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Chinatown: Globalization, Hybridity and Literacy Education

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Positioning and Identity in Chinatown: The SARS Outbreak
           SARS cases across Southeast Asia, in the spring of 2002, started suddenly. Then, within a few months,
the disease seemed to be contained; the total number of deaths, although in the thousands, was far less than that
from many other infectious diseases affecting the same region. What started out seeming like the beginning of
an epidemic turned out to be an outbreak that was containable and limited.
           But the SARS outbreak had another facet, which we learned through working with middle school
students in New York's Chinatown: SARS made evident a certain type of Chinese identity in students who may
have never felt or done anything about this identification before. This identification occurred on multiple levels:
students both sought out information on SARS, and were subject to events related to the outbreak. For instance,
in the rapid proliferation of websites, news articles, and televisions stories, some students were glued to the
multimedia information sources on SARS. They checked websites updated hourly on the death toll and spread
of SARS, and they participated in discussion boards about why/whether the Chinese government concealed
SARS cases, or what the next events might be. But on the other hand, students found themselves positioned
negatively by the SARS outbreak. Some students saw family members quarantined on returning from China.
When tourism to Chinatown dropped, and many family restaurants and businesses suffered, students found
themselves positioned as outsiders, as though by virtue of being Chinese they or their families could bring
SARS to the city. News reports from other Chinatowns in North America reinforced the position as outsiders: it
seemed that residents of Toronto's Chinatown had more in common with those of New York's Chinatown than
other New Yorkers.
           In short, this crisis event brought to light how students in Chinatown are positioned and position
themselves alternately as Chinese, as members of a Chinese diaspora, as New Yorkers, and as Americans. This
type of positioning is a process particular to the digital age, but it is not particular to the Chinese community.
Appadurai describes a similar occurrence around incidents of communal violence in South Asia: small events
that highlight sectarian tensions (and commonalities) can have massive global implications, thanks to networks
of exchange through which ideas, money, and subjectification reverberate endlessly. Anderson's "imagined
communities" (Anderson, 1991) are just as imagined—and made just as real through this imagining—and they
span geographic boundaries and bring together new kinds of imagined identities.
           Within such an "ethnoscape," to use Appadurai's (1996) terminology, we are compelled to re-think
traditional notions of critical literacy. The significance of neighborhood studies and New Literacy Studies
research has to be viewed in light of the changing notion of a neighborhood, and the changing life pathways of
neighborhood residents. We will look at how the literacy practices of students in Chinatown supports notions of
syncretism and home-school connections central to some work in New Literacy Studies. Then we will explore
the areas where new perspectives on globalization and hybrid subjectivities are needed to shape our thinking
about literacy curriculum in communities that, like Chinatown, are affected in multiple ways by the forces of
globalization.

           A Fluid Methodology for Generating and Analyzing Data with Students about Literacy Practices
           In this paper, we examine some of the data from a 3-year study with students at a small, public middle
school in New York City's Chinatown. As part of a larger study of multiliteracies in a transdisciplinary
curriculum (Albright, Purohit, & Walsh, under review), we undertook a project with 60 students to identify
literacy practices in their lives—in and out of school. As the project progressed, we used data collected with
students to decide on the next steps. The process was a generative one, and in retrospect we can identify the
following sets of data:
   • teacher/researcher notes and journals
   • students' literacy logs
   • students' analysis of their literacy logs; analysis of teachers and researchers of the logs
   • photographs and neighborhood descriptions conducted by one focus group
   • "ethnographies" conducted by individuals and pairs of students
   • discussions and writing from other focus groups
           Our approach to the study of students' literacy practices was influenced by the work of other
researchers studying the connections between different literacy practices – home and school, community and
academic, formal and non-formal. For instance, Comber and Thomson (2002) and Janks (2002)worked with
young people from poor communities in South Australia, having students use video and photos to document
their neighborhoods. This work aimed not only to understand students various identities, but also to investigate
"what it is that children appropriate from the media available to them, and then make use of that material along
side the authorized literacies of schooling" (p. 16). Related work in Johannesburg, South Africa (Janks, 2002)
developed critical literacy pedagogies relating students' reading, writing, and representational practices with
their separate neighborhoods and their places within them. We also drew on related research conducted in the
United Kingdom (Reay, 1997) and the United States (Nespor, 2000).

Methodological directions for this study were influenced by work in New Literacy Studies (NLS). Broadly, NLS argues that cognitive and developmental perspectives in literacy education universalize and privilege particular forms of texts, textual practices, and text users. These "autonomous model" of literacy (Street, 1984, 1993) presumes that there are clear-cut links between literacy, cognitive ability, and progress. Literacy, so conceived, is a neutral technology associated with national economic competitiveness, employment, and personal and social fulfilment. New Literacy Studies has countered that literacies are plural, social, institutionally-bounded, and historically evolving practices. The NLS "ideological" stance substantively expands our understanding of literate practices beyond instrumentalism to document communicative modalities of speaking, reading, writing, viewing, representing, etc. ignored inside and, especially, outside institutions like schools. Following work in NLS, we aimed to construct a body of data that would reflect overlooked literacy practices, or practices assumed to be unrelated to students' literacy.

Data Sources

Keeping field journals of our reading and observations, we initiated discussions with students to determine the kinds of literate activities they engaged in at home and in the community. They discussed literate practices associated with pleasure or recreation, connected to religious and cultural purposes, supporting school assignments, maintaining relationships with family and friends, and helping their family negotiate language differences. As we discussed with students the sorts of activities that could be considered "literacy events," students kept literacy logs, documenting their literate practices inside and outside school. They kept these logs for two weeks, with ongoing feedback from teachers and peers about the nature and scope of events they were recording.

We then gave students a written analysis of the literacy logs (Jim conducted this analysis, since he had not been involved as much in the day-to-day work of helping students keep these logs). The analysis categorized the major topics that came up in literacy logs, and students were asked to provide their views on the analysis. Which topics sound familiar? What was surprising or left out? Which would you choose to study in more depth? We then introduced the idea of "ethnography" and had students pick one of the literacy areas to investigate further. The assignment was to describe the area in depth, as one would for an outsider, then interview an "expert" (this could be a classmate, or anyone else with expertise in the literacy practice). Students' write-ups of these small ethnographies became part of the data for this study.

Later, reviewing all data collected through student interviews and diaries, we formed student focus groups to investigate particular literacy practices. One focus group photographed and analyzed spaces related to literacy and representations of Chinatown. Another focus group shared stories about tutoring younger brothers and sisters. A third discussed how many of them were frequently called upon to translate and negotiate for their families, dealing with English-speaking businesses, utilities, and agencies. Still others talked about various literate practices connected with computers; for example, learning HTML or as members of various chat rooms. We draw on student-generated data and analysis, as well as our own notes and analysis, in our discussion of this study.

Problematic Aspects

Such a fluid methodology, which we were able to develop along with students as new categories and topics emerged, was possible in part because of the schedule of the school day. At the time of the study two of us were working as classroom teachers in humanities (Chris) and math/science (Kiran). The collaboration with a university researcher (Jim) took place during regular school-day planning time, but also in separate meetings outside school. More significantly, though, we were able to devote a regular class period to working on literacy logs, and later to helping students do their ethnographies and organize their focus groups. Being able to devote this time during the school day to this study made it a part of the literacy curriculum, connecting it to subject-related literacy work students were doing, and making it a "serious" topic of study in the curriculum.

This approach, while ensuring we had a regular group of students to work with, and that interested students had time in the day to work on this project, also had its drawbacks: making the study of out-of-school literacies a compulsory part of the school day curriculum can feel a bit like colonization, as school takes over even the personal aspects of kids' literate lives. This is a difficult line to tread. Students' opportunities to select different focus groups to work in alleviated some of the tension and made the situation less coercive. But student resistance to studying their practices was still in evidence, and this is a point we return to later.

Data from Other Accounts of Chinatown

We conducted this research in Chinatown, an area of lower Manhattan next to (and gradually growing to become a part of) the Lower East Side, a neighborhood that has been populated by different waves of immigrants over the last 200 years. We were concerned with how to construct data about a neighborhood that has constantly been a site of change, seeing successive waves of immigration from Eastern Europe, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Hong Kong and Canton . . . and, most recently, parts of Mainland China. The work of Gregory

and Williams (2000) analyzing community literacies in the London community of Spitalfields was helpful in thinking about how to incorporate the history of a dynamic and changing neighborhood into analysis of the literacy practices of people currently living there.

In the case of Chinatown, we decided to situate literacy practices of our students in the context of different accounts of Chinatown itself. Rather than ignoring the other groups who, historically, have lived in the area, we saw this as focusing on the multiple constructions and views of this Chinatown community. Understanding these multiple ways that the community is positioned helps us in reading the students' data about community literacies. We draw on studies that position Chinatown and Chinese in New York in terms of the developing definition of race in the 19th century (Tchen, 1999); studies that document the way demands for labor in New York shaped Chinese immigration (Kwong, 1979/2001, 1987/1996; Siu, 1987); journalistic explorations that emphasize the position of Chinatown as a closed society, as a dangerous and dirty place (Hall, 1998; Kinkead, 1992); and even studies that affirm the "model minority" myth by proclaiming the hard work and oppressive conditions in Chinatown as a precursor to living an affluent American life (Zhou, 1995). As we look at students' literacies, we return to these accounts and the way they position people who live in Chinatown; they contribute to the voices we tried to make sense of in thinking about a community literacy practices, and directions for critical literacy in Chinatown.

Competing Notions of Globalization

A thread we drew from work in New Literacy Studies was the intention to construct understandings of students' articulations of their "placed" identities – how they are classed, gendered, and raced in a particular neighborhood and elsewhere – and explore the literate resources students use to explain and contest their identities. There are multiple forces at play in the generation and articulation of students' identities. Often, the impact of "globalization" – with its multiple meanings – is cited as a force on young people, particularly those from migrant/immigrant and transnational communities. It is worth looking at what globalization can mean, and how these meanings can relate to discussions of literacy.

"Globalization" can commonly refer to the ongoing intensification of cross-border relations, part of an historical development of increasing international interdependence and trade (Hirst & Thomson, 1996). The term is applied to neo-liberal agendas that seek to deregulate and free the flow of capital around the world (Scholte, 2000). Alternatively, "globalization" is associated with the ways in which new technologies link us all to common cultural forms, textual practices and identities. It is in the intersection of these political, economic, and cultural developments that "globalization" becomes either synonymous with westernization (a.k.a. Americanization) and neo-colonialism or with what Giddens (1990) calls the process of deterritorialization and supraterritoriality.

Competing notions of "globalization" as neo-colonialism or deterritorialization are seemingly in opposition. The first posits modernity—capitalism, science, industrialism, etc.—as destructive of indigenous cultures, economies and environments. The second, in post-modern fashion, characterizes increasing global interconnectedness as bringing a fundamental change to social relations and networks, liberating identity from in significant/signifying ways from the limitation of being tied to territory (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999; Scholte, 2000). As we look at the literacy practices of students in Chinatown, we are intrigued by how globalization can in fact operate in many ways. It is possible to imagine young people as unfettered global citizens – and simultaneously as connected and unconnected to territorial and supraterritorial spaces as subjects of hegemonic and homogenizing new economic and cultural orders (Shaw, 2001). In the case of students' responses to the SARS outbreak, we saw that being connected through the internet and telephones—and, for many students, being able to read sites in Chinese languages as well as in English—connected them to the crisis. They were able to form opinions on it, share ideas with other people, and escape boundaries related to age, language, and education as they participated in conversations. But our students were also affected by the circulation of knowledge, subjected to the very real material, economic consequences of prejudice and fear during the outbreak.

We found that ambivalence about globalization was a thread that ran through the data we collected in this study. Instead of trying to pin down a single definition of globalization, therefore, we view these multiple processes involved in globalization as contributing to our students' literacy practices.

Overview of the Findings

Through the literacy logs, focus groups, and our own observations of students and analysis of their data, we organized the findings into a few major categories. These topics bring out some of the ways that globalization took on different meanings in the literate lives of our students.

"Street literacies" vs. "community literacies"

One issue we encountered in working with students as co-researchers in this study was that there was not always agreement about what constituted "literacy practices." Students disagreed with one another about what even belonged in the literacy logs. In order to work with this disagreement, without getting stuck in it, we

talked about how out-of-school literacy practices could be broadly categorized into "street literacies" and "community literacies." Rather than argue that one type of practice was more significant than the other, we stressed that the categories are fluid, and that things that might seem insignificant could have greater meanings in terms of literacy if you look more closely.

For instance, reading street signs and finding routes in Chinatown is definitely a literacy practice, an example of what we were calling "street literacies." It is not immediately clear what the significance of reading street signs could be. For students, in particular, such street literacies are so second-nature, that they often have trouble identifying what is significant or meaningful about them. In the case of finding routes in the neighborhood, young people in Chinatown can often identify the significance of different blocks (who lives there, what kinds of shops are available), the history of different buildings, and the modes of transport people are using. One group of students, taking pictures of Chinatown, photographed a scene of women entering a bus on Canal Street, near the entrance to a bridge going to Brooklyn. Later, they went back and wrote the following explanation:

> *This picture shows a van with these three women entering it, which is what makes this a Chinatown picture. These three women aren't related in anyway; they all just wanted to get in the van. This isn't something you'd see everyday, since this only happens in Chinatown. Chinatown's filled with these vans that pick up individuals to Brooklyn. A person from outside of Chinatown might not know how these three women aren't related to one another. Being an insider, I would know that this van where the women want to get in is actually a 'Chinese bus," where it transfers them to Brooklyn. I would know that any van that has the same descriptions as this one would find a stop to leave its door open and allow anyone that desires to go to Brooklyn to enter.*

We identified another set of neighborhood literacy practices, which we came to call "community literacies." These included community institutions that more obviously provided access to out-of-school literacy practices. For example, students participated in classes at churches after school, Chinese school on the weekends and evenings, and programs in math skills at local tutoring schools.

As "communities of meaning," places and spaces generate strong affective benefits connected to our "sense of belonging" (Cohen, 1982, 1985; Crow & Allan, 1994). Putnam (2000) argues that "community" membership earns 'social capital, promoting openness, curiosity, reciprocity and trust. Importantly, communities provide access to various forms of embodied cultural capital, too (Bourdieu, 1986). Communities pedagogically cultivate dispositions and practices in their members. Some of these we define as *literacies*, the acquisition of specialized skills and attitudes for producing and consuming various kinds of texts. Some of these capitals are institutionally grounded in various kinds of schools, churches, and organizations.

We encouraged students to make familiar events, that are a part of community literacies, *strange* and explain what they know about such events. In doing this, we pushed them to notice how even "street literacies" that may seem insignificant could have a larger value as a community literacy practice. For some students, the practice of translating between English and Chinese for older family members is a frequent event, but it was not necessarily an activity they recognized as a significant literacy practice:

> *Some literacy activities found here are sort of surprising or weird. Like translating for other people or drawing. These activities never occurred to me just yet as literacy activities. (LLA 11)*

Noticing this pattern in the literacy logs, and looking at this as a common phenomenon, helped students to consider their translation work as a significant literacy practice. Students identified their expertise with translating between Chinese and English:

> *The things I think is important is translating for family members and I am kind of an expert in it. Translating is good because some family members don't know english so translate can be a benefit because you are making life easier for them. (LLA 1)*

One student even took this topic as the focus for his "ethnography," interviewing students with experience as the family translator:

> *After interviewing [another student], I came up into the conclusion that he thinks that translating is a pain in the butt. His words were that he translates a lot and that it distracts him from doing homework, playing games, etc. He states that it is a real pain in the butt and that he couldn't always translate every single word in Chinese to his parents. [He] wishes that his parents would understand english. [He] hates translating, that is what I drew in conclusions from my interview with him. He doesn't want anything that has to do with translating. I could understand how many kids would feel the same as [him] that they can't always translate correctly and can't pull out/describe the words to their parents. I've been in his shoes before plenty of times. (E 8)*

It was crucial for this study for us to move away from students judging all out-of-school literacy practices as insignificant—even if they gain significance as being a "pain in the butt." When some students were willing to try out the idea that many practices outside of school fall under the category of "literacy," and that many kinds

of items they encounter outside of school are in fact "texts," we were able to work with students as co-researchers for data collection and analysis.

In our consideration of community literacies, we noticed several ways these practices operated in the lives of students. These categories of syncretism, diasporic identities, and hybrid subjectivities are not to be taken as mutually exclusive topics. Rather, these are three prominent ways of framing community literacy practices in Chinatown that came up through our work and through the data generated by students. We see these modes as contradicting one another in many ways, but also producing a complex picture of the types of community literacies in this study, as well as the ways these practices are understood by students themselves.

Syncretism

Syncretism is a concept from cultural anthropology that Gregory & Williams (2000) bring up to describe how a "contrasting literacies" model for looking at community literacy practices might be useful, and they use syncretism to formulate a perspective on their own findings about community literacies in Spitalfields. "This view states that young learners are not entrapped within any single early childhood literacy practice. The families in the study certainly reveal a complex heterogeneity of traditions, whereby reading practices from different domains are blended, resulting in a form of reinterpretation which is both new and dynamic. Duranti and Ochs refer to this type of blending as *syncretic literacy*, which merges not simply linguistic codes or texts, but different activities" (p. 13). For our work, syncretism is a useful concept, because it moves us beyond looking at students' literacy practices outside of school simply in terms of the work they are doing with texts, but more broadly in terms of the activities they engage in and how these work with formal school literacies.

Repetition of diasporic Chinese identities

Historically, the concept of diaspora among Chinese people has been a strong one. Ang (2001) defines diasporas as "transnational, spatially and temporally sprawling sociocultural formation[s] of people, creating imagined communities whose blurred and fluctuating boundaries are sustained by real and/or symbolic ties to some original 'homeland'" (p. 25). In her work, she shows how the constant re-imagining/re-production of a Chinese homeland is problematic on many levels, most notably in the ways it excludes other subjectivities for those living outside of China; she looks, for example, at her own inability to speak Chinese – seemingly a central aspect of any Chinese identity.

In this study, we found interesting the ways in which students did and did not resist being positioned as part of a Chinese diaspora, in the context of this work. This is a notion we raised already, in the way students resisted being connected with the SARS outbreak, while at the same time using their connections to China to understand and voice opinions on the event. The notion of diaspora has a particular significance in connection with syncretism: the emphasis on a singular culture or homeland articulates well with the notion that practices coming from a students' "home culture" syncretise with school literacies. Questioning a diasporic notion of "Chinese-ness" brings to light certain ways to problematize the notion of syncretism.

Production of hybrid subjectivities

In place of diasporic notions of subjectivity, Ang and others imagine subjectivities as "hybrid." "What the recognition of the third space of hybridity enables us to come to terms with is not only that the diasporic subject can never return to her/his 'origins', but also, more importantly, that the cultural context of 'where you're at' always informs and articulates the meaning of 'where you're from'" (Ang, 2001, p. 35). In fact, hybridity opens up the possibility of thinking about syncretism not only as a correlation or combination between two somewhat stable set of literacy practices, but the production of new forms. In the case of China, Ang points out, "hybridity marks the emancipation of the diaspora from 'China' as the transparent master-signified of 'Chineseness': instead, 'Chineseness' an open signifier invested with resource potential, the raw material for the construction of syncretic identities suitable for living 'where you're at'" (p. 35).

We are interested in this connection between hybridity and syncretism that Ang explains so well. It allows us to look at students' literacy practices not in terms of how they make a connection between some reified notion of "Chinese" or even "Chinese-American" literacies, but in terms of the hybrid forms that emerge. We find these forms in students' work online—as designers and consumers of various forms of new technology—and in literacy practices that position them outside a singular notion of a Chinese diaspora.

Syncretism: Literacy Practices in and out of School

We found that many of students' out-of-school literacy practices contributed to a broader notion of literacy. A common example was Chinese School. Many students attend Chinese School on the weekends, or after attending their regular public school on weekdays. Chinese Schools are run by members of the community, and they provide a setting not only for learning to write Chinese characters, but also for participating in Chinese-style schooling. Several students were interested in Chinese School as an important location of community literacies, and they conducted interviews and ethnographies about this topic. One

student, in her introduction to an interview with a current Chinese School student, noted how it had been an important institution in her life:

> *For the ethnography work, I am planning to work on studying on Chinese school. I will be studying on what people do in Chinese school. I personally have experience on Chinese school, because I have been in Chinese school for around 8-9 years, and also now my little brother is in Chinese school also. From the 8 years of experience in Chinese school, I had a very great time in Chinese school, because I have a lot fun there expressing my home language. I think that I express in Chinese is much easier, and sometimes if I can't express in Chinese, I would use English to support. Another thing in Chinese school that is very fun is the programs that they arrange there. The most programs that I like was dancing, there is only traditional Chinese dance like old dances back in the old days.* (I 17)

This student's interview of a current Chinese school student (her brother) shows some of the ways Chinese school introduces different modes of instruction and literacy practices:

> *Then the teacher would tell us to read these Chinese books, it is kind of big, so we all call it big books. The books are mostly about what children do in school. After that, the teacher would make us write something about or related to the book, such as sometimes she would pull out words from the book, and tell us to write it over and over again so we would remember it. This is the time when most people would start to talk, and chat. Then we all have presentation, such as we would read the big book in front of the class. Everybody has to read the book, and sometimes when someone reads something wrong, then the teacher would correct that person. Sometimes we don't have the presentation, but instead we would have a test. Many people like having the test instead of reading the big book in front of the class, because many people is scared and nervous to stand in front of the class. Sometimes we get nervous and scared that the teacher would yell and classmates would laugh at them and their mistakes. Then play time is here, like finally.* (I 17)

The authoritarian approach of Chinese school, and traditional ways of teaching reading and writing in Chinese, may seem in opposition to constructivist, progressive models of instruction. But we are interested in how it can be a body of literacies that in fact syncretise with the work students do in school.

We have mentioned how, in the work of Gregory & Williams (2000), the notion of syncretism is employed to explain productive interactions between community and school literacies. Their research shows that poor, urban and immigrant students have rich literate lives, can be successful despite not having access to "good" literature or parents who read it to them, having access to a variety of literacy mentors and textual practices, and curricula that attempts to replace 'home,' neighborhood or community literate practices with more privileged ones fail to recognize how these practices "syncretise" or blend with school literacies to enhance learning and success. In showing this, they dispel four myths (p. 13) that affect the literacy education of poor, urban, and frequently immigrant students. The first equates poverty with poor literacy skills, the second conjoins success in reading and writing with particular forms of parenting, and the third predicates the need to ameliorate a mismatch between 'home' literate practices and those privileged in schools. A fourth myth, that there is a best method to solve these children's literacy problems, discounts the richness of these students' literate lives. An emphasis on syncretism allows literacy researchers to examine the way things work together, and not view non-school literacies as competing with the work students do in school.

Viewing community literacy practices in terms of syncretism with school literacies provides different ways of reading students' activities. We have already mentioned the common out-of-school practice of translating official documents and bills, and accompanying adults on their trips to deal with various city agencies. One student concluded his interview by saying that such responsibilities are a "pain" and wishing "that his parents would just learn english." Other students' experiences with this topic, however, add a different dimension. One student had this response, as she selected a literacy practice she could be an expert on:

> *Yes because one integral thing is watching the store or also known as helping my parents at work, this is integral because I live on that money and I'm an expert on it because I know what to do and the percentage or fractions of it.* (LLA 34)

Another student explained:

> *When it comes to looking at the mail and writing checks, I'm the expert on. I do it so often that I remember my mom's Cable and bank account.* (LLA 32)

Again, this practice can be read as taking away from students' time to study and do school work, or from their opportunities to do reading that would be more relevant for school. But how does the practice of dealing with city agencies, of translating for parents in public settings and on the phone, actually syncretise with the work students are doing in skills? Certainly it adds to the kinds of work students are able to do, enhancing their perspective on the uses of literacy. It also changes the way students view the uses of English: it's not only a school language, but also a medium for communication about issues of material value to their families.

Producing and working with online texts was a major area of non-school literacy for students. Many students talked about spending hours upon hours online every day after school – and as much as 10 hours a day on the weekends. But it is not just the fact that students were spending time online that makes it a significant

area. We were also struck by how many students wanted to discuss the literate aspects of online activities such as downloading new games and programs, participating in chatrooms, and designing websites using HTML code or web design programs. This student discussed at length his involvement in Anime:

> *I could be an expert on Japanese Anime and Japanese Music Videos. This is because I have spent half my life watching and learning about these stuff. I have watch many series of Japanese Anime. Also, my siblings and I all like Japanese/Korean videos. We spent hours downloading it, even if it is 3:00 AM in the morning. (LLA 35)*

Many students chose "online" as a body of practices they wanted to do their ethnographies on; in fact many interviews were conducted in chatrooms or via email. The Anime expert whose comments are above even ended up conducting online interviews with other Anime experts at the school. Another girl designed an inquiry into gender and online gaming:

> *Some of the things that we do daily in our lives are by playing games. Logically everyone has their own opinion on the games that they play with. . . . It might be interesting to know how different both female and male might have a specific liking on a game for example: Killing, responsibility games (for example having a robot dog or a little digit pet), educational games, or business (for example Neopets). During the experiment, I would make polls were people would answer for example:*
> *What types of games to you like?*
> > ☐ *Violent Games/Action (War Craft, Star Wars, Star Fox, Unreal, Counter Strike, Mario Bros etc)*
> > ☐ *Responsibility Games (Robot Dog, Robotic Baby, a Digital Pet, etc)*
> > ☐ *Educational Games (SAT Prep, Mathematical problems, etc)*
> > ☐ *Business (Neopets, etc)*
> > ☐ *Socializing Games (The Sims, etc)* (I 33)

Although she was never able to draw a conclusion about the relationship between gender and game preference (for this student, a surprising number of girls preferred violent action games!), even her categorization reflects a detailed understanding of the different contexts students inhabit online.

The ethnographies, interviews, or "experiments" students decided to conduct demonstrated a significant level of understanding about the online world. Students bought into the notion of their online lives—and those of other students—as different in some ways, culturally, from their lives in school or even at home. They were able to step back from this subculture (or collection of subcultures) and comment on the norms, expectations, and practices of these communities perceptively. They talked, for example, about the different social rules of an online gaming community. Some other students commented on the purpose and outcomes of web design:

> *I think this is important to life because the future is all technology and it is a new form of reading. Reading html codes isn't just reading but is understanding something that really doesn't make sense to a lot of people. It is understanding the code and knowing what it would look like in the end. That is what makes it so important. (LLA 14)*

This comment indicates how students understood the value of web designing. Like gaming, it is not a solitary activity. It involves creating a text for readers, for an audience who you want to understand your point. A significant finding, in terms of syncretism, was the way students stressed the importance of online work in relation to school success. How students talked about online work, in many cases, fell into two categories: work that would be productive for academic success, and work that would be known as "wasting time." One students' conclusions after an interviewing a fellow 8th grader who spends a significant amount of time online emphasized this dichotomy:

> *By the interview that I took along with [another student], I can clearly see that going on internet is a pretty frequent thing for [him]. He goes online just about everyday (except Monday, Sundays, and Saturdays) and each time he goes on, it's about more than 4 hours. Most of the time he goes online for academic purposes, but he goes on the internet on his own. When he does go online, he goes on educational sites like NYCHumanities.com, NYC-Kiran.net, and Google.com for research and homework opportunities. He is a great example of an 8th grader going online for school purposes only!* (I 14)

Meanwhile, other students talked about the usefulness of online expertise explicitly as a commodity, something that could give clear material gains now and in the future:

> *Without a doubt, the most interesting activity that caught my eye that I want to know more of is "HTML learning." Firstly, I am a bit afraid, because that means HTML will be much more common amongst my peers and before I know, my skill of HTML will become worthless. Otherwise, I must know the progress that each student in 8th grade is making just for the fun of it. I am eager to compare the passion my classmates have for web design to the passion of mine. Perhaps it's just some shameless self image I am trying to get.*

The fact that (some) students were convinced of the value, in terms of cultural capital, of their online work affects how they themselves perceived the possibility of syncretism. That is, they didn't regard the online activities they were doing outside of school as being disconnected from those they were asked to do in school:

> *Besides, it doesn't seem right to only carry our knowledge of web designs only to the end of this school year. To me, if I started working on the web for something useful (for once in my life), then why not use the experience throughout the rest of my life? (LLA 21)*

They saw a connection between school literacies and non-school practices, and for many students the distinction was blurred.

This is troubling in some ways, because it seems to discount the value of non-school literacies that do not have a clear value in terms of academic returns. The way students looked down on very common activities like translating for parents – or expressed doubt that a common activity like Chinese School was worth researching – shows a certain reluctance to associate these practices with any sort of literate value in school. One reading of this is that, in fact, knowing how to translate or being able to write in Chinese fluently *doesn't* have the immediate value of being able to do certain kinds of web design. But the success of bringing students' online lives into classroom instruction also points to the possibility of other areas of non-school literacy being acknowledged as well.

A final troubling notion of syncretism is the tendency to posit the home or community literacy practices as a finite, stable list of activities. That is, we might say some of the following: Chinese-American students go to Chinese School; they learn how to read and write in a visual system of pictographs; they participate in extremely structured school settings; therefore, this is a set of literacies we can work with in school. This is a very limited way of looking at home-school connections, and this is in part why the overwhelming amount of time students spend in their online lives is important to recognize. Their participation in subcultures that are not totally of Chinatown, that related to but are more than just the neighborhood, points to how syncretism is much more than just a process of neighborhood and school, or home and school. In the next section, we further complicate the notion of a "Chinatown" or "Chinese" approach to literacy, as we question notions of diaspora in the Chinese community.

Repetition of Diasporic Chinese Identities

Let's return to students' ethnographies of Chinese School. We mentioned how a few students characterized the work they did there, describing differences between "normal school" and Chinese School. The following exchanges show another line of reasoning about the value of Chinese School; both are transcriptions from interviews students did:

> *As a Chinese, what do you think about going to Chinese school? Do you think it is useless or helpful? As a Chinese, I believe that going to Chinese School is a significant thing. There's plenty of advantages if you learn Chinese, plus I'm Chinese. We experienced going to Chinese School before and it helped me a lot, I was able to read Chinese Newspaper and able to know what's going on in my homeland China. But I didn't have much interest in it, so I dropped out soon.* (E6)

1) *What do you think Chinese School is about?*
   - *"Chinese School is about learning about the Chinese culture, Chinese words, and lessons in life."*
2) *How do you feel about Chinese School?*
   - *"Let's see, at first I don't really like to go to Chinese School, but as I went to Chinese school more, I kind of liked going because you get to learn stuff about your own culture and its good to learn another language 'cause when you get to college you'll need to know more than 2 or 3 languages."* (E 7)

The notion of Chinatown being responsible for maintaining a connection to the "homeland," for being a place where people can feel connected to Chinese culture – as though this is an unchanging entity – is prominent in writings about Chinatown, and we were surprised to find it in students' discussions of their own literacies. In this section, we explore the emergence of "diasporic" ways of thinking of an immigrant community, using Chinatown as an example. This is certainly a way students thought of themselves and their work, in the context of this study. We worry, however, that this identity can make it difficult to see other, less powerful, hybridities that are also important in these students' literate lives.

The almost mythical notion of a Chinatown's connection to China itself is reflected in many histories and sociological accounts of the neighborhood. Hall (1998), whose book recounts a family history of Chinatown as well as his own relationship to the neighborhood, expresses this perspective well:

> I was an outsider with inside connections. An inside/outsider, perhaps, definitely a Connecticut boy, albeit one who could eat with chopsticks. Yet I knew that even Connecticut only went back three hundred years or so, whereas on Mott Street I could almost smell the beginning of time. I could sense

ghosts back then too, but only dimly. The enchantment I felt was stronger for their being just out of sight, heightened by the fact that we would visit only a few times a year. Months of atmosphere and mystery would be crammed into forays lasting only as long as it took to consume a twelve-course banquet, with insufficient time to explore the shadows behind teakwood dragons and mysterious basement doorways. Over time, I determined to drag those ghosts into the daylight, and find out more about the Chinatown that was tugging on my sleeve. Of course, I am talking about the "old" Chinatown, those few blocks of Mott Street from Canal south to Chatham Square, and then up the Bowery to Doyers and Pell Streets, then west back to Mott, three little thoroughfares to which a whole universe had been transplanted, in miniature. (p. 6).

That Chinatown has such a mystique is problematic. Making an easy equation between the streets of Chinatown – the boundaries of which Hall describes so precisely, as though he is intentionally leaving out newer migrants to a growing Chinatown – and a history that extends to the "beginning of time," Hall sets up the notion of a culture that has remained fixed. Similarly, the notion of a universe, ostensibly the universe that is Chinese-ness, transplanted into these streets also emphasizes a certain static view of culture. As Ang (2001) would point out, this language emphasizes the notion of the Chinese as a diaspora, as though everyone maintains, at heart, a certain central connection to an essential "Chinese-ness."

We were interested to find that students were willing to play into diasporic notions of the importance of Chinatown. One ethnography group wrote about work they had done in the neighborhood taking pictures of significant aspects of Chinatown, and writing about these pictures. The following photo and writing is an example:

Even though in New York City, where people adapt to the American culture pretty well, traditional structures like these are in culture neighborhoods like Chinatown . . . . it is a way for Chinese to remember their traditions and their history.

Like the picture above, the other photos students chose as significant for understanding Chinatown highlighted the architecture of the neighborhood – the outdoor elements encountered primarily by tourists and visitors. The streets with shops and businesses, the obviously Chinese-style architecture, and restaurant windows that would

be familiar to tourists were all prominent:

We pressed students to talk about why these aspects of the neighborhood would be important to a study of community literacy practices. We asked them to consider what might be invisible in these pictures to people from outside Chinatown. The following was a typical response:

> However, what they (tourists/visitors) do not see is that all of these people (Chinese) are different and from different places, some are enemies but in this community they stick together to fight racism outside the Chinatown walls. In the world where there are mostly Americans, they become inferior and scared because they are no longer with those like themselves.

We were struck by how students reproduced notions of the Chinese people as one, a concept central to Zhou's (1995) study of Chinatown as an "urban enclave," in which she argues that oppressive work conditions and a poor living situation are the trade-off for being with other Chinese and being looked after. This logic is refuted not only in labor histories of Chinatown (Kwong, 1979/2001, 1987/1996), but in students' own accounts of their experiences in the neighborhood. There are pronounced divisions around language, immigration history, and locations within Chinatown. In the exercise of writing about these pictures, we had asked them to consider explaining Chinatown to the "outsider." In doing this, we had apparently asked students to summon a notion of their unity as Chinese.

There are a few important points in this re-statement of diasporic identity that are worth exploring. In considering what the forces of globalization might mean for critical literacy education, Luke asks: "How can and should critical literacies and multiliteracies respond to the new push/pull dynamics of economic and cultural globalization?" He argues, that there are "implications and possibilities of literacy education for the construction of 'diasporic' and 'cosmopolitan' identity" (Luke, 2002). As noted earlier, globalization can be addressed differently. Although it might be tempting to imagine that globalization leads to more fluid and hybrid identities, globalization is also marked by parallel patterns of closure, of new types of identity formation related to the "production of locality" (Appadurai, 1996; Shami, 1999). We note that globalization, while producing different pathways and different networks of communication, can also paradoxically work to re-produce fixed forms of identity, very closely related to certain places and particular notions of history. There are notions of cosmopolitanism, as Anderson (1998) has shown, that are so linked to an ethnic connection to a homeland or a unifying past that they effectively shut out hybrid subjectivities that may be available to people. This problematic aspect of cosmopolitanism and globalization has to be confronted in neighborhood studies. How does a study of a neighborhood re-create diasporic identities? And how could it open up the possibility of seeing other subjectivities at play?

Production of Hybrid Subjectivities

Community connotes sentiments of identification, attachment, and location. A community may be understood geographically as a neighborhood, a classroom, or a shared connection through something other than a physical place. For example, 'intentional communities' (Hoggett, 1997) accessed through computer based technologies are central to many of our students' lives. Religious belief, sexual orientation, occupation, or ethnic origin form communities. Further, non-spatial communities may overlap with those grounded in place. In exploring the multiple spatial and non-spatial communities students were a part of, and the literacy practices of these communities, we developed an understanding of the types of hybrid subjectivities that were a part of students' lives.

As we began to discuss in the section on syncretism, students' online literacy practices was an area where we first began to notice the importance of hybridity. The internet formed, for many students, a community that did not correlate directly to the "real world" community of their school or Chinatown, but was nonetheless a place where they spent hours a day. Ang (2001) argues for "the importance of hybridity as a basis for cultural politics in a world in which we no longer have the secure capacity to draw the line between us and

them, between the different and the same, here and there, and indeed, between Asia and the West" (p.3). In this research, we first noticed such an inability to "draw the line" when we looked at students' practices online. They were not who they seemed to be in the classroom, and their interests, priorities, and personalities shifted. Rather than reverting to notions of "community" that stressed their Chinese-ness or even Asian-ness, students had complex commitments to different modes of communication, groups of people, and types of activities. They were hybrid, we noticed, in that the very notions of "community" they talked about did not all sound the same.

There is, of course, an overlap between the online world and the real world for many students, as they meet school and neighborhood friends online, or design websites and blogs with particular real-world people in mind. But as many students acknowledged, even in interactions with people they know from school or from the community, one's online personality and image can be very different. An example is the way in which students who were reserved in class were "vocal" online, circulating petitions supporting political campaigns or just sending constant emails on their views about love or friendship. There are other examples: students talked about finding communities of people devoted to Japanese Anime, even if they were not involved with Anime much among real-world contacts.

But students' online literacies were also complicated by the degree to which some saw their skills as a commodity. The most skillful HTML writers talked with each other in interviews and discussions about where they hoped this programming skill would take them:

> *Of course, there is a practice that is extremely important in my life, which I must be an expert on. That is obviously web designing. I am planning to obtain a challenging position in web designing as my career. I love web designing and I've been doing it since December of 2001. I began working with HTML before anything else (such as the Yahoo! PageBuilder) and I've grew immensely throughout the course of the year. . . . After a period of time, I don't think the activities students do would change much. The slackers will continue to chat online all day, the hearted ones would continue to socialize reasonably, and my passion for web designing since the very beginning would perpetuate.* (LLA 33)

Many of the students who saw the potential in HTML looked forward to making a lot of money doing design work. These same students, as the quotation above exemplifies, tended to discount the value of "non-academic" online work like chatting, gaming, and blogging. This devaluing of the range of other students' practices is disturbing. First, it just re-creates the same problem that drew us to study students' non-school literacies: the idea that not all of the things that kids do outside school really help them be more literate, that only practices encouraged by schools will facilitate literacy. This is the very notion we are trying to avoid, so we worry when students are so exclusive about the potential value of their literacy practices.

Moreover, we are convinced that developing an ease with multiple forms of new technologies is powerful for students not because any single body of practices holds the key to syncretising with the realities of some unknown future. That is, being skilled in HTML is not a wonderfully hybrid literacy practice because HTML is inherently useful. On the contrary, the uses of the internet are constantly expanding, and the types of interactions that occur online are changing, such that a range of practices—both "academic" and "non-academic"—contribute to developing a hybrid subjectivity. HMTL may (or may not) be useless in a few years, but being able to move between technology-mediated literacy practices – to have a "portfolio" of practices and dispositions that correspond and shape one's interaction with emerging literacy practice – is to us a more compelling aspect of hybrid subjectivities in literacy.

So we are compelled to revisit some students whose literacy practices did not, at first, appear terribly hybrid or even significant. Students who were really involved in gaming – some of them to the extent that online games took up their "free time" during the school day and the after school program – talked about their alter egos online. Even more significantly, many of these students resisted the invitation to talk about or document their online literacies, by either avoiding the assignment or leaving out any critical details. This is an example from an interview in a chatroom between two students:

> *Azn pSycHo: yo. . . . here's mah interview questions:*
> *Azn pSycHo: 1. Why are games an enjoyment? 2. Why are games attractive to people your age?*
> *TemPleR: ok games are enjoyment because it help me relax and get the stress away from schoolwork*
> *Azn pSycHo: n...*
> *TemPleR: it's attractive because it just is*
> *TemPleR: something about human makes it attractive*
> *Azn pSycHo: say more*
> *TemPleR: u wanna beat the game*
> *TemPleR: so it gets interesting*
> *Azn pSycHo: okay*
> *Azn pSycHo: thanks*
> *TemPleR: np*

We can take this as laziness or reluctance to do school work. But it is more likely that students were reluctant to let go of the ways in which the gaming world is separate from the world of school, or even of home life.

Trying to classify the value of certain online literacies in academic terms may have been a bit much to demand of students. This is especially true considering the degree to which their digital literacies—with games, websites, and even movies or music—had been excluded for most of their schooling. In other words, the willingness of students practicing an academically valuable online literacy (web design) to talk about this practice is not surprising, nor is the reluctance of students interested in gaming or music downloading, given the relationship these students saw between their online world and the world of school.

A similar analysis could be extended to students who had trouble talking about the significance of acting as English translator for parents and other adults, or students who spent an hour every afternoon copying Chinese characters in a local Chinese School. These practices typically being kept separate from school literacies—and in the worst scenarios seen as detracting from the effectiveness of the literacy work going on in school—students' reluctance to look at them carefully is understandable. The hybrid nature of even these clearly community-based neighborhood literacies then is typically overlooked. But we wonder how, even in these practices, hybrid subjectivities are made available, in ways that might be connected to the hybridity students show in their online work. The significance of the "Third Space" (Bhabha, 1994) lies, after all, in a challenge to history and a recognition of in-between spaces:

> The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. . . . . the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end, we should remember that it is the "inter" – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of meaning of culture. . . . (Bhabha, 1994p. 37-8)

This disruption of the typical means of defining "culture" is central to our understanding of hybridity. Instead of a diasporic notion of students in Chinatown, one which centers on the things they have drawn from their Chinese heritage and the remnants of their Chinese-ness still existing in a new country, the Third Space emphasizes their hybridity. This includes ways in which, without a doubt, students may still articulate in their literate practices and cultural expressions connections to some "originary Past," but also ways in which they create new cultures forms and literate practices that contest this notion of their identity. Recognizing that these different articulations are available and at play all at once is necessary in developing a concept of hybrid literacy practices that moves beyond syncretic connections between school and non-school institutions. It puts some of the agency in the hands of students as not only consumers, but also *producers* of culture and literacy practices.

Implications for Critical Literacy in the Context of Globalization

Engaging with students as co-researchers in this study helped us in identifying different literacy practices—in and out of school—that are relevant to them. However, it was probably more significant for us actually to move away from a strict location of the "neighborhood" in the physical space around the school. Guided by the types of literacy practices students were identifying as most important in their lives, we looked at how they were at once positioning themselves as Chinese, and rejecting being located *only* in Chinatown.

Given the hybrid character of these students' literate lives, then, we suggest some implications of this research. First, it calls for rethinking, or at least continually expanding the terms of, New Literacy Studies – both in terms of the methodologies employed and the conclusions that may be drawn. Second, this work points out some directions for school literacies in the context of globalization, particularly in terms of incorporating and recognizing the practices available to students and the value these practices may have. Finally, we have pointed out that there are multiple forces associated with globalization, and that it certainly is not one linear process. But the reality is that the value and meaning of students' literacies are changing rapidly due to forces outside their communities and beyond their expectations. Often these forces are completely beyond local control, and involve linguistic, cultural, and economic homogeneity. We close by discussing some visions of research and practice in such a volatile globalizing context.

New Literacy Studies and Relations of Power in Literacy

Destabilizing received notions of what and who counts as appropriately literate, New Literacy Studies raises questions of legitimation and access to privileged communicative practices. While NLS has been a powerful and necessary descriptive tool to contest autonomous conceptions of literacy informing literacy education and policy, it has limited researchers' ability to understand how literate practices work recursively

within relations of power. Heller (2005) contends that NLS be taken to its logical conclusion, "that we see 'literacy' as an ideological construct, relating to a variety of forms of communicative practice that are, for reasons we can empirically discover, understood to be somehow different from other forms of communicative practice." Determining the providence to legitimate previously discounted or stigmatized texts, communicative practices, text users, and text makers becomes possible, she argues, when they are seen within social "terrains" or fields.

Bourdieu's conceptual framework problematizes both "autonomous" and "ideological" conceptions of literacy. Literate practices circulate in economies of distinction across many fields in social space. Heller concludes, "Until we can provide analyses of why we even bother with the concept of literacy, and why certain kinds of socially-situated actors take the positions [within fields of social practice] regarding literacy they do, we cannot fulfill the NLS agenda of understanding how literacy is bound up in the construction of relations of power."

Our research revealed the ways that, even within a study of students' non-school literacy practices, students themselves can engage in creating hierarchies of more and less-relevant practices. With academic success and future financial security held up as standards to aspire to, students can continue to stigmatize their own practices that seem less useful or having less potential. This is a problematic aspect of investigating hybrid literacies. One way of negotiating this problem could be, to use Heller's argument, to locate students' practices in relation to "terrains" – even in cases where it is not possible to locate them *within* social terrains.

School Literacy Curriculum in the Context of Globalization

Forces associated with globalization have altered the experiences with literacy and community that are central to our students' lives. These forces have at once influenced the production of hybrid subjectivites, forms of technological competence, imaginings of life pathways – and paradoxically re-inscribed students' notions of themselves as Chinese. Globalization opens up potential life pathways and networks of communication, while simultaneously pushing groups of people not only to the *local* margins, but to the *global* margins. How can we even judge the relevance of literacy practices, online competencies, and hybrid subjectivities when the power of globalization often seems to be its ability to shift the ground we are firmly standing on? Even the HTML skills that gave students some technological distinction as we were conducting this study do not have the same meaning now. As HTML programming is subsumed by web design software, and other forms of page design are developed, the value of a particular skill slips and shifts.

One direction this study suggests is that literacy instruction cannot attempt to predict the future digital literacy "needs" of students. Instead of guessing directions, we are intrigued by the idea of providing students with the critical competency to discern what is important, to read different kinds of new emerging texts, and to learn to work with them. Of course, seeing how students pick up everything from "Responsibility Games" to Dynamic HTML, it is not unreasonable to imagine students have this potential. On the other hand, we have cause for concern when we see students *still* skeptical about the literacy value of complex online games or home language literacy.

Perhaps this is because, for so many years, students' literacy practices were seen as deficits – even construed as inconsistent with school and traditional print texts. As long as school fails to meet the challenge of responding to changing literacies, students too will retain some reluctance to value even the practices they spend half their waking hours developing. The argument can be taken even farther, as the most evil aspects of globalization – deterioration of local communities, homogenization of (consumer) culture, declining quality of life – are not taken into account as decisions about school curriculum are made. Perpetuating mythologies around success with traditional print literacies arguably disadvantages those most affected by the affects of globalization and the failure to see what new forms of literacy have to offer.

Future Research Directions and Methodologies

The very terms of New Literacy Studies research can be problematic, then, when used to research literacies affected and reformulated by global patterns of migrations and economic change – flow and closure involving people, ideas, media, and subjectivities. First, by looking so closely at categories such as neighborhood and local community, the NLS approach can fail to see the generation of literate practices from larger, global contexts. Second, even when students are involved in this process of analysis of home/school or community/school literacies, the problem of repetition is not really resolved. That is, when students are invited to analyze how literacies outside school represent things "other people wouldn't know about Chinatown," they are in fact asked to re-inscribe this notion of outsider/insider. And while this insider/outsider positioning is not a complete fiction, as our data show, it is not the whole picture.

We believe this study has gone some of the distance in broadening the terms of researching community literacies. But judging from the de-localized nature of much of our students' practices, we believe there is a need to extend the notion of locality, even with the students involved in research. In his discussion of how ethnography needs to change with the shifting notion of locality Appadurai (1996) writes the following:

> . . . ethnographers can no longer simply be content with the thickness they bring to the local and the particular, nor can they assume that as they approach the local, they approach something more elementary, more contingent, and thus more real than life seen in larger-scale perspectives. . . complex, partly-imagined lives must now form the bedrock of ethnography, at least the sort of ethnography that wishes to retain a special voice in a transnational, deterritorialized world. (p. 54)

What Appadurai says about ethnography is true of literacy studies as well. As important as the local context is, there is now a need to look more carefully at local-global connections and the production of hybrid subjectivities. Young people's lives and literacy practices may no longer follow logical or predictable trajectories, particularly students who are migrants in some way. As our students' different connections to the SARS outbreak showed, they may be forced into a hyper-ethnic position, in which their connection to a homeland becomes evident in how they are positioned and treated. At the same time, students themselves may create different pathways and perspectives in the way they frame their lives online or in other hybrid spaces. Future research should take up these different possibilities as inherent to a globalizing world, a challenge to research in literacy studies.

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