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Wendy Cumming-Potvin
Murdoch University

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Social Justice, Pedagogy and Multiliteracies: Developing Communities of Practice for Teacher Education

Wendy Cumming-Potvin
Murdoch University

Abstract: Celebrating and responding equitably to diversity have become increasingly essential for teachers' work in the new millennium, which is characterized by shifting local and global communities. Aiming to broaden conceptions of teacher education within a predominantly 'back to basics' literacy environment, this article draws on selected results from a qualitative study underpinned by the metaphor of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). Conducted in Western Australia, the project involved a small group of pre-service teachers using a pedagogy of 'Multiliteracies' (The New London Group, 2000) in face-to-face and on-line settings to construct understandings about literacy learning and teaching. This article focuses on one pre-service teacher, who engaged with multiple discources and communities of practice on the journey of becoming a professional teacher. Conclusions call for a re-conceptualization of teaching communities and sustainable innovation across teaching education to encourage critical and socially just literacy learning.

Introduction

As diversity deepens in post-industrial societies, standards' agendas increasingly define educational outcomes through globalized competition (Roland, 2008). Intense scrutiny of teacher accountability and student literacy performance has resulted, leading to a re-examination of teacher education (see Brady, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 2005; Mitchell, Murray & Nuttall, 2006). Citing falling results from the Organisation for Education, Co-operation and Development's Programme of International Student Assessment, a 'back-to-basics' direction in Australian teacher education has focussed on training, including skills to teach reading through phonics and literature through limited and pre-approved texts. Reflecting a depoliticized view of teaching (Down & Hogan, 2000), a 'back to basics' direction views educators as the problem and solution for increasing students' literacy performances (see Cochran-Smith, 2005). These limited explanations about literacy dismiss the power of classroom culture to reproduce social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1990; Martino, Mills & Lingard, 2005) and are often underpinned by a managerial philosophy (O'Brien & Down, 2002).

Although understanding differences is essential in an increasingly interconnected global society (see Allard & Santoroa, 2006; Romo & Chavez, 2006), Doecke and Kostogriz (2005) argue that the recent managerial climate in teacher education is inadequate for understanding the socially constructed nature of literacy,

which is grounded in diverse social practices. Privileging a wider approach that includes not only knowledge acquisition and skill development but also critical engagement (Luke, Luke & Mayer, 2000; Smith, 1992) is essential for moving beyond a technical model of teacher training. For literacy education, embracing the multiplicity of communication channels and increased cultural and linguistic diversity (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000) is necessary for developing teachers and students who successfully engage with global and local communities (Luke, 2004; Tierney, 2006) to advocate for social justice.

Against this backdrop, by interweaving the concepts of social justice, literacy and pedagogy from a perspective of learning through social interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1986; Wenger, McDermott & Synder, 2002), this article aims to explore innovation in pre-service teacher education. The article focuses on understanding the trajectory of one pre-service teacher who graduates and becomes a teacher. As this case study participant engages over a period of more than two years with diverse discourses in multiple communities of practices (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002), she discusses, reflects and acts in relation to the teaching and learning of literacy for an evolving world. The discussion is first located within a sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1986) with the teaching and learning of literacy defined as a sociocultural phenomenon across multiple contexts. A review of literature highlights policies, discourses and concepts surrounding literacy, social justice, and pedagogy for teachers, pre-service teachers and students in the twenty-first century.

Learning Through Social Interaction: Literacy and Communities of Practice

The study was underpinned by sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1986, 1978), which reflects the view that learning is constructed and negotiated actively through social experiences. Over the past three decades, the influence of Vygotsky has shifted the focus of developmental psychology, which was previously dominated by Piaget's constructivist theory of learning. Vygotsky (1986, 1978) proposed the notion that children, from birth, evolve and learn from their social environment in a manner which is not necessarily determined exclusively by nature. While Piaget viewed social interaction as being conducive to development, Vygotsky (1986) argued that our schema of development is first social, second egocentric and finally internal; hence speech and thought are determined socially and historically and are married with practical activity. From this perspective, literacy can be viewed as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

Supporters of a socio-cultural perspective of literacy argue that a close relationship exists between cognitive skills, cultural technology and societal institutions through which understandings and practices are developed (Dooley, 2008; Ferdman, 1990; Heath, 1983; Luke, 1993). The individual is studied systematically within the social environment, with literacy defined as a social and historical construction that evolves dynamically. Being literate implies more than superficial contacts with print, but an understanding of how to manipulate words and concepts through complex daily social interactions in an accepted manner (Reid, 1998) through cultural apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990).

Lave and Wenger's (1999) theory of situated learning and the metaphor of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) have emerged in the field of education over the past decade as helpful for understanding literacy from a socio-cultural perspective. With roots in

Vygtosky's social emphasis on learning, this work is particularly pertinent for investigating how pre-service teachers develop understandings through interaction in complex communities of practice to become professional teachers, particularly in the area of literacy. A community of practice is defined as a group of people with several characteristics, such as: sharing a concern or passion about a topic, deepening knowledge and expertise in the area by interacting on an on-going basis, mutually negotiating actions, introducing newcomers into the community and acquiring knowledge about how to ask for help during learning (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). Learning within a community of practice is viewed as the newcomer gradually moving from peripheral to full participation. Wenger (1998) also describes communities of practice as ubiquitous, across work, home and leisure settings.

Social Justice in Education: Policies, Discourses and Concepts

The study took place in Australia, where official education policies refer regularly to the concept of social justice. For example, in Western Australia, the Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998) acknowledges that within a pluralist society, a core set of shared values thrives; social justice is interpreted as social and civic responsiblities, commitment to promoting the common good, and participation in democratic processes and cultural diversity. Although the WA Competency Framework for Teachers (Department of Education and Training, 2004) does not explicitly employ the term social justice, the third phase of teacher development includes investigating barriers to students' learning outcomes and using teaching and assessment strategies fairly. The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century (Australian Government, 1999) outlines one of the major educational goals for Australian schools as students exercising judgment and responsibility in questions of morality, ethics and social justice. Schooling is expected to be socially just and not influenced negatively by discrimination through sex, language, culture, ethnicity, religion or disability (or socio-economic status and geographic location). Despite this policy framework which seemingly positions Australian educators to challenge social injustices, numerous researchers have argued that current school philosophies and practices remain inequitable (Keddie and Nayler, 2006; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; McInerney, 2007).

On a broader level, despite numerous references to social justice in educational discourses, the conceptual interpretations of the term remain largely unexplored (North, 2006) and difficult to define (Merret, 2004). North utilizes Fraser's (1997) framework to suggest a shift from justice for redistribution to justice for recognition, meaning that the centrality of social justice is recently defined through cultural groups who struggle to defend their identities, end cultural domination and win recognition rather than economic classes who struggle to defend their interests, end exploitation and win redistribution. Under current Western capitalism, comments Fraser, an increasing stress on cultural politics also undermines redistributive efforts to improve the lives of marginalized and exploited citizens. To acknowledge that economic disadvantage impedes equal participation in the public realm and biased cultural norms exist in the state, Fraser (1997) suggests integrating the redistribution and recognition concepts of social justice.

North (2006) concludes that the relationship between social justice for redistribution and recognition is complex and dynamic; on the one hand, a focus on recognition may distract from the ongoing exploitation of workers and the marginalization of impoverished people. On the other hand, an emphasis on redistribution may not challenge the underlying structures (Bourdieu, 1990) that maintain unequal power relations in social institutions. Merrett (2004) concludes that recent debates over affirmative action demonstrate how seemingly contradictory definitions of social justice can be reconciled. One could argue that having all individuals begin at the same starting line does not provide equal opportunities for those who suffer disadvantage, such as unequal access to education.

Social Justice, Literacy and Pedagogy: Learning for Teachers, Students and Pre-service Teachers

Numerous educational researchers have commented on the interwoven nature of social justice, literacy and pedagogy, which is useful for better understanding the learning of teachers and pre-service teachers in the twenty-first century. Banks (2004) for example, argues that in an interconnected global world, the education of literate citizens should involve reflection, morality and action, with aims of making a more socially just world. Luke, Comber & Grant (2003) describe literacy as cultural practice, linked to the politics of social justice, or communities working constructively to understand diversity and address economic exploitation and social discrimination. Literacy educators and students, contend Cope and Kalantzis (2000) must view themselves as active participants in social change, which shapes citizens' working, public and private lives. Singh and Han (2006) define the teaching of language, literature and literacies as preparation for new generations of global/national citizens, who will take an active and sceptical role in a knowledge-based democracy. Literacy teachers, claim Jones, Taylor Webb & Neumann (2008), are responsible for developing students' use of language to empower themselves and participate in various communities.

Recently, numerous teacher educators aiming for more socially just teaching practices have examined the connections between social justice, literacy and pedagogy in teacher education based in the USA, Canada and Australia (see Assaf & McMunn Dooley, 2006; Boyd, Ariail, Williams, Jocson, Tinker Sachs & McNeal, 2006; Doecke & Kostogriz, 2005; Kooy, 2006; Miller, 2008). In the Australian context, calling for critical pedagogy, despite the challenges of the managerial climate currently dominating the field of teacher education, Doecke & Kostogriz use Engestrom's (1987) activity theory to reconceptualise the literacy learning opportunities afforded to their pre-service teachers. Activity theory, conclude the authors, provides an alternative manner for examining pre-service teachers' commitment to social justice in the area of literacy, as part of a larger social collective. From a practical viewpoint, Beavis and O'Mara (2006) recommend developing a sense of community in pre-service literacy education classes by: challenging and nurturing students' ideas about literacy and social justice; encouraging students to engage with the broader field of English teaching (i.e. websites, government departments, bookshops, etc.) and introducing a wide range of texts for critical analysis, reflection and enjoyment.

In a world of increasing technological change and cultural diversity, alternative ways of defining and doing literacy are viewed as essential for empowering students for academic, economic and personal success (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Luke & Freebody,1999; Unsworth, 2001). To address this new literacy landscape and provide more socially just student opportunities, which celebrate sociocultural diversity, The New London Group (2000) designed a pedagogy of multiliteracies. Assuming that human knowledge is embedded in social, cultural and material contexts and developed collaboratively in a community of learners, The New London Group argue that a pedagogy of multiliteracies integrates four factors. *Situated practice* includes learners' prior and present experiences in a community of learners (composed of experts and novices). *Overt instruction* involves the teacher's or expert's interventions to scaffold (Bruner, 1983) or support learning and increase the learner's consciousness about learning. *Critical framing* refers to learners interpreting the historical, cultural, political and ideological contexts of learning. *Transformed practice* includes implementing new understandings through reflective practice in other contexts.

Although the concept of multiliteracies has been applied extensively to early childhood, primary and secondary school settings (see for example Cumming-Potvin, 2007; Crafton, Brennan & Silvers, 2007; Dooley, 2008; Unsworth, 2001), The New London Group's pedagogy of multiliteracies has not been readily investigated for tracking the literacy understandings of pre-service teachers who graduate and become professional classroom teachers. By integrating the concepts of literacy and social justice within a framework of multiliteracies, this article aims to extend knowledge about the teaching and learning literacy and promote discussion about innovation in teacher education. In current Western educational climates touting 'back to basics' literacy (see Routman, 1996; Siu-Runyan, 2007) and increased academic performance, discussions which promote deep reflection about teaching and teacher education for a socially just world are imperative.

Research Design, Participants, Field Site and Methods

The research paradigm was interpretive, which places emphasis on understanding the social world from the viewpoint of individuals who are part of the action being investigated (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). This focus on the individual and their understanding of the world allows the researcher to draw on direct experience and particular situations to develop theory. More specifically, a qualitative approach, emphasizing words, rather than numbers, provides for 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) which are suitable for investigating relationships between people, space and objects (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). A qualitative approach also allowed for exploration of phenomena which have not been extensively investigated and flexibility to pursue complementary pathways during the data gathering process (Patton, 2002). Due to the emphasis on uncovering a unit of human activity in the real word, which blends with the research context to blur precise boundaries (Gilham, 2000), a case study was privileged and qualitative methods, such as focus group discussions, on-line discussions, shared literacy events, email correspondence and semi-structured interviews, were employed.

The study's participants consisted of a small group of adult tertiary students, enrolled in the University's pre-service teacher education program. Also participating in the study were four of these tertiary students' children, who were aged between four

and seven years old. All participants used English as a first language. All adult participants were enrolled in the University's fourteen week- compulsory English unit, aiming to prepare initial education students for teaching literacy in primary schools.

The field site involved multiple contexts. At an urban Western Australian university, two focus group discussions were held on campus (in April and July 2006). In between the focus group discussions, shared literacy events unfolded in the homes of the participants, who resided locally. The on-line discussions took place between May and August on a private discussion forum, which was adapted from the University's management system for flexible learning. At the end of 2007, a case study participant (Sally) was selected and a semi-structured interview was scheduled.

The qualitative methods were facilitated by the researcher (also a teacher educator) and the research assistant (also a primary classroom teacher).The on-campus focus group discussions were audio-taped and transcribed in their entirety. At the closure of the first on-campus discussion, adult participants were offered a selection of children's picture books, so that they could engage in shared literacy events with their young children at home. Participants chose several titles from the initial recommendations, which focused on the theme of families. As the literacy events unfolded at home, the pre-service teacher participants added to the original list of picture books by suggesting personal favourites, children's preferences, or librarians' recommendations. Via an online discussion tool, pre-service teachers were given the opportunity to share their reflections about topics raised at focus group discussions and shared literacy events. The individual semi-structured interview, which was audio-taped and transcribed, was compiled with additional notes and informal email correspondence. Transcripts were returned to participants for review and comment.

Discourse analysis (Gee 1999; Lupton 1992) was used to examine transcripts and speech patterns on textual and contextual levels (i.e. grammar, syntax and rhetorical devices). Although Gee views the boundaries as blurred, he identifies two distinctions within the term discourse. 'Discourse' refers to the ways in which individuals use language, think, value, act and interact in the right places, at the right times and with the right objects (see also Bourdieu, 1990). The term 'discourse' represents stretches of language as understood in conversations or stories. Miles and Huberman's (1994) strategies for understanding transcribed data, such as clustering, seeing plausibility, counting frequencies and noting themes, were also utilised

Presentation and Discussion of Selected Data: From Pre-service to Practicing Teacher

Data were selected from a case study documenting the journey of Sally, a pre-service teacher who engaged with related and contending discourses in university, home, school and online contexts as she became a professional teacher. The analysis and discussion are underpinned by sociocultural frameworks, notably a pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 2000) and the metaphor of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). During the focus group discussions, on-line discussions and home shared literacy events, Sally was enrolled as a part-time external student in the University's required literacy unit for pre-service teachers. She was keen to interact with fellow students to develop her understandings about the teaching and learning of literacy. When the interview took place in 2008, Sally had graduated from the initial teacher education programme and was undertaking her

second year of primary school teaching. Because Sally was located in country WA where she had taken up her second teaching placement, the interview took place via telephone.

Sally's journey: Communities of Practice for a Pre-service Teacher

Born in the United Kingdom, Sally completed her primary and secondary schooling in WA. Prior to enrolling in a Graduate Diploma of Primary Teaching, Sally completed postgraduate studies and taught in the area of Science at the tertiary level. Presented below and drawn from two on-campus focus groups, an on-line discussion forum and home shared literacy events, the data pertaining to Sally's journey as a pre-service teacher focus on the following questions:

1) *How would you define literacy?*
2) *As a future teacher, what do you think is important for the teaching and learning of literacy in relation to primary-school aged children?*

As the first on-campus focus group discussion unfolded (01/05/06), Sally quietly listened to two peers describe their definitions of literacy. When the researcher asked for her opinion, Sally remarked:

> …I agree with both the comments, but it's becoming more aware of how, it's not just about the book, it's how it connects with life ahm, especially with the theme of this one's families and stuff, so it's how it connects with the families and how it can relate to what happens in the book… to themselves and to other people …. I suppose it's just making the connection with life…and trying to put the child say in the place of another child so like…you know. We're in a single parent family so that's what we're used to, but then you see another family where there's lots of relatives around …. And vice versa for kids in different situations, so it's learning to broaden the horizons beyond what happens in the home and the school.

From a general perspective, Sally's discourse can be positioned within the metaphor of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). Meeting on-campus to share a common interest in literacy teaching and learning, the immediate community of practice included members with varying degrees of expertise and mastery: a small group of pre-service teachers and two group facilitators (the researcher and research assistant). When Sally defined literacy as being underpinned by conventional text and the connections to children's and families' lives, her remarks also demonstrate situated practice (The New London Group, 2000). Tying her knowledge to patterns relating to children's worlds, Sally drew on her personal context of a single parent family to situate her definition of literacy.

The next evening, as Sally used the on-line discussion forum, she reflected on her original definition of literacy:

> I just had another thought on this definition of literacy issue. Maybe it's also helping children become emotionally literate... Many of the books… are exploring issues of feelings of emotions e.g. how they feel about granny, who she is as a person, the value of having a dog, feelings about going to school etc. Thus it's helping children connect with and explore their humanity. To me this is very important in a society that seems be driven by the ability to consume and make money above all else (certainly pushed by our government). ..

As Sally shared her understandings in writing, the on-line discourse represented pedagogical elements pertaining to situated practice and critical framing (The New London Group, 2000). On one level, Sally evokes the situated aspects of children's everyday lives, such as school attendance or relationships with extended family members or pets, which can influence children's classroom learning. On a second level, Sally extends her original definition of literacy to comment more broadly on possibilities for using children's picture books to explore the human condition. (See the work of numerous sociocultural researchers, such as Luke and Freebody (1999); O'Brien (2001); Schmidt, Armstrong & Everett (2007) for discussions about the importance of shared conversations around children's literature for developing critical literacy.) On a third level, Sally deepens her reflection to identify links between social justice and literacy, such as exploring children's humanity, particularly in societies driven by consumerism.

Approximately two and a half months later (19/06/06), a home shared literacy event which explored the recurrent theme of families, illustrates the pedagogical aspect of transformed practice (The New London Group, 2000). Collaborating in this alternative community of practice, which included Sally, her five year old daughter (Louise) and the research assistant, Sally engaged in literacy practices, which enacted values embedded in her personal definition of literacy. As articulated in the extract below, following their collaborative reading of the picture book *Little Fish Lost* (by N. Van Laan), Sally asked Louise open-ended questions about the emotions they might feel if Louise became lost:

> Sally: What do you think you'd feel like if you did lose your Mum?
> Louise: Sad.
> Sally: How do you think your Mum would feel?
> Louise: Sad.
> Sally: Scared.
> Louise: Why? Why would you feel scared?
> Sally: If I didn't know where you were I would be really scared.

As the home shared literacy event unfolded, conversational space was created for Louise, who asked open-ended questions. When Louise asked her mother why she would feel scared if she lost her daughter, the discourse connects to the pedagogical aspect of situated practice (The New London Group, 2000) by drawing on participants' personal worlds. Interestingly, a few days earlier (15/6/06), following a shared home literacy event, Sally noted with excitement in an email that Louise had started to read independently for the first time. Harnessing The New London Group's pedagogical aspect of overt instruction, Sally asked Louise how she 'suddenly knew how to read.' Gaining awareness of the reading process, Louise explained that she had been listening, a comment reinforcing the positive relationship between being read to and reading independently. As Sally regularly scaffolded her daughter to take control of the reading process, tasks involved sounding out unfamiliar words and using the context of the story to facilitate meaning.

During the second focus group discussion which took place approximately three months subsequent to the first discussion (24/7/06), Sally and her peers reviewed topics relating to the teaching and learning of literacy. At this point in time, because Sally was approaching graduation and exploring teaching possibilities, the following question resonated clearly with her immediate professional preoccupations:

> *As a future teacher, what do you think is important for the teaching and learning of literacy in relation to primary-school aged children?*

Taken from the second focus group discussion, the extract below highlights the recurrent theme of families and illustrates how Sally's discourse connects to situated practice and critical framing (The New London Group, 2000). In a community of practice gaining expertise over time (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), Sally presented a hypothetical teaching example which identifies 'the hidden curriculum' (see Apple, 2004; Connell, 1989) that can inhibit students' participation in shared classroom activities.

> …like if you are reading it to a large group of children…. I think you have to be really careful where your kids are coming from. Like if they don't come from ideal backgrounds… or maybe if their background is ok, but not what you perceive as being the ideal childhood, I think you have to be really careful with these family related books… cause if you say, this is the way family, you're kind of saying this is the kind of way a family should be and if that is not the way their family is, it's going to make the child feel quite…

The comments above present Sally's understandings, which had developed over time, from the first focus group, the on-line discussion forum and home shared literacy events. Here, Sally questioned the ways teachers could adopt taken for granted attitudes and processes during classroom literacy practices (see Connell, 2000; Keddi & Nayler, 2006; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003), which could be potentially oppressive for children from non-mainstream families. For example, Sally pointed out that during shared reading, a teacher may privilege a narrow definition of a 'normal' family.

Sally's Journey: Multiliteracies and Communities of Practice for a Primary School Teacher

The data pertaining to Sally's journey as a primary school teacher are drawn from informal email correspondence and a semi-structured interview with the researcher, which was conducted during Sally's second year of primary school teaching. When Sally was asked to describe her definition of literacy, she responded:

> I've become aware of the difference between the child's own literacy and what we define as literacy at school. Children are immersed in the dominant Australian culture, but as educators, we need to be aware of cultural differences. …Although we don't have many kids from other cultures here, we need to be aware of how literacy is used in those cultures.

Sally's comments illustrate an increasingly wide definition of literacy, which highlights the frequent dichotomy existing between children's home and school literacy practices and discourses (see Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Although the immediate community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) involves the school community where Sally taught, she also chose the subject pronoun 'we' in reference to a broader community of educators working within the dominant Australian culture. Sally's discourse that it is imperative for educators to be aware of children's cultural differences implies the pedagogical element of situated practice (The New London Group, 2000), which draws on students' home experiences to design meaningful classroom activities. On a conceptual level however, it can also be argued that Sally's repetition of the adjective 'aware' alludes to a social justice of

recognition (see Fraser, 1997) whereby non-dominant cultures and identities of students are acknowledged in school communities.

When asked what she thought, as a practicing teacher, to be important for teaching and learning literacy in relation to primary-school aged children, Sally immediately stressed the importance of resources such as First Steps material (Steps Professional Development, 2007). Based on social constructivism, First Steps' philosophy involves adapting pedagogy to cater for student differences using developmental maps. Introduced during Sally's pre-service teaching programme, First Steps was the focus of intensive professional development during Sally's first year teaching placement. During her second year of teaching, Sally continued mastering the implementation of First Steps in daily planning, suggesting that on a general level, similar discourses operated for resource selection across university and school communities of practice.

Nonetheless, as indicated in the quote below, Sally expressed concern about a group of middle primary students, who faced literacy difficulties (three boys, including one of Aboriginal descent and one girl, who experienced dyslexia):

> There is a group of students who are below the benchmarks. There is one boy in particular, who has problems with reading. But what he reads, for example, one of the books we're reading is about the city. He has barely been to the city. I need to get this boy something that is adapted to his needs. It's about giving the skills and more to be literate in our society.

As Sally described the challenges the Aboriginal boy faced in reading, she reflected on classroom pedagogy, with her discourse drawing on critical framing and situated practice (The New London Group, 2000). Due to the apparent mismatch between the boy's life world and the school reading texts, Sally alluded to limited resources appropriate for supporting the literacy progress of children from non-mainstream families. Sally further commented that oral literacy may be a priority in this boy's home and suggested resources, such as picture books with meaning inherent in illustrations to complement written texts. Here the reflection linked to overt instruction (The New London Group, 2000) as Sally discussed the importance of allowing children experiencing literacy difficulties to voice their perceptions about problems to better understand the process of becoming literate. Finally, Sally recommended potential school strategies, such as play groups for early learning, to help young children become exposed to and excited about print.

Spontaneously elaborating her reflection about literacy, Sally commented more broadly on the literacy levels at the School. As indicated in the transcript below, Sally's discussion about literacy levels can be situated within the compulsory standardized testing occurring across Australian schools over the past several years.

> …So I think certainly our literacy levels here [at the school] in like, grades, have been good, that we compare quite well to, you know, the principal…you know where we live is like a leafy green suburb in Perth. You know, that's what (name of town) is like. So our literacy and our general marks, if you like, are good. But then, I think that to go to a town or a place or even a school that's not so socially cohesive…then generally your standings and for all your other things are generally not so good, because you're spending so much time…you know, teaching social values, behaviour management and stuff like that.

As a teacher obligated to participate in a community of practice involving standardized testing driven by the Australian Commonwealth Government, Sally readily acknowledged the relationship between student populations and quantifiable

literacy results. Positioning herself within the discourse of academic comparisons between schools, Sally also linked teaching social values in some contexts to academic performance. Here, the practice of school administrators and practitioners teaching acceptable social values while managing student behaviour could be associated with a managerial discourse, which may appear contradictory to social justice and a pedagogy for multiliteracies (The New London Group, 2000). However, it is important to consider Wenger's (1998) comment that in communities of practice, professionals are under constraints to 'get the job done', particularly those who are newcomers to communities.

Discussion of Sally's Learning Journey: Opportunities and Limitations within Communities of Practice

Because learning takes place continuously, knowing involves social engagement in formal and informal communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Tracking Sally's journey from pre-service to professional teaching allowed for nuanced analysis of one individual's learning, which was painted with multiple discourses. For Sally, understandings about the teaching and learning of literacy evolved through discussion, reflection and action; this trajectory was also shaped by the recurrent theme of social justice viewed from a framework of pedagogy for multiliteracies (The New London Group, 2000). Whilst the aim of this discussion is not to comprehensively deconstruct the multiliteracies model with the metaphor of communities of practice, Sally's journey provides a framework through which teaching and learning are explored, particularly through the pedagogical aspects *of situated learning* and *critical framing.*

During her journey as a pre-service teacher, Sally engaged with several overlapping communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) through which she developed understandings about being a professional teacher and literacy educator. On a broad level, Sally was a member of the University's teacher education program and required literacy unit, which aimed to prepare initial education students to teach literacy in primary schools. Sally took up the Unit's learning opportunities by drawing on resources such as readings, on-campus and on-line lectures, discussions with tutors and links to the broader field of literacy teaching. Simultaneously, Sally chose to intensify her learning with a smaller community of practice, involving the study's self-selected pre-service teacher participants. In both tertiary communities, literacy was framed from related discourses, involving speaking, reading, writing, listening and viewing and the ability to manipulate cultural knowledge in an acceptable way (see Reid, 1998; Rogoff, 1990).

Guided by the researcher and research assistant in a focused tertiary community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) displaying passion and interest for literacy, Sally informally shared discussions, insights and information to gain experience and knowledge on campus and on-line. Aiming to widen the socially just literacy resources offered to respect families' socio-cultural differences, Sally recommended the picture book *Grandpa and Thomas* (by P. Allen) to the community of practice; as members adopted Sally's suggestion to transform practices using this text in home shared literacy events, Sally moved to full participation within this informal community of practice. As Sally described literacy discourses and practices from her perceptions as a pre-service teacher, she drew frequently on students', as well as her own, prior learning. Here, Palmer (1998) argues that knowing oneself is as

crucial to culturally relevant pedagogy as knowing one's students. From a pedagogy for multileracies framework (The New London Group, 2000), Sally engaged with and discussed children's literature from personal and professional perspectives; she linked her discourse to pedagogical aspects such as *situated practice,* demonstrating her commitment to social justice by stressing the importance of exploring humanity.

While Sally took up additional learning opportunities as a pre-service teacher, she developed her reflection through critical framing (The New London Group, 2000) within the focussed tertiary community of practice. Here, the notion of critical reflection adds depth to Sally's discourse about teaching and learning literacy for a socially just world. Critical reflection, contends Howard (2003), is helpful for teachers to recognize whether or not they are unconsciously or consciously subscribing to deficit notions of culturally diverse students. Sally's critical reflection took the form of questioning how teachers could inadvertently create a negative profile for students who are raised in non-mainstream families. As a pre-service teacher, Sally had gained the necessary personal and theoretical distance (The New London Group, 2000) to provide constructive criticism about the learning context.

After completing her degree and assuming the role of practising teacher in country contexts, Sally engaged regularly with a school community of practice (Wenger, 1998, Wenger et al., 2000) characterized by related and contending discourses. Through teaching opportunities afforded by her professional posting, Sally gained practical experience which built on theoretical knowledge developed from her tertiary communities of practice. Positioned within these related discourses, Sally appeared to seamlessly draw on the aspect of situated practice (The New London Group, 2000) to advocate for literacy pedagogy which considers differences between children's home and school practices. Sally also negotiated expertise within the school community of practice through professional learning opportunities such as workshops pertaining to First Steps. Although anchored within the local school's community of practice, Sally was also able to discuss issues pertaining to classroom actions, structures and objects (see Bourdieu, 1990).

Despite the apparent continuity of Sally's professional teacher discourses advocating for social justice in classrooms increasingly characterized by socio-cultural diversity, Sally was limited by a local community of practice, which was underpinned by a broad managerial framework of teacher accountability and student performance (see Mitchell, Murray & Nutall, 2006). Kincheloe (2002) argued that this race for meeting competitive educational outcomes may directly impinge on the promotion of social justice for diversified socio-cultural and linguistic societies. As she worked towards full participation in the school community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002), Sally needed to familiarize herself with this dominant discourse, which focused on improvement and comparison of literacy standards across educational institutions. As such, the limitations imposed on Sally's learning can be viewed as a form of cultural transmission (Bourdieu, 1973) whereby the individual necessarily acquires the language specific to a school context as part of the underlying social structures, practices and ideologies.

For Wenger (1998) school is not the privileged focus of learning, but part of a broader learning system that involves life itself. Families also develop their own routines, symbols and conventions as communities of practice. Sally was simultaneously a member of her family community of practice while she learned with school and tertiary communities on her journey as a pre-service and practising teacher. Sally's daily interaction with her daughter (Louise) provided learning opportunities via cultural apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990). As Sally gained experience

scaffolding her daughter through shared literacy events, Louise's learning developed from collaboratively reading simple picture books to independently reading short chapter books. Commenting that picture books such as *Little Fish Lost* and *Love You Forever* (by R. Munsch) re-affirmed family feelings and values, Sally highlighted the aspect of *situated practice* (The New London Group, 2000) in her family community of practice. Sally also referred regularly to critical framing with a discourse suggesting that children should be made aware of multiple media issues at an age appropriate level. Through *transformed practice* during television viewing, the cultural apprenticeship also linked social justice and literacy when Louise asked questions such as "Why is this war happening?"

Concluding Remarks

This article focussed on one pre-service teacher, who engaged with overlapping communities of practices and multiple discourses on her journey to becoming a professional teacher. To understand Sally's development from a sociocultural perspective, the discussion was located within sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1986) with emphasis on the metaphor of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). Because a pedagogy for multiliteracies (The New London Group, 2000) has not been readily explored for tracking the literacy understandings of pre-service teachers who graduate and become professional classroom teachers, the analysis integrated concepts of literacy and social justice from a framework of multiliteracies to extend knowledge and promote discussion about literacy and teacher education. From this perspective, Sally's journey offers insights into pedagogy and teacher education for the new millennium, which is characterized by educational contexts of increasing socio-cultural diversity.

With respect to promoting socially just pedagogy, Sally's learning about literacy emphasises the complex and multi-dimensional nature of *situated practice* (The New London Group, 2000). From a constructivist viewpoint, Sally's journey as a pre-service and practising teacher drew on experiences from students' life worlds and informal communities of learners (Wenger, 1998). This process created meaningful activities for learning through *situated practice*. However, drawing on Sally's personal experience as a teacher or facilitator also proved to be helpful for guiding learners to engage collaboratively and productively in a community of practice. Vygotsky (1986) argued that our schema of development is social, egocentric and internal, which indicates a world of learning constructed by learner and facilitator. As such, as a person with greater expertise, the teacher or facilitator uses their personal experience and capacity for critical reflection (Howard, 2003) to scaffold activities, motivate the learner and encourage them to be both introspective and extrospective.

To advocate for socially just pedagogy in post-industrialized societies mediated by multiple communication patterns and sociocultural diversity, the notion of critical reflection becomes paramount for connecting teachers' personal experiences to the multiliteracies' aspect of critical framing (The New London Group, 2000). Howard (2003) elaborates the connections between personal experience and critical reflection by arguing that based on Palmer's (1998) framework, critical reflection is crucial for assisting teachers to ask challenging introspective questions such as: Is who I am contributing to the underachievement of students who are different to me? From an empirical perspective, Martino et al.'s (2005) Australian study also pointed to teachers' tendency to modify their pedagogy based on

stereotypical constructions about how boys and girls learn. For Sally, who drew on her personal experience to critically reflect on the theme of families, pedagogy promoting stereotypical definitions about families during classroom literacy practices could be detrimental for children's learning.

Like Sally, many pre-service teachers will graduate into the professional world to engage with multiple communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and complex literacy discourses linked to underlying power structures in schools. If we aim for a broader approach to teacher education, that provides opportunities for graduates to develop more than technical skills but also critical engagement (Luke et al., 2000; Smith, 1992) and agency for social justice, a re-conceptualization of teaching communities and innovation in pre-service teaching programmes are essential. Reconceptualising educational settings as complex and overlapping communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) in which participants encounter contending and related discourses could be advantageous for pre-service and practicing teachers to better understand the iterative and sometimes contradictory processes and discourses involved in becoming a teacher. Combining the metaphor of communities of practice with the work of Doecke and Kostogriz (2005) in which the authors utilize the metaphor of activity systems (Engestrom, 1999) to describe the diverse and contradictory construction of school networks, proves promising to broaden critical reflection for newly graduated teachers in diverse communities.

Sally's journey provides one example of how innovation in pre-service teacher education provided opportunities for understanding the teaching and learning of literacy from a socio-cultural perspective through engagement with multiple communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Sally gained confidence and expertise as she enjoyed full membership with her tertiary and home communities of practice. However, limitations of time and distance arose once Sally became a professional teacher and needed to work intensively towards full participation in the school community of practice. Although Sally continued to broaden her definition of literacy and question the equity of classroom literacy resources and practices, as a new teacher in a specific school setting, Sally needed to acquire specific knowledge and language related to the underlying power structures of the school (Bourdieu, 1973), notably those related to national standardized literacy assessment. Thus, in some instances, Sally understandably did not critically reflect from the viewpoint of both local and global teacher about the school community of practice.

In a 'back to basics' literacy environment, developing educators who advocate for social justice and engage successfully with local and global communities (Luke, 2004; Tierney, 2006) represents a challenge requiring sustainable innovation across teaching education. Further research is recommended to investigate how university educators and school practitioners can collaboratively design long-term professional learning to support communities of practice where literacy learners are encouraged to participate critically and responsibly in democracies.

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