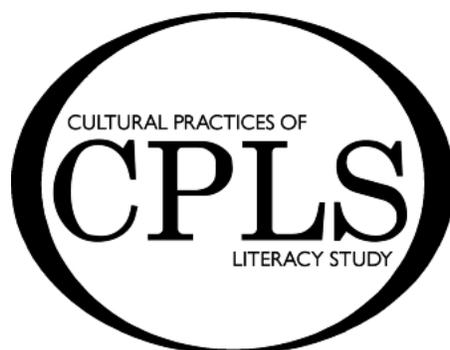


**“You Have to be Bad or Dumb to Get in Here”:  
Reconsidering  
the In-School and Out-of-School Literacy Practices of At-Risk  
Adolescents**

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“You Have to be Bad or Dumb to Get in Here”: Reconsidering the In-School and Out-of-School Literacy Practices of At-Risk Adolescents

For the last period of the day, 22 ninth graders enter the classroom, half of them looking tired and ready to take a nap, while the others already have their coats on to leave school at the end of the period. Each time they enter through the doors, the same six students run for the two couches dispersed at opposite ends of the room. The students who are not lucky enough to find a seat on the couch find themselves at one of the desks pushed together in the middle of the room, facing the whiteboard nailed to the wall at the front. These 22 students represent a diverse group of ethnic communities. They are all recognized by various school personnel as being greatly at-risk for failing and/or dropping out of school. For this reason they are placed in this particular school as an opportunity for them to "get back on track" in their schooling. The school is part of a district-wide initiative to recognize and provide a proactive intervention for the students who are on a downward path in their schooling (e.g. poor attendance, grades, behavior), and act as a springboard for their future years in high school.

As a result of this unique set-up (for adolescent students recognized as “at-risk” of dropping out), the class provided a promising context within which to address Luke’s (2003) questions for language and literacy-in-education policy:

- (1) Which linguistic competencies, discourses and textual resources, and multiliteracies are accessible?
- (2) How are these resources recognized and misrecognized, remediated and converted in school-based literacy instruction?

The purpose of the study was to explore the texts and purposes for literacy in the lives of the students who are “struggling” in a classroom at an urban school, and to come to an

understanding of how these practices come into contact with the school practices in one English classroom.

### Researcher Location

My past work in urban schools (as a teacher, tutor, and researcher) influenced and informs my interest in understanding how to reinvent the classroom experience for students who have given up on school (and on whom, quite often, school has given up). These students move from class to class, often apathetic to classroom activities, struggling to stay awake in class, and disconnected from most teachers. Such students have always interested me because, although they seemed unengaged with reading, writing, and speaking in the classroom, they seemed to be quite engaged (and adept) at reading, writing and speaking when in the hallways between classes and outside the doors of the school. This phenomenon has led me to explore the relationship between the in-school and out-of-school literacies in the lives of students (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 1998; Moje, 2002).

I had met the classroom teacher of this case study the previous year, and I was intrigued by the way he encouraged his students to engage in the curriculum by forming personal relationships and individualized instruction for the variety of interests and abilities in his classes. Therefore, for this new class, I volunteered to tutor while undertaking this research to learn more about the ways students such as these use literacy in their lives.

For two periods a day, two days a week, I served as a classroom tutor, helping students with their daily class tasks and activities. During a few of the classes, I read with from one to three students in the hallway. To the students, I was seen as a “university

tutor,” someone who cannot and would not “get them in trouble,” but who could provide a helping hand when they were struggling with their assignments.

Although I was not a teacher and wouldn’t tattle on them, my looks, role and demeanor in the classroom led them to believe I was “one of those guys”. During one of my participant interviews, one girl, in response to a question about the texts she reads in school, asked with a smile, “Besides the books that you guys give us?” Understanding that the students saw me as a tutor person in the classroom, I was aware that this role might influence the data that I would receive in the interviews. However, I felt that it was important that I be helping out when I could. When students called me over to help them with an activity, I was willing and able to provide models and suggestions for them.

#### The Case: One Classroom of “At-Risk” Adolescents

To be a student in this particular classroom was to be identified as being deficient and/or resistant of academic literacy. Constructing the students as deficient of literacy, the school’s goal was to give the students literacy tools (proper grammar, vocabulary training, essay structure, canonical texts) to succeed in future classes. This intention could be seen, as an example, in the degree and quality of the attention given to vocabulary words. In response to the district-wide pacing guides, each week the teacher listed a group of the words on the board (e.g. *discretion*, *affliction*, *reckoning*, *innocence*), and throughout the week the students would be directed to engage in a variety of activities intended to teach them the new words.

Inevitably, the students in the class concurred with this construction of deficiency. As one student explained to me so succinctly, “You have to be bad or dumb to get in here.”

*Four Focal Students*

The four focal students for this case study represented the diversity of this ninth grade urban classroom (e.g. two African-American students, one European-American student, and one Mexican-American student). Three of the four focal students attended consistently and participated in class to the extent that any of the other students in the classroom did. Alessandra (all names are pseudonyms) was one of the top students in the class. She passed in most of her work (e.g. essays, daily writing assignments) and was actively engaged in class. Self-identifying as Mexican, Alessandra was born and had lived in the same city for her entire life. She enjoys traveling with her family, and she wrote about herself in an essay, “I basically just like to be simple and have fun.” She understood school as a pathway for going to college and having a successful job.

Loving Hip Hop music and cooking, Lashon (African-American) is a mother to a one-year-old boy, and was still involved in a relationship with the father at the time of the data collection. She dreamed of getting her high school diploma, going to college, and becoming a judge, in order “to send people to jail.” She, like Alessandra, was born in the same urban city she had lived in all of her life, living with her large extended family. In class, Lashon participated when asked but she often forgot and failed to turn in her assignments.

Marshon (African-American) also refused to work on assignments, and he repeatedly told me that he dislikes reading and writing in school, especially reading aloud in class. When discussing his past school experiences, he stated that he failed to do anything last year in school. “That’s why I’m [in this class].” He would rather play role-play and video games, Monopoly™, hang out and listen to music with his friends.

Living in and out of three different homes--with her mother, father, and Grandparents--Carlee (European-American) attended class only about a quarter of the time that I was there. When she did attend class, she usually spent much of the time chatting with her friends, passing notes to her friends in class, or asking to see the nurse. When she began to read any book, she would become quickly bored. She enjoys, according to her, writing poetry and hanging out with her friends. During one of her interviews, she expressed her anxiety with her father's opposition to her dating an African-American student, something she often wrote about in her poetry. Carlee's attention to this dilemma reminds us that each of these students were actors in a variety of stories played out in a range of different social and cultural contexts through their school and non-school lives.

I selected these four students because (a) they were fairly typical of the students in the class, and (b) they were the only ones to return signed permission slips.

#### The Diversity of Out-of-School Literacy Practices of "Struggling" Adolescents

Although the students in the ninth grade English class were often seen by the school as students who were deficient in literacy, the students revealed to me the many ways in which literacy mediated their lives outside (and, in unexpected ways, inside) of school. The students reported a wide variety of reading or writing activities that were part of their everyday lives. To help them think about the texts in their lives, at various times during the interviews I prompted them with a variety of possible social domains (e.g. fashion, enrichment activities, church, sports, going to movies, hanging out with friends) in which written texts may have been involved. With this prompting, each student elaborated on a variety of texts that they considered essential and that mediated their

daily lives, as well as the vast array of social and cultural purposes for engaging in each of the literacy practices. Although there were textual commonalities among the four focal students, each of them reported diverse textual worlds.

### Literacy and Passion

What I began noticing during my time with all of the students is that they not only used literacy to navigate their everyday lives (e.g. T.V. guide, shopping lists, checking the news with newspapers), they each passionately read and wrote texts as a means of participating in activities that were entertaining, important for a means to some end, and/or for understanding one's part of their social world. Both the texts and functions of literacy for these students were determined by the activities that were structured for identifiable sociocultural purposes (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). For these students, culture-specific practices were embedded in three fluid spheres: in the home/community sphere, in the sphere of youth culture (i.e. what it means to be 15, a teenager in the city), and in the "official" sphere of the classroom. Each of these spheres, defined as social and cultural networks of social practice, provided opportunities for the students to engage in literacy for (culture-specific) sociocultural purposes. These broadly defined cultural networks of social practice generally have their own ways of participating, within a social network, with their own particular shared understandings (Dyson, 1993). A better understanding of the spheres that literacy mediates and how the students negotiate the boundaries of these different spheres, will afford literacy researchers a better understanding of the nature of literacy in the lives of adolescents youth (Moje, 2002).

"I could just sit there for hours, and write everything down." Literacy in the

### Home/Community Space

Each of the students engaged in certain literacy practices because of particular practices in place specific to some dimension of the home or community social networks. One of the activities in the home community that the students used literacy for was cooking. Marshon said that his father's friends would often tell him and his father of different ways of cooking common things, like Ramen Noodles, that he would write down and try at some point.

For Lashon, cooking was more than simply a necessary activity that she did when she came home from school everyday. Cooking was a hobby and passion of hers. While discussing her fascination with TV cooking shows, she exclaimed, "I could just sit there for hours, and write everything down." Lashon would watch shows dedicated solely to cooking, surf the Internet looking for new and innovative recipes, and follow written recipes that had been passed down in her family. One instance in which literacy mediated Lashon's passion for cooking was when, after an episode of *Emeril Live*, she became excited about the appearance of a lime cheesecake Emeril had just made. She wrote down the required ingredients for the recipe, "and made one just like how [Emeril] did." When her mother needed to work late, Lashon would step in to prepare the dinner meal for the family. This family role provided the context within which Lashon learned to cook and to enjoy it. Understanding that the family recipes were important to her and the family, Lashon created a family recipe book consisting of the many recipes that had been passed down in the family.

The networks that were sustained through the home/community sphere became a major source for literacy for these students. As pointed out by Barton and Hamilton (1998), reciprocal networks of exchange are a prime medium for literacy practice

engagement as people support and communicate with one another. Carlee used letter writing to correspond with members of her family who lived in all parts of the country. For Carlee, the purpose of these letters was to inform family members “that I’m staying off the streets and keeping busy.”

Likewise, the role of support in social networks became evident in Alessandra’s correspondence with her older brother who was currently serving time in jail. Recognizing that she had a social and family responsibility to write to him when other people in his life were not, she continued a correspondence through mail with her older brother. Negotiating this relationship with her brother, as a sister and a supporter, is a sophisticated and socially valuable literacy skill that is shaped by relationship and institutional structures. Her correspondence with her brother is a mature and socially important practice that she had adopted out of the desire to participate in the network of support. Moje (2002) argues that educators must begin to view adolescents’ out-of-school literacy practices, such as these that are negotiated across contexts and institutional barriers, as valuable tools for supporting literacy learning in school.

When Alessandra decides to continue the correspondence with her brother when all others in his support network stop, she exerts agency, identifying herself as a supportive family member and a sophisticated member of a mature network of social support. Likewise, as Carlee writes her family members to assure them that she is “staying off the streets,” she positions herself as an adolescent who is in charge of her social situation. Carlee uses letter writing in order to take control of her world. Exchanging letters serves both a personally and socially supportive role, as well as a way of negotiating space within a community. Indeed, these are essential tools for each of the

students' lives. As Carlee and Alessandra read and write texts as part of their relationships with their family members, they are actively negotiating their identities within these communities.

Another area in which the home/community allowed for literacy practices was with storybook reading. What became apparent was that this family practice led to adolescents reading to their younger siblings as well as being read to by their older siblings when growing up. This is a family practice (perhaps influenced by schooling) that offered many opportunities for the adolescents to share in literacy practices within the family. The idea that these students assume responsibilities for reading with their younger siblings must be explored as to how it facilitates literacy development over time, and how they become apprenticed into the practice. Exploring how to connect this literacy practice with academic practices taught in school might be beneficial for these students who are seen as deficient with reading. As argued by Barton and Hamilton (1998), studies of family literacy can give us the opportunity to rethink the home-school literacy connections, and lead to a more dynamic understanding of literacy across these domains.

### Literacy in Youth Culture

The second social sphere in which literacy was important was in the students' experiences and identities as teenagers, and consumers and producers of youth culture. Youth culture is defined here as the social sphere that constitutes what it means to be an adolescent living in this urban area and to be a youth in the popular cultural world (i.e. the music they listen to, the films they watch, the signs and symbols they use to identify

themselves as part of the group). Like all cultures, this space is in no way static. It is constantly metamorphosing as students negotiate the space. Studies of literacy in youth culture reveal how students navigate a variety of texts, and through these interactions, “make sense of and take power of their worlds” (Moje,2002, p. 217). All four of these students engaged in reading and writing in authentic ways as they mediated the various texts saturating their everyday lives.

Listening to Hip Hop was a major theme that ran through all four students’ interviews. All were active listeners of Hip Hop, and mentioned that they read the song titles on the CD cases and the lyrics, downloaded from the Internet. Lashon bought *Word-Up!* and *Jet* (popular culture magazines) to learn of news of her favorite artists (e.g. B2K, Chingy, Nelly, Snoop Dogg). She said that she reads these magazines in order to “catch-up,” revealing the importance of being up-to-date when locating and identifying oneself in the youth culture space.

Lashon spoke highly of her computer skills for finding lyrics on the Internet for her favorite artists, prompting her classmates to ask her to help them to do the same. Lashon quite often would share magazines and lyrics with her cousin who was also “crazy” about B2K. Alvermann and Hagood (2000) argue that it makes good sense to understand adolescents’ loyalties with particular music artists and other fandoms as similar to our tastes and passions for particular objects. According to Alvermann and Hagood, adolescent fandoms for things like particular music tastes and fashion styles (as was the case for Alessandra) should be seen as no different than our own passions for particular literature or films. Therefore, understanding these adolescents’ fandom for Hip

Hop as a taste and preference, it makes sense for educators to then view these as resources and pathways into the passionate literacy lives of adolescent youth.

One particular passion that consumes the time and attention of many youth are video games. Marshon was an avid video game enthusiast, and spent a great deal of his time looking at a variety of websites related to video game “cheat” codes. These codes would enable him to experience parts of the game or become characters in the game that he would not otherwise experience without the codes ([www.miniclip.com](http://www.miniclip.com); [www.cheatplanet.com](http://www.cheatplanet.com)). Within the actual video games, themselves, there are a wide variety of written texts that comprise the video gaming experience, such as the texts that are embedded in the game that determine the player’s decisions and actions. There are also video game booklets that the game manufacturers produce that Marshon reads “when I get stuck..” Marshon told me that he does not read the manual unless he runs into a problem, a problem situated in the activity of the game. Video games have increasingly been viewed as a technology that may have a great deal to teach us about literacy and how students learn and understand literacy learning (Gee, 2003). Easily dismissed as purely fun and entertainment, video games require and promote active reading and navigating practices within situated activities that are completed for pleasure and entertainment by youth.

Part of the literacy engagement of the youth culture has to do with the vernacular literacy texts that are produced by these students. Camitta (1993) defines vernacular text as:

that which is closely associated with culture which is neither elite nor institutional, which is traditional and indigenous to the diverse cultural processes

of communities as distinguished from the uniform, inflexible standards of institutions (228-229).

Vernacular texts for these youth are those texts that are created within the space allowed by their social lives and cultures.

When Carlee first heard that I was interested in students' literacies in and out of school, she immediately responded, "I write my own poems." I first was thrilled that she would be eager to tell me this, considering she had been so resistant in class prior to this. After thinking about her comment a bit longer, I realized that she may also have been using literacy to position herself in the class and in her world. Carlee's comment, along with my discussions with her, revealed that her poems allowed her to "express her emotions," and produced texts that were embedded in the non-institutional, unofficial sphere. Through my discussions with her, I began to see the role that her poems played in her life. She informed me that she often uses codes in the poems, as a way for only her to understand them. She would only share these poems with someone very close to her, because she has written about personal topics, such as her father's disapproval towards her and her boyfriend's interracial relationship. Carlee's vernacular writing became a tool for her to take control and manipulate the realities of her own social and cultural world.

#### Literacy in the Official School Sphere

The third sphere in which literacy played a part of the students' lives was within the official/school world. The practices in this sphere are what most educators refer to as school literacy practices (e.g. formal written essays, worksheets, canonical texts, textbooks, and traditional dialogues about texts). Not surprisingly, students reported these

same literacy practices for their in-school literacy texts and practices. In this one classroom alone, the students were asked to engage in the following literacy practices: formal five paragraph essay writing , creating paragraphs that interconnect the week’s vocabulary words, writing names on the classroom attendance sheet, copying definitions out of the dictionary, reading traditional short stories from the course textbook (e.g. “The Lottery”), reading short stories for messages to teach Mythology. Topics for the five-paragraph essays included: An essay (biography) about the teacher; an autobiography, goals/dreams/school, fear, film review, music (song and lyrics), one’s major life transitions, favorite quote, and argumentative essay, free to choose. Example vocabulary words taught each week include: *enthusiasm, tactful, ethical, oppressed, explicit, divine, obnoxious, and intolerable*.

The students were asked to complete an essay each week, and the teacher would spend time modeling what he might write for the topic, and then allow the class time to write in class. The teacher spent at least one to two periods a week introducing and working with the week’s vocabulary words that were taken from the district-wide pacing guide. (It was important to the teacher for the students to be experiencing similar curriculum as the students in the other high schools in the district, in order for his students to be on-track with them in the next year). At the end of the week, the teacher would quiz the students on the various vocabulary words that were discussed during the week.

In other classes, these students experienced similar types of literacy practices. All the students mentioned the textbooks that were used in their math, science, and social studies classes. In her social studies class, Carlee had to read the newspaper for particular

assignments. The students mentioned that they had journals in some of their other classes, used primarily to write notes from the board. The texts that students were being asked to read and write were clearly part of a different sphere than the texts and purposes for literacy in the other two social spheres.

### Borderland Literacy Practices

The three spheres above reveal the social networks in which literacy practices are embedded in the lives of these adolescents. Unlike classic views of culture, these sociocultural spheres are without rigid boundaries, not easily demarcated. The fluidity of these spheres allows for literacy practices to be simultaneously connected to more than one sphere. These literacy practices find themselves on the border of these social networks, as in the case of Alessandra looking up the cinema times in the newspaper in order for her to go to the movies with her mother and friend. Shopping at the nearby mall and going to the movies for Alessandra was on the boundary of the peer and home/community sphere. Often the literacy practices of these students revealed texts and purposes for literacy on the boundary between social networks.

The fluidity of the spheres also provides the means for literacy practices to cross borders, and be exported from one sphere to another. The dynamic nature of these spheres of social practice present an interconnected web of social networks across spheres that are shifting and evolving. Many of the literacy practices that were in the home were facilitated by the students' abilities to read and write, skills learned through formal schooling. In addition, some of the practices that were involved in the home/community sphere involved the influence of school literacy practices. For example, when Marshon was required to read a self-selected book in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, he chose *A Child*

*Called It*, by Dave Pelzer, that his mother had read and recommended. While reading the book, he discussed it with his mother, as well as wrote a book report for class. The literacy practice of reading books and textbooks entered the household on a number of occasions, sometimes interacting with home/community spheres, other times remaining in the official home sphere.

More often than school texts and purposes entering the home sphere, peer and home/community texts and purposes entered the school hallways and within the classroom. There were a few peer and home/community practices that were imported to the classroom. The essay topics that the students were required to write were often intended to tap into the students' peer and home/community spheres. Their autobiography, film review, and essay about their favorite song invited the students to write about some of the things that are affiliated with their non-school experiences. In this way, the teacher was trying to incorporate the students' interests and experiences from outside the classroom in order to motivate them to write about what they know well—their favorite music and movies. Although recommended by many, this pedagogical attempt at building upon what the students bring to class did not manage to provide meaningful authentic purposes for the students. These students still approached the essay as a five-paragraph essay for the teacher, and, although the essays were seeking to include out-of-school experiences, the purposes for literacy were not imported from the peer and/or home/community sphere.

Imports of peer and home/community texts and purposes into the school sphere did occur, though. Lashon's experience with newspapers (she reported reading a variety of sections of the newspaper), along with her enthusiasm and passion for participating in

the production of a newspaper made reading and writing for the school newspaper an important, authentic practice for her. In her middle school, Lashon was on the school newspaper staff and she was waiting for her current school to start their newspaper. This overlap between her reading the newspaper in the home/community sphere and her participating in the writing of the school newspaper reveals a successful literacy import for Lashon.

The students in the class were quite adept at finding space within the halls and in the classroom to engage in their “unofficial” literacies, especially when the teacher was involved in teaching a reading or writing lesson as part of the official curriculum. These literacy practices took many forms. The students brought in their own literature to read (i.e. *Harry Potter*, comic books, and various magazines), passed notes in class, and wrote graffiti on the desks and blackboard. For the first ten minutes of one class period, I saw one student reading a comic book, while she was quietly chatting with the student next to her who was flipping through two different Paintball magazines. In another class period, one student brought his own newspaper into the classroom, and for 15 minutes (while the teacher was reviewing the vocabulary words for the week), he searched for his name in the local newspaper as a result of a recent indictment. These literacy practices on the boundary of the peer and official school sphere were unsanctioned literacy practices, unrecognized by the official school institution.

It was apparent that these students engaged in literacy activities for purposeful and important reasons in ways that had very little to do with the official curriculum the teacher set forth (Dyson, 1993; Gutierrez & Stone, 2000). These borderland literacies

often become hybrid literacy practices, the creation of a new practice in the interaction of the different spheres.

One of the most popular literacy practices in the borderlands of peer and the official/school sphere was the abundant note passing in class. Lashon described her experience passing notes in class: “We write notes everyday...I just wrote a note to a guy, but he didn’t write me back...[My friends and I] [write] about what we’re doing over the weekend.” Passing notes was not a usual practice for these students outside of the classroom; therefore, through the interaction of these two spheres (peer and school/official) a new, hybrid literacy was formed.

In one instance, Carlee and another student were discussing an incident at a party they had been to the night before. They were engaged in a lively discussion and were asked a few times by the teacher to stop talking. It was then that the student who was talking with Carlee said, “I need to write this down,” and produced about a half page of text, and gave it to Carlee to read. This literacy act was a result of the students using literacy to claim space in the classroom for an authentic purpose –sharing information and feelings in the service of maintaining social bonds.

Understanding the literacies in the classroom as hybrid literacies may be helpful for understanding the negotiation between the teacher and students. Rosaldo refers to two different notions of hybridity:

Hybridity can imply a space betwixt and between two zones of purity . . .

On the other hand, hybridity can be understood as the ongoing condition of all human cultures, which contain no zones of purity because they

undergo continuous processes of transculturation (two-way borrowing and lending between cultures). [cited in Cazden, 2000, p. 257]

In Rosaldo's second view of hybridity, the notion of transculturation speaks to the transactional nature of the literacies when involved in the borderlands, not one building off of another, but a borrowing of each in the creation of new hybrid literacies. The transactional nature of these spaces, along with the fluid notion of zones, provides a look at a literacy practice that is created while on the boundaries. The hybrid texts and literacy practices that are created in the borderlands between spheres reveal how students negotiate diverse contexts with their appropriate resources. Further study of how students negotiate these spaces (i.e. borderlands between social and cultural spheres) can further our understanding of the creativity of these literacy practices, and the amphibious nature of the negotiation of different contexts (Moje, 2002).

#### Towards a Reconceptualization of Adolescents' Literacy Practices

Apparent in each of the student's lives was a passionate engagement in the literacy practices that were culture-specific to three fluid social spaces: home/community, youth culture, and the official space of the classroom. Literacy mediated their participation in each of these spaces, as well as across them. Within and across these spheres, the students used literacy for a variety of purposes: as a means to an end (e.g. Lashon reading the recipe off the television and then writing it down so she could make her cheesecake), as ways of participating in the network of their sociocultural worlds (e.g. Alessandra writing to her brother in jail), and as ways of understanding one's place in the world and exerting some power upon that world (e.g. Carlee's poetry about her fathers' attitudes toward her interracial relationship).

My time in the school and in the classroom offered many insights into the literate lives of these adolescents that were not recognized as useful resources by the school or classroom teacher. Failing to acknowledge students' variety of literacy practices may have serious outcomes for students and for schools. One obvious outcome is that students will likely be seen by themselves and by others, inaccurately, as deficient of literacy, as not holding the requisite literacy behaviors needed for competence. Lashon, when asked what reading and writing meant to her, responded, "Something that is successful, something that I'm going to need for the rest of my life . . . even though I hate it . . . but I got to do it though in order to get credit to pass." Although she had just listed the variety of things that she reads and writes in her everyday life (e.g. in cooking, reading Hip Hop lyrics), she still believes that she needs to get "credit" for it to be literacy, that literacy is intertwined with her achievement in school, and she "hates it".

Another effect of not recognizing students' multiple literacies may be that educators and students themselves may attribute the lack of success to ability, effort, or particular learning strategies without a strong consideration of the social, cultural, and political influences that shape literacy practice (Gee, 1996, 2001; Street, 2001). Educators with this view are likely to adopt a simplistic view of how to improve the students' skills (as separated from the sociocultural and political influences of literacy). In addition, by not recognizing the multiple literacies and the social, cultural, and political links with literacy, educators will miss many valuable literacy resources that could help shape academic literacy practices (Dyson, 2003; Moje, 2002). And finally, when students' literacy practices are unacknowledged in schools, they will miss

opportunities for developing even further these rich literacies that are marginalized from dominant Discourses.

It is for these reasons that researchers and educators must take seriously adolescents' literacy practices in their culture-specific, fluid communities. It is through this approach that we will more fully understand adolescents' literacies in their everyday lives, as it is embedded in the variety of communities in which they participate. Understanding "at-risk" youth as active participants in a variety of fluid communities, we will develop a richer understanding of the resources that they bring with them to the classroom, and how they makes sense of and adopt particular literacy practices.

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