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More than Standardisation: Teacher's Professional Literacy Learning in Australia?

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Abstract: Current policies guiding literacy and teacher professional learning in Australia, tend to foreground the importance of standardised practice and assessment in classrooms and schools. However, enactments of print-oriented literacy and professional learning in alignment with this emphasis stand in contradiction with contemporary approaches, which implicate consideration of diversity and contextual relevance. This paper positions teacher problematisation and negotiation of this contradiction as key for broadening literacy learning horizons. Incorporating multiliteracies, Cultural Historical Activity Theory and sociocritical perspectives on policy and professional learning, the authors propose a multidimensional framework for exploring and supporting dynamic and conflictually sensitive teacher learning processes. Such visioning is important if teachers, school leaders, pre-service educators and researchers are to enable learners with adaptable literacy repertoires with relevance to rapidly evolving twenty first century communications and social interactions.

Introduction

In twenty first century post-industrialised nations such as Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia, primary and secondary school teachers of literacy navigate more complex and numerous challenges than ever before (Alexander, 2011; Connell, 2013; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; OECD, 2016). Cultural, linguistic and communicative diversity in social and institutional settings is on the rise, in parallel with globalisation, attendant sociocultural transformations and rapidly changing digital technologies. To respond meaningfully to this morphing landscape, teachers of literacy in all career phases need to critique and transform the content, processes and purposes of their professional learning (Luke, 2013; Luke, Sefton-Green, Graham, Kellner & Ladwig, 2017).

However, in recent years, the nature of teacher professional learning for literacy in Australia has narrowed, steered by policies aimed to standardise learning and its assessment (Luke, 2013; Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell & Mockler, 2016). Such steerage reflects bipartisan federal responses to the politically constituted 'problem' of improving measurable teaching and learning outcomes. Resulting policy 'solutions' have become increasingly formulaic and prescriptive, with teacher and school implementation of particular practices evaluated through testing and accountability mechanisms. The perceived importance of student and teacher performance in relation to this agenda, is reflected in the *Australian Education Act* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013), which proposes that by 2025, Australia should be ranked in the top 25 nations on international testing benchmarks for literacy.

However, according to sociocritical theorists such as Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012), teachers 'enact' these official priorities in various ways, contingent on historical, cultural, political, institutional and personal factors. It follows that as teachers variously resist, adapt, or adopt policies for professional learning and literacy practice, potential arises for the expansion or impoverishment of literacy within and across communities. Taking a 'new look' at established theory in relation to literacy and professional learning, the present paper argues that teachers should be supported to:

- collectively acknowledge, problematise and negotiate tensions and contradictions between discourses, policies, professional learning needs and other factors in context, including standardised high-stakes assessment architectures;
- generate literacy knowledge and practices relevant to changing local and global contexts of communication and cultural interfaces.

To catalyse research for change, this paper incorporates sociocritical perspectives on professional learning and policy (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012; Connell, 2013; Mockler, 2013), multiliteracies theory (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000) and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engestrom, 2001, 2011). Underpinned by commonalities, complementarities and unexplored interplays in the framework, the authors suggest that future research can contribute nuanced information and support to a range of educational stakeholders (such as teachers, school leaders and pre-service teacher educators) who may be seeking to:

- negotiate and contest policy arrangements aimed to standardise rather than diversify teaching and learning;
- expand literate practices inclusive of the formats, structures and patterns of participation relevant to digital communication spaces;
- develop and contextualise these practices as appropriate to specific rather than generic cultural and educational situations.

Organised in three sections, the first part of the article reviews and problematises standardised constructions and enactments of professional learning and literacy in the current Australian policy context. This review outlines how current policy agendas function to constrain rather than enable participatory professional learning. Looking beyond such constraints, the second section envisions aims and processes of professional learning through the lenses of multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000) and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (Engestrom, 2001, 2011). The final section presents potential strengths of the theoretical framework, in relation to expanded and contextually relevant professional learning for literacy. Such possibilities are crucial in view of the currently restrictive policy milieu in Australian education, as well as limited research focused on teacher participation in diverse and contextualised professional learning.

Enactments of Standardised Professional Learning in the Current Australian Policy Context

Like their international counterparts, a number of Australian theorists understand professional learning as an ongoing process of situated and socially interactive opportunities, where teachers engage deeply with conceptual and contextual diversity (Connell, 2013; Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell & Mockler, 2016; Parr, 2010). From this perspective, full participation in professional learning enables teachers to:

- generate and evaluate professionally specialised knowledge;

- negotiate multiple perspectives informed by diverse biographical, cultural and institutional experiences;
- situate emerging practices in complex policy landscapes;
- interweave local and global learning priorities.

Such understandings are consistent with a social practice perspective on literacy learning, where literacy is seen to shape and be shaped by local culture and experience, as well as factors beyond the immediate locality (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Gee, 1990, 1999; Kress, 2010; Mills, 2010; Street, 1997). It follows from this perspective that literacy practices and ways of ‘knowing’ them are diverse rather than uniform. Further, in a digitalised twenty first century, these ‘ways of knowing’ are understood to be increasingly dynamic, socially purposeful and participatory, rather than transmitted to learners through authoritative experts (Kress, 2010; Mills, 2010).

Empirical research across a range of settings in Australia suggests that primary, secondary and pre-service teachers value participatory opportunities to reflect with peers on diverse professional responses to their own and others’ learning needs (Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell & Mockler, 2016; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013; Parr & Bulfin, 2015). However, other research evidence points to the circumvention of such dialogue, by policies aimed to standardise pre-service and teacher professional learning (Cormack & Comber, 2013; Hardy, 2015; Klenowski, 2014; Lewis & Hardy, 2014). Often referred to as ‘best practices’, these standardised emphases are strongly articulated in Australian federal government policy portfolios such as *StudentsFirst* (Australian Government, 2014a). The espoused mission of this portfolio is to review, monitor and improve teacher ‘quality’ in relation to standardised curriculum, standards-aligned professional learning, and associated ‘back to basics’ approaches to teaching and learning. Related policies such as the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, AITSL, 2014), likewise promote print-oriented focuses for literacy teaching and learning, in accordance with policy-driven standardised test emphases (Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell & Mockler, 2016; Parr, Bellis & Bulfin, 2013; Parr & Bulfin, 2015). For instance, AITSL’s web-based professional learning videos almost exclusively showcase ‘back to basics’ literacy content. Such moves seem consistent with what Simons (2015) refers to as ‘governing by examples’ (p. 715). In further acts of governance, large-scale, formal, face-to-face staff development initiatives are shaped to assist teachers to adopt these emphases (Doecke & Parr, 2011; Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell & Mockler, 2016; Mockler, 2013).

Policy-focused management of teacher professional learning stems from neoliberal notions of governance, aimed to shape professional learning for the production of politico-economic advantage. In the Australian context, this advantage is perceived to pertain to favourable student performance on standardised national and international assessments (Lewis & Hogan, 2016; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Luke, 2013). Such logic is overt in the *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s* (OECD) influential *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 2016, p. 14). In contradistinction however, Australian sociocritical academics view this logic as highly problematic, because it undermines teacher enablement and enactment of rich, variant and contextually responsive knowledges and practices (Connell, 2013; Cormack & Comber, 2013; Hardy, 2015; Klenowski, 2014; Lewis & Hardy, 2014; Lewis & Hogan, 2016).

Through its architecture of internationally normed data, garnered from the *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA), the OECD has intensified member nation ‘buy in’ to comparative, measurement-oriented approaches to educational processes. In Australia, movement towards this measurement-oriented approach has increased in momentum during recent decades of federal and state policy setting, which has been aimed to align Australia’s educational goals with national economic productivity targets (see the *National Education*

Agreement, Council of Australian Governments Reform Council, COAG, 2008). Currently, to monitor national, state and sector movement towards these goals, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (ACARA, 2013a) is used to generate normative and standards-referenced comparisons of all Australian students' academic performance in grades three, five, seven and nine. Numeric representations of these performances are open to public scrutiny through the federal government's *MySchool* website (ACARA, 2013b). Empirical research suggests however, that escalating government and public scrutiny of these comparative measurements has steered teachers and school leaders to perceive standardised learning and its assessment as 'high stakes' (Cormack & Comber, 2013; Hardy, 2015; Klenowski, 2014; Lewis & Hardy, 2014).

In contradistinction, recent curriculum reforms in Australia have offered some potential for broadening teaching and learning beyond back to basics versions of literacy, although many sociocritical scholars view teachers' enactment of these curricula as strongly constrained by perceptions of what 'counts' in a 'high-stakes' environment (Klenowski, 2014; Lewis & Hardy, 2014; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Luke, 2013). First implemented in 2012, *The Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2014) aimed to set "standards to improve learning outcomes for all young Australians", by articulating "what students should be taught and achieve as they progress through school". Since instigation of the national curriculum, a federal *Review of the Australian Curriculum (the Review)* (Australian Government, 2014b), as part of the *StudentsFirst* policy initiative (Australian Government, 2014a), has argued for stronger standardisation of learning content and didactic pedagogy for this purpose. Consequently, with recent roll out of state-based curricula, such as Western Australia's *k-10 Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline (The Outline)* (SCSA, 2014), terms such as 'mandated' and 'prescribed' explicitly accompany recommendations for teacher planning, assessment and reporting activities.

As a stand-alone document, *The Outline* (SCSA, 2014) offers a multidimensional and integrated perspective on literacy and learning. At the time of writing the present article, *English* in the *Outline* is structured into Language, Literature and Literacy strands, indicating that text should be understood as including written, spoken and multimodal elements, in print and digital formats. 'Communication' is likewise explained as integrating reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing, in recognition that traditional print-based modes are one of an array of modes significant for meaning making in current times. Although contemporary theories of literacy, such as multiliteracies theory (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000), are not acknowledged in *The Outline*, concepts emerging from this theory, such as those to do with multimodal practice, are referred to throughout. While multimodality itself will be described in a later section, in brief, multiliteracies theory suggests how literacy teaching and learning can be broadened to respond to changing patterns of textual and sociocultural diversity in twenty first century communication environments. Important from this view, print literacy practices are held as necessary but insufficient for informed and equitable communicative participation.

Although Australian curriculum refers to multimodal texts, it does not detail associated concepts and their implications for changing sociocultural and social practices (Lu & Cross, 2014; Luke, 2013; Mills & Exley, 2014). For instance, teachers are not offered explanations or metalanguage concerning multimodal text or design. In this circumstance, where policy pursues standardisation, it is thought that many teachers attend to and enact the aspects of curricula they already know and understand; traditional print-oriented emphases (Luke, 2013; Luke, Wood, & Weir, 2013). Adding to concerns about this gap, critical researchers have illuminated how teacher enactments of literacy teaching and learning in schools inter-relate with policy directed priorities.

In particular, research inquiry into school-based practices and professional learning across a range of geographical locations in Australia, points to the heavy effects of standardised and assessment-focused policy imperatives. For instance, Allard and Doecke (2014) and Hardy (2014) suggest that both primary and secondary teachers perceive officially orchestrated professional learning as strategically important for improving student and school-based NAPLAN performance, where teachers report frequent involvement at the school level in NAPLAN data analyses and target setting. Additionally, primary school teachers perceive programming for and ‘drilling’ of print-based literacy skills such as spelling, grammar and phonics, as contextually valued strategies for improving student and school NAPLAN profiles (Cormack & Comber, 2013; Hardy, 2015; Klenowski, 2014; Lewis & Hardy, 2014; Lobascher, 2011). Based on this body of evidence, it would seem that teachers and schools perceive that what ‘counts’ as legitimate literacy learning is that which is policy directed, measured and scrutinised: traditional print-based practices (Cormack & Comber, 2013).

In contrast, further empirical studies suggest that many teachers recognise and are concerned about narrowed perspectives on literacy learning, but experience few opportunities to voice their concerns in light of heightened surveillance (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2013; Lewis & Hardy, 2014). Luke, Woods and Weir (2013) argue that in these circumstances, redesigned horizons for teacher professional learning and participation are imperative. The following theoretical framework is oriented to such redesign.

Participatory Professional Learning from the Vantages of Multiliteracies and Cultural Historical Activity Theory

Multiliteracies Theory: Learning Literacies for Contemporary Times

Multiliteracies theorists (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000) suggest that professional work involves teachers in generating, critiquing and evaluating context sensitive knowledge and practice in relation to diversifying digital and social interactions. Emerging from theoretical and practice based research spanning more than 15 years, multiliteracies theory follows New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1990, 1999; Street, 1997) in recognising literacy as a multidimensional and variable enactment in context. Such recognition accords with the work of Lev Vygotsky (1986), which articulates communication as constituted in changing social, cultural and material relations. Based on these recognitions, multiliteracies theory challenges traditional assumptions that literacy learning in contemporary times can be uniform or formulaic, and that people in different cultural contexts or groupings are likely to access, interpret and/or produce texts in uniform ways.

Multiliteracies theory focuses on dual twenty first century complexities: proliferating textual and linguistic forms of communication in an increasingly digital world; and diverse sociocultural patterns of participation and meaning making in relation to these forms (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000). Academic commentaries on childhood and adolescent lives offer ready examples of the array of communication practices at large, with web-based gaming and information searching across national and cultural boundaries being just two examples (Mills, 2010). Mills and Unsworth (2016) argue that teachers are uniquely positioned to draw on these types of diverse ‘real world’ practices, to afford students and citizens with informed and critical strategies relevant to their recreational and workplace activities. With this in mind, multiliteracies theory suggests pedagogy aimed to assist students and teachers to expand their literacy repertoires.

The New London Group's (2000) 'pedagogy of multiliteracies' describes four recursive and intertwined knowledge processes for developing student and teacher literacy repertoires:

- 'situated practice' for unveiling learners' (students and teachers) existing knowledge, experiences and interests as a basis for inquiry;
- 'overt instruction' for explicitly fostering shared strategies, understandings and metalanguage about diverse texts and contextual practices;
- 'critical framing' for unpacking embedded sociocultural and sociopolitical purposes;
- 'transformed practice' for redesigning understandings and practices in relation to evolving needs and knowledge.

These knowledge processes weave through ongoing learning, enabling learners to make existing practices and understandings explicit, and to generate more sophisticated critical and technical responses (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013). As learners, teachers are positioned to explore contemporary literacy horizons in response to situated needs, and create a reciprocal flow of new knowledge into situated pedagogy and practice.

One focus for expanded pedagogy pertains to diversifying text forms and sign systems, a focus recently included in the *Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA, 2014) and the Western Australian *Outline* (SCSA, 2014). In contemporary environments, digital communications take place through *multimodal* sign systems. Kress (2010) and Cope and Kalantzis (2013) refer to seven sign systems: print in alphabet or numbers; spoken words; still or moving visual images; sounds; meaningful movements and gestures; tactile phenomena; and aspects of time and space. Learners demonstrate fluency in multimodal understandings and design when they can manipulate and relate these seven modes for meaning making, and recognise embedded sociocultural and sociopolitical agendas.

From a multiliteracies perspective (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000) teachers plan learning opportunities in response to their own and others' learning demands, and seek support and feedback on this planning through collaborative professional dialogue (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013). While adherents to a managerial approach to professional learning may express qualms about teacher participation in sophisticated knowledge work (see Mockler, 2013), multiliteracies a priori positions teachers and students to generate and resource ongoing, situated, and deeply conceptual activity. Seeking to facilitate this development, some Australian studies have provided teachers with conceptual supports for planning, and for grappling with multiliteracies terminology (see Callow, 2013; Exley & Mills, 2012). Additionally, a small number of studies have explored how multiliteracies can be contextualised in Australian classrooms, although these studies focus on student learning rather than teacher inquiry, collaboration and dialogue (See Hill, 2010; Hesterman, 2011; Walsh, 2011).

The present paper argues that important next steps are to explore: how dialogic opportunities can be generated, supported and explored, so that teachers can make sense of multiliteracies; what directions this sense-making might take; and how contradictory conceptual, contextual and policy influences might be negotiated. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001, 2011) provides a way of framing this mediated and potentially contradiction-rife professional learning activity.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT): Negotiating Contextual and Conceptual Contradictions

A small number of CHAT researchers in Australia (Doecke & Kostogriz, 2005), and overseas (Anderson & Stillman, 2013), have begun to show interest in the ways teachers may transform traditional literacy teaching and learning practices, although to date, not in the area

of multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; New London Group, 2000). Adding a new dimension to the existing body of research, this paper argues that CHAT provides an invaluable lens on professional learning for multiliteracies, due to its dynamic and context sensitive focus on:

- ‘cultural factors’ explaining how people know and draw on cultural values and resources;
- ‘historical factors’ accounting for how people evolve practices and discourses over time;
- ‘activities’ explaining how people negotiate and enact practices in context;
- ‘theory’ to conceptualise patterns in the above (Engestrom, 2001, 2011; Sutter, 2011).

CHAT is widely associated with Engestrom (2001, 2011), who draws on theorising by Vygotsky (1986), to assert learning as a socially and contextually mediated activity. That is, learning is seen as mediated by available and newly emerging tools, relationships and understandings. To explain mediated activity, Engestrom offers a schema of dynamic components depicted within a bounded ‘activity system’. Analytically, learning can be mapped onto changing relations between components of a system, and/or between networks of systems at the societal level. An activity system schema is presented below in Fig. 1.

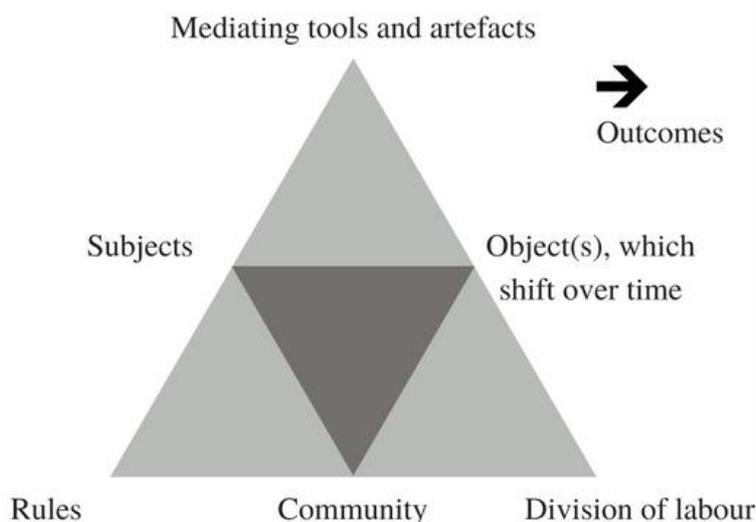


Figure 1: A single activity system (drawing on Engestrom, 2001, 2011)

In relation to teacher professional learning, components in the above schema can be described in the following way: subjects are teachers who engage in shared activity; artefacts (or tools) are material things or concepts with meaning for a professional object of activity; object refers to purposes which motivate and orient activity; community is the social group engaged in object-oriented activity; rules are procedures and understandings informing the way the group interacts, such as etiquette and timing; division of labour refers to the way tasks and interactions are distributed amongst members of the community; and outcomes denote new teaching and learning practices and artefacts developed as a consequence of object oriented dialogue and professional activity. Negotiation of conceptual and contextual contradictions emerging during interactions, and resulting shifts in purposes, lead to transformed relations in the whole activity system (Engestrom, 2011; Sutter, 2011).

Five theoretical principles guide interpretation of changing activity systems. First, as mentioned, activity is conceptualised through dialectical relationships between system elements, which are nested in broader social, cultural, and historic processes and conditions. Second, participation is multivoiced; subjects express diverse cultural and conceptual

perspectives. In turn, discursive differences may lead to perceived tensions between claims, practices and priorities. As an example, tensions may emerge when teachers express different views about literacy learning and/or policy enactment, influenced by experiences, beliefs and contextual factors. Third, available artefacts or tools such as resources and organising frameworks can afford or constrain activities, and implicate broader cultural and historical trends. In the instance of professional learning for literacy, artefacts of interest might include current Western Australian curriculum documents (see *The Outline*, SCISA, 2014), or official textual representations of ‘best practice’ (see the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*, AITSL, 2014). Fourth, recognition of emergent contradictions can prompt collaborating teachers to problematise, reframe and potentially transform practices, tools and contextual arrangements. For instance, when sharing diverse perspectives on curriculum, teachers may question, debate, and deepen existing understandings of literacy in relation to multimodality. Significant to issues discussed in this paper, such instances of peer led dialogue and negotiation are definitive aspects of participatory professional learning (Mockler, 2013), and multiliteracies knowledge processes (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000).

The fifth and final principle is specific to how actors negotiate and transcend conceptual and contextual contradictions. The full process is referred to as expansive learning, where learners:

- consider and critique existing practices, beliefs and discourses;
- generate possible alternatives;
- problematise potential strengths, constraints and demands of these alternatives;
- experiment with new practices, concepts and tools;
- reflect on experimentation and evaluate implications.

Like learning processes articulated in a pedagogy of multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000), expansive learning actions are viewed as emerging iteratively but in no particular order, in acknowledgement of the complex and dynamic nature of social negotiation and learning in context. Over time, processes therefore often include “ambiguity, surprise, interpretation, sense making, and potential for change” (Engestrom, 2011, p. 134). Also consistent with multiliteracies principles, research designed from a CHAT perspective is sensitive to learners’ diverse perceptions of and shared dialogue about context relevant needs and purposes.

For Engestrom (2001, 2011) contradictions are not simply differences of opinion or experience, but involve historical, structural, cultural and perspectival factors, with consequences in social and material realms. This paper has argued that in the present Australian context, contradictions and their impacts are extant between multiliteracies approaches to professional learning, and standardised policy-driven arrangements serving competitive agendas. In regard to such contradictions, research using an expansive learning lens is multilayered; it frames exploration of teachers’ goals and processes of negotiation, as well as their perceptions of contextual enablements and barriers to change. Engestrom locates four categories of contradiction, which are presented below in Tab. 1 together with hypothetical examples relevant to teacher professional learning.

| Category | Description | Examples |
|------------|--|---|
| Primary | Mismatches arise between components of activity | Teachers question current policy requirements and related resources (tools), in light of the need (purposes) to develop contemporary practices |
| Secondary | When subjects struggle to grapple with new understandings or purposes | Teachers examine a new literacy tool or practice, such as concepts to do with multimodality, but need to negotiate 'fit' with existing understandings |
| Tertiary | When new practices disturb pre-existing practices | Teachers experiment with a new practice, such meaning making about multimodal text, but need to negotiate discordances with established routines |
| Quaternary | When new practices or concepts are transferred to other contexts, but conflict emerges with arrangements in those contexts | Teachers transfer expanded understandings of literacy to new settings, but experience resistance from other teachers or school leadership |

Table 1: Categories of contradiction and examples

Adding nuance, Engestrom and Sannino (2011) outline how 'process mapping' can render the discursive emergence and negotiation of contradictions more visible. This approach focuses closely on the temporal development of four discursive forms in learner dialogue:

- 'dilemmas' where learners make comparisons about incompatible choices or phenomena;
- 'conflicts' where learners express disagreement, opposition or criticism;
- 'critical conflicts' where learners recount conflictual circumstances, and mobilise sense making for motivated action;
- 'double binds' where learners share perceptions of barriers that cannot be negotiated without broader systemic change.

According to Engestrom and Sannino, while articulation of a dilemma, conflict or double bind may serve as an antecedent to expansive learning, articulation itself is not sufficient for transcendence of contradictory schemas or circumstances. On the other hand, when subjects actively navigate critical conflicts, they generate new realisations and/or alternative activities in alignment with object goals. As a consequence, critical conflict negotiation is deeply implicated in progression through the expansive learning cycle. Therefore, Engestrom and Sannino suggest that transitions from one discursive manifestation to another may unveil the evolution (or not) of expansive learning, and signpost points of inertia or challenge. Engestrom and Sannino have called for further empirical elaboration of this approach. More recently, Postholm (2015) reiterated this recommendation during methodological commentary on CHAT and school-based change research. However to date, this avenue of theorising has remained untapped.

Authors of the present paper further note that all four of Engestrom and Sannino's (2011) discursive manifestations fall within the scope of 'critical framing of situated practice' as described by multiliteracies theory (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000). Hypothetically, it follows that as learners negotiate critical conflicts, they move towards the fourth multiliteracies knowledge process, 'transformed

practice'. These theorised correspondences between CHAT and multiliteracies learning processes are also yet to be explored empirically, but signal a wealth of starting points for inquiry into goal oriented participatory professional learning for literacy. Potential strengths in terms of theoretical commonalities, complementarities, and dynamics between processes in this framework, are outlined in the final section.

New Research Horizons

Research incorporating multiliteracies theory (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000) and CHAT (Engestrom, 2001, 2011) holds promise for describing and supporting context sensitive and conceptually participatory professional learning for literacy in Australia. As described above, expanded versions of literacy and professional learning run counter to current policy emphases prioritising standardised print-oriented practices and their assessment. On the other hand, drawing again on Hardy (2015) and policy enactment perspectives (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012), this paper takes into account the difficult position that teachers may find themselves in regarding their enactments of these policy priorities:

“this is not to downplay the concerted efforts on the part of teachers to resist the more reductive effects of such [standardised] tests, or to marginalise their efforts to do so. Instead, it is to foreground how overwhelming policy and political support and attention to such testing can dominate schooling practices, students learning, and teachers’ learning, and that consequently, more educative logics may be at risk.”

(Hardy, 2015, p. 26)

Moving beyond this impasse, a multidimensional theoretical framework for orienting future research has been presented. A nested depiction of the framework appears below in Fig. 2.

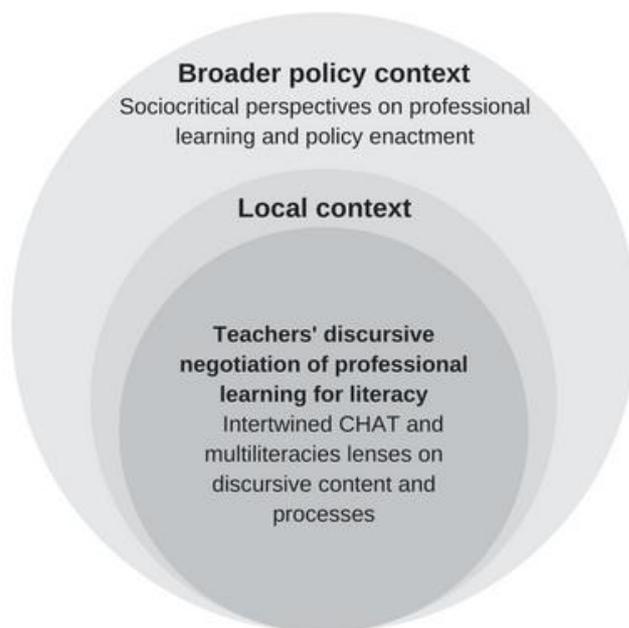


Figure 2: Nested theoretical frames

The promise of this theoretical framework emerges from commonalities, complementarities and as yet unexplored interplays between multiliteracies theory (Bull &

Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000) and CHAT (Engestrom, 2001; 2011). In terms of commonalities, the theories fit seamlessly in explaining learning as a:

- complex social practice, which varies across contexts, influenced by cultural, material, political and conceptual factors;
- mediated process, implicating cultural, material and conceptual artefacts;
- discursive process, where meanings and purposes are negotiated, settled and transformed through social interaction.

From this view, learning and enactment are interpreted as dynamic and social; anchored in actors' emergent purposes and ecologies; impacted by local and global discourses; and amenable to collective inspection and reconstruction. Ideally in the Australian educational setting, activation of these complex processes implies teachers' critical engagement with current policy directives and imagined alternatives.

On the other hand, complementarity between the theories allows the researcher to employ bifocal lenses. CHAT (Engestrom, 2001; 2011) is concerned with how actors collaboratively negotiate particular goals and perspectives, impacted by contradictory sociocultural practices and artefacts; whereas multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000) highlights practices, knowledge and pedagogy relevant to twenty first century literacy learning. Sociocritical perspectives (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012; Connell, 2013; Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell & Mockler, 2016; Luke, 2013; Mockler, 2013; Parr, 2010) signal focuses on:

- local and global discourses which shape and are shaped by teacher practice and knowledge;
- conceptual paradigms which embed and influence divergent social trajectories and aims;
- international and national policies impacting local discourses and conceptual referents in use.

Beyond these synergies and complementarities, the authors have drawn on the discursive analysis of Engestrom and Sannino (2011), to recommend fine-grained developmental mapping of CHAT (Engestrom 2001, 2011) and multiliteracies learning processes (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope and Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000). Such mapping logically empowers researchers to:

- explore how teachers' motivated goals and purposes orient successful negotiation of conflictual circumstances and/or literacy concepts;
- document how teachers unveil and reflect on conceptual and contextual constraints during serial dialogue;
- examine retained ambiguities, dilemmas or conflicts and relate them to contextual or conceptual factors;
- theorise ways of deepening professional 'critical framing of situated practice' through CHAT inspired conflictual negotiation.

In summary, research combining CHAT and multiliteracies lenses will potentially contribute empirical and theoretical detail about the enablements, constraints and residual contradictions impacting teacher professional learning and multiliteracies enactment. Such detail may assist stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders and pre-service educators to support conceptually rich rather than generic professional learning for literacy.

This paper has highlighted that teachers' exposures to contemporary and evolving literacy concepts in current curriculum landscapes have not created a groundswell of literacy innovation. On the other hand, 'new look' research incorporating CHAT (Engestrom 2001,

2011) and multiliteracies theory (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope and Kalantzis, 2013; Kress, 2010; New London Group, 2000) promises alternative ways to leverage:

- contemporary approaches to literacy teaching and learning in Australian classrooms and schools, in connection with the diverse ‘real world’ communication practices of students and their communities;
- contextually sensitive opportunities for professional dialogue, where teachers, school leaders and other educators can open up enactments of literacy teaching and learning to collective inspection and reformation.

In conclusion, this article is timely; it offers a unified and multifaceted research framework in keeping with Ball, Maguire and Braun’s (2012) call to explore dialectical interplay between educational practices, policy discourses and the current conceptual landscape. The challenge of such research will be to problematise and contest standardised approaches to teaching and learning, and grapple with diverse and expansive alternatives. Importantly, such an approach seeks to enable teachers, pre-service educators and school leaders to imagine non-homogenised landscapes for participation in literacy learning and practice in Australia and beyond.

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