9. In Transition to School: Across Vernacular and Institutional Multiliteracies

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Introduction

Conceptions of childhood are a constant socio-cultural struggle between taking the normative perspective of the adult and the agentive perspective of the child, between prescribed conditions for development during early years and the free spirit of the child. This issues goes back several centuries—at least to the time when Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) wrote his case study about *Émile ou De l'éducation* (1762) as an argument for the child finding its own way during upbringing. A core part of this struggle about childhood and the child in our culture today involves reading and writing —in recent years, these have been linked to both digital developments as well as the nature of educational institutions.

Part of a contemporary discourse about childhood is the interrelationship, or the lack thereof, between vernacular and institutional aspects of literacy and learning. This is expressed as ways of understanding children's agency and productive literacy practices on the one hand (Williams, 2017) and institutional and instructional practices of literacy learning and its impact on later performance in school on the other hand (Hattie, 2009). As a consequence, there is an ongoing debate in many countries concerning preschools and kindergartens and the emphasis on better preparing children for school versus emphasizing free play and alternative ways of engaging children in literacy activities. The issue at stake is that "schooling" now applies to younger age groups and has more explicit learning objectives.

"Multiliteracies" is an interesting term since it goes beyond traditional tensions and struggles about childhood and suggests that children's literacy practices have become increasingly complex, both in diverse ways of reading and writing and in their multimodal expressions (Marsh, 2015; Flewitt, Messer & Kucirkova 2015). Still, we know relatively little about how such practices are embedded in children's and their families' lives. Holistic and ecological (Barton, 2007) understandings of multiliteracy look across both vernacular and institutional aspects of literacy and learning as there is a growing interest in finding ways to

study and understand the interconnections of literacy practices in everyday lives as experienced by young children and their families (Sefton-Green, Marsh, Erstad & Flewitt, 2016).

The aim of this chapter is to explore how multiliteracies are embedded in different activities and places where children (5–6 years old) participate within a community and the tension between vernacular and institutional framings of such activities - as children make the transition from kindergarten/preschool to first grade. Multiliteracies are defined as how children interact with different modalities and technologies in different activities and settings. I do not focus on one specific technology but rather on activities across different places and contextual settings as possible "sites of learning."

I structure this chapter theoretically, raising some key issues about ways of understanding children and their literate lives in contemporary cultures and as a conceptual agenda for studying multiliteracies as an interplay between different practices and places where children in read and write. I took the empirical data presented in this chapter from an ethnographic study in a multicultural community in Oslo, following youngsters in three different age groups over a two year period from one level of education to the next, and across institutional and everyday contexts (Erstad et al, 2016). I focus on one boy who was followed over the transition from kindergarten to school and expand the analysis with a couple of examples, one from a Tamil cultural centre and one from a training studio. My interest is in how multiliteracies as part of children's lives provide insight into the interplay between informal and formal practices, with implications for these children's learning trajectories. The research question addressed in this chapter focus on; how is the tension between informal contexts versus formal/institutional settings experienced by children in their transition from kindergarten to school?

Children's Literate Lives

There are several socio-cultural transformations that are important to how we understand childhood in contemporary cultures as a basis for literate lives. *First*, is the development of digital technologies. The growth and spread of digital media technologies as well as their changing capabilities seriously enable (or disable) interpersonal, community, and individual communication as well as significantly affect what it means to be literate and to learn in the 21st century. Digital technologies have increasingly become part of children's early years, with tablets and smartphones available in most homes as well as the development of the "Internet of

toys", connected to a range of cloud-based platforms. Such technologies provide opportunities for interacting with content in new ways using touch interface to play with letters, numbers, and creating multimodal content. Children are engaged in reading, writing, and multimodal authoring/design across a range of screen-based media in homes and communities, although there are differences due to socioeconomic status and family histories (Chaudron et al., 2015; Marsh et al., 2015; Nevski & Sibak, 2016).

Second, learning and education have become pervasive in all facets of daily life for children and their families, as seen in families' investments in tools and resources to stimulate intellectual development and after-school activities for children and their families. At the same time, there is growing public discourse and advice from experts on how to provide the best conditions for children's development and learning, either in kindergartens or at home. Parents often relate to these considerations with good intentions, but within an escalating commercial market, especially concerning investments in digital technologies (Sefton-Green, Marsh, Erstad & Flewitt, 2016).

Third, societies are becoming more culturally heterogeneous, with migration creating increased political tensions, student populations with diverse cultural and language backgrounds, and changing family structures. Chambers (2012) notes how the traditional vision of the family is "ethnocentric," and that what are called "ethnic minority" families may live and enact daily family life in different spaces to the idealized dominant norm. Yet, many "ethnic minority" families score lower on socioeconomic indicators than other families. These three areas of social transformation indicate that formal aspects of children's development in their early years has taken on a new emphasis as literacy practices have simultaneously become more diverse.

Studying the everyday lives of children has also emerged as a key source for understanding the dynamics of emerging literacy practices during early childhood (Marsh, et al., 2015). The child-centered approach that has guided much of the research during the last decade addresses children as active participants in practices of reading and writing, increasingly more via the mediational means provided by digital technologies, especially the tablets that have become common in many families. At the same time, there is a tension in research on children's literacy and learning between studying specific situated practices versus studying the holistic and ecological complexity of literacy in children's daily lives. There is a need to unpack what

multiliteracy implies in children's lives and how it is linked to instruction in formal/institutional settings..

Such an approach relates to what David Barton and Mary Hamilton have termed "local literacies" (1998) and "literacy, lives, and learning" (Barton, Ivanic, Appleby, Hodge & Tusting, 2007)—in other words, studying literacy practices as what people draw upon in meaning making during everyday life. They have suggested six propositions (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 7):

1) Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events that are mediated by written texts;
2) there are different literacies associated with different domains of life;
3) literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible, and influential than others;
4) literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices;
5) literacy is historically situated
6) literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

The focus here is not on texts themselves but rather on what people do with texts, with whom, where, and how. Literacies are viewed as historically situated and purposefully embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices. Literacy practices change and new ones are often acquired through processes of informal learning. The "local literacies" study revealed that varying characteristics of literacy practices could be mapped according to different elements, which help distinguish between what they called "vernacular" and "institutional" literacies, as informal and formal or as inside or outside of schools (or kindergartens). In 2015, Mary Hamilton revisited the community where "local literacies" study was set. The most striking change was of course the communication practices using different technologies that evolved during this 20-year period. This work raised issues about the concept of "community" and how to study literacy practices within a community setting (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 15) connected to the idea of a learning ecology:

A learning ecology is defined as the set of contexts found in physical or virtual spaces that provide opportunities for learning. Each context is comprised of a unique configuration of activities, material resources, relationships, and the interactions that

emerge from them. Ecological perspectives emerged from a desire to better articulate the interdependencies between child level and environmental variables in development and acknowledge the tight intertwining of person and context in producing developmental change. (Barron, 2006, pp. 195–196)

Such ecological framings change over time, especially as part of transitions from one context to another or from one level of education to another. A key premise of multiliteracies is that young people learn to "read" and "write" through many modes that they encounter in everyday life, and that the acquisition of literacy thus takes place within this broader ecology of symbolic codes, genres, modalities, narrative forms, and communication structures.

Studying transitions from one educational level to the next is of specific significance because such processes involve the child in particular ways of change—in identity making, external expectations, institutional framings, and personal relationships (Salmi & Kumpulainen, 2017). Starting first grade is an important aspect of growing up—moving from kindergarten and preschool to the formal school system is a transition from free play and informal activities combined with literacy learning for preschoolers to a more explicit learning focus in first grade. In a country like Norway, most children go to public kindergartens, from the age of 2 to 5-6, and during their last year in kindergarten (5–6 years old), they are taken out of class for special group sessions that prepare them for school by learning the alphabet, numbers, and so forth. For families, children, and kindergarten teachers, these activities are of great importance as ways of positioning themselves for future prospects.

Multiliteracies and Multilocalities

To date this interconnection between places and activities concerning young children and their families has not been a central issue in the field of literacy research. When places and spaces have been defined as part of literacy studies, it has mainly been with teenagers and youth (Hull & Schultz, 2002; Leander & Sheehy, 2004). Still, some of the classical studies within new literacy research emphasize the importance of studying literacy within community settings, like S. Brice Heath's (1983) study of children learning to use language and literacy at home and at school in two communities with different demographics in the southeastern United States. This study, and a return to the same families and communities three decades later, brings about some important insights into the nature of language development, the effects of literacy on oral

language habits, and the sources of communication problems in schools. Heath (1983) states that she studies local cultural practices, specifically, "face to face networks" in which "each child learns the ways of acting, believing, and valuing those about him" (p. 6) and against sociodemographic, quantitative, and input/output business models of research (p. 8) as well as deterministic categories of race and class (p. 3). The primary community for the children—and in this geographical imagination—is "geographically and socially their immediate neighborhood" (Heath, 1983, p. 6).

Barbara Comber and her colleagues (2007) provide a more recent example from Australia of relevant empirical studies in what they term "literacies in place" (2007) (see also Comber's book *Literacy, Place, and Pedagogies of Possibility*, 2016). This research explores the positive synergies between critical literacy and place-conscious pedagogy with different age groups, and it looks at how families engage with children around literacy in different parts of a community. Such research orientations also represent broader developments of what Leander, Phillips, and Taylor (2010) describe as "new mobilities" and the changing social spaces of learning. They state that "the creation of new spaces and places, and new speeds and rhythms of everyday social practice, is arguably the most important contrast between contemporary social life and that of just a decade or two ago" (2010, p. 329). Further, they refer to research about how children's everyday lives have radically changed during the last decades, for example, in terms of time spent outdoors to time spent indoors, children's restricted movements within communities, the way urban city spaces have changed, how organized activities like sports have taken over from free play, and how parents express more fear about their children's safety from the mid-1990s onwards.

These notions of spaces and places as well as new mobilities among children in contemporary societies can be related to conceptions about communities and cities as the environments and resources in which children interact. Growing up in cities, children in contemporary societies experience diverse spaces and places that provide different resources for engaging in literacy practices. Christensen and O'Brien (2003) provide an interesting reflection by emphasizing

> . . . the overlapping connections between home, neighbourhood, community and city. Living in the city is as much about negotiating relationships with other humans as it is about living in material places and spaces: there is continual interactivity between the

webs of relationships, places and spaces for children and adults alike. (p. 1)

This underscores the importance of looking at children's multiliterate lives within community settings and different localities within such communities. I use the term "learning lives" (Erstad & Sefton-Green, 2013; Erstad et al., 2016) as a way of studying interconnections between literacies, lives, and learning. Recently, there has been increasing interest in linking learning and identity formation as interrelated practices connected to the capacity to adapt to changing roles within different contexts (Holland, Lachicotte Jr, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Moje & Luke, 2009). Many of these studies have criticized the institutional practices of education, claiming that the resources, identities, and experiences that students develop in other settings are not properly recognized or used as an anchor for developing their skills and knowledge in school (Heath, 1983; Rajala et al., 2016; Wortham, 2006). The aim of a "learning lives" approach is to make explicit the mobilization of resources or affordances within specific contexts (Wertsch, 1998) while at the same time focusing on an approach that sees learning, and the capacity to adapt to changing roles, across different contexts (Holland et al., 1998; Hull & Schultz, 2002).

Methods and Context

In my research projects in recent years, I have been inspired by developments within ethnography, biographical narratives, and participatory approaches to studying people in everyday contexts using diverse and multiliterate resources (Holland et al., 1998; Thomson, 2009; Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Erstad et al., 2016). In this chapter I draw on data from a comprehensive study involving ethnographic fieldwork related to three different age cohorts: 5–6, 15–16, and 18–19. In this study, the team of researchers followed children and teenagers in these cohorts as they went through important transitions as learners, and we investigated changes and transitions in and between their institutional and everyday lives. One of our aims was to analyze how children's identities are shaped and developed in different settings over time.

Pursuing an ethnographic approach supported by recorded interviews and other data collection tools, we created detailed descriptions of the learning lives and the learning contexts of three cohorts of young people. The study consists of interviews, observations, field notes, video recordings of selected episodes and activities, participant-generated materials in the form of diaries and photos, and maps produced together with the participants (Erstad et al., 2016).

Our challenge has been to develop and use methods to understand how learners might

learn across different sites and locations, including learning across institutional frames between informal, semi- and formal locations; learning on- and off-line; learning through play; and learning across a range of cultural and interest-driven spaces.

One challenge is of course ways of researching everyday childhoods and how multiliteracies are embedded in the daily lives of children and their families. We were not concerned with the "digital" per se but rather the complex and diverse practices that children are involved in using a number of different resources; (see also Thomson et al, 2018). The challenges concerning collecting data about children's everyday lives were in our case solved by involving parents in documenting their children's activities by taking photos and writing explanations in addition to our own observations. We used digital tools to collect, analyze, and present data about everyday childhoods, including digital cameras, mobile phones for photos and audio, and NVivo software for analysis.

While we can understand a great deal about how children make connections between spaces and experiences, we still face the challenge of gaining access to how these resources actually move between contexts as well as how children appropriate them in certain circumstances and are enabled to use them in new contexts. The methodological challenges are practical (how to track and physically follow learners), ethical/legal (how to ensure access and trust across social domains), and conceptual (the circumscription of what might constitute evidence of learning)[1].

Policy and Place: The Community of Groruddalen

In our "learning lives" project, we focused on one particular community in Oslo with a dense multiethnic population. The Grorud Valley (130,000 inhabitants) is situated in the eastern part of Oslo (600,000 inhabitants). In the 1950s and 1960s, working-class and lower-middle-class families moved in and bought their own apartments in this area, which was made possible by cheap loans that were partly financed by the government. During the last two decades, a variety of different migrant groups have either arrived in Norway and moved directly into apartments in this area, or they have moved in from other parts of Oslo, finding cheaper, more

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[1] The data from the case story below are taken from our book, Erstad et al (2016). Øystein Gilje collected the data for this particular case; however, I have rewritten the data analysis for the purpose of this chapter

spacious flats here (Nielsen, 2009). The valley has many minority languages, and many of the neighborhoods have populations that are over 35% immigrant, with percentages reaching up to 90% in certain areas. For this reason, public discourse has constructed this area of Oslo as a challenge as well as a picture of the new and multi-ethnic Norway. In this regard, the population is culturally and linguistically diverse - a relatively new phenomenon in Norway. The municipality of Oslo, supported by large investments from the state, made a commitment to transform the community over the period of 2007–2016. We used this intervention program as a unique opportunity to develop a community-based understanding of the learning lives of children and young people inside and outside of kindergartens and schools and to frame the analytical perspectives within a particular social and geographical context.

The Fabric of Everyday Multiliteracies: Vernacular and Institutional

Even though we studied different age groups, we still encountered children's multiliterate practices in diverse ways. In this section, I present one narrative case about a boy (Tharakesh) and his transition into first grade and two illustrative examples of other kinds of vernacular and institutional literacy learning. This case and the illustrative examples give insight into the rich fabric of everyday activities among children and their families in this multicultural community. I do not highlight just one issue from this research, but rather, I examine the diverse experiences of growing up in this community and how multiliteracies are part of children's social living.

Tensions in transition to school: a case study

This section describes one boy and his family with a Tamil ethnic background and his transition from preschool to first grade at a local school. We began in kindergarten, and on one group of 5 children (from a total of 24 children in three different kindergartens), who, as preschool group were taken out from play activities during the week to prepare them for entering school the next year. These settings offer diverse resources for children. Different posters made by the personnel hanging on the walls of the kindergarten create an environment of letters and illustrations where the children can interact with reading and writing throughout the day. In Figure 1, we can see how this environment creates rich possibilities to engage with different resources to stimulate literacy learning with blackboards to draw on, drawings of specific letters

that the teachers and students made, as well as toys they can play with to create letters. iPads are also available, but they are locked in a closet. Overall, the kindergarten and being in the preschool group gave Tharakesh rich possibilities to practice reading and writing.

<Insert Figure 9.1 here.>

Figure 9.1. Multiliteracy setting at the kindergarten.

We also did several home visits (sometimes with interpreters). What became obvious from our observations of Tharakesh in the kindergarten and visiting his home was that his voice and ways of performing using his voice were very important ways into his multiliteracy practices. His parents and kindergarten teachers all emphasized that Tharakesh had a good voice, and over the years, he had assumed a particular role as a singer and performer at the kindergarten. We recorded several events where Tharakesh was asked to perform as a singer when the children gathered before their lunch meal:

When they have finished washing their hands, they gather and sing four to five songs together. One of the teachers points to the different days in the week, visualized as a train over the door to the room they gather in [because of lack of space, they gather in the hall]. They sing a Christmas song, and here all the preschoolers must stand in front of the smaller kids and sing together. Then, the teacher asks Tharakesh if he can sing alone. He would love to do that, and he sings "Postman Pat" very well in front of all the children and the other teachers, without appearing shy at all. (Field note, 2011)

During the summer holiday before the children entered primary school at the age of six, we received photos of Tharakesh's domestic life taken by his father at our request, with the instruction to take photos of situations where Tharakesh was involved in learning activities as the parents defined them (see Figures 2 and 3). With Tharakesh's singing performances at the kindergarten in mind, we were not surprised to see that several of the nine photos that Tharakesh's father sent us showed his son using a microphone (see Figure 2).

<Insert Figure 9.2 here.>

Figure 9.2. Photo taken by Tharakesh's father at home showing him singing using a microphone.

These were sent by email, together with a vignette produced for the Tamil radio in which Tharakesh performed with his father. We used these photos as points of departure for informal interviews during the home visits we made over the summer. Before we visited Tharakesh and his parents at home, we copied these photos to an iPad and used them to structure the conversation. In the field notes describing the living room, we noted how the microphone occupied an apparently natural place on the table:

On the table in the living room: two remote controls for the stereo and the TV. Beside them, a microphone. I notice the microphone is identical to the one in the image Tharakesh's father sent. He addresses Tharakesh and says that he should go and get the small microphone stand and show me. Tharakesh runs into his bedroom [which I hadn't visited at this stage] and is back in 20 seconds, proudly showing me a small microphone stand, claiming that this is his microphone. . . . The father says: "He likes to talk and sing into the microphone. Because I work on the radio for Tamils in Oslo. Voluntary work, three times a week. He likes to watch me when I am talking into the microphone." (Field note, 2012)

The father makes programs for the Tamil Radio in Oslo three days a week when his son is not home. However, sometimes he also involves Tharakesh in this activity; for instance, they have made a jingle together. At the end of this visit, the mother came out from the kitchen with a book in her hand. It was a scrapbook for writing, and she had marked small dots on a chart next to a number of Norwegian letters on the one side and a number of Tamil letters on the other side. She had also written down all the numbers from 1–20 (see Figure 3).

<Insert Figure 9.3 here.>

Figure 9.3. Resource developed by Tharakesh's mother to learn both Tamil and Norwegian letters, and Tharakesh practicing writing letters using different resources at home.

Tharakesh's mother explained that every day during that summer she had sat down with him for at least half an hour and had him work with different resources at home and the chart she had adapted for him (Figure 3). In Tharakesh's case, this cultural work was structured using artifacts that his mother provided. Tharakesh's performances as a singer in kindergarten had

some similarity and connection with his domestic life, while his work on Norwegian and Tamil letters during the summer was more connected to his participation in Tamil school (see next section).

After entering first grade, Tharakesh underwent changes as a learner regarding the way he engaged with reading and writing. The biggest change was that the students in his class were part of a program implemented in many first grade classrooms in this community. The program is called Tidlig Innsats Early Years (TIEY), or in English, Early Years Literacy Program (EYLP); it was originally developed in Victoria, Australia. It is a structured program based on moving between workstations and different activities. As we observed, the program is very structured and has specific time schedules for each work station, and the teacher follows this on a mobile watch and either blows a high tone or claps her hands when the students have to immediately stop what they are doing and move to the next station. The focus is on providing a structured way of working for students at risk of struggling at school as defined by the educational authorities in Oslo, which meant all the students in first grade at this school. We observed Tharakesh as he followed the teacher's instructions for eight minutes doing literacy activities on the computer and then switching to a new workstation without interacting with any of the other students.

<Insert Figure 9.4 here.>

Figure 9.4. Tharakesh working on learning letters in first grade moving between workstations.

By following Tharakesh from preschool into first grade, we were able to observe whether he had any opportunities to be positioned in similar ways as in kindergarten. We observed him and an Iranian girl for several days during their early literacy program (see Figure 4). It became evident that Tharakesh struggled with understanding many of the Norwegian letters—he was easily bored, and the teacher had to talk to him several times when he did not pay attention. When the group gathered to sing songs, he did not pay attention and showed no commitment. The tension with the teacher and ways of learning the letters became particularly evident when we re-interviewed Tharakesh a few months later. During this interview, he voluntarily took on the role of the teacher (Interview, 2012):

Tharakesh: You must try to write the same letter as I do. (I try to copy one letter on the blackboard.) No, not like that. You did one of the . . .

Tharakesh: Now, I will write another letter and then you have to write it as well. (He writes another letter, and I try to copy it.) No, not like that. No, not like this, I will show you. (He starts to instruct me on how to do it.) You did it a little bit wrong, but it is OK.

Interviewer: This is the last one.

Tharakesh: No, this is not the last one. There are many letters . . .

For Tharakesh, music and working with songs and the radio became part of his literacy practice at home, which was deeply embedded in his father's story and flight from Sri Lanka. Tharakesh embedded his cultural background in a number of different ways through singing, watching TV series in the Tamil language, and occasionally working on radio jingles with his father. These cultural practices played an important role in his domestic life. In kindergarten, he was able to maintain his role as a singer, but only by singing Norwegian songs, and often as performances in front of the other children. At school, he struggled to maintain this role, and the few times we observed him singing; it was always as part of a larger group, and he did not pay attention to the text or the rhythm. When we were alone with Tharakesh in the classroom, not only did he start to approach us in Tamil, showing proudly how he could write Tamil letters on the blackboard, but also, his attention was very fixed on the microphone and the audio recording device we used. For Tharakesh, singing and working with his father on Tamil radio were two strong forms of performing a cultural identity in his domestic life. In primary school, however, he had to negotiate his role as a singer and learner *against* the formal curriculum. The structured program for literacy learning he began at school made him insecure and frustrated, and as a consequence, he became quieter and more withdrawn.

Like school, but not: two illustrative examples

In following some of the older students participating in the project out of school and into the community, and often as part of organized activities, we also encountered different families involved in multiliterate practices in diverse settings. Some of these settings could be described as containing school-like elements even though they were not institutionally defined as

schools—some more so than others. Children encounter instructional practices in different ways where they are engaged as learners working on specific tasks and content. There is no specific curriculum, and even how outcome-oriented the activities are differs. All these settings outside of school contain diverse multimodal resources that let the children engage in literacy practices in very different ways. There is also an interesting interaction between young adults and children similar to a teacher/instructor and a student. However, a huge difference from the institutional practices in schools is that the activities are based on play and decreased formality. Since participation is not compulsory, the same students did not show up for every session in these settings.

The school-like elements might be interpreted a form of "pedagocization" (Sefton-Green, 2016) of everyday life. Children's everyday lives are more and more dominated by organized activities involving adults and less time for free play (Leander et al., 2010). During the last two decades, parents have grown more anxious about their children's wellbeing in the sense that they engage with their children in more organized ways, making sure they get support that could stimulate their learning and development, though this is strongly related to social class and the parents' socioeconomic background. The two examples presented below are expressions of the same tendency toward adapting organized activities for children during their everyday lives, but in very different ways.

An ethnic community center.

One example is ethnic community centers within the community of Groruddalen. While doing our fieldwork, some of the parents we interviewed made us aware of an important activity in their family life every weekend. One such center I visited was for families of Tamil ethnic background, situated on the second floor of a warehouse building. For this visit, I collaborated with a master's student at my department who had a Tamil background and who had herself attended this center. She made contact with the leaders of the center and accompanied me, showing me around and interpreting when I encountered language difficulties with the children and adults at the center.

Like many other similar centers in this community, this one was set up to bring together families of the same ethnic background, with activities based around adults cooking food,

dancing, and chatting while children could play and participate in cultural activities. However, what surprised me was that they had organized activities to stimulate the children's literacy skills and prepare them for other subject domains that were very similar to school. The overall aim of the center, as stated on a sign at the entrance, was to support Tamil families to become resourceful and well integrated into Norwegian society. This school-like environment with a teacher's desk and rows for the students was set up to provide extra resources for children to perform well in the Norwegian school system from an early age. An important difference was that the teachers were former Tamil children from the same community who were now studying at the university within prestigious fields such as medicine, biology, math, and engineering. For the older children aged 8–13, the instructional practice was more school like, while for the younger children aged 3–8, the activities were focused more on play, even though the leader at the center also emphasized that it was important to learn discipline from an early age. This is an expression of the tension between vernacular multiliteracies and the institutional expectations toward more formal ways of learning in a setting that could be defined as a continuation of school activities, but within a more familiar environment with their parents present in the next rooms.

Since most of the "teachers" were aged 21–25, my observations during the two weekends I visited the center showed that they emphasized interacting with the younger children in smaller groups, often organized as projects involving making objects. For the older students, they had separate teaching hours more similar to whole-class instruction. I observed a group of six children engaged in several activities which both the children their parents noted especially. Figure 5 shows a child (five years old) lining up cars that children in this group made as part of a project on movement and building cars. In addition to making things with the children, several of the "teachers" mentioned that the other dominating activity focused on reading and writing in both Norwegian and Tamil. Both the "teachers" and parents developed assignments and resources for the children in order for them to practice literacy skills, like Tharakesh's mother did for him at home.

<Insert Figure 9.5 here.>

Figure 9.5. Objects that the children created as part of learning activities at the Tamil cultural center.

In talking to the leaders at the center, they explained there was an international organization called the Tamil Education Development Council, with headquarters in Paris serving Tamil families that facilitated exams for children in different age groups around several European countries. For younger age groups, the exams were mainly focused on literacy skills. The exams were organized on the same day during a weekend for all the children in all the participating European countries; the students received grade cards in the Tamil language afterward. This is an illustration of the way these practices were highly organized and school-like, but at the same time, they were less formal than school because they were combined with other cultural activities involving their families at the cultural center.

Multiliteracies in a training studio.

The second example in this section is from a totally different setting. One of the informants in our study was an 18-year-old boy called David; I made arrangements to meet him at a local training studio where he worked to earn some extra money after school. I met him in the reception area of the training studio where he had arrived just after school. He unlocked the door to a big room in the entrance area situated in front of the training facilities. Parents would sign their children in before entering to do their training for about one hour. David was looking after the children and was supposed to engage them in some activities. It turned out he did more than was expected of him. He showed me diverse materials that he and some others looking after the children had developed in order to stimulate literacy activities for these children, like renting DVDs to see cartoons together, play activities, and stocking notebooks to draw and write in. He also showed me one notebook that he and his colleagues maintained consisting of reflection notes that they wrote after each session about the progress of different children (see Figure 6). I also had the opportunity to observe some of the children's activities while I was there.

<Insert Figure 9.6 here.>
Figure 9.6. David sharing the multiliterate resources he provided for the children.

David told me he specifically focused on literacy practices with the children even though some came every week and others coming only now and again. Some of the children came regularly, so he tried to give them assignments that progressed their learning from session to session, as he explained to me and showed me in his notebook. His motivation for this was that he wanted to become a teacher. Sometimes there was just one child in the room, other times there were 5–6, all between the ages of 2–6. He explained how he chose specific films to watch with the children and then interacted with them by making drawings and inventing different writing activities.

In the session when I visited, there were three children aged four (2) and five (1). I visited for two hours, and the three children entered at different times in this period. The first activity that all the children did after arriving was to sit a in front of a flat screen and watch parts of a DVD showing short cartoons. After a while, David moved the children over to a low table where there were colored pencils and notebooks containing figures and letters for them to color and exercise books to work on letters and numbers. In addition, there were a number of iPads that the children could use containing age-adapted games and different apps. I sat together with David and the children following their activities and interaction. The children did not talk a lot, but David encouraged them to continue in their activities. He obviously knew all the children well, and they seemed comfortable in his company.

What was striking with this example was that this multiliteracy practice was more informal and less organized than the Tamil center, even though David had some educational goals in mind while organizing the activities for the children. This activity was, more than for the Tamil example, defined as part of the everyday schedule of parents and their children and not framed as a school-like setting. David had no formal qualifications in looking after the children, much less in ways of instructing them—he did it out of his own interest. The children were engaged, and from my observations, they seemed interested in the activities that were genuinely multiliterate. David exemplifies the kinds of casual informal social organization that frequently play a role in our lives.

Conclusion: Webs of Literacies, Lives, and Learning

In this chapter, I have shown how multiliteracies are part of children's lives across vernacular and institutional settings. Such an approach provides insight into the interplay between informal and formal literacy practices and has implications for children's learning trajectories. 4–6 year olds are interesting because in this phase, children are in transition from kindergarten, (with its playful activities in approaching reading and writing), toward more formal and institutional settings; initially by becoming part of a dedicated preschool group preparing for school and then by entering first grade. Diverse resources are being used both at home and in kindergarten and school, but increasingly, they are more regulated and organized in school. I have emphasized how multiliteracies need to be understood as being embedded in diverse settings in children's everyday lives and how literacy practices unfold over time, affecting how children learn and are engaged in reading and writing in different ways.

The data I presented show how children and their families experience tensions between the vernacular and the institutional enactment of multiliteracies. The case of Tharakesh shows how one boy engaged in multiliterate practices both in kindergarten and at home, demonstrates exploration of the use of different resources combined with guided participation (Rogoff, 1990) by teachers in kindergarten and by parents at home. After his transition to first grade in school, something changed. The use of resources became more formal as part of a structured and regulated instructional program on literacy learning by moving from one activity station in the classroom to the next. I speculate that Tharakesh changed from being an open and engaged learner in diverse practices to a withdrawn and disengaged student within the institutional framing of school.

The two illustrative examples showed two different ways that children in this neighborhood were involved in the varied and diverse multiliteracy practices as part of their everyday lives. In the first example, children involved attended an ethnic community center that was very similar to a school, but that provided multiliteracy practices for the children in quite different ways than in the institutional setting of school by "teachers" who were themselves only students in higher education; in this setting, everyone had similar ethnic backgrounds, and the children's parents were present in nearby rooms. This created a relaxed atmosphere, even though the focus of the activities was content driven with the goal of learning specific skills and knowledge. These informal activities also created opportunities for inter-generational learning and ways of bridging social practices stemming from home and school. This example illustrates

the importance of cultural institutions as sites for literacy, learning and identity construction for children and their families. The second example was much less organized as part of the everyday schedule of the parents and their children since it comprised the parents dropping off their children in a special room at the entrance of a studio when they were training. The person looking after them in this room was not a trained teacher, but he was an upper secondary student working after school to earn some extra money. However, instead of just sitting there, he made multiliteracy resources for the children that they could engage in. He also created progressions in task assignments for individual children since most of them came on a weekly basis.

These examples show how multiliteracy among children must be analyzed both as a tension between vernacular and institutional practices *and* as practices across different settings *and* furthermore over time. Referring back to the six propositions made by David Barton and Mary Hamilton, the case of Tharakesh and the two examples document how these propositions refer to multiliteracy practices of children in different domains of life. I argue that we need more research that untangles the ways of performing and constructing multiliteracies related to the longer timescales in children's life-course trajectories and within different settings. Children's everyday lives are becoming increasingly complex within a digitally saturated world, which also implies that we need to further develop research methodologies and approaches to better understand the webs of literacy, lives, and learning as they unfold over time and across diverse settings (Thomson, Berriman, & Bragg, 2018; Barton et al., 2007). Children are positioned within contexts and life circumstances that open up some possibilities and close down others when entering formal schooling. These webs of multiliteracies, lives, and ways of learning are important to study and discuss in contemporary culture because of a tendency to polarize the vernacular and the institutional aspects of multiliteracies, where formal literacy and learning is beginning at an earlier age during childhood and how forms of "pedagocization" (Sefton-Green, 2016) are increasingly becoming part of children's and family's everyday lives: instead we need to focus on how the multiliteracy practices of children are intertwined across contexts and over time.

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