

EDITORIAL

KEIKO YASUKAWA

This issue of *Literacy and Numeracy Studies* offers a selection of articles that illustrates the diversity of sites in which researchers of adult literacy and numeracy are working. They focus on teacher education, workplace literacy practices, working with young people, and an autobiographical account of 'road safety literacy', and they demonstrate through their different methodological approaches and foci the richness of the literacy and numeracy research arena.

The first article by David Wallace explores a new adult literacies teaching qualification in Scotland that is grounded in the social practices approach to literacy. In many Western societies the neo-liberal discourse on education can be seen to limit the possibilities of learning and the ways teachers can work with students, but not in Scotland. Thus, as Wallace describes, a program for teachers that foregrounds learners' experiences and knowledge creates tensions between what the trainee tutors expect from the course and what they encounter. However, the author argues, using the concept of 'liminality', that 'it is these contested or uncertain spaces - the stage of liminality' when transformative learning takes place. The article is an account of an ambitious, principled and ultimately hopeful approach to the education of adult literacy tutors at a time when interest in the creation of knowledge and meaning of teaching practice through critical inquiry is increasingly being displaced by externally manufactured, standardised curriculum.

In the second article, Ann Kelly provides a study of tacit literacy practices in the workplace that are deployed through oral communication. She argues that these tacit literacies play a critical role in enabling the workers to perform their tasks, yet they remain unrecognised in the relevant industry training packages that ostensibly articulate the competencies needed in the workplaces. Her argument is not for these particular tacit literacies to be 'added' into the training packages; rather it is that work practices cannot be pre-packaged, and literacy practices in particular, emerge in particular contexts and in localised circumstances. Teachers and workplace supervisors therefore need to be more closely observant and document the work practices of their workers in order to be able to develop a more authentic description of the practices in which their trainees and workers are engaged. In Australia, this article provides some important and challenging insights that need to be taken notice of by industry leaders who are rediscovering adult literacy and numeracy as a key workplace issue (Australian Industry Group 2010), and are piloting programs to improve workers' literacy and numeracy levels.

Andrew Chodkiewicz, Jacquie Widin and Keiko Yasukawa provide the third article in this paper in which they present a case study of the teaching practices of experienced adult educators who work with young people who have disengaged from the formal school system. Their study of the teachers' practices, through which the teachers effectively and skilfully engage the young people, leads them initially to challenge the claims made about the social practices approach to literacy and numeracy pedagogy. What they observe is not obviously what might be recognised as a social practices approach. However, through closer and more critical reflection, they themselves arrive at a new interpretation of what could be called a social practices approach. Such an approach may actively avoid drawing directly on the learners' lived experiences or using materials that are authentic to the learners in their everyday world, and yet still create the possibilities for the learners' new and desired learner identities to emerge.

The last article by Jinghe Han, Michael Singh and Dacheng Zhao stretches our understanding of what literacy is by providing an autobiographical study of a Chinese woman learning 'road safety literacy' in an English speaking country. The article shows that like learning to read printed text, learning about road safety might be characterised from a functional perspective as a purely instrumental process of learning signs and rules, and acquiring psychomotor skills to manoeuvre their vehicle. However, their examination of the lived experiences of the learner driver shows that a wide range of personal and socio-cultural factors can interfere with and texture the way the learner makes meaning of road safety; for example, the learner in this study had brought with her a view that road rules were not something that had strict legal standing because of the way they were regarded in the country where she grew up.

This issue concludes with a book review by Armin Hollenstein of the publication *Unlatching the Gate: Helping Adult Students Learn Mathematics* by Katherine Safford-Ramus (2008), based on her doctoral study.

References

- Australian Industry Group, 2010, National Workforce Literacy Project: Report on employers (sic) views on workplace literacy and numeracy Skills, Australian Industry Group, North Sydney.
- Safford-Ramus, Katherine, 2008, *Unlatching the Gate: Helping adult students learn mathematics*, Xlibris, USA.