

## Analyzing Literacy Practice: Grounded Theory to Model

Victoria Purcell-Gates, University of British Columbia  
Kristen H. Perry, University of Kentucky  
Adriana Briseño, University of British Columbia



## Analyzing Literacy Practice: Grounded Theory to Model

- *An understanding of literacy requires detailed, in-depth accounts of actual practice in different cultural settings. It is not sufficient, however, to extol simply the richness and variety of literacy practices made accessible through such ethnographic detail: We also need bold theoretical models that recognize the central role of power relations in literacy practices.* (Street, 2001a, p. 430)

## Cultural Practices of Literacy Study



University of British Columbia  
Victoria Purcell-Gates & Kristen H. Perry,  
Co-Directors

## CPLS Theoretical Frame(s)

- Activity theory (Vygotsky; Wertsch)
- Language as social semiotic (Halliday & Hasan)
- Language & Literacy as multiple, situated (Bakhtin, Street)
- Literacy as social and cultural practice (Barton & Hamilton)
- Issues of power: Social/cultural reproduction (Bourdieu)

## CPLS Umbrella Spokes

<http://www.cpls.educ.ubc.ca>

- The collection of ethnographic case studies on the ways that literacy is practiced within specified cultural contexts
- The creation of an expanding database using these data for future cross-case analyses of literacy practice and for further development of theories of literacy as social practice
- The design of models of literacy instruction that reflect these data and that provide links between the literacy worlds of students and literacy instruction within formal educational contexts

## Sample of CPLS Case Studies

- Migrant Farm Workers & Children in Head Start
- Nicaraguan Immigrants in Costa Rica
- 'Lost Boys' of Sudan in U.S.
- Sudanese Refugee Families in U.S.
- Fe y Alegria School in Bolivia
- Indigenous families in Oaxaca
- Indigenous students at university in Oaxaca
- English literacy practices in Puerto Rico
- Family literacy practices of a language minority community in Uganda

### Database for Cross-Case Analyses: Why?

- Desire to reach for greater *generalizability* than that afforded by a single case and
- To deepen understanding and explanation  
*"Multiple cases not only pin down the specific conditions under which a finding will occur but also help us form the more general categories of how those conditions may be related"* (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 173).

### Cross-Case Analyses: Why?

- Bourdieu approached method with a healthy respect for the ways that the subjective (or 'local') are never totally free of objective frames and systems. He sought to describe these frames and systems without losing the specificity of individual fields—to identify structure without reducing the individual to the larger, "...or to treat everything as if it were a mere epiphenomenon..." (Thomson, 1991).

### Be Warned....

- Brian Street (2003) warns, "Literacy comes ... loaded with ideological and policy presuppositions that make it hard to do ethnographic studies of the variety of literacies across contexts" (pg. 78).

### CPLS Database for Cross-Case Analyses

- | <u>Case Study Data</u>   | <u>'Flat Database'</u>  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Field notes</li><li>• Interview transcriptions</li><li>• Photos</li><li>• Final write ups/interpretations</li><li>• All contained digitally within <i>Atlas.ti</i> hermeneutic units</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coded literacy practice data</li><li>• Demographic data</li><li>• Contained within large <i>Atlas.ti</i> hermeneutic unit</li></ul> |

### Common Data Collection Procedures

### Participant observation/field notes in communities, schools, and homes

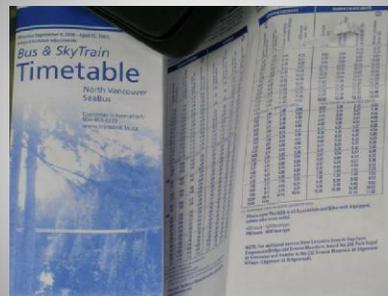


## Literacy practices interviews with semi-structured interview protocol

What kinds of things do you read in your life (that are not part of any school you might be attending)? For each text or practice mentioned, elicit information about why (purpose of reading), social context (as part of what type of activity, like work, church, committees, shopping for family, etc.).

- PROMPTS (with each of the following, you can give example texts but don't ask about any one specifically):
- for daily tasks?
- with your children? with your spouse? with your friends? with your co-workers?
- for official purposes like getting a visa or work permit?
- for paying taxes?
- at your job?

## Artifact collection



## Photos



## Common Coding of Demographic Data for 'Flat' Database

## Demographic Database

- Researcher name
- Participant ID
- Study country
- Date when the study was conducted
- Participant pseudonym
- Participants age, gender, occupation(s)
- Country of birth
- Nationality
- Legal status
- Marginalized status
- Participant's native language(s), language(s) spoken at home, other spoken language(s)
- Language(s) read or written

## Demographic Database (cont.)

- Participant's level of schooling completed
- Participant's status as student
- Participant's parents' level of schooling and occupation(s)
- Whether participant lives in urban, rural, or suburban area
- Number of people and minors in participant's household
- Computer and internet availability

## Common Coding of Literacy Event Data for 'Flat' Database

## Descriptive Codes

- Study/participant ID (Id:)
- Mode of literacy engagement: reading, writing, listening to, copying language of the text read or written (Md:)
- Language(s) of the text read or written (Lg:)
- Whether the event occurred in participant's childhood or adulthood (Tm:)
- Whether the event coded involved observed or reported literacy engagement (LE: LE)
- Or was observed in the environment without the presence of a person reading or writing it (LE: CT)

## Theoretically Based Codes

- Social Activity Domain (Dm:)
- Text read; written; copied; listened to (Tx:)
- Function for reading, writing, etc. (Fn:)
- Social Purpose for reading, writing, etc. (Pr:)

## Social Activity Domain

- Activity theory: Mediated social activity is the basic unit of analysis for human behavior
- Each literacy event was coded within a social activity domain first
- Our social activity domains arise from our data; they are not inclusive

## Social Activity Domain

- Differ from Barton & Hamilton (institutional spaces: Health, religion, work)
- Differ from Dyson (Social spaces: School, home)

## Social Activity Domain

- Our definition is one that reflects more essentially the nature of the activity
- Included in this is the sense that human activity within a domain can cross physical spaces
- For example, activity related to schooling can take place in a school, at home, or on a football field (if one is doing homework while sitting in the bleachers)

## Social Activity Domain

SOCIAL ACTIVITY DOMAIN	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES OF LITERACY EVENTS WITHIN THIS DOMAIN
ART (Doing one's art)	Social activity for individuals that centers around creative/artistic activities and is engaged in for purposes of developing, improving, exploring, performing within one's creative/artistic area(s) of focus/interests/talent.	Writing short stories, participating in a poetry slam, reading to develop a quilt pattern, reading music while playing in a jazz group, directing a play, Writing in a journal to explore an idea for a novel.
CIV (Responding to civic rules and regulations)	Social activity that centers around responding to bureaucratic requirements of governmental (on all levels). Bureaucratic requirements reflect official procedures, red tape, routines, rules that bind. Hierarchical administrative systems.	Filling in green card forms, reading instructions for filling taxes, rereading transcripts and other saved documents in order to fill in the forms for citizenship, filling out a form at the police to recover personal property, reading a parking ticket to decide whether to contest it, filling out a form to get special status to bypass strict security at national borders.
COM (Participating in Community life)	Social activity that centers around life in community, defined by the participants. This would include organizing, building, maintaining, or defining a community of people, inviting other members of one's community, relating to other members of one's community, defining oneself as part of one's community. "community" can be at different levels from local to global.	Reading newspaper from Botswana, writing a column for a religious newsletter, participating in community discussion boards on the Internet, Writing a letter to the UNHCR about conditions in a refugee camp, taking notes at a community meeting, writing a letter to invite people to a community event, reading an invitation to a picnic for grade six students.
SOH (Participating in formal schooling)	Social activity that centers around participation in formal schooling as a student.	Writing an essay, filling in a worksheet, doing homework.