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# The textuality of learning contexts in Further Education

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(version as of 5 Sept 2006)

A significant aspect of learning contexts is the way in which semiotic artefacts mediate learning within them. The *Literacies for Learning in Further Education* (LlLFE)<sup>1</sup> project is researching the role of texts and associated communicative practices in constructing and mediating teaching and learning, in shaping communities, in constructing and sustaining relationships, and in helping students to achieve their goals. A particular aim of the project is to identify ways in which people can bring literacy practices from one context into another to act as resources for learning in the new context. In this paper we explain what we mean by 'literacy practices', demonstrate the textuality of learning contexts through examples from contrasting curriculum areas, and show how learning can be enhanced by mobilising literacy practices from one context to another.

## The concept of 'literacy practices'

The LlLFE project takes its orienting theory from the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Street 1984, Barton 1994, Baynham 1995, Barton and Hamilton 1998, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič (eds) 2000). NLS takes a social view of literacy, which entails several central tenets. Firstly, it is revealing to think of literacy as the (social) use of written language to get something done in a specific context, rather than as the (cognitive) ability to read and write, independent of context. Literacy is not an autonomous set of skills for decoding and encoding linguistic structures which can simply be learnt, measured by tests, and then transferred from one context to

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another. Rather, each literacy is situated in its social context, serving different purposes in different contexts, and varying from one context to another. Hence, it is more productive to speak of 'literacies' in the plural than a single literacy.

Ethnographic observation of social life reveals that we live in a textually mediated world (Smith 1990): it is not long before a literacy researcher finds that almost any aspect of social life involves reading and/or writing of some sort.

Literacy researchers make their unit of analysis a 'literacy event': an activity in which reading and/or writing plays a part. They observe and gain participant perspectives on literacy events, seeking to understand their culturally-specific characteristics.

They pay attention to who does what, with whom, when, where, with what tools, technologies and resources, how, in what combinations, under what conditions, and for what purposes. They try to uncover participants' values, attitudes and beliefs about literacy, and what literacy means to them. They pay attention to issues of power and status in literacy events, and the consequences for identity of participation in them. From such data, they derive insights about 'literacy practices' – culturally recognisable ways of doing things with literacy in which people can be seen to be engaging. This account presents the learning of literacy as informal, situated, achieved through participation in socially significant action.

Most of the research in NLS has been undertaken in non-pedagogic settings – studies of the reading and writing people do to accomplish their lives at home, in the community, in the workplace. They have included studies of literacy practices in a variety of languages, of multilingual literacy practices, of the literacy practices of adults and of children (see, for example, Barton and Hamilton 1998, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič 1994, 2000, Martin-Jones and Jones 2000, Gregory and Williams 2000).

These studies have emphasised the complexity, diversity and richness of literacies in which people engage as part of their lives as workers, citizens, family members, and

participants in widely varying communities of practice. In order to distinguish these literacies which are embedded in social action from the type of reading and writing which is done in school, the term 'vernacular literacy practices' has been used. Vernacular literacy practices are those in which people engage for purposes of their own: these practices are very different from 'doing literacy' at school, and they are learnt through participation in the activities of which they are a part, not through instruction, drills and tests.

The situated view of literacy makes it essential to study written language not just as a set of linguistic structures which can be turned into electronic form, as many linguists do, but in their exact visual and material form. Even the simplest written texts are always multimodal, consisting of linguistic, visual and material modes. The analyst needs to pay attention to the size of the writing and of the surface on which it appears; whether handwritten or typed; the colour of ink, pencil, digital image, the paper, the screen background; the relationship between writing and space; the way parts of the writing are related to each other and/or to graphics; underlining, use of space, framing, overlaying of text, and other aspects of layout. (See Cope and Kalantzis 2000, Ivanič 2004, Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 2001, Moss 2001, Ormerod and Ivanič 2002).

Beyond the linguistic text, a social view of literacy recognises that linguistic components of texts often cannot be disentangled from other forms of visual semiosis such as pictures, logos and diagrams. Literacy practices therefore include the use, interpretation and production of texts which depend upon intersemiotic communication. When the texts we are talking about are electronic, the complexity and diversity of these features is pushing the limits of existing means of semiotic analysis. Further, the term 'texts' can embrace a very wide range of cultural artefacts, including clothing, architecture, and landscape, and the term 'literacy practices' can

be stretched to apply to the use, interpretation and production of all of these either separately, or in interaction with, written language. In the LfLFE project our focus is on texts which use written language, however minimally; we take note of texts in the broader interpretation above, but they are not our central concern. In all the ways outlined here the textuality of learning contexts is not just linguistic, but multimodal.

Attention to the multimodality of texts leads to an interest also in the media, technologies, materials and tools for inscription whereby texts-as-artefacts are made and received (Ormerod and Ivanic 2000). New technologies add enormously to the significance and diversity of literacy media and artefacts, leading them to interact with the linguistic aspects of genres in complex ways. This factor is proving to be highly significant in the LfLFE project, with students varying across the whole range from high-tech to low-tech in the media they employ and prefer for reading and writing.

### **The textuality of learning contexts**

While the NLS view of literacy is not fundamentally an educational theory, it is central to any study of context, since almost all contexts are in some way textually mediated, and it is highly relevant to the nuanced understanding of, we suggest, nearly all learning contexts. In this section, we identify the connections between a social view of literacy, as outlined above, and learning and teaching.

A wide range of written texts are in use as mediating tools in learning contexts: texts such as booklets, websites, letters, handouts, overhead presentations, textbooks, logbooks, files containing notes on A4 paper, labels, maps, diagrams, writing on blackboards, white boards, measurements, lists. Each of these suggests not only a particular type of physical object, but also a particular type of multimodal communication of which that object is a part. The texts themselves invite questions about purposes, processes and the cultural situatedness of reading and/or writing in

pedagogic contexts: who reads and writes what, how, why, when, where, and in what relation to other aspects of learning: cognitive, linguistic, material, social, and ideological.

It is crucial not to conflate 'literacy' with 'learning'. 'Literacy' is 'the use of written language to achieve a social goal': literacy is a means to an end, not an end in itself; 'learning' is one of the sorts of social goal that literacy can serve, whether or not in an educational context. Learning is not necessarily textually mediated, although we have not had to look far to find written language somewhere, even in the most practical curriculum areas. In most of these contexts there is an astounding diversity and complexity of multimodal texts, and of the practices surrounding their use, and the relationships between literacy practices and learning differ substantially from context to context.

Texts within literacy practices are, we claim, an extremely valuable locus for educational research, as they are tangible cultural artefacts of the teaching/learning event, which may or may not be enhancing learning. By eliciting participants' perceptions of their role in the learning process, we hope to increase our understanding of what makes texts useful to learning, of ways of using texts which are productive for learning, and of possible ways in which learning might be enhanced by texts and literacy practices which have not previously been used in educational contexts.

### ***The Literacies for Learning in Further Education Project***

The LfLFE project is taking the New Literacy Studies approach to the study of literacy in two new directions. Firstly, it is extending it to a new group of people: we are studying the situated, multimodal literacy practices in the everyday lives of people who are attending a range of F.E. courses. Secondly, we are bringing this theoretical

approach to literacy into a pedagogic context: that of learning a range of curriculum subjects in Further Education. We are basing our research in 32 units of study from eleven curriculum areas across four colleges of Further Education. The 16 teachers of these units are acting as College-Based Researchers in collaboration with university-based researchers to research the literacy practices relevant to their units of study. Firstly, we are researching the literacy practices in which the students on those courses participate in their everyday lives: in connection with their families, domestic responsibilities, communities, leisure pursuits, travel, health, employment, and encounters with bureaucracy (see Edwards and J. Smith, 2004, J. Smith 2005, Stanistreet 2004). We are doing this through iterative interviews, supported by clock-faces which they draw to show what they do in a 24-hour period of their lives, and for some students by photographs they take of the literacies in their lives. This is data about what people use reading and writing for, and is not necessarily focusing on learning.

Secondly, we are collecting evidence of the literacy practices surrounding all the texts read and written by the students for the purpose of learning on each of these curriculum units, for the purpose of demonstrating learning, and for participating more broadly in college life (see, for example, Edwards and J. Smith, 2004, Ivanič 2006). We are doing this through observations, interviews, in-depth study of the use of specific texts, and comprehensive collection of and reflection on the use of texts within each unit.

We are not focusing on the teaching and learning of literacy skills, as might take place in a 'Communication Skills' class or a 'Literacy Hour'. Rather, we are interested in the literacies which are entailed in the learning of a subject area such as Childcare, Media Studies, Travel and Tourism. We are using a social view of literacy to study literacy practices in which students need to participate in order to learn the content of

that unit, and to demonstrate their learning of it. It is, of course, likely that through participation in situated literacy practices within their curriculum units, the students will also develop their literacy capabilities 'informally', but that is only a secondary consideration for us.

Noticing and collecting texts is a starting-point for our research into the literacy practices whereby these texts mediate, potentially mediate, or fail to mediate learning in the curriculum areas in our sample. We are supplementing the collection of texts with data on the purposes and processes of reading and/or writing these texts - according to the teachers, according to the learners, on who does what with them, and how. In the next section we discuss the textuality of two contrasting learning contexts in Further Education, showing how texts are to a greater or lesser extent constitutive of curriculum areas, and that texts play an important role even in relatively practical curriculum areas.

### **Examples of texts and literacy practices in two F.E. learning contexts**

#### ***A textually saturated curriculum area: Media studies***

Media Studies is a curriculum area in which students are expected to engage with a wide variety of different texts. In terms of the LfLFE project, this is an unusual area in that it is not seen as a vocational subject. However, students on the course are often focused on a career in the Media. Texts do not just mediate but actually constitute this curriculum area. Reading and writing a wide variety of multimodal texts in a wide range of media is the main activity on the course, making it very different from, say, Painting and Decorating, or Catering and Hospitality – the area of our second case study. The particular unit looked at for the project is the three-month introductory unit of the AS course, which is the first year of the two-year A level. In this section we start with an analysis of the first text the students receive, both as an example of how a text mediates enculturation into a new course, and for the way in which it



represents the literacy practices which constitute the course. We then expand out, first to examine the other texts which the students encounter in their very first lesson, and then to consider the textuality of learning on the course as a whole.

The first text handed out on the course is a stapled introductory booklet consisting of 11 double-sided pages in black and white. It encapsulates semiotically the relationship between 'Media' and 'Studies' on which the course is based, illustrating the range of texts and literacy practices associated with the course, and suggesting links between them.

The front page is representative of the whole booklet in the way it intersperses the discourse of education with media discourses (see Figure 1). The title of the booklet is 'AS MEDIA STUDIES' and sub-title 'COURSE OUTLINE' – phrases which belong to the discourse of education. But sandwiched between these phrases is a picture of the poster for the film 'Gladiator' with two other photograph images on either side of it, one from the Oscars and the other from the same film. The word "GLADIATOR" is on the poster and also the words "A HERO WILL RISE", but these words are almost illegible due to the quality of the printing. Directly beneath the words "COURSE OUTLINE" are the advertising slogans: "just do it." (in lower case but with a full stop after it) and "You bet it's delicious" along with the *Coca-Cola* logo. So, while the title is in the discourse of education, the rest of the semiotic content of the front page is reproducing images and words from a range of popular culture artefacts.

The rest of the booklet continues to interperse the discourse of education with media discourses. The second page contains more words, all in large capital letters, and uses bullet points for the "key concepts" for Media Studies. In the centre of the page is an image of a film spool. The booklet continues with written descriptions of the modules and their assessment methods and weighting, interspersed throughout with

a variety of images from films of various genres, advertising, newspapers and magazines. Side by side with these images are photographs of students in front of computers, and a close-up of someone hand-writing an examination paper. Under a heading “Learning Resources” is a photograph of a set of library shelves holding books, another of library shelves holding DVDs and videos, and another of the inside of a video shop. On the next page are photographs of relevant newspapers and magazines: *Sight and Sound*, *The Guardian* (on Mondays) and the *TES*. Following this is a picture of a computer screen with ‘Search’ highlighted, and beneath this the logos of local cinemas.

The juxtaposition of the images from media alongside student literacy practices in a range of different domains highlights the nature of the course – that the students will study elements of the media world all around them, using media to do so. In this respect the document suggests that the course itself is a borderland between literacy practices associated with media consumption and literacy practices associated with education. Although not many students made this connection when they were interviewed at the beginning of the course, the majority tending to see the course as unconnected with their everyday lives, this perception began to change as their involvement with the course – and with the research - progressed.

In the same lesson the students were given a questionnaire designed to indicate to them how much of the media they “consume” on a daily basis. Questions include: “Write down in one sentence what you think Media Studies is”. This is the only question that uses the word “sentence” and only the first three questions use the words “write down”. We would suggest that this first question is the one which most directly relates to the educational context, which is reflected in the explicitness of the terms relating to an educational literacy practice: one which has the sole purpose of “demonstrating understanding”. Thereafter the questions relate to the students’

everyday practices, including “How often do you rent videos?” and “How many hours of radio do you listen to in a week?” The students were expected to write answers to these questions in the spaces left on the sheet. Further handouts for this first session included a single-sided page headed “Reading the Media (Unit 1) Key Concepts” and containing written text and bullet points. This was accompanied by a three-page document on “Key Concepts” printed from the internet. The students also made their own notes on each of the Key Concepts, and were then asked to apply them to a print media text they were given, by writing down notes relating to their given text under each of the Key Concept headings.

In this one lesson, the students were required to ‘read’ written texts and images simultaneously, to write notes based on the teacher’s explanation and with reference to paper-based texts produced by the teacher, sourced from examination board assessment criteria, from a web site, and from local information relating to the college resource centre and cinemas and video shops in the towns nearby. They were expected to keep this information and refer to it as the course progressed.

An instruction towards the end of the introductory booklet is “In short increase your media intake!” The content of the booklet itself indicates that this refers to accessing websites; watching films at home or in the cinema; reading books, newspapers and magazines; watching TV; listening to the radio. These are all activities in which students engage on a daily basis, but they alone do not ensure success on the course. This is acknowledged by the inclusion of images of the college resource centre and of people writing essays and sitting exams. The message carried by the booklet is that it is only the combination of ‘real world’ media literacy practices and educational literacy practices which will enable students to succeed. Indeed, the *raison d’être* of Media Studies can be seen as the reification of that combination.

In subsequent sessions students were shown moving images from documentaries, advertising, news programmes, films, pop videos. After watching a clip, they were required to write notes and subsequently to develop their notes into an academic style essay, all the while being expected to translate their interpretation of the visual images into a standardised form of language espoused by the education system but frequently flouted by the very texts under scrutiny. While the media texts they were analysing are part of the everyday world, the way in which they are analysing them is securely grounded in academic terminology and the literacy practices associated with that domain.

The LfLFE project has been attempting to uncover details about students' everyday literacy practices while also revealing the range and detail of the literacy practices required by their college courses. Media Studies as an academic subject throws into relief the complexity of the relationship between the two areas of our research, and highlights the difficulty of bringing the two together; while texts mediate literacy practices in different contexts, the very same texts can be the focus of crucially different literacy practices. While a student may 'idly' watch pop videos or read magazines in their spare time, the same video clip or magazine article can become the focus of a literacy practice which carries the values and identities of the educational system. For us as researchers to understand what and how texts can most usefully be employed in education, we need first to understand the perceptions of the participants in the literacy practices which involve those texts.

### ***A curriculum area with minimal textuality – or is it? Catering and Hospitality***

Although Catering and Hospitality might seem a far cry from Media Studies in that the literacy practices associated with Media Studies are explicitly (in the title) and obviously many and diverse, we have found that Catering, both as a job and as a subject area, also requires engagement with a variety of literacy practices. When the

Catering and Hospitality department was first approached as a subject area for inclusion in the project, the response was that there was not much literacy in Catering. However, observation of the college restaurant and kitchens – not to mention the theory classes - indicates that this is not necessarily the case.

Students on courses of level 2 and 3, including the NVQ Food and Drink Service (level 2) course researched, are given a log book which has to be filled in as they complete different elements for assessment. The logbook is used to demonstrate knowledge and competence for the purposes of accreditation. The completion of the log book is a formal literacy practice firmly grounded in an educational context, although the term 'log book' itself may be an attempt to de-formalise the concept of a 'Record of Achievement'. This is a practice which students regard with varying degrees of enthusiasm, but is generally seen as a necessary and relatively manageable activity. Because completion of the log book is crucial to students completing the course, they are in evidence throughout all activities in the restaurant and kitchens.

At the same time, as part of their college course students are 'working' in the restaurant, taking orders ('writing checks'), reading and explaining menus to customers, reading booking entries in the diary, working the bar and the till, reading the whiteboard in the kitchen with details of the dishes and who is cooking what, accessing the computer for information about customers' special requirements, and filling in electronic templates for customers' bills and cash summary sheets.

At other times they are designing and writing menus, posters and leaflets for direct use in the restaurant. In addition students are asked to complete assignments, such as, at level 1, researching how to find a job and complete a CV, culminating in a mock interview, and designing and costing a menu to fit given criteria. One student

explained how he had learnt to describe the same dish in a variety of styles, ranging from a £7 meal to one for £40. This might appear to be the kind of activity required of an A level (level 3) Media student, rather than level 2 Catering.

The fact that a large part of the students' time in Catering even within college is spent in a work environment, means that once again the juxtaposition of different kinds of literacies is clearly in evidence. In this curriculum area, there is the requirement for formal academic literacy practice in the completion of the log book, and the less formal but equally prescriptive workplace literacy practices involved in the effective and efficient running of a restaurant.

It may be significant that, although many students found no difficulty in completing their log books, some struggled with it. I observed two students requiring individual help with writing down what they had done in the restaurant, whilst apparently having had no difficulty in actually doing it. The same students had no problem with writing orders, checking the computerised restaurant bookings and so on. But they felt they needed help with spelling 'cafetiere' and 'cutlery' and remembering where to put the full stops and commas (it was the students asking these questions, not the tutors). The students acknowledged that the conventions of the formal literacy practice of completing a log book were different from those of the workplace-based practice of writing a check: moving between practices involves recognising their differences.

### **Textuality as a resource for learning across contexts**

What we have described so far is our research into the semiotic artefacts and literacy practices which mediate learning on two contrasting F.E. courses. We are also studying the same students' literacy practices in domains of their lives other than their college courses: the role of multimodal texts in their domestic lives, their leisure, their travel, their communication with family and friends, their participation in

community action, their religion, and their part-time work. This has revealed that most students are engaging in a wide array of practices and have a variety of expertise, and yet the students – and their tutors - often see these as separate from and irrelevant to their college lives. The LfLFE project has been working with F.E. tutors to identify ways in which the students' literacy practices and expertises outwith college might be mobilised to increase their success on the courses on which they are enrolled (see, for example, Smith 2005, Ivanič and Satchwell forthcoming, Satchwell forthcoming).

As we emphasised earlier, it is not primarily students' (informal) **learning** in their everyday lives that we are studying, with a view to mobilising knowledge or ways of learning from one domain to another. Rather, it is their everyday **literacy practices** we are concerned with. Almost certainly their participation in literacy practices in the many different domains of their lives does entail some learning, but that is not our primary focus, as we pointed out earlier. We see literacy practices as resources for getting things done, and learning is one among many of the social actions which literacy practices can mediate.

Our hypothesis is that literacy practices, employed in the first instance for purposes of conducting aspects of everyday life, have the potential to be mobilised, or 'networked', as resources for learning in the F.E. domain. So, for example, we are interested in how students on the *Media Studies* and *Food and Drink Service* courses described above can draw on their practices in other domains to serve the purpose of enhancing learning in these college contexts. In the example below we contrast two students on Catering and Hospitality courses, showing how one mobilises literacy practices across domains, and the other doesn't.

### ***Separation of everyday literacy practices from the college course***

Some elements of a practice are more crucial than others for effectively engaging in that practice. For example, to play a computer game it is necessary to install the game following the on-screen instructions, to read directions as to which buttons to press and in what order, and to build up experience of playing such games over time. To play a computer game *successfully*, however, it is also prerequisite to want to succeed (for whatever reason) and to reach the next level. If this desire is not in place, there is little motivation to engage in the practice, and certainly little hope of doing so effectively (for discussion of this, see Gee 2003). Similarly, to successfully create a poster advertising an event, there is a need to be convinced of the validity of the event, and of the possibility of reaching the desired audience through this means.

The following examples illustrate how a lack of awareness of or engagement with certain elements of a literacy practice can differentiate between a student who succeeds on their course, and one who does not. Students on the level 1 Introduction to Hospitality course were required to design a leaflet related to catering in an environment of their choice. Two of the students in the project researched their chosen topic comprehensively, completed spider diagrams, and produced extremely effective leaflets which they handed in with their notes and evidence of research. However, another student involved in the project handed in a leaflet with no accompanying notes or evidence, entitled 'THE ARMED'. This student had chosen the armed forces as the environment on which to focus, as he related strongly to them in his everyday life. He had produced the leaflet at home on his computer, on which he frequently played games and surfed the net. However, he had clearly not engaged with the literacy practice required of him in producing the leaflet: he had not recognised the need for the text to be accessible to an audience and had apparently not noticed that the heading was incomplete. The literacy practice of creating a leaflet not only requires being able to use a computer and having an understanding



of the conventions of the genre, but also requires a belief that there is a purpose in creating it and a potential audience for that leaflet. This student's lack of engagement with the task indicates his lack of conviction in this respect, culminating in him not taking ownership of the pedagogic practice.

When one of us interviewed this student, he clearly differentiated between his activities in and outside of college; in fact he was unable to recall most of his college activities, but was able to talk at length about his interest in playing computer games, teaching Army Cadets, and researching weaponry. In terms of topic and technology, therefore, one might have expected this college literacy practice to be resonant with his home practices. However, there are crucial differences between the two sets of practices, which militate against him being able to mobilise his resources effectively between domains: his sense of purpose and ownership in the pursuit of the literacy practices in his own time was clearly not replicated in his college literacy practices. Although at the present time this student appears to be struggling on his course, there is no reason to assume that this will continue, or that he will not find his own key to mobilising the literacies in his life from one domain to another.

### ***Everyday literacy practices as resources for learning on the college course***

In contrast, a student on the level 2 Food and drink service course who also worked as a restaurant supervisor, made clear links between his college life and his life outside college. Most significantly he saw his work even in the college restaurant as a reflection of himself – although not to the extent it would be if it were 'his own place'. He talked in an interview about producing an information sheet to accompany a menu in the restaurant at college. When asked whether this was something he was required to do for the course, he replied, "It's, it is and it isn't!", indicating that, whether or not it was part of the course assessment process, it was

worth doing for other reasons. Asked how he would feel about a spelling mistake on the menu, Logan replied:

Well, it would matter and I'd feel, as soon as a customer pointed that out, whether it was me that wrote the menu or whether it was someone else, I would feel embarrassed because it's the place where I'm representing ... Yesterday the menus had a, were done, and Mr H [the college restaurant manager] had to add something quickly and it came up in a smaller font, and I was a bit, I don't like that, but not in the way that I would say 'oh we're going to have to print out 8 new menus because of it', but I would feel like, if it was my own place I probably would, do you know what I mean?

The production of menus for the college restaurant can be seen as an example of a literacy event which is situated in a time and place, following particular conventions of format and usage, but also – for Logan – is imbued with values and attitudes to which he subscribes in a professional capacity. Logan's personal identification with the values inherent in the literacy practice required for both the course and the effective running of a restaurant may be the key to his success: Logan, at the age of 20 and still part-way through his course, is now maitre d'hotel of a highly prestigious local golf club restaurant. We might say that Logan is able to mobilise his everyday literacy practices as resources for learning and succeeding in a college context, largely because he does not differentiate between crucial aspects of his own life and his college life: "It is and it isn't". In Logan's case it is identifying with the values that are prerequisite for the running of a successful restaurant (see Ivanič 2006 for further analysis of this case).

## **Conclusion**

The LfLFE project is showing the significance of the textuality of learning contexts in F.E., and the nature of the literacy practices associated with these texts. It is showing

how courses which are explicitly constituted by literacy practices, such as A Level Media Studies, recontextualise the everyday texts and practices of media consumption in pedagogic practices. This heterogeneity may go unrecognised not only by students but also by staff, and may hinder rather than enhance learning.

Further, the research is showing how even curriculum areas which are thought of as mainly practical, and are chosen by students who don't think of themselves as good at reading and writing, such as Catering and Hospitality, are to a large extent textually mediated. Firstly, the vocational areas for which such courses are preparing students are dependent on a wide range of largely hidden literacy practices.

Secondly, there are pedagogic literacy practices surrounding learning and teaching and, more especially, the provision of evidence of learning on such courses. The textuality of such contexts is a major factor to be recognised and taken into account in the management of learning.

The project is also uncovering the literacy practices which mediate the activities and relationships in which students engage in other domains of their lives. These are characterised by the high degree of ownership and agency with which they participate in these practices: for many students there is a marked contrast between this ownership and agency and their lack of engagement in the literacy practices on their courses. The challenge is to identify factors which might provide the impetus for transforming the literacy practices demanded by the learning environment into practices with which students can identify. Success in their courses may depend on students taking ownership of these literacy practices in the same way as they engage with the literacy practices in the contexts of the rest of their lives.

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