

vor for how these insights inform conceptions of new literacies. Specifically, Chapter 6 (Tracey, Storer, & Kazerounian) examines new literacies in terms of narrative theories, box and pointer models, computational models, and cognitive neuroscience. Chapter 7 (Hartman, Morsink, & Zheng) details the cognitive complexities of reading and writing from print to pixels.

Sociocultural Perspectives

A sociocultural perspective examines literacy as an artifact of culture. From this perspective, the nature of literacy changes as culture changes. Resnick and Resnick (1977) recount how expectations for reading in Europe and the United States in the late 1600s involved mastering a range of religious texts. If you could orally read these familiar texts you were considered to be literate. By the mid 1700s reading was limited to mostly familiar texts and not intended as an activity for learning. By the early 1900s literacy was operationally defined as getting the gist of newspaper articles and following simple written directions. Researchers in the sociocultural tradition also demonstrate that etic (outsider) perspectives construct literacy differently from emic (insider) perspectives. For example, Heath (1983) examined the culture of literacy in two Appalachian communities. She then contrasted these practices with the expectations these children faced in their classrooms. While schools saw these Appalachian children as illiterate, Heath's work showed that the literacies of their home culture were simply not the same as the literacies of the school culture. In other words, the culturally sophisticated literacy practices of this community was simply not aligned with (or privileged in) those of the broader culture. Similarly, Moll (1992) examined the tension between the literacy practices of Latino children and those of the schools they attended. Leu (2000) goes as far as to claim that literacy is deictic (i.e., its meaning requires reference to the context in which it is used); for Leu, the nature of literacy changes so readily that what was literacy a moment ago has already changed in the present moment.

In 2001 I (E. A. B.) published a study of what, at the time, was considered to be a technology-rich classroom (more computers in the room than students, one Internet connection, scanners, video cameras, printers) from a sociocultural perspective (Baker, 2001). My question was, what is the nature of literacy in this setting? Four characteristics emerged. First, literacy was *semiotic*. Students read (gained meaning) from alpha-

betic text as well as photos, graphs, illustrations, and video (with musical accompaniment and narration). Furthermore, they wrote (expressed themselves) by using multiple sign systems such as PowerPoint presentations that incorporated alphabetic text with photos, narration, video, graphs, and the like. Second, literacy was *public*. Reading and writing in this classroom were not private activities. Students walked past one another's computers, read each other's screens, and discussed their work in passing as well as by invitation. If they chose to post their work to the Internet, students also had a worldwide audience. They were no longer limited to the teacher as their primary audience (see Baker, Rozendal, & Whitenack, 2000). Third, literacy was *transitory*. The products that the students read and wrote were in constant flux, more dynamic than fixed or static, more situated than generic. The websites they used today may be different or even nonexistent tomorrow (e.g., content posted to Wikipedia). In addition, they were able to update their publications months after they presented them to the class, handed them into the teacher, or posted them to the Web. They were not limited to a publication being "done" and fixed forever, like a butterfly pinned to cardboard in a collection. Finally, literacy was *product oriented*, but in the positive sense of creating artifacts to communicate to specific audiences or "reading" artifacts to learn specific concepts. In some ways, this product orientation incorporates other important characteristics of authentic communication. For example, students did not read for their own, individual, isolated pleasure. They read to engage in conversations (*public nature*), albeit asynchronous, with classmates and other audience members. Reading resulted in products that would communicate what interested them. Because these products were all about conveying meaning, they had an inherent *semiotic* character. As they discussed their readings with others, students commonly chose to improve both the content and the presentation of their compositions (*transitory and provisional nature*). This study is useful to demonstrate the focus of the sociocultural perspective. Literacy was shaped by the culture of a technology-rich fourth-grade classroom that used technology to find and share information and insights.

Given a sociocultural perspective, focus shifts from individual cognition to cultural norms. In her book regarding literacy and identity in Second Life with avatars, Thomas (2007) states, "With every new form of community, children are participating in new forms of literacy" (p. 182). In Chapter 8 of this volume, Gee examines literacy as a sociocognitive practice by melding the concepts of literacy as a cog-

nitive and cultural practice. In Chapter 9, Chandler-Olcott and Lewis use the metaphor of scrapbooking for examining new literacies from a sociocultural perspective. In Chapter 10, Mikulecky reveals the reading and writing skills required in current workplaces. He then highlights the role of schools in preparing children for a workplace that requires proficient technology-based reading and writing skills.

Critical and Feminist Perspectives

Critical theorists (Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1991) and feminist theorists (Connell, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1993; Thorne, 1993) travel further down the contextual pathway than do sociocultural theorists. They expand the notion of context beyond the social and the cultural to include historical, political, and economic forces (Siegel & Fernandez, 2000; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). These forces are viewed as influential in shaping our perspectives, ideologies, and cultural practices. Thus it is not only how we view a particular situation that is determined by external forces; our assumptions, our actions, and our evaluation of the consequences of those actions are all shaped by these forces. Freire, a Brazilian philosopher and educator, is noted for his work in Brazil, in which he examined how schools reified social stratification so as to maintain the economic status quo. In other words, Freire argued that the literacy instruction in Brazil was designed to keep workers in their place. He based this argument on his ability to help 300 illiterate adults become literate within 45 days. Similarly, feminist theory examines the disenfranchisement, marginalization, and underrepresentation of women.

For any given cultural practice or action (including speech acts), the questions to ask are:

- Whose interests are served by this point of view, perspective, or practice?
- Who benefits by its existence?

For any text, oral or written or imaginal, we can ask, who (or whose perspective) is represented, who is marginalized, and who is just plain absent? What we think, say, and do is inherently “interested” and shaped by these powerful external forces. What matters about a given text (again, broadly defined) or action is its assumptions (where does it come from?) and its consequences (what does it do? to whom?).