

4th Postgraduate Student Conference: Assessing and Analyzing Discourses

Faculty of English Language and Literature
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Athens, 26 June 2014

Connected or mismatched? Theorising and researching (dis)connections between teenagers' formal and informal literacy practices in English as a foreign language

Anastasia Rothoni

This paper explores the complex nature of teenagers' literacy practices in English as a foreign language. It reports on findings of an ethnographically oriented multiple case study doctoral research which draws theoretically and methodologically on New Literacy Studies (Street, 1993; Barton, 2001), discourse analysis and ethnography. The study extended over a period of eighteen months and employed a combination of multiple data collection tools and data sources (i.e., in-depth interviews, field notes, literacy diaries and checklists, in-home observations, text and document collection, photographs, visualisations and drawings) to document and provide a holistic, 'emic' account of the literacy practices in English of fifteen teenagers from varied sociocultural backgrounds living in Athens, Greece.

This paper will illustrate one aspect of the study, focusing on the hybrid nature of teenagers' English literacy practices. Contrary to conventional understandings of home and school as mutually exclusive domains and of teenagers' practices across these spaces as disconnected and mismatched (cf. Luke, 2004), this paper will try to foreground a more subtle understanding of the relationship between school and out-of-school literacy. Following Barton and Hamilton's (1998) notion of 'negotiated literacies' and Dyson's (1997) suggestion of the 'permeable boundaries' between literacy domains and discourse communities, the aim will be to highlight the tension between teenagers' informal and formal literacy practices across home and school domains and essentially to present a view of young people's literacy and their engagement with the English language at home and school as a complex configuration of school and home practices which cannot be easily disaggregated into separable school and home practices. The paper concludes by highlighting an interesting paradox: despite the fact that in- and out-of-school literacy practices are shown to be 'multisourced' (Prinsloo, 2005) or 'multiply placed' (Bulfin and Koutsogiannis, 2012) and inextricably connected rather than mismatched, the two domains of home and school are verbally contrasted and ultimately considered disconnected by teenagers themselves the implication being that teenagers' perception of English literacy and language learning remains largely framed by the dominant discourse of literacy as a traditional, school-based skill (cf. Nikula and Pitkänen-Huhta, 2008).

References

- Barton, D. & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. London: Routledge.
- Barton, D. (2001). Directions for literacy research: Analysing language and social practices in a textually-mediated world. *Language and Education*, 15(2&3), 92-104.

- Bulfin, S. & Koutsogiannis, D. (2012). New literacies as multiply placed practices: Expanding perspectives on young people's literacies across home and school. *Language and Education*, 26(4), 331-346.
- Dyson, A.H. (1997). *Writing superheroes: Contemporary childhood, popular culture and classroom literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Luke, A. (2004). On the material consequences of literacy. *Language and Education*, 18(4), 331-335.
- Nikula, T. & Pitkänen-Huhta, A. (2008). Using photographs to access stories of learning English. In P. Kalaja, V. Menezes & A.M. Barcelos (Eds.), *Narratives of learning and teaching EFL* (pp.171–185). Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Prinsloo, M. (2005). The new literacies as placed resources. *Perspectives in Education*, 23(4), 87-98.
- Street, B. (1993). Introduction: The new literacy studies. In Street, B. (Ed.) *Cross-Cultural approaches to literacy* (pp. 1-22). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.