in a curriculum subject, or even informally, as we will discuss at a later stage. And yet, as has been argued in recent years, it is a fundamental source of rich literacy practices which enables a more equitable and vital curriculum experience (Parry, 2013).

Turning to the curriculum itself, as even the most cursory study of semantic and grammatical shift in England reveals, the codes and conventions of literacy are in a constant state of evolutionary change; we should expect nothing less from a living language, responsive to wider cultural influence, though such happenings are routinely lamented by conservative

commentators, even as they are celebrated by others. Attempting to preserve and fossilise literacy in a narrow and prescriptive way robs it of its potential for dramatic and playful use which, in turn, denies its expressive potential for human communication across a variety of modes and means. We might also argue that it *potentially* inhibits the development of future digital makers and artists, although, as we shall note in later chapters, there may yet be potential for this activity in other spheres. Certainly, to try and pretend that the world is otherwise and that literacy is unchanging is to deny the obvious, profound and accelerated experience of change in the context of the new century, however complex and often inequitable those changes may be.

It is important to be clear that we are not arguing for a literacy curriculum which fails to attend to ‘the basics’. After all, children and young people are arguably more than ever in need of many of those skills, not least because they are reading more than ever. If we factor in the way that text is shared in ever multiplying ways, on screens on myriad devices, as well as continuing to have a life on the printed page, then children and young people are daily attending to myriads of words, maybe even more than at any time in history. Accessing the codes, making sense of them and learning how to use them are all tasks which are inseparable from the world in which they are actively and routinely used to make and share meaning. Unfortunately, in England, as research has shown, our curriculum currently pays more attention to technical decoding skills than to the exchange of meaning even at the level of print literacy (Davis, 2013) and even as such politically instigated pedagogy has long been shown to represent only one, albeit important, component of the way in which people learn to read fluidly, strategically and critically (Scarborough, 2001).

Our main argument, then, is that we should be more ambitious for our children and young people in the way we design their schooled literacy experiences and in the ways in which we ascribe value to them. If we had a curriculum for literacy which, alongside the basic precepts, made time for the dominant modes of contemporary popular communication, the still and moving image, the music file and more, we would arguably have a living, responsive educational experience. Many children and young people are using a plethora of conventions and protocols outside of the conventions of the school, none of which is static or immutable, all of which are changing and dynamic and all of which have huge potential for learning and life. We should really expect our education systems to shift and widen their range to accommodate some of these changes to the ways in which we make meaning to take account of media, as many have argued over a long time (e.g. Buckingham, 2003, Hobbs, 2014, Burn, 2009, Cannon, 2016). However, in too many recent examples in the developed world (for reasons which we will explore later), including the current National Curriculum for Primary Schools, ages 5-11, in England (DFE, 2013b), the direction of travel is back to narrower definitions and, we would suggest, back to concomitant narrower visions for pedagogy. In summary, our argument around the curriculum is not actually about excluding or diminishing the place of print; the argument is essentially about being more inclusive and widening the definition of literacy, so that we can be more ambitious with our pedagogy, more ambitious for learning in digital media culture.

Case study: Persistence of Vision

How might a pedagogy for literacy be made to be inclusive of learning about and making media as well as retaining relevance to text, enabling children to achieve in both? This is the challenge outlined in the preceding section and a small number of studies have begun to suggest ways forward. In the UK, from the ways in which Cary Bazalgette first envisaged a curriculum which explored learning about the unique properties of media and time-based texts (Bazalgette,

1989, Bazalgette, 2000), there has been a tradition in media education of connecting literacy and media learning (Parry, 2013). But this is not to suggest that one is to be learned *through* the other, that media is a useful prop for *real* learning in the traditional subjects. It is simply to suggest that, as in lived experience, print and media are bound up together. We stated that literacy and pedagogy were in a symbiotic relationship. So too are print literacy and media literacy, with neither acting as the sole driver of communicative experience or of expressive potential for meaning-making.

As one case in point, a few years ago, there was a project which brought together poetry, animation and social media as part of wider initiative to demonstrate the value of a wider definition of literacy in learning. 'Persistence of Vision' took the premise that non-narrative poetry could be taught alongside animation production and, potentially, benefit younger learners in primary schools (Bazalgette et al., 2011, Bazalgette, 2010). Animation, as a form, shares many of the characteristics of non-narrative poetry: an emphasis on time, image, rhythm, repetition and more. In three rural, local authorities children made simple animations from poetic starting points and, subsequently, made poems from animated starting points, reverse engineering images back into playful experiences with words. In one of the locations, the work was enhanced and supported by a social media space on a video sharing platform. It became a network for exchanging ideas and opinions about starting points for both poetry and animation. As reported soon afterwards,

'In terms of observable existing theoretical frameworks, some of the characteristics of Etienne Wenger's (1998) "communities of practice" were in evidence, most notably the ways in which the tripartite notions of "mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire" were represented in the exchanges in the comment spaces'
(Bazalgette et al., 2011, p.5)

Many short animated films were made over the course of the year in the project and teachers reported enhancements to children's understanding of both animation and poetry, as well as to their writing. Projects like this are always open to challenge. How generalisable are these findings after all? What numbers of children were involved? Firstly, we can make a claim that the project went further than a simple celebratory experience of a one-off project in a single school, massively staffed by specialists who came in, conducted a creative classroom experiment in widening the definition of literacy and subsequently left. The reason for this being that the work was designed, alongside the principles of the 3D Creative, Cultural and Critical model of literacy (derived from Bill Green's Operational, Cultural and Critical model, see Green, 2002) to be iterative and recursive. It took place over the period of a year, with multiple visits to classrooms on the part of the researchers. Were specialist animators involved? Yes, but not to work directly in the classroom. Instead they were to provide the teachers with initial methods at in-service training sessions throughout the year. The idea was to create a replicable model that a busy primary school class teacher could implement. Was there a vast amount of technical knowledge and support required? Not really, though it would be wrong, and in keeping with some of the enthusiastic commentaries on educational technology to pretend it was implemented without any difficulty. However, simple, inexpensive software, a webcam and a laptop were all that was required in terms of equipment, layered in alongside the supportive training model described above. If the project were to be repeated now, with the advent in many classrooms of tablet devices, it could conceivably be easier still; though to begin to argue in this way is to drift towards determinism and start to think about technology. The biggest shift was not engineered by technology alone, indeed recent history is littered with examples of 'technology enhanced learning' as, at best, a

questionable idea (Selwyn, 2013), which we will discuss again in later chapters. The really successful outcomes in this project were in the changing perceptions of the teachers over the pedagogy which was implemented, which saw a productive engagement with media as a vehicle for widening both the definition and enactment of literacy in the classroom. As we wrote at the time:

‘Teachers on the whole reported that POV was successful in driving up writing standards. We came to see that this was because of the creative connections which could be made between curriculum areas and knowledge domains. Writing had a purpose and was holistically connected to a curriculum experience. It makes sense to children to work in this way as many have pointed out: firstly, for reasons of fashioning and maintaining creative flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and secondly because situated learning and the development of literacy skills go hand in hand (Gee, 2004). In textual terms, at both functional and formal level, the poetry supported the animation and vice versa. In one of the project schools, a teacher reflected on the ways in which working in a complementary way in the different modes of text and visual production supported the children’s overall literacy development in ways envisaged by writers and academics in the field (see, for example, Bearne, 2009pp. 156-187)’
(Bazalgette et al., 2011, p.6)

The New Literacy Studies

Clearly, then, our version of literacy, one which seeks to connect classrooms to lived, cultural experience, especially of media, is an *ideological* one with connections that go back to the New Literacy Studies (NLS) and the work of Brian Street and others (see, for example, Gee, 2015b for one account of the development of NLS). Street introduced the ‘ideological’ version of literacy (2003) as a binary to the ‘autonomous’ version, in which, as we’ve discussed above, becoming literate *by itself* confers success and status upon an individual. He also argued for a fundamental break with the autonomous version in social terms:

‘What has come to be termed the "New Literacy Studies" (NLS) ...represents a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice.’
(Street, 2003)

Certainly the autonomous version dominates the agenda for education and testing in those countries which work with the narrowest of definitions of literacy. In those systems it is both context and abstraction; its meaning is apparently fixed but its nature actually makes it contingent and bound to context in use. Whilst the curriculum for English in schools (DFE, 2013a) contains many fine statements about its aims and promising an enriching experience for all, in recent years it has become operationalized as a reductive activity for the times in which we live with a focus on arcane technical competence. So-called ‘traditional’ literacy of the kind described above exerts a powerful influence over school pedagogy. In its purest form it corresponds with constructivist notions of child development, of ages and stages, of the step by step acquisition of knowledge, even as it over-privileges phonological awareness as the only predictor of successful reading development (Scarborough, 2001). As Gee has pointed out, it is a version of literacy which is backed by a particular kind of thinking about child development, informed by the view that literacy develops individually, internally and *solely* by mental processes in the brain (Gee, 2015a, Ch.2). Over time we have come to an understanding

of how these processes are augmented by *social* factors which actually influence literacy development. Literacy is in the mind, yes, but also involves learning how to take part in communicative acts which are shaped in the particular social and economic circumstances around and between people. In the early years of the 21st century and beyond, this means finding ways for literacy learning to account for materiality and pedagogy in the context of digital media, the dominant modes of communication.

In recent years scholarly engagements with *literacy* and, in particular the NLS with its connection to pedagogy have sought to re-configure its relationship with wider media and visual culture, to move its definition and scope away from a technical and reductivist focus on the codes and conventions of print and to include the many modes in which meaning is made in the digital age. Some of the key figures in this approach are identified with the ‘New Literacy Studies’ (or NLS) which James Gee has pointed out arises out of work from a range of disciplines. He lists the following key domains contributing to the NLS way of thinking about literacy, as follows: ‘...linguistics, history, anthropology, rhetoric and composition studies, cultural psychology, education and other areas...’ (2015b). Brian Street, for example, a key figure in the NLS, cited in the section above with the terms ‘autonomous and ideological literacy’, is an anthropologist. He has argued that the study of literacy is concerned with all the practices and arrangements around making meaning; that it is therefore inherently ‘ideological’ and contested (Street, 2003). Within this key founding principle, the NLS has made room for a broad range of approaches which, in addition to arising from the fields which Gee lists, concern themselves with a range of practices, texts and artefacts. Consider the ways in which the editors of *The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies* (Rowse and Pahl, 2015) have recently organised their contributors into specific gatherings of topics and approaches: *foundational, space-focused, time-focused, multimodal, digital, hermeneutic, every day and community based*. All of these are in some way concerned with being inclusive of wider definitions of literacy and none of them is solely print focused. Some are inherently focused on everyday practices in wider digital culture whilst others, *multimodality* for example, focus on different kinds of texts and take semiotics as their starting point, examining the many ways in which meaning is made from an orchestration of different modes, from still and moving images, through gesture, speech and the design of texts in the dominant meaning making space of the screen (Kress, 2003, Burn and Parker, 2003, Jewitt, 2011). In recent years this has been extended into thinking about what this may mean for learning of many different kinds in many different settings and set out as a set of unifying principles for materials gathered in many different projects. Bezemer and Kress identify three connected matters when reflecting on this work, all of which are important for any account of what it is to be literate and act in the world to make meaning:

‘First was the core, the ‘substance’: the connection between *communication* and *learning* as the constant, recurring issue throughout the different projects we (had) worked on. The second was our use of a *social semiotic theory*, which meant we were bound to look at all of the means for making meaning. It provided us with the overarching frame of *multimodality*. The third, equally crucial, matter – the other large constant – as and is our settled understanding of the significance of the social as the *frame*, as the shaping force for all actors and all action.’
(Bezemer and Kress, 2016, p.ix).

Scholars who have identified themselves with the New Literacy Studies (NLS) have all in some way moved the debate on literacy into a closer alignment with more contemporary forms of meaning making (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, Gee, 2004). Along

with the NLS has come a raft of attempts to renegotiate literacy's engagement with the changing social arrangements and practices in wider digital culture. In 'Literacy and Education', a recent re-appraisal of these approaches, Gee (2015a) describes distinct phases of thinking about literacy and traces their antecedents through the constructivist, the 'social mind' and up to 'digital media'. In the final section of the book he argues that our understanding of literacy must be inflected by our knowledge that different kinds of textual production have different affordances, some of which we barely understand. Certainly this is the case with 'Digital media' as he notes:

'All of this raises questions about digital media: What are their connections to oral language? To print? How are they transforming oral and written language and changing their ecologies? What effects in digital contexts are digital media having and likely to have? What institutions or groups sponsor or serve as catalysts for digital media to have certain sorts of effects in certain sorts of practices and contexts? How are digital media transforming human talk, text, action, interaction, mind, and memory, and how can they do this?

We do not yet know the answers to these questions. Things are too new and changing too fast to have answers yet...'

(Gee, 2015a, p.103)

This allusion to a *dynamic* conception of literacy and literacy research is important and we will return to this towards the end of the chapter.

Case study: Image making and voice

At this point, here is a recent example of an observation from a research project. How might some of this 'orchestration of modes' take place and in what sense can they be part of a school's offer and a pupil's experience? In the vignette which follows we see one small example of connecting to the 'funds of knowledge' of a group of children...

On a Monday morning in a secondary school classroom in the north of England, a group of 8 young people, aged about 12-13 years, is taking part in a project which is aiming to enable them to operate as researchers of their own lives. There are two parts to this activity which is being facilitated by youth workers and a teacher/academic. Firstly, they must record words and emotions which describe aspects of their own lived experience under difficult socio-economic circumstances, made up of collaged images and words cut from magazines on a tablecloth-sized sheet of paper. Secondly, they are tasked with recording this activity in still and moving images made on tablet devices. The group divides into two and undertakes these activities in parallel, taking a turn at making the collage and filming their friends doing the making. Each member of the group has something to say about the filmmaking part; one in particular wants to demonstrate the best way to connect to the network and show how he edits and uploads videos to his own online channel. Another, in contrast, wants to know which way up to hold the device and how best to open the applications needed. The rest are confident exploring the devices, based on their past experience with touchscreens, their own or other people's. For all of them, however, it is the first time they have had the opportunity to make any still or moving image representation of their lives on a Monday morning in a classroom. All are enthusiastic and motivated. However, the session is not without its difficulties and issues and, once the technology has receded into its place as the tool rather than the locus of the activity, the focus shifts to the means by which shots and edits can be used to convey emotions, make a documentary record or tell some kind of story.

Looking back at the clips and simple edits now, performed over a period of an hour, with the integrated still shots and music added from the software's demo sound files, there is a genuine if nascent facility with the modes and means of contemporary media, which is familiar from similar projects in previous years (Potter, 2012, Burn and Durran, 2007). Along with the collage activity the work reveals a knowledge of process and product which is more usually employed in social media (for those with the equipment and online accounts to facilitate it). Close-ups and two shots are skilfully taken; in moving image pieces the camera moves slowly round the table varying in height. The tablet screen enables constant review within something that looks like a viewing screen, so that the finished product and the process elide in the same space, as has been noted in studies of mobile filmmaking (Potter and Bryer, 2014).

Up to this point in their school lives, in the country in which this scene takes place, these young people have had no *formal*, sustained engagement with the means and modes of contemporary communication. Informally, of course, and to varying degrees, many of them are likely to have encountered 'making' with digital media. They will have experienced at first hand the issues of power and control which accompany any digital representation of identity and experience. At times, in the space beyond this room, the young people, as well as the adults who are facilitating the work, will have counted both positive and negative effects amongst those issues. In the room itself, they are acutely aware of this, even in the safe environment in which they are operating, sometimes laughing *at* each other, sometimes *with* each other, sometimes switching to the front camera to create 'selfies' and to parody selfie culture. At all times, they realise that without control over the deletion and retention of these digital images, they become something that can be used to tell stories with them, about them, around them. They know and the adults working with them know how these images find an audience, how they are placed together, and in what spaces and for how long is integral to the practice of making images in digital media. They will know this practice but perhaps will not have the word 'curation' as their first choice of name for it. We have written elsewhere about curation as a new practice arising out of the pervasive use in wider culture of the tools of new media representation (Potter, 2012, McDougall and Potter, 2015) and there is more on this subject in a subsequent chapter. Certainly the connections between making, editing and exhibiting inhere in their conversations and are part of a whole nexus of practices and arrangements in lived culture.

For now, there are some questions worth asking about the activity as a whole. What was creating the sense of agency and urgency in the room? Was it the act of representation itself, familiar from outside culture, less familiar, in this format in school time? Was it the permission inherent in the activity to be off-topic, to be off-timetable, to work in a different space within the school? This group had, after all, previously jumped at the chance to be part of the research project and to spend some of their time disentangled from their usual routine. If a curriculum subject name had been used to label these hours on the timetable, what name would it have taken?

Answers to these and related questions lie in the domains of literacy, of agency and of location. Overarching all of these is the sense of the *dynamic* which we experience whenever we pick up a device with the intention of making a record of something happening to us or our family or friends. And these images which we make, moving and still, are always in motion from somewhere to somewhere. When they are first taken they are called back to life in a thumbnail gallery, arranged chronologically moment to moment for deletion, selection, editing, curation in what some have described as the 'multimodal mixing desk' (Burn and Parker, 2003). In the background they may already be duplicated and placed in a file server in the 'cloud'. They are sometimes under our control or, in the best of cases, of those we trust. In the worst cases,

control of these images is ceded to those institutions or individuals who would curate them in different ways or mine them for usable, useful and, sometimes, sellable, data (of which more in later chapters).

It is certainly the case that representational and communicative practices have changed rapidly since the times in which the earliest digital images were made. The young people making the stories of the self which are described above were unused to making such representations in the context of a safe and distancing critical space. They were cared *for* and cared *about* by their school, but their experience of these newer and nascent forms of literacy were strictly external and subject to personal social and political capital, to control or lack of it outside. Unless any of them were to go on in the following years to take a media-related subject, should it be on offer to them, they were unlikely to encounter this kind of literacy practice again in this kind of setting.

In England with the focus on literacy as a ‘basic’ subject and with the huge swathes of time devoted to its study and practice in both primary and secondary schools, it could be said to be in a unique position to allow for exploration of critical, creative and cultural contexts of people’s lives. However, since it is defined narrowly here and in many other countries of the developed world and majority world, we find that the general experience of the curriculum, both in its content and how it is enacted in pedagogy, are similarly narrowed. In other words, arguably, the definition of literacy in a society determines the limits of its pedagogy, its range and scope of ambition as a site for explorations of the social world. We might ask ourselves: How has this limiting of pedagogy been allowed to happen? But perhaps with more immediate impact on life and learning in mind, we should also ask: What would an alternative view of literacy look like, one which admitted *dynamic* processes into its construction? And, furthermore, what kinds of spaces would support work which enabled this to happen?

Categorising Multiple literacies

How many literacies can we name now? Adding the qualifier ‘education’ and searching on the terms in this sub-heading will result in many thousands of returns. From *Digital literacy*, to *Media literacy*, *Multimodal literacy* and more, the field is crowded with terms and definitions which are interrelated and overlapping, though sometimes contradictory and even oppositional to one another. The major difference between the possible positioning of pedagogy resulting from each version of literacy is revealed by looking more closely at its origin. In all cases, appending literacy has conferred some kind of status and a demand to pay attention to it as a serious phenomenon. Some members of the ‘New London Group’ anticipated the plethora of forms which new definitions of literacy would take when they called their key text ‘Multiliteracies’, further anticipating its connection to economic and cultural life when they subtitled it: ‘Literacy, learning and the design of social futures’ (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000).

To take one or two of the major, extant forms of literacy and examine them, beginning with *Media literacy*... in the UK, as has been noted, ‘Media literacy ... has never been an accepted and cohesively defined idea’ (McDougall et al., 2013, p.7) whilst *Media education* as a concept has a much longer tradition and an, arguably, much better defined historical and political identity (Buckingham, 2003). Meanwhile OFCOM, a government agency in the UK, issues continual reports and advice under the term ‘Media literacy’ although it is mainly focused on accounting for trends and patterns of use of media artefacts and texts in the wider population (see OFCOM, 2015, for a rationale for its work). Educationalists are invited to the launches of reports and the data is useful for academics and educators to build on. But the agencies themselves do not argue for intellectual and educational curriculum change in the same way as

the main lobbying groups do and have done for years (see the Media Education Association website, MEA, 2006)

In these debates ‘Media literacy’ is sometimes seen as a politically pragmatic term, accruing respectability for the study of media in schools whilst flawed in itself as a description and lacking a focused and coherent vision for its future. Media studies, on the other hand, in England, is the main curriculum presence there for media education, a subject which is only available on an optional basis for children at secondary school age. Here too there is an issue which is particular to the UK of the habitual, political mainstream belittling of ‘media’ as a serious subject of study, particularly, but not exclusively, where children of primary school age are concerned. Many have written in its defence (Buckingham, 2009, McDougall, 2012) and invoked similar arguments made in this account for enlarging literacy itself; it remains a subject which faces continual threats to its existence in England. Even as an exam subject Media Studies is far from safe in the UK, with attempts by government to curtail its practical work, even as it attempts to cram in a range of disparate theorists, perhaps in an attempt to make it appear more rigorous and intellectual, more fit for academic purpose in the way a ‘traditional’ subject is (for an account of recent struggles to save Media Studies in England see MEA, 2016).

In Europe, the terms ‘Media education’ and ‘Media literacy’ are also existentially split but they depend on one another in a number of country contexts, including, for example, for the partners in the ongoing E Media Education Lab project where a series of training scenarios are being built for use across the EU which stress the interconnectedness of media education and media literacy, two dimensions of essentially the same phenomenon (EMEL, 2014).

In North America, ‘Media literacy’ has a longer tradition from the early 20th century and the dawn of popular radio onwards (Rowe, 2014). In the US the terms ‘Media education’ and ‘Media literacy’ cross over one another and are used interchangeably by leading figures in the field (see, for example, Hobbs, 2014) but all point to an enlarged and media-centric curriculum for all citizens, even as it is harder to envisage it happening consistently across such large areas in a distributed and regionally regulated system. However, one thing which these definitions and others around the world have in common (e.g. Wilson et al., 2011), is that their agenda extends from understanding media texts to a protectionist rhetoric around wider e-safety and stretches to encompass claims for e-citizenship as an enhanced, positive, media-led and supported version of participation in democracy. The UNESCO curriculum is a key example of this whilst studies have shown that by itself, new media, including social media, affords little in the way of actual civic participation except under very specific circumstances (Banaji et al., 2009).

In the case of the term ‘Digital literacy’ there are very many recent instances and multiple points of origin, from the education technology agenda through the e-safety agenda. It has generally been taken up in connection with ‘new technologies’, ‘educational technology’, ‘technology enhanced learning’ and other related branches of study and play. In most cases, this seems to refer to the skills connected with using technology is used to gain access to information as well as to assess its usefulness and provenance. In its Wikipedia definition the range and scope of the term is expanded exponentially to the point of including almost everything else within the umbrella term. There is little of the ‘cultural’ represented here though, nor even the various words listed previously, and most of it seems to refer only to its instrumentalist properties, and its relationship to the software and hardware of new technologies. We will see in chapter 3 how this is accounted for in a slightly different way in emergent work on literacies and sociomateriality. For now, though it appears that ‘Digital

literacy' shares some common ground with some definitions of 'Media literacy', in most versions of this term the social and cultural life of digital texts and practices is downplayed at the expense of emphasising the technological. Because of this it has become, to an extent, a politically expedient way of attempting to generate interest in an intellectual and educational programme which incorporates new technologies and new media. The reason for this, perhaps, is the fact that it does not have the negative connotations of the word 'media' which appear to be politically difficult for some to use; 'media' is after all, a school and academic subject which is frequently mocked and discredited in some public commentary in England (for a useful, short article exploring the arguments see Buckingham, 2009). We shall see in a later chapter how the relatively new computing curriculum in England avoids the word media by referring to 'digital texts', and, useful though this is for teachers who would like to access the modes and means of contemporary communication with their students, it is, of course, no substitute for a complete media education programme for children and young people.

More recently still, in a convergence of ideas and concepts with some of the more deterministic and educational technology orientated discourses, a freelance educational consultant Doug Belshaw has written about 'Digital Literacies' (his plural) which makes an argument for further additions to the Bill Green 3-d model of literacy discussed above, employing eight words which convey the changing nature of communicative skills and dispositions in the context of the connected nature of contemporary digital literacy practices: *Cultural, Cognitive, Constructive, Communicative, Confident, Creative, Critical, Civic* (Belshaw, 2014, pp.44-45). This neat but expansive set of words does encapsulate at least some of the life of digital and media texts and sets out a possible useful programme for educators to think about. Somewhere in the DNA of this framework is a concern for many of the issues raised by writers from the disciplines of media literacy, media education and cultural studies and yet its origins in commissioned work for the Mozilla technology foundation sees it operationalised in a way which sits at odds with the ways in which media literacy and media education has been discussed and argued over some decades in detail in the work of David Buckingham, Renee Hobbs and others. In other words, it is neither argued from the cultural studies nor traditional perspectives but contains many persuasive elements which, if nothing else suggest that the practice of digital literacies must be agentic and fluidly.

Can there even be such a thing as a vision of a critical digital literacy, one which does not simply allow the word 'digital' to provide a techno-centric gloss on a range of sweeping and fundamental shifts in our understanding of what it is to be literate? In one possible set of responses to this question Luci Pangrazio provides a detailed review of the terrain, exploring a number of complementary and occasionally contradictory positions. She notes that 'Defining what is meant by digital literacy ... has proven complicated, as the spaces, texts and tools which contextualise such practices are constantly changing.' (Pangrazio, 2014, p.2). She argues that this is why the brush strokes of some commentators are broad and sweeping and often without much nuance or criticality, focused on instrumental rather than ideological skill sets.

Where can we turn to find new critical theory in literacy which is located in fields which are not purely text-based, nor debating the cultural and political at a surface level? Emergent and interesting ways to account for literacy practices in the digital age which are cognisant of bodies, space, artefacts, systems and the *performance* of literacy in the context of digital media are starting to be made in the fields of Sociomateriality, (im)materiality and fractionality (Dezuanni, 2015, Burnett and Merchant, 2014). The rich descriptions of classrooms and after-school clubs, employing the language of the language of fractionality and materiality arguably point to a significant new turn in literacy studies which is focused on practices and

performance. In these circumstances literacy studies returns to an almost anthropological view, telling stories of artefactual versions of sociomateriality, layered with aspects of actor-network theory (Latour, 2005, Law, 2004) and these are themes to which we will return in future chapters devoted to unpacking them in the context of digital making and digital curation.

‘Dynamic literacies’

The literacies we have considered - *Digital literacy, Multimodal literacy, Sociomaterial literacy, Media literacy*, and more - are they not all in some way *dynamic*? And could we see them as subsets of an overarching ideological set of ‘dynamic literacies’ with distinct traditions which, nevertheless, frame a genuine attempt to account for the changes to the ways in which meaning is made in the digital age? Some are undeniably social, technological and cultural frames (media literacy, digital literacy, sociomateriality), whilst others are concerned with the design of texts made up of different semiotic resources in a range of modes (multimodal literacy). All share the basic tenet of responding to changes to the way we think about making and sharing meanings in the course of living, and ultimately learning, with digital media. All therefore share the quality of being *dynamic* resisting static, fixed positions on what literacy can and cannot be in the 21st century. This is not to say that they are essentially the same, because they most certainly are not, and many do not share cultural or even critical perspectives in common. Their starting points are different, but the historical circumstances under which they have arisen are the same: the screen has emerged from its place as a medium of distribution in the corner of a room and has entered social and material life in ways which were inconceivable in times gone by. This rapid dynamic in material culture and lived experience has spawned a parallel dynamic set of literacies which are all in some way ideological, recognising that literacy is bound to context and to the means of production and reading of texts. These new media texts are different, the artefacts are different, and the social arrangements which pertain to them both are utterly changed (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006) and we must add to this the fact that *literacy* as a means for describing these changes has also changed.

Why might this be important as a unifying concept? Because conceptions of literacies with a sociocultural emphasis can fail to focus on important aspects of text and design, on the ways in which meanings are shared and read. On the other hand, literacies which focus solely on text and design run the risk of failing to pay attention to important aspects of lived, aesthetic and embodied experience (Leander and Frank, 2006, Burn, 2009, Dezuanni, 2015). Bringing them together in this way may be a useful and productive way to explore literacies and learning.

In the diagram in Fig. 1 we have brought sociocultural and semiotic literacies together in the same frame. Those above the line are emergent literacies which are sociocultural in nature, located in the spaces, actions and practices of digital media. Those below the line are semiotic, focused on text and design, the changing nature of both in the context of the screen and digital media. Both sets belong in the same space and on a continuum between a vision for literacy and a set of pedagogical responses and actions. These are our overarching groupings for ‘dynamic literacies’ and our frame of reference for including wider digital culture and lived experience in pedagogical practices which will be elaborated in different contexts of digital media, culture and education in the chapters which follow.

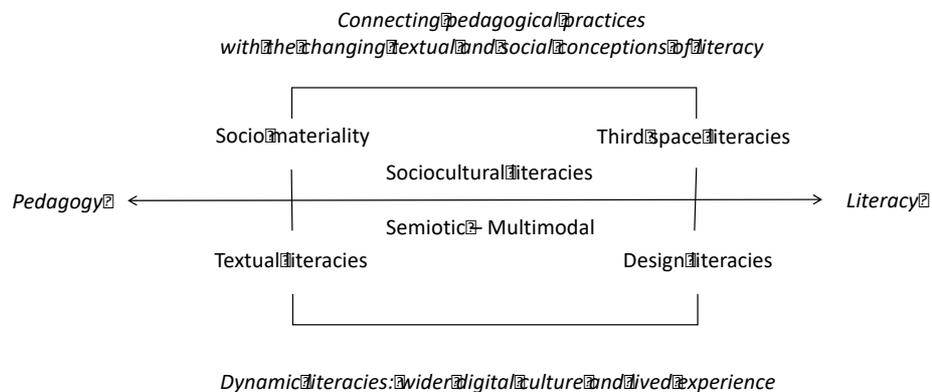


Fig.2.1 Dynamic literacies and pedagogical practices

Of course, it could be argued that *literacy* has *always* been dynamic and responsive to changes in technologies and practices (Ong, 1982). However, the accelerated nature of these changes in the late 20th and early 21st century and the cultural dissonance which arises from the static nature of systems around them, such as those in neoliberal educational assessment driven models, make for challenging and unresolved tensions. Because of their response to societal change, their inherently ideological approach and their design for inclusivity for all forms of communication, it seems to us that the word *dynamic* is a useful way to bracket together the conceptions of literacy we have discussed, from the sociomaterial and (im)material, to the multimodal and semiotic. If we do this of course, having argued above that there is a symbiotic connection between literacy and pedagogy, we need to think about a response to conceptions of *dynamic literacies* which connects back to pedagogy and to systems for learning, formally and informally. Both the textual and sociocultural sets of definitions contribute to the push and pull on teaching and learning in a system, especially one which operates at a time of such rapid change in the artefacts, texts and arrangements around digital media. We therefore need to account for those practices and arrangements which inhere in literacy events in the widest sense, whilst at the same time acknowledging the actual physicality of the screen, its place in embodied arrangements, in other words, we should be concerned with the *sociomateriality* of the digital. How might these events which take place on screen, between social actors and artefacts in a range of locations become part of the pedagogical frame? What kinds of things might people do? What kinds of interactions are possible formally organised spaces? Do we need to start thinking about other kinds of (third) spaces? And where does the term ‘dynamic literacies’ fit into the argument?

Beginning with the final question above, ‘dynamic literacies’ first came to our attention as a term when it arose out of a seminar series run by Prof Pål Aarsand at Trondheim University. At that point Aarsand was attempting to develop work in the field which explores this possibility using the term ‘Dynamic Literacies’ to group together the approaches as they embark on studies in pedagogical practice, making the connection between a conception of

literacy and pedagogy stronger. Indeed, this is now the subject of some curriculum development at Trondheim. A recent course there in ‘Dynamic literacies’ is described as follows:

‘...we will pay attention to dilemmas, tensions, challenges and changes that can be identified in studies of literacies. To illustrate what could be seen as multimodal and dynamic aspects of literacies, the focus will be directed to media literacy practices and related to phenomena such as learning, identity, and agency. Anchored in a sociocultural perspective, it has been claimed that literacy is situated. This raises questions: What is literacy? Can literacy be any kind of competence with regard to reading, understanding and writing texts in its broad sense? Different prefixes put to ‘literacy’ indicate that this is the case. These, for instance are: digital literacy, media literacy, visual literacy, information literacy, and multi-literacy. Viewing literacy as situated has actualised, among others, the notions of time, place and mobility. How do we capture literacy practices that seem to appear across different activities? How can this be studied?’
(Aarsand, 2015).

We would argue further that *Dynamic literacies* is a term which is both *synchronic*, inclusive of current situated practices, and *diachronic*, a term which opens the possibility of movement through time as an incorporated principle. It holds within it several of the terms mentioned above, but has its own momentum as a sharp contrast with the static nature of the literacy of ‘the basics’, of performative systems. In other words, it is aligned more closely with the ideological version of literacy because it suggests that literacy is always context-bound and contingent. For the moment, it is a necessary additional term which stands for a version of literacy which is usefully inclusive of various other liminal, spatial and technological literacies gathered together in the NLS. More than this, it provides an immediate contrast with the static nature of curriculum and assessment design for literacy in many performative systems. Elsewhere we will argue that reform of the curriculum to take account of dynamic literacies in an agentive and inclusive way, is a prerequisite to addressing inequality and disconnections in educational settings. We will also see how, in the chapters which follow, these concepts are related to a number of current positions around ‘networked learning’ and ‘porous expertise’ in digital media and education.

