10 Literacy Socialization

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Introduction

The presence and influence of written signs in contemporary Western cultures is widespread, and in fact so pervasive that it often passes unnoticed (Todorov 1990 [1978]). While living in environments saturated with written signs that require multiple forms of engagement with text, we tend to perceive reading and writing as simple and straightforward decoding and encoding processes. This perspective on literacy permeates the popular media. It also bears witness to a scholarly conceptualization of reading and writing as decontextualized tools that was only recently criticized and debunked.

This chapter engages with reading and writing research in the language socialization tradition to illuminate the multifarious ways in which literacy is implicated in broader sociocultural processes. The paradigm of language socialization posits that learning to read and write implies not only the acquisition of a set of cognitive and motor skills but also cultural apprenticeship into a community’s values, social positions, and identities, which are associated with locally shaped literacy practices (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Bourdieu’s notion of habitus is employed in the language socialization tradition to highlight the historical and cultural nature of literacy practices (Kulick and Schieffelin 2004; Sterponi 2007a). Thus, rather than conceiving of reading and writing as decoding and encoding skills, we are compelled to think of a literacy habitus, a set of historically contingent and culturally situated organizing principles that shape individual involvement with text.

In this chapter, I trace the shift from theorizing literacy as a decontextualized technology to situated accounts of reading and writing practices. In addition, I examine the historical roots and ideological underpinnings of literacy instruction, from kindergarten and early grades to higher education and academia. In the last
section of the chapter, I present an ethnographic study of spontaneous reading activities in two elementary-school classrooms to shed light on the surreptitious mechanisms that bring about variations and transformations in literacy practices.

**Shifting Notions of Literacy: From ‘Great Divide’ Theories to Situated Perspectives on Reading and Writing**

Reflections on the impact of forms of inscription on individuals and societies can be traced back to antiquity. Plato formulated his perspective in *Phaedrus*, expressing it via the pharaoh Thamus when Theut, the alleged inventor of writing, presents his creation to him. After a brief preface that praises the supposed advantages of Theut’s invention, which would allow storage of a great amount of information, Thamus expresses his deep concern (Plato 2005: 275a–b):

> If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks. What you have discovered is a recipe not for memory, but for reminder. And it is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance, for by telling them of many things without teaching them you will make them seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing, and as men filled, not with wisdom, but with the conceit of wisdom, they will be a burden to their fellows.

The pharaoh/Plato is concerned that writing will decrease the capacities of the human mind and change the practices of knowledge acquisition, removing novices from the key relationship with their teacher.

In the eighteenth century, modes of textual transmission and forms of writing came to be linked to major changes in the development of the human mind and to the progress of nations and peoples. For example, Vico in his *Scienza Nuova* (1999 [1725]) identified three stages in the evolution of all societies and linked each period with a particular type of language and writing system. The third and most advanced epoch, the age of men, is characterized by the introduction of alphabetic writing, which in turn makes possible abstract thinking. Furthermore, according to Vico, the replacement of a great number of signs (in logographic systems) with a few letters representing the various linguistic sounds breaks the clergy’s and aristocrats’ monopoly on knowledge to increase individual freedom and to promote equal access to information and the law.

In the twentieth century, scholars from different disciplines reconsidered and further articulated arguments about the impact of literacy on human cognition and cultural tradition. In 1963, anthropologist Jack Goody and literary critic Ian Watt published a now classic essay, ‘The consequences of literacy’ (1963). Therein the two scholars put forth a conception of literacy as an intellectual tool that, by
creating a distance between the word and its referent, yields abstract thinking. More broadly, Goody and Watt argued that the invention of the alphabet brought about basic transformations in the approach to and transmission of knowledge. In particular, they contended that the inception of alphabetic literacy afforded distinctions between (1) myth and history, (2) opinion and truth, and (3) group cohesiveness and individuality. This chapter will not review these assumed key changes in detail, but it is important to note that literacy is taken as the organizing principle of large-scale periodizations in human history and of fundamental distinctions between literate and nonliterate societies.

Goody and Watt’s literacy thesis was echoed by classic, historical, and psychological scholarship. Walter Ong (1982) concerned himself with communicative modalities and proposed a set of distinctive characteristics of oral and written cultures. Oral culture, according to Ong, is conservative and traditionalist: it centers on the figures of wise old men, who have the privilege and responsibility of holding (mnemonically) and transmitting (orally) the cultural patrimony of the community. In addition, orality fosters not only activities but also personality structures that are oriented toward communal and participatory experience. With writing, Ong claimed, human consciousness is enhanced to an unprecedented and unsurpassed extent. Writing restructures thought, fosters reflection, heightens accuracy in the treatment of information, and favors greater individuality. While attributing major and straightforward consequences of (alphabetic) literacy to thinking and social dynamics, Ong’s theorization also highlights interaction and mutual influences between orality and literacy. For instance, Ong pointed out that the inception of writing did not reduce orality but enhanced it, making possible the development and systematization of the principles of oratory and the art of rhetoric.¹

Some theorists have argued for a fundamental divide between literate and nonliterate societies, emphasizing the cognitive and conceptual implications of reading and writing. Notably, psychologist David Olson (1977) linked abstraction, metacognitive awareness, and logical and ideational thinking to alphabetic literacy (see also Greenfield 1972; Luria 1976). In fact, Olson contended that literate culture did not attain its full potential until well after the invention of the alphabet: the transition ‘from utterance to text’ (Olson 1977) – which makes it possible for language to be used unambiguously, separately from the circumstances of production and independent from context – was achieved only in the seventeenth century, when the Protestant Reformation’s orientation toward the scriptures as autonomous text extended to a wider range of written materials and genres.² At the same time in England the Royal Society formulated a set of norms for the production of writing that included employment of definitions, explicit premises, and formal rules of logic enabling sentences ‘to have only one interpretation’ (Olson 1977: 270).

While the belief that literacy brought about individual and societal advancement is still widespread in the popular media, ‘great divide’ theories have been a target of critiques since the 1970s. Scholars in a variety of fields, including anthropologists, folklorists, historians, linguists, and psychologists, have rejected
the conception of literacy as a technology and the idea of a big divide between spoken and written language practices. They have challenged on numerous grounds the claimed consequences of the invention of the alphabet: historical material from ancient India and China offers counter-evidence of a causal link between alphabetic literacy and historiography, and between alphabetic literacy and discernment regarding beliefs and empirical corroboration (Gough 1968). Contemporary research on nonliterate peoples shows that they have richly developed philosophies of language and metalinguistic discourse (Finnegan 1988a, 1988b) and that they practice introspection and individual critical reflection (Akinnaso 1992; Finnegam 1988b).

One of the most compelling and influential critiques of the great divide perspective comes from cultural psychologists Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole. They found among the Vai people of Liberia the ideal context in which to assess whether cognitive consequences can be ascribed to literacy, and in particular to test the idea that only alphabetic literacy enables abstraction and analytic thinking (Scribner and Cole 1981). In the Vai community three literacy traditions coexisted, each related to a different language and script (Arabic, English, and Vai—the first two having alphabetic writing systems and the Vai script being a syllabary), distinct social activities, and separate institutions. Because different Vai subgroups were differently acquainted with the three languages and scripts, Scribner and Cole were able to evaluate the effects of different literacy experiences on people’s cognitive skills. They found no generalizable consequences of alphabetic literacy for cognition, and only literacy-specific effects on distinct task-specific skills. For example, individuals a few years into Qur’anic schooling obtained high scores on incremental recall tests.

In lieu of examining the technology of writing systems or literacy as a monological phenomenon, Scribner and Cole proposed a situated account that conceives of literacy as ‘a set of socially organized practices’ (Scribner and Cole 1981: 236). Practices of literacy are various and highly differentiated, and to be literate means not only knowing how to read and write a particular script but also how to employ this ability for specific purposes in specific contexts.

Such a situated perspective on literacy has been further developed by anthropologist Brian Street, who posed an ‘ideological model’ of reading and writing that foregrounded the sociocultural matrix and the political and economic conditions that shape any literacy practice (Street 1984, 1993) (in contrast to the traditional view of reading and writing referred to as the ‘autonomous model’ of literacy). Street tested the analytic purchase of his model by considering the literacy landscape of the Mashad area in northeastern Iran, where he conducted fieldwork in the 1970s. Among the people who inhabited the area, Street witnessed the co-presence and interaction of different literacies, each inextricably associated with distinct social institutions, power relationships, and practical and ideological goals. Reading and writing in the maktabs, or religious schools, differed from the commercial language used by the traders in managing transactions and exchanges of goods with other villages or the city of Mashad. Yet another set of practices and meanings developed with the introduction of state-school literacy. Further, Street
noticed that those who had been educated at the maktab and then engaged in commerce were able to adapt the literacy skills they had acquired in the religious context to the needs of their profession. In contrast, newly literate youths trained in state schools did not transfer their literacy skills to trading. Street employed notions of ideology and social relations to explain this opposite outcome, ultimately arguing that political and ideological forces are inherent in all literacy practices (Street 1984: 8).

The idea that literacy is a social practice, historically contingent, culturally organized, and ideologically shaped, is the grounding assumption and motivation of the trend of ethnographic studies of literacy known as New Literacy Studies. Since its emergence in the early 1980s, this school of thought has produced detailed descriptions of particular literacy events (e.g. Messick 1993; Sarroub 2002; Shuman 1986) and more comprehensive examinations of literacy practices in focal communities (e.g. Barton and Hamilton 1998; Besnier 1995; Reder and Green 1983). Both types of analysis have contributed to our understanding of the heterogeneous ways in which people engage with text and the multiple meanings of reading and writing in different contexts. In addition, New Literacy Studies has shed light on the embedding of these activities in broader communicative repertoires, on the role of literacy in identity formation and group dynamics, and on the relationship between power and the ability to access and produce written texts. The following section discusses these issues in the process of literacy socialization in school and out-of-school contexts.

Learning to Read and Write

Shirley Brice Heath’s (1983) classic ethnographic study in the Piedmont Carolinas documented the ways in which young children are apprenticed to make meaning with words in three communities. Heath found that the white working-class community of Roadville, the black working-class community of Trackton, and the mixed-race middle-class community of Maintown differed in their assumptions about and expectations of young children, in patterns of language use among children and adults, and in the ways adults were oriented toward written texts and children were introduced to literacy.

Heath’s study analyzed how children from the three communities experienced school and performed on academic tasks. Heath observed that, for Maintown children, school activities were remarkably similar to those they had practiced at home since they were infants. The questions teachers asked students were similar in kind to those frequently heard in Maintown households. The narrative style nurtured and legitimized in school showed overlapping characteristics with that employed in recounting everyday experiences at dinnertime or in bedtime storytelling. Furthermore, she found that Maintown adults used books and other literacy materials in their interactions with children as young as six months of age. As a result, Maintown children thrived in school, excelling in classroom activities and ranking consistently highly on reading tests.
In contrast, when Trackton children entered school they experienced many unfamiliar activities and communication styles: teachers asked rhetorical questions or 'what-explanation' questions, which were rarely heard in Trackton's households. At home, Trackton's children were most frequently asked analogical questions, which prompted them to draw comparisons between a focal object/person/event and something/someone else. In the classroom, Trackton children were required to listen silently while books were read to them, and the comprehension questions related to the text did not allow them to draw parallels or metaphorical links as they were used to doing in oral storytelling and everyday conversation. In recounting what they had read, Trackton children were not encouraged to employ their ability to embellish tales with original fictionalized elements; nor were they allowed to proceed non-linearly in the presentation of chains of events. Thus, for Trackton children school presented multiple challenges. Teachers were often unaware of these challenges, misunderstanding the children's different communication style and approach to literacy as resistance or cognitive weakness. In most cases, therefore, Trackton children lagged behind and dropped out of school or became disengaged well before their analogical and creative skills could be fruitfully used in text-related school activities.

Roadville children experienced easy entry to school, where they were asked to perform tasks their caregivers had already been apprenticing them in. Roadville children were used to sitting still and being read to aloud, as this classroom activity paralleled the reading of Bible stories at home. They were also prepared to answer 'what-explanation' questions, which were very similar to the factual questions adults in Roadville asked children, both in the context of moral narratives and in Bible reading. When, however, the teacher presented extra-credit activities – tasks requiring a more creative take on texts, personal commentary, or exploring an imaginary realm – the Roadville children's performance declined. Such activities were indeed not practiced or approved in Roadville households. As a consequence, these children experienced increasing difficulties after the early primary grades, and by fourth grade they were most often found in the low-achieving group.

Heath's study played a pivotal role in revealing how language and literacy learning is embedded in the broader process of becoming a competent member of a community. It also showed that tensions may result from the encounter between certain ideological orientations toward oral and written language and contrasting literacy habitudes.

Ethnographic studies carried out in newly literate communities have further illuminated frictions and transformations brought about by the introduction of literacy (see e.g. Dyer and Chksi 2001; Kulick and Stroud 1990; Schieffelin 2000). Duranti and Ochs (1986) examined literacy instruction in a traditional village in (Western) Samoa, showing how, through learning to read and write, Samoan children were also socialized to expectations and dynamics of adult–child relationships and task accomplishment that differed from those typical of their native community. Thus, literacy acquisition for Samoan children had far more encompassing effects than mastering a script receptively and productively: it engendered transformations in social identity and relationships. Briefly, in the village
of Falefa, children as young as three or four were introduced to formal instruction when they began attending the pastor’s school. There they learn the alphabet and basic decoding in order to recite passages from the Bible. (Older children were also instructed on how to interpret those passages.) Literacy materials (e.g., the alphabet table) were filled with ‘Western’ images and indexes of an orientation rather distant from the traditional Samoan lifestyle. Further, the pedagogical procedures employed by the pastor/instructor differed from those used by Samoan caregivers. Whereas at school children were exposed to simplifying actions and partitioning of the task to reduce the cognitive load, at home, simplification and other forms of accommodation to children were rare as Samoan caregivers assigned greater responsibility for learning to the child. Moreover, in literacy instruction children were often praised individually for succeeding in a task. The effort and support of the instructor, arguably key to the child’s success on the task, were not acknowledged. The emphasis on individual achievement was remarkably different from the traditional Samoan orientation that foregrounded the social and collaborative nature of most everyday pursuits. Thus, in the course of becoming literate, young Samoan children were socialized to attitudes toward themselves and others that were typical among the Western missionaries. Beyond the acquisition of decoding and comprehension skills needed to read the Bible and cultivate their Christian faith, Samoan children were socialized into worldviews and interactional patterns that prepared them to enter and contribute to a Western economy and labor market.

Literacy is also often deeply implicated in gender socialization. Linguistic anthropologist Ayala Fader has described the markedly different paths of literacy acquisition for boys and girls in a Hasidic community in Brooklyn in the mid-1990s (Fader 2001). While boys spent their entire school day acquiring literacy in liturgical Hebrew and Yiddish and studying religious texts, girls were from first grade introduced to English language and literacy and to secular subjects. In this way, literacy instruction contributed to socializing boys and girls to distinct roles and activities within and across the community boundaries. There was not, however, a simple one-to-one differentiation: while girls’ fluency in English was strongly associated with their role as mediator between the community and the secular world – a role that girls considered to be important and proudly took on to allow their brothers and fathers to focus exclusively on Torah study – they were also pressed to maintain their fluency in Yiddish. Literacy materials and activities contributed to mitigating this tension and shifting the ideology of English from a gentile language to a language that could convey Hasidic values too: in the school library and neighborhood bookstores, new books for Hasidic children and young adolescents were available. These books had been written in English and had orthodox Jewish peers as protagonists. The narratives promoted an orthodox Jewish lifestyle and worldview. In this way, on the one hand literacy activities played an important role in an early gender socialization that inculcated essentialized differences between girls and boys; on the other, they deflected the tension that using a secular language could bring to an orthodox community.
Ideologies of Text and Literacy Instruction

The theoretical concepts outlined above enable us to critically examine school-based literacy practices, from kindergarten and early grades to higher education and academia. They allow us to identify the ideological and institutional underpinnings that shape literacy instruction and inform schooled reading and writing activities. In other words, we can analyze the modes of production and reception of the written word that dominate educational institutions as products of a historically evolved textual ideology, one that began to emerge at the inception of the modern age (Chartier 1994; Foucault 1977; Trimbur 1990).

In the field of literacy studies, such orientation toward the production and reception of text is usually referred to as 'essayist literacy.' Essayist literacy treats written text as explicit and self-contained representation of meaning. Such a textual orientation is in turn grounded in the assumption that written language is transparent — eminently literal and referential (Collins 1996; Cook-Gumperz 1986; de Castell and Luke 1983; Olson 1977; Scollon and Scollon 1981).

This perspective has implications for our understanding of current pedagogic practices as well as ideals of academic literacy: reading and writing are treated as distinct, decomposable, and quantifiable skills. In the early grades they are taught as a uniform, generalizable, and context-independent set of technical abilities (Gee 1996; Luke and Baker 1991). Students are invited to think of their reading activity as decoding words and sentences, or in the most difficult cases as deciphering the hidden meaning that is there on the page waiting to be apprehended. Writing in turn consists of rendering the intended (singular) meaning through unambiguous, self-contained language (Luke 1992).

Deborah Poole’s (2008) study of fifth-grade reading groups offers convincing evidence of the dominance of essayist literacy as orientation to text explicitly taught or implicitly legitimized in the classroom. Poole focuses on two central characteristics of essayist literacy, decontextualization and componentiality, and delineates linguistic and interactional patterns that instantiate such an orientation to text: (1) the students’ turns at reading aloud, which are orchestrated by the teacher and render the text as a collection of distinct segments; (2) the question-and-answer sequences following reading-aloud cycles, which are mostly centered on the text so that the student is expected to respond by identifying text segments that match the wording used in the teacher’s question; and (3) the teacher’s favoring of short and self-contained responses over longer and more complex ones.

A similar orientation to text and instructional strategies has been found by James Collins (1996) in third-grade reading lessons. The extensive teacher focus on dialect correction during reading-aloud cycles attests to the fact that ‘the text is treated as an object of faithful utterance’ (1996: 208). In addition, the most frequent teacher comprehension queries and student answers illustrate a concentration on factual knowledge of the text rather than possible multiple meanings and interpretations.

Focusing on reading literature rather than essays, and on higher education rather than early school grades, Michael Warner (2004) has highlighted
comparable ideological underpinnings of the modes of engagement with text that are cultivated and legitimized in academia. In particular, Warner considers the chief pedagogical goal of English departments across the United States to be ‘critical reading,’ framing it as one (but not the only) mode of engagement with text and placing it in a history of textual practices. In literature classes, however, critical reading is taught as the appropriate mode for apprehending texts; alternative reading habits are discouraged (2004: 13). Warner provocatively asks whether there are any other kinds of engagement with text, besides critical reading, that can or should be taught in college classes (2004: 16):

But what if it isn’t true, as we suppose, that critical reading is the only way to suture textual practice with reflection, reason, and normative discipline of subjectivity? If we begin to understand critical reading not simply as the coming-into-reflexivity of reading, but as a very special set of form relationships, then it might be easier to recognize rival modes of reading and reflections on reading as something other than pretheoretically uncritical.

One of Warner’s main points is that critical reading is ‘the folk ideology of a learned profession, so close to us that we seldom feel the need to explain it’ (2004: 14). He also points out that, despite strict censoring and meticulous inculcation practices, college readers do in fact engage with texts in ways other than those included in the official curriculum.

Similarly, Poole (2008) observed that fifth-grade students also related to text in ways that departed from the teacher-imparted and -orchestrated essayist mode: especially when they focused on text illustrations, students employed ‘a more situationally contextualized and personal form of language’ (2008: 400). Poole’s analysis showed that this alternative approach to the text ‘afforded opportunities for more complex expression and extensive interactional involvement with the curricular topic’ (2008: 401). The illustration-oriented sequences were longer and included more student initiations and fewer teacher-led IRE exchanges than text-oriented sequences. In general, the talk students produced in the illustration-oriented sequences was also more nuanced and less scripted: for instance, hypothetical constructions and metacognitive expressions were more frequently produced when children were focusing on images.

**Alternative Literacies**

A number of studies of reading and writing activities in educational contexts attest to the existence of unofficial literacy practices – that is, modes of engagement with texts that diverge from the scripted curriculum or flout the rules of cultural orthodoxy (Dyson 1993; Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson 1995).

In newly literate communities, the ways in which individuals actively and creatively adapt reading and writing to their own goals is sometimes particularly noticeable (Besnier 1995). Don Kulick and Christopher Stroud (1990), for instance,
observed that the villagers of Gapun, Papua New Guinea, perceived and used literacy according to their own cultural concerns, primarily linked to a ‘cargo-oriented’ worldview: as soon as Gapuners acquired rudimentary literacy skills from the Catholic missionaries, they most often used them to compose letters to obtain cargo or worldly goods. Even when Gapun children began attending a government-run grammar school — where the language of instruction was English and the texts were not religious — the newly available language and reading materials were interpreted within a millenarian framework as powerful resources to connect with spiritual beings and obtain an abundance of material possessions. Thus, the aims of the agencies that introduced literacy to Gapuners remained largely marginal to them.

In the classroom, researchers have witnessed the tension between the literacy curriculum and children’s spontaneous reading and writing activities (Dyson 2001; Gilmore 1986). Children’s appropriation of literacy materials and use of newly acquired coding and decoding skills often depart from those prescribed in the curriculum and promoted by the teacher. An ethnographic and analytic discourse study of children’s clandestine interactional reading is used in what follows to shed light on the interface between the acquisition of a normative reading habitus and the tactical operations that produce its clandestine transformations (see also Sterponi 2007a).

**Reading habitus and clandestine reading**

In the early 2000s I conducted a study of children’s reading activities in two classrooms, one second grade and one third grade, in an elementary school in southern California, for the duration of an academic year. Approximately 45 hours of video recordings document the reading activities practiced in the two classrooms. I integrated the video-recorded data with daily fieldnotes, which provide additional information about the classrooms’ micro-culture, implementation of curricular goals, and daily decision-making by the teachers.

The reading pedagogy in the classrooms I observed promoted individual silent reading as the preferred mode of engagement with text and the ultimate goal of reading instruction. Twenty minutes of independent silent reading followed the children’s lunch break every day. In addition, the children visited the library once a week and were invited to circulate independently in order to select books to borrow and bring to class or take home (for individual reading). Teacher-led group story time also occurred regularly in the classrooms, although less frequently than individual silent reading. The official reading practices in the classrooms mirrored a reading ideology dominant in the popular media and education campaigns, one that frames reading as an individual, invariable, and often decontextualized activity. In my observations, however, children displayed a preference for collaborative involvement with text and organized complex interactive reading events, usually surreptitiously. When they were brought to the library, children took time from the official task of book selection to gather in small groups and engage in collective reading. Even in the classroom, children used peripheral areas, corners, or
the space under the desks to elude the teacher’s surveillance, share and compare books, and read them together.

The structure and organization of children’s interactional reading episodes were remarkably different from other reading or instructional activities orchestrated by the teacher. The participant roles assigned by the teacher to different students during group story time (e.g. primary reader, audience, commentator) were not explicitly taken up by the children engaged in interactional reading, nor did they remain the same throughout the joint-reading episode. Most frequently, the children created a symmetric arena and all participants treated each other as readers and audience. Moreover, peers’ interactional reading often involved more than one book at a time. Children usually selected texts that shared themes or broad topics with the ones the other classmates had chosen. In this way they created a rich textual platform to explore together. Example 10.1 illustrates the establishment of a joint reading episode:

Example 10.1

Upon entering the library with the class, Paul follows Jeremy to the bookshelves that have books about animals. Jeremy proposes to find out if there are owls in the desert. The two boys reach the bookshelf and pull out a few books about owls.

Then they take a seat at a desk and begin reading together:

1  Paul: there are all kinds of owls here. (leafing through a book titled *About Owls*)
2  Jeremy: is there one that lives in the desert?
3  Paul: I’m not sure. Let me see.
Paul continues to leaf through the book, examining pictures and reading segments of the text. Jeremy begins silently reading another book titled *Owl Moon* (a storybook with pictures):

4 Jeremy: look how owls make their nest. ((pointing at page))

5 Paul: but that's a story.

6 Jeremy: I know but you can learn a lot from stories.

7 Paul: then we have to find a story about an owl in the desert.

In Example 10.1, Jeremy and Paul's reading activity is motivated by a specific inquiry: to learn whether there are owls in the desert. To this aim, they examine different books, primarily science texts but a book of fiction as well. Paul raises some doubts about the usefulness of consulting a storybook to address their inquiry (turn 5). Jeremy's answer indicates that he is aware of the genre distinction (turn 6). However, he argues that some trustworthy information can be gained from reading stories, not only nonfiction books.

In interactional reading, the simultaneous engagement of multiple texts both fostered and was fostered by the weaving of intertextual links. In other words, texts were not merely juxtaposed but were interpreted in light of one another. Consider Example 10.2:

**Example 10.2**

Anthony (A), Jeremy (J), Sharon (S), and Wendy (W) have arrived one by one at a desk in the library. Each of them has chosen a book and has begun reading independently. Soon Anthony attracts the others' attention through a verbal summons accompanied by a pointing gesture. It will become clear in the unfolding of the exchange (examined in the next section) that Anthony is reading a book about dogs because his family is planning to buy one:
A: ehi look. ((pointing on the page))
2 (2.8) ((Jeremy and Sharon move closer to Anthony; Wendy turns head toward Anthony's book))
3 A: I am not going to buy this.
4 J: let me see.
5 S: ugly ((looking at the page)) these are poodles=
6 J: =poodles. ((reading from the page))
7 S: [they're just so-
8 A: [I know, I- I- I read from the book that there are some ((turning to following page))
that are nice [(and)]
9 S: [nn- ((making a grimace and shaking head))
((Jeremy sits back and resumes reading his book))
10 A: but the poodles that have that- those little furry things right [there in the legs.

S: [nd then they- ((mimicking with right hand scissors cutting))
and then they get shaved ((facial expression of disgust))
12 A: e:nn. ((of disgust; flipping his hands))
13 J: how about this kind of dog? ((pointing at page))
14 (1.0) ((Anthony, Sharon, and Wendy look at the image Jeremy is pointing to))
15 J: golden retriever.
16 A: mhm, I’m not sure.
17 J: ((starts reading from his book)) These are lovable, well-mannered, intelligent dogs with a great charm. (0.2) they are easily trained, and always patient and gentle with children.
18 S: yes, they’re nice.
19 J: ((turns the page and points to text and then looks toward Anthony)) and they also love swimming.
20 W: wow, swimming?
21 J: ((turns to Wendy)) yeah.
((resumes reading pointing to text)) these dogs also love to swim.

Anthony’s book, left flat open on the desk, offers the other participants space in which to maneuver: Jeremy and Sharon can access the text directly to see the breed of dog indicated by their classmate (turns 5–6). Then, through talk and iconic gestures, Anthony and Sharon ‘sketch’ an additional picture, juxtaposing it to the one offered in the text (turns 8–12). Drawing from the text and their previous knowledge, they co-construct, through language, prosody, gestures, and facial expressions, a negative evaluation of the target of attention. In this way, Anthony and Sharon jointly create a multivocal text in which the authorial voice is animated and put into dialogue with their own voices as readers. At this point, Jeremy intervenes again (turn 13), inviting the others’ gaze to the book he has been reading. Jeremy’s verbal accompaniment to the pointing gesture provides an interpretive frame for the action that he is soliciting gesturally: the participants are not merely invited to look at a picture, but also to look at it in relation to Anthony’s book and as an illustration of a possible alternative to the object previously examined and assessed. In other words, Jeremy’s contribution outlines an intertextual link, thereby expanding Anthony and Sharon’s analysis and inviting further reading and commentary. In order to convince Anthony that golden retrievers are good dogs, Jeremy proceeds to read an excerpt from his book, which gives a very positive description of the breed.

This sequence brings to light some of the ways in which the children I observed engaged with texts and made sense of them. The co-construction of intertextual links as well as the engagement of prior knowledge and personal experience were among the most frequent and effective comprehension strategies the children employed.

The active readership exercised by children in clandestine interactional reading emerged also in the form of interpretive double-voicing or double-voiced reading: the young readers actively engaged in dialogue with the text and produced a reading/interpretation that was internally dialogized – that is, one that acknowledged the
authorial voice while actively and creatively accentuating or refracting it with their own intention (Bakhtin 1981).

In Example 10.3 we observe Jason, Luca, and Nate engaged in reading together a book on the solar system (while also leafing through another text on the Earth and planetary geology). Jason reads aloud portions of the text, specifically a section on Galileo. His reading is punctuated by pauses that allow Luca and Nate, but also Jason himself, to offer commentaries on the text. These commentaries often both animate the authorial voice and challenge it:

Example 10.3

1 J: ((reading from the page)) Galileo’s father, who let him stay up late to look at the sky (0.8) filled with (1.0) thousands of stars, couldn’t answer all the boy’s questions.

2 N: let me see. ((getting closer to the open book)) what questions?

3 J: ((reading)) what are they made of? Galileo cried. where did they come from? His father (1.0) laughed. Always asking questions aren’t you?

4 (2.0) ((the boys laugh))

5 J: ((reading)) Galileo was a very good student in school

6 L: he was a troublemaker. ((smiling voice)) (0.2) always asking questions ((giggles))

7 J: ((giggles)) always looking at the sky

In this segment of the interactional reading episode, the boys first display an understanding of and alignment with the authorial voice, when they laugh together (line 4). In a sense the boys are laughing with Galileo’s father, thereby ratifying the authorial stance. However, after Jason’s reading of the author’s assessment of Galileo’s success as a student (turn 5), Luca juxtaposes a different interpretation of Galileo’s behavior at school, one that challenges the authorial
stance (turn 6). Jason promptly aligns with Luca’s perspective using a parallel construction but proposing a different image of Galileo the student, one of a daydreamer with his head always in the clouds. This excerpt illustrates the multivocal character of peers’ interactional reading: the textual voices were animated in different ways, interwoven with one another, and punctuated by the readers’ own voices.

In summary, this study shows that, as children are being socialized into a particular reading habitus, they concurrently and surreptitiously cultivate unofficial variants of the prescribed praxis. As clandestine practitioners of interactional reading, children are like de Certeau’s consumers; that is, they are ‘unrecognized producers, poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungles of functionalist rationality’ (de Certeau 1984: 34). Within the territory of a foreign power, young readers clandestinely produce their own signifying practices. Creative manipulation of the habitus is thus intermingled with the habitus’ transmission and reproduction (Bourdieu 1977).

Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed pivotal theoretical issues that have long framed and still strongly influence our thinking about texts, and about reading and writing, broadly conceived. The ‘great divide’ theorists revisited previously articulated perspectives and established the terms of debate about the nature of written language, as well as about the relationship between orality and literacy and between literacy and social and cognitive development. Situated perspectives on literacy tempered grand claims about the consequences of literacy and pluralized the term, documenting a multiplicity of reading and writing practices shaped by historical, sociocultural, ideological, and institutional circumstances and conditions. Learning to read and write is no longer seen as a matter of acquiring a set of cognitive skills afforded by neurophysiological maturation; the acquisition of coding and decoding abilities has been shown to be part of a wider process of socialization through which children come to participate in recognized practices and take on sanctioned social identities.

A language socialization perspective on literacy thus conceptualizes the acquisition of reading and writing abilities through apprenticeship in a literacy habitus, namely as a set of organizing principles that regulates individuals’ engagement with texts at the sensorimotor and the intellectual and emotional levels (Luke 1992; Sterponi 2007b). At the same time, the language socialization paradigm conceives of apprentices as agents in the social world and investigates how their actions contribute to variations in and transformations of prescribed practices.

Ethnographic research on literacy activities in school contexts has shown that, as children are socialized into a particular literacy habitus, they concurrently and surreptitiously, playfully and seriously, cultivate unofficial variants of the dominant praxis. Young apprentices in literacy operate in liminal spaces, both within
and outside institutionally defined contexts. For instance, the children's clandestine reading practice that I described in the previous section engages an institutionally valued activity while subverting its official format. In other words, while transcending the normative praxis, peer interational reading rests on resources, both material and intellectual, made available by the institutional context and through the official literacy curriculum. A deeper understanding of how literacy is concurrently implicated in empowering and limiting practices in sociocultural reproduction and transformation remains a central aim of literacy socialization research.

NOTES

1 Furthermore, Ong (1982) makes a distinction between primary oral culture, which is foreign to writing, and secondary orality, which coexists with writing and is linked to the emergence of electronic media such as telephone, radio, and television. Much like primary orality, according to Ong, secondary orality is aggregative and communal. Secondary orality, however, is a more deliberate and self-conscious practice than primary orality.

2 Luther's contention that the meaning of the scriptures did not depend on dogmas promoted an approach to text that no longer required the mediation of clerics or masters to supply the necessary context for interpretation. A more independent engagement with text was also made possible by the invention of printing, which in producing multiple copies of any work allowed a more direct and widespread access to written texts.


4 This orientation is particularly salient when the reading materials are textbooks and the written text is expository (Luke, de Castell, and Luke 1983; Trimbur 1990).

5 'Componentiability' is a (re)presentation of knowledge as constituted of discrete information units (Poole 2008).

6 In contrasting high- and low-ranked reading groups, Collins found that prescriptivism pervaded the reading activities of low-ranked children to a much greater degree than it did of high-achieving students. On the other hand, the teacher prompted and supported an interpretivist orientation with high-ranked students more frequently and systematically than with poor readers (Collins 1996).

7 A prototypical pattern of classroom interaction, an IRE sequence involves the teacher opening the exchange by asking the student a question (initiation), the student who is called on producing an answer (response), which the teacher then evaluates (evaluation) (Cazden 1988).

8 In fact, research on emergent literacy has shown that young children actively and autonomously construct their notions of how written language works long before entering school (Ferreiro and Teberosky 1982; Hiebert 1978; Pontecorvo et al. 1996).

9 All images in this chapter are reproduced from Sterponi (2007).
REFERENCES


