

# LACMF

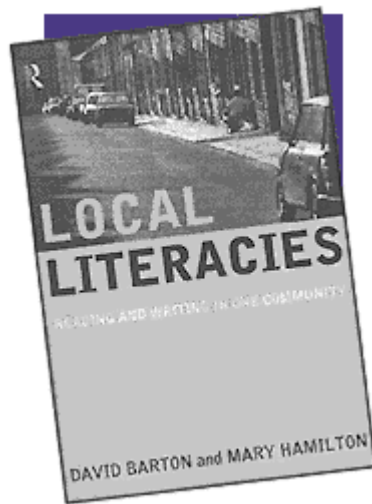
## LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM MEDIA FOCUS

Connecting literacy, media and technology in the schools, community and workplace

### By the light of local knowledge

by Linda Shohet

When *Local Literacies* arrived on my desk last month, most of this issue was already on diskette. The theme was community learning and literacy; it highlighted the ways people use text and media to make sense of their lives and to organize and empower their communities. After reading *Local Literacies*, I have put it at the centre of this issue. It is one of the most readable academic studies of literacy to appear since Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words*, and should have as great an impact in shaping future thought (and,



people share their sense of themselves, and their perceptions about being educated or "uneducated." Their lives take us beyond functionality as the authors hoped they would. Barton and Hamilton began with an "approach....strongly shaped by the insistent voices of practitioners and adult students in community-based adult education who reject definitions of literacy in terms of skills, functions and levels which do not fit their experience...."(5).

If I had to choose one book to explain literacy today to someone unfamiliar with the field, I would pick *Local Literacies*. Beside the

everyday life from home support for schools to interactions with government and legal systems. They also note a need for critical examination of media representation of literacy issues.

### Connecting to LACMF

Many articles in this issue reflect the concerns raised in *Local Literacies*.

- Literacy is integrated into health education (p. 4)
- A British statistician critiques the model that underlies IALS and similar studies and suggests that more complex models now exist to represent the complexity of real world literacy (p. 7)
- Communities across Canada are setting up learning networks to meet the needs of their members outside traditional

dare one hope, a greater impact in shaping practice?).

Based on a longitudinal ethnographic study of Lancaster England in the 1990s, Barton and Hamilton set out to "offer a detailed, specific description of literacy practices in one local community at one point in time" and to show how literacy is linked to other social practices. Recognizing that this account "is often at odds with the public image of literacy...in the media and much current policy discourse," they wish to "offer an alternative public discourse which foregrounds the role of literacy as a communal resource contributing to the quality of local life."

The study looks closely at the lives of four individuals - Harry, a retired fireman trying to write his war memoirs; Shirley, a

study itself, the authors have incorporated a brief history of literacy studies, a discussion of different theoretical perspectives, definitions of complicated terms such as "literacy event" and "literacy practice," and exploration of seemingly uncomplicated terms such as "community" and "network"[See To Ponder, p. 3]. They include questions for further study and a comprehensive bibliography.

In one of several appendices, they also connect theory to practice, although that was not an original goal of the book. Here they argue that these new views of literacy can be applied in nursery, primary, secondary and post secondary education as well as adult education. They link adult basic students learning to write and university students learning to write in new ways.

Policy implications touch on institutional frameworks for literacy as well as government policy directions. Finally, they make connections with

institutions. (p. 12)

- Some communities in rural Newfoundland use video and community television for local development (p. 14)

In all these accounts, functional notions of literacy are questioned and we are invited to see "by the light of local knowledge."

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LACMF always suggests that there are multiple literacies, but that they can and should be linked. These links cannot be made unless those of us involved in literacy work --in every context-- understand the different, often contradictory, models which currently shape practice.

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housewife with strong convictions on many social issues and a commitment to her children's education; June, a part-time market worker, who keeps careful household accounts; and talkative Cliff, a man who has held many jobs from hairdresser to shop steward, who loves the race track and enjoys writing. But we also look at their social networks and local organizations. Beyond the data from interviews, questionnaires, observations and analyses, it is the fullness of the lives, the richness of experience and the variety of social practices that engage our attention.

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**Above are excerpts from the current issue of *Literacy Across the Curriculummedia Focus*. To subscribe to this newsletter, print out the [subscription form](#) and return it to The Centre for Literacy of Quebec.**

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