

Special issue on
**(Im)mobility, literacies and second language
education for adults and adolescents with
limited previous education**

Guest editors

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In this special issue, we draw attention to research on literacy and basic literacy education for adult and adolescent migrants with limited or no previous school background who are learning a second language. This introduction addresses issues closely related to literacy education for this group of migrants, namely human mobility and immobility, including both horizontal (geographical and spatial) and vertical (social) mobility, as well as the interrelation between the two (Canagarajah, 2017). Mobility includes the movement of individuals in the social space as well as movement over time. While education is one important aspect of intergenerational social mobility, it is not the only one. The individual's social capital and investment (Norton, 2013) in education are important resources for students' mobility through the education system and into the labour market. That said, other factors aside from the design of education also affect social mobility. Literacy does not in itself affect social and cognitive practices or social mobility (Street, 1984; 2003), literacy is situated in different contexts and societies. Consequently, the effects of different literacies under different conditions vary. So, even if literacy skills are important in modern, digital economies, these skills in themselves are no guarantee of social mobility or social equality. The situatedness of literacy and literacy education for second language learners in various social, cultural and material contexts is emphasised in the articles published in this special issue.

While mobility and diversity have always been intrinsic aspects of human societies, it can be concluded that social, economic and technological changes have intensified migration, the movement of artifacts and communication between people over vast distances (Faist et al., 2013). As mobility and diversity in human societies have increased, so there has been a development of theoretical perspectives and research in applied linguistics. Critical perspectives have been applied in research on mobilities, superdiversity, flux and ongoing movements as characteristics of language and literacies in various settings all over the world (Blommaert, 2010; Arnaut et al., 2015). One line of research in this field is directed towards peoples' spatial and temporal movements across multi-

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ple types of borders: physical, mental, semiotic, economic, social, linguistic and cultural. Mobility is thus understood as including movement between both real and virtual spaces. At the same time as research has called attention to this increasing mobility, there is a political and societal shift towards nationalism, closed borders, racism and populism in many nation states, especially in the global north. These nationalist and populist narratives typically promote language testing as a gatekeeping mechanism for permanent residence and citizenship (De Fina & Tseng, 2017).

For many people, mobility is not an option. They have no possibility of choosing whether to stay or to go; instead, they face forced displacement or insurmountable obstacles to mobility, both of which involve a loss of power and agency. Whereas some people's mobility is considered a threat that must be regulated and restricted, other people's mobility is encouraged. As Mazzaferro (2022) notes: "Mobility is historically, ideologically, and discursively determined and unequally accessed" (p.379). The mobility of some individuals also involves the immobility of others (De Fina & Mazzaferro 2021), hence the two must be viewed in relation to one another (Canagarajah, 2021). Furthermore, changes in mobility also involve changes in communication and the perception of language. In superdiverse contexts (Vertovec, 2007), people use and transform their linguistic resources in new ways, characterised by translanguaging and transliteracy. Migration often involves a devaluation of linguistic capital (including literacy) and a need to acquire new linguistic resources. This is largely the case for individuals with limited or no schooling. For them, language and literacy are often not tied to their own decisions but to structural factors that are usually beyond their control. Travelling is tied up with texts that open up possibilities but also put constraints on peoples' movements (Kell, 2017). Forced immobility may be the result of the state not issuing documents that are regarded as valid identification, such as birth certificates, passports, visas and driving licences; in other words, literacy artifacts of various kinds. It is essential that research sheds light on structures that limit the mobility of this group of people and their possibilities of developing dominant and highly valued literacy practices. There is also a need for research into the complexity of (im)mobility in relation to second language and basic literacy development. At the same time, the agency of individual learners also needs to be highlighted in order to avoid a reproduction of the deficit perspective from which learners are viewed as "illiterate" and a burden to society.

The relationship between literacy and social mobility is complex. The broader perspective adopted in New Literacy Studies (NLS) helps to shed light on the educational challenges and highlights those literacy practices that can be powerful resources for individuals in their everyday lives. Earlier research in the field of NLS (such as Barton, 2007; Barton et al, 2000; Street, 1993) has focused on the tension between global and local perspectives (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009). Two central concepts in NLS are *literacy events* and *literacy practices*. The term *literacy events* refers to any activity that involves written language in any form (Heath, 1982), while the term *literacy practices* refers to how people make sense of written language and their habits and attitudes in relation to written language (Street, 2003). NLS focuses on the context in which literacy events take place and how this context affects the shaping of specific literacy events, just as literacy practices are integrated into and influence people's lives. The focus on sociopolitical and cultural contexts stems from the fact that NLS was created in reaction to what Street (1984) calls the "autonomous" model of literacy in which literacy is perceived as decontextualized or, in other words, as neutral, given and independent of contextual factors. In contrast, in the ideological model, literacy is a social practice integrated into people's everyday lives; people actively and creatively initiate and engage in new forms of literacy practices in so-called *local literacies* (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Brandt and Clinton (2002) have criticised NLS researchers for overemphasising the local setting and people's opportunities to create their literacy practices in their local contexts, arguing that global contexts and structural power factors have been overshadowed. This

tension has since then been resolved, or perhaps rather has given rise to new theoretical perspectives that interweave the local and the global by, for example, combining NLS with actor-network theory (cf. Hamilton 2001; Lemke, 1998; Prinsloo, 2008). Ivanič (2009) contends that the definition of literacy practices needs to be fine-tuned and that micro-practices need to be examined in order to observe the aspects of literacy practices that co-emerge or are “*resonant* across contexts” (Mannion et al. 2009, p. 323). This resonance is particularly relevant to the present special issue with its dual focus on mobility and immobility. There are two different approaches to researching literacy education for adult second language learners: one can reproduce the deficit perspective, or one can focus on the learner’s resources. From the first perspective, students’ challenges are explained by the linguistic and social barriers that they face, while the second recognises that students invest and engage in their education and develop strategies based on their own expectations and desire for social mobility.

In this special issue, we bring together studies of second language and literacy education for adolescent and adult second language learners in different contexts, illustrating both similarities and differences between educational domains. As discussed above, mobility, or immobility, affects language learners, teachers and texts on a global as well as a local level (Kell, 2017). On the one hand, literacy education and learning are affected by global political structures, such as international agreements and treaties on migration that have an impact on learners’ physical mobility, as well as by communication technologies that open up possibilities to use literacies for communication across vast distances. On the other hand, there are patterns on a local level that are specifically tied to a certain setting, such as how different types of texts mediate teaching and learning and how practiced language policy (Bonacina-Pugh, 2017) relates to second language and literacy learning in a specific classroom in, for example, North America or Scandinavia. The different characteristics and preconditions of the contexts in which the studies in this special issue are situated affect the education that takes place there. Interest in literacy education and second language learning for adults and adolescents has increased among researchers (Condelli, 2020) and the Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) network has generated a number of digital resources for teachers (Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). This special issue contributes to the field by publishing seven empirical studies that demonstrate its complexity.

Articles – educational domains

The studies presented in the seven articles in this special issue were conducted in Canada, Norway and Sweden.

In the first article, Kulbrandstad and Danbolt address the complex teaching-learning situation in LESLLA classrooms in a Norwegian context. Based on an interview study with LESLLA teachers, they explore teachers’ understanding of themselves as professionals on macro and micro levels based on sociological and pedagogical theories of professional practices and social theories of literacy. They find that the teachers combine content, care and the adaption of teaching to their students as adults, thus taking on the function of bridge builders for their students. The authors highlight the importance of having teachers who are competent to teach both the new language and basic literacy skills. They argue that, by focusing on the consequences of students’ social reality, teachers occupy a span between macro and micro challenges. However, Kulbrandstad and Danbolt also warn of the risk that increased testing requirements introduced by the government will place teachers under additional pressure, possibly leading to a greater emphasis on formal language learning.

In their article, Maynard, Beaulieu, Fortier and Laberge present a study of what they call a balanced approach to literacy instruction. From the initial stage of an action research project in Quebec, Canada, they report on how they worked with teachers to

increase the use of meaning-focused instructional activities, with the intention of supporting plurilingual and multimodal text production in the form of identity texts. They found that using identity texts did not necessarily lead to students incorporating their various languages and that teachers tended not to mention their students' use of a variety of languages. Their conclusion was that a lack of training prevented teachers from encouraging the use of diverse languages and that, in the subsequent stages of the action research project, they as researchers needed to pay particular attention to providing teachers with more resources in this regard.

In a Swedish context, Eklund Heinonen and Lindström explore L2 teachers' thoughts on the initial assessment of adult learners' literacy in the municipal adult education programme Swedish for Immigrants (SFI). The literacy assessment is conducted by the teachers with the assistance of an interpreter and is directed towards learners with little or no prior education. The assessment begins with the student completing a set of basic reading comprehension tasks in their strongest language. Questionnaires and interviews with teachers revealed great variation based on four categories of teacher knowledge: *subject matter knowledge*, *knowledge of students*, *pedagogical knowledge*, and *knowledge of educational contexts*. These four categories were partly intertwined with each other, focusing on both a resource and a deficit perspective. Teacher cognition varied regarding the concept of literacy, the value of an initial L1 literacy assessment and students' prior literacy and multilingual resources, as well as the potential for using these to plan instruction. This cognition may have significant implications for what emerges from initial assessments of a student's L1 literacy, as well as for their teaching. This in turn affects the validity of the assessment and, ultimately, the quality of education.

The importance of the teacher in literacy instruction is the focus of Winlund's ethnographic case study of the Language Introduction Programme in Swedish upper-secondary schools. Winlund uses the concept *literacy mediator* or *literacy broker* in her analysis of how a teacher is perceived by a group of migrant adolescents with limited prior formal education. She studies the students' opinions on how their teacher supports their engagement in literacy practices and the fact that certain literacy practices seem to be enabled while others are hindered. The analysis reveals that students appreciate the teacher's support in meeting new literacy standards, while also highlighting their acceptance of the devaluation of some prior literacy practices as a strategic choice to facilitate engagement in the mainstream society's literacy practices. The study also discusses the students' opportunities to express themselves, both in interviews and within the classroom, in connection to these findings. Finally, the concept of literacy sponsorship is discussed.

In an ethnographic study using action research, Wedin and Berg explore space for multiliteracies in municipal adult education in the programme Swedish for Immigrants (SFI). They study classroom interactions through the lens of Hornberger's continua of biliteracy and demonstrate that teachers encourage students to use their varied linguistic resources not only by providing space and time for the use of other languages but also by showing interest in learning from the students' languages. The translanguaging practices in the classroom were mostly oral but also included space for multiliteracies. However, spaces for multiliteracies varied depending on the student's earlier literacy skills, the number of students sharing a particular language and the availability of study guidance assistants.

In a study from French-speaking Quebec, Bédard, Fortier and Amireault investigate teaching materials used in French-teaching LESLLA classes, especially teachers' attitudes to them. Using activity theory, they explore usability in relation to students' heterogeneity, finding that due to this heterogeneity, one type of material cannot meet teachers' needs. Their findings demonstrate that the use of a wide range of resources is reported, mostly various kinds of existing study materials, either employed as they are or adapted, but also study materials created by the teachers themselves. With a few exceptions, the teachers give a negative assessment of available materials, including "out-

dated”, “ill-suited”, “irrelevant”, etc., and report that they put a considerable amount of time and effort into adapting the resources they have to hand and creating new material. In this regard, they find that student heterogeneity presents a challenge. The authors conclude that the division of labour involved in this activity is more concentrated than previously noted by other authors; in addition to choosing, creating and adapting materials, teachers are also responsible for researching and purchasing them, which adds even more to their workload. The authors also conclude that it would be extremely valuable to obtain learners’ views on the teaching materials used in LESLLA classrooms, so that their needs and concerns can be better understood.

The use of literature in the classroom is researched in a Swedish context in Norlund Shaswar’s study of a teacher and a group of adult learners of Swedish as a second language working with an easy-to-read novel. The theoretical and analytical framework includes the four resources model, transactional theory and the concepts *translanguaging* and *embodied literacy practices*. Data for the study were obtained from classroom observations and focus group conversations with teachers. Findings show that decoding and meaning-making practices were most prominent, while text-using and text-analysing practices were scarcer. Aesthetic reading was connected to multimodal aspects and embodied literacy practices while efferent reading was found at many levels in the reading and was interconnected with all families of practice. Translanguaging practices often intersected with meaning-making practices. One implication of the findings is that using a wide range of modalities supports the learners in expressing their thoughts, experiences and opinions in literary conversations, and is therefore crucial.

In conclusion, we are delighted to have had the opportunity to work as guest editors of this special issue and the seven articles it contains. We would like to thank the authors and reviewers for all of the work they have put in. We are happy to say that their efforts have resulted in a body of work that contributes to research on literacies and literacy education for adults and adolescents with limited previous education. It is also our hope that the seven articles included in the issue will inspire additional research in the area in the coming years.

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