

Teacher and Librarian Partnerships in Literacy Education in the 21st Century

Joron Pihl, Kristin Skinstad van der Kooij
and Tone Cecilie Carlsten (Eds.)



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**Teacher and Librarian Partnerships in Literacy
Education in the 21st Century**

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Teacher and Librarian Partnerships in Literacy Education in the 21st Century

Edited by

Joron Pihl

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway

Kristin Skinstad van der Kooij

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway

and

Tone Cecilie Carlsten

Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education, Norway



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
1. Why Teacher and Librarian Partnerships in Literacy Education in the 21st Century? <i>Joron Pihl, Tone Cecilie Carlsten and Kristin Skinstad van der Kooij</i>	1
2. New Literacy Studies in Educational Contexts <i>Brian V. Street</i>	23
3. Can Library Use Enhance Intercultural Education? <i>Joron Pihl</i>	33
4. A Library and School Network in Sweden: Social Literacies and Popular Education <i>Helen Avery</i>	45
5. Literacy Education, Reading Engagement and Library Use in Multilingual Classes <i>Ingebjørg Tonne and Jonon Pihl</i>	63
6. Librarian and Teacher Collaboration: Enhancing Second-Language Learners' Literacy Development <i>Ulla Damber</i>	75
7. A State-Run School Library Programme in Norway: Political Contradictions <i>Tone Cecilie Carlsten and Jørgen Sjaastad</i>	89
8. A Multilingual Book Café at the School Library: Contradictions between Literacy Discourses <i>Thomas Eri</i>	103
9. School Librarians as Leaders of Extracurricular Reading Groups <i>Teresa Cremin and Joan Swann</i>	119
About the Contributors	139

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JORON PIHL, TONE CECILIE CARLSTEN AND
KRISTIN SKINSTAD VAN DER KOOIJ

1. WHY TEACHER AND LIBRARIAN PARTNERSHIPS IN LITERACY EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

INTRODUCTION

Why do we consider teacher and librarian partnerships to be essential to literacy education in the 21st century? An unprecedented pace of knowledge development, digitalization, globalization and extensive transnational migration characterizes the 21st century (Bottery, 2006; Daun, 2011; Delgado & Norman, 2008; Sassen, 1998). These phenomena, the subsequent social inequalities through education and the multiplicity in schools, challenge us to reconsider the purpose, pedagogy, theory and practices within literacy education. Based on the contributors' educational and interdisciplinary research, *New Literacy Studies* (Street, chapter two in this volume) and international research in the field, we find that teacher and librarian partnerships provide fundamental contributions to literacy education in the 21st century.

By reconceptualizing literacy education based on teacher and librarian partnerships, including partnerships between schools, public libraries and school libraries, we introduce a paradigmatic shift in literacy education. This has philosophical, pedagogical and structural foundations and implications. We reconceptualize literacy education by treating literacies as forms of social practices rather than autonomous skills. We reconceptualize teacher professionalism based on interprofessional collaboration. Teacher and librarian partnerships facilitate reading for pleasure and reading engagement in work with school subjects and curriculum goals. The partnerships facilitate work with multimodal literacies and inquiry-based learning, which are essential in the present era of digitalization and worldwide knowledge development. Furthermore, teacher and librarian partnerships facilitate work with students' and communities' multiple literacies, intercultural education and community building in multicultural communities.

We propose to reiterate the purpose of literacy education as democratic education. Democratic literacy education develops literacies and empowerment among *all* pupils and students (Andreotti, Biesta, & Ahenakew, 2015; Biesta, 2007, 2014). We suggest that literacy education based on teacher and librarian partnerships can make a major contribution to literacy development for all, and contribute to democratic agency and citizenship (Pihl, 2009b, 2012a). We define the purpose of literacy education against a social background in which inequalities through education are persistent and even increasing in several countries. Systematic differences in literacy achievements persist, depending on gender and

the social, linguistic and cultural background of pupils (OECD, 2009, 2010). Neo-liberal policies prioritize literacy education in terms of high-stakes international standardized assessments and competition, the teaching of individual literacy skills, outcome-based education (Davies & Bansel, 2007). However, rather than reducing social inequalities, research indicates that these policies, in fact, strengthen the reproduction of social inequalities through education (Au, 2009; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Fibkins, 2013; Méhaut & Winch, 2012; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2010; Pihl, 2015; Walford, 2013). The case studies we present from Sweden, Norway and the U.K. highlight partnerships in work with reading literacies, multimodal literacies and learning, and community building. Common to the contributors is that they apply sociocultural and intercultural theory and treat literacies as forms of social practice, in line with New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000; Street, 1995, 2003). In chapter two, Street presents theoretical perspectives within NLS, focusing on Literacy as Social Practice (LSP). According to Street, the sternest test of NLS is to apply NLS/LSP perspectives to mainstream education. We present case studies that do just that. Moreover, they integrate other theoretical perspectives, such as the cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, 2011), to analyse conflicts and contradictions within literacy education (Eri, chapter eight in this volume).

The case studies adopt a bottom-up approach, in which teachers implement a paradigmatic shift in their professional work from the implementation of top-down concepts of literacy education and teacher professionalism promoted by the state (Evetts, 2006; Fournier, 1999) to the implementation of bottom-up concepts of literacy education and teacher professionalism developed by researchers and teachers themselves, thereby involving interprofessional partnerships. With respect to the theory of professionalism, teacher professionalism is reconceptualized in terms of specialization in combination with interprofessional collaboration and partnerships (Pihl, 2009b). This is highly appropriate in relation to the challenges that multiplicity and digitalization represent to education in the 21st century.

The contributors build on research that documents the powerful impact of reading (Krashen, 2004; Krashen, Lee, & McQuillan, 2012) on learning and language development (Dickinson, A, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2012; Small & Snyder, 2009) and democratic agency (Freire & Macedo, 2005). We address a gap in educational research related to the development of reading engagement (Guthrie, 2016) and inclusion of the school library and librarians in the very concept of literacy education and practice in the 21st century (Pihl, 2012a), drawing on studies in library and information science.

PARTNERSHIPS AND LITERACIES AS SOCIAL PRACTICES

NLS defines literacies as forms of social practices. Literacies are socially and culturally specific (Street, 2003, 2005). In line with sociocultural educational theory (Vygotsky, 1978), NLS assumes that literacy education should build on the literacy resources among pupils and communities. We define public libraries and school libraries as literacy resources in the communities that are invaluable to

literacy education. We conceptualize pupils' extensive voluntary reading and the sharing of reading experiences and multimodal literacy activities as social practices that are fundamental to literacy education. Partnerships between teachers and librarians facilitate such literacy education.

In the information age, inquiry-based learning is becoming increasingly important. Children and young people learn how to investigate a topic or problem and make use of multiple communication channels in exploring the phenomenon. The use of research-based methods is one form of inquiry-based learning. In inquiry-based teaching and learning, school librarians are vital partners for teachers. Guided inquiry means that a team of teachers and school librarian guides pupils in the use of a wide range of information resources, to provide in-depth understanding and a personal perspective of the problem (Kuhlthau, 2010). Guided inquiry is responsive to educational challenges in the information age in the 21st century. It equips pupils with the abilities required to address an uncertain and very rapidly changing the world (Kuhlthau, 2010). School librarians are experts in guided inquiry.

School librarians are vital partners in creating schools that enable students to learn through vast resources and multiple communication channels. School libraries are dynamic learning centres in information age schools with school librarians as primary agents for designing schools for 21st century learners. (Kuhlthau, 2010, p. 17)

In the following, we expand on what we mean by teacher and librarian partnerships, the rationale for such partnerships, and discuss some of the challenges. The contributors to this volume examine teacher and librarian partnerships in the contexts of sociocultural and intercultural practices (Pihl, chapter three) and community building (Avery, chapter four). We also explore challenges to such partnerships.

We define partnerships as professional *and* institutional collaboration. Partnerships imply professional and institutional agreements to collaborate within literacy education. We shall see that such partnerships can take many forms. One interesting example is a partnership in a library network in Sweden, in which a public library branch, five school libraries and two preschool libraries pooled institutional and professional resources (Avery, chapter four). Another example is the research and development project *Multiplicity, Empowerment, Citizenship: Inclusion through the Use of the Library as an Arena for Learning* (Pihl, 2011, 2012c), which involved partnerships between teachers, school librarians, public librarians and educational researchers, as well as headteachers and a library director. At the institutional level, the partnership included a municipal public library and a public library branch, two public schools and two teacher education institutions. These institutions collaborated on the development of literature-based literacy education (Tonne & Pihl, chapter five).

A prominent characteristic of partnerships is that the professions and collaborating institutions formalize their partnership agreement and their plans for collaboration. This is an important precondition for sustainable partnerships

(Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter, & Warmington, 2009; Eri & Pihl, 2016; Kuhlthau, 2010). At the level of school leadership, this implies that teacher and librarian partnerships are included in the strategic plans of the school, and are formalized in the teaching plans at every grade level, in preschool, primary school and secondary school (Pihl, 2012b).

Our concept of “teacher and librarian partnerships” implies interprofessional collaboration, but transcends Montiel-Overall’s concept of teacher and librarian collaboration (Montiel-Overall, 2007, 2008), in that “partnerships” imply *formalized* professional and *institutional* collaboration. The use of “partnerships” in the plural communicates that there are many possible types of partnership. At the professional level, partnerships involve collaboration between teachers, public librarians and school librarians, as well as partnerships between public librarians and school librarians¹ and even researchers. The contributions show that for successful partnerships to evolve there needs to be an available partner at each school; that is, a qualified school librarian and a well-developed school library that is staffed and open during all school hours (Carlsten & Sjaastad, 2014).

In this volume, we present innovative case studies of different forms of partnerships between teachers and librarians and libraries and schools. We also focus on policies for the development of school libraries (Carlsten & Sjaastad, chapter seven). The contributors document how partnerships enhance reading engagement, high educational achievement, empowerment and democratic agency and community building, and they discuss some of the challenges of teacher and librarian partnerships.

MULTIPLICITY AND TEACHER AND LIBRARIAN PARTNERSHIPS

Teachers and librarians share a democratic mandate, namely to contribute to literacy education, democratic inclusion and agency in multicultural societies (Aabø, 2005; Audunson, 2005; Pihl, 2009b).² The Multicultural Library Manifesto outlines the library profession’s interpretation of their democratic and professional mandate in multicultural societies:

Each individual in our global society has the right to a full range of library and information services. In addressing cultural and linguistic diversity, libraries should:

- serve all members of the community without discrimination based on cultural and linguistic heritage;
- provide information in appropriate languages and scripts;
- give access to a broad range of materials and services reflecting all communities and needs;
- employ staff to reflect the diversity of the community, who are trained to work with and serve diverse communities. (IFLA/UNESCO, 2009)

In her contribution, Helen Avery shows how librarians implement this democratic mandate in a multicultural suburb in Sweden (Avery, chapter four).

By joining forces and professional expertise, we argue that both the teaching and library professions strengthen their potential for the realization of their professional mandate. Librarians are knowledgeable about children's literature and information literacy, and this is complementary to teachers' knowledge about pedagogy within literacy education. Librarians are media experts, knowledgeable in guided inquiry, literature dissemination and the use of library resources for the benefit of the user.

Heterogeneity and hybridity in school populations today cut across the "majority"/"minority" divide. The traditional concept of "difference" – usually reserved for "the other" – does not adequately capture the complexities and diversity that transcend the "majority"/"minority" divide. These complexities pertain to social, linguistic, cultural, religious and gender variations as well as to variations in abilities, interests and individual and collective histories. Such variations unfold even within the "majority" and "minority" populations in schools.

Against this background, we introduce the multiplicity concept as a foundation for dealing with difference. Multiplicity is an ontological concept meaning "difference in itself" (Deleuze, 2004). Deleuze introduced this concept in contrast to the traditional concept of "difference", which defines "difference" as the opposite of "identity". In the traditional conceptual framework, identity and difference are binary concepts, with identity being the norm and difference being subordinated to identity. Difference is constructed as inferior and subordinate to identity.

In contrast, the multiplicity concept assumes that all things, people and phenomena are multiplicities, that is, differences "in themselves". Multiplicity (difference) is even a characteristic of identity. Multiplicities are continuously in processes of becoming, in other words, continuously in processes of change. This ontological assumption has important implications for education with respect to how we theorize about the content of education, pedagogy and the school population in the 21st century.

Historically, the development of a national identity has been a priority in public education (Pihl, 2009a). Today, the development of a European identity is the purpose of education in many European Union countries. However, from an ontological perspective, it becomes problematic to define the development of a national or European identity as the purpose of education. Any attempt to define "identity" as a primary analytical concept will reify a dominant "identity", which is then applied across a diverse population. Similar arguments can be made in relation to knowledge. Multiplicity is also a fundamental characteristic of knowledge. Thus, we argue that work with multiplicity in content, rather than standardized content, ought to be the purpose of education, especially in the present era of globalization, digitalization and migration.

Taking the multiplicity concept as a point of departure for dealing with "difference", the most interesting question concerns which multiplicities may be put into interaction to promote democratic literacy education in the 21st century. This is the issue that we address here, faced with today's educational challenges and the continuous reproduction of social inequalities in education. Starting with

the democratic purpose of education, and literacy education, in particular, we find that the teaching profession (teachers) and the library profession (librarians) share a democratic mandate. Accordingly, we propose that when teachers and librarians join their expertise and engage in partnerships, they may generate new literacy practices and experiences that benefit all children. Multiplicity in the content of public and school libraries is conducive to the school population in the 21st century. These philosophical reflections were at the foundation of the research and development project *Multiplicity, Empowerment, Citizenship: Inclusion through the Use of the Library as an Arena for Learning* (Pihl, 2011, 2012c). Education that includes library resources in teaching and learning is potentially more relevant to the multiplicity in schools than education that relies heavily on standardized text-books and literacy materials. Libraries are recognized as essential to teaching and learning in higher education. Likewise, in the information age, access to good school libraries and good public libraries with multimedia resources and the expertise of librarians is equally essential to teaching and learning in schools (Kuhlthau, 2010).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

NLS document that people engage in reading and other literacy practices that are meaningful to them (Barton, 2007; Barton et al., 2000; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000). How can schools facilitate reading that is meaningful to the pupils? Research indicates that extensive access to and time to read high-interest books of one's own choice are powerful incitements to further reading and the development of a passion for reading (Guthrie, 2016; Krashen, 2004). Consistent with NLS, the contributors in this volume show that the sharing of reading experiences and other literacy events is equally important. Sharing is a type of social practice that can take many forms; from dialogue about reading experiences at school libraries and public libraries to work with aesthetic and multimedia literacies and the sharing of this work with fellow pupils/students. Schools can make a fundamental difference in children's lives by providing *all* children with such reading and literacy experiences. We propose that teacher and librarian partnerships within literacy education and the use of public and school libraries are essential to the development of inclusive literacy education in the 21st century.

Librarians work with situated literacies (Street, 1995) and take people's multiple literacies and interests as a point of departure. These characteristics of librarianship are important from an educational and democratic perspective. Teacher and librarian partnerships stimulate young people to pursue their knowledge interests and social interests through the use of library resources (Hedemark, 2012; Rafste, 2005). Helen Avery (chapter four) shows that teacher and librarian partnerships make important contributions to empowerment among young people, democratic agency and community building. Many children and youth who use the public and school libraries frequently in school become devoted library users.

International assessments, however, indicate that there is a decline in reading literacy among children (Hedemark, 2012). According to the Progress in