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Literate Practices in Worklife Histories, Transitions and Learning

Laurent Filliettaz

Abstract This chapter explores the forms and functions of literacy in the sorts of experiences adults make when they negotiate worklife transitions across their life course. It also reflects on the sorts of learning and agency that may arise from such literate practices and their contributions to the richness, diversity and heterogeneity of educational provisions encountered by adult workers across their lives. Based on 14 life history interviews of informants of the Australian population and by borrowing from the theoretical frame of interactional ethnography and multimodal semiotics, the chapter investigates the forms or shapes of literate practices and literacy events in worklife histories and reflects about the sort of learning that might arise from such experiences across the life course. Findings of the qualitative and quantitative empirical analysis show that literate practices often emerge as guided experiences, which take place both in formal and informal settings. These experiences also constitute means for continuity and coherence across working lives, and not only as obstacles or causes for disruptions and discontinuity.

Keywords Literacy · Literacy practices · Literacy events · Workplace · Learning · Transitions · Language and literacy skills · Socio-linguistics · Discourse analysis · Semiotic characteristics · Language · Intersubjective · Intra-subjective

Introduction

This chapter explores the forms and functions of literacy in the sorts of experiences adult workers make when they negotiate transitions across their life course. It also reflects on the sorts of learning that may arise from such literate experiences and their contributions to the richness, diversity and heterogeneity of educational provisions encountered by adult workers across their lives.

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The chapter proposes detailed findings from the first phase of the project – *Practices and policies for sustaining employability through work-life learning* – funded by the Australian Research Council (DP 190101519). As explained in chapter "Adults' Worklife Learning" (Billett et al., this volume), the project aims to generate evidence-based policies and informed practices supporting work-life learning arrangements to promote Australian workers' employability. Much is made of the importance of adults' learning across their life span, particularly for work-related purposes (Billett, 2009). This learning is now seen as being both important and urgent as the requirements for work constantly change and the need to be employable over a longer portion of adult life grows stronger. The different kinds of educational experiences are likely to be particularly helpful when adults are making transitions to different kinds of work or workplaces and confronting significant worklife challenges. Therefore, it is important to understand how that learning arises and how it can be supported, guided, and augmented by educational provisions and by other forms of support.

To contribute to this topic, a mixed-method research design has been implemented, combining qualitative interview data with a large-scale survey (*see* chapter "Investigating Learning for Employability: Method and Procedures"; Le et al., this volume). In a first phase of the project, 66 informants from diverse occupational classifications were interviewed, from across gender and ages. Each provided retrospective accounts of their worklife history of learning (Salling Olesen, 2016) through two interviews, the first being general, and the second focusing more deeply on an elaboration of transitions, seen as significant by the informants. This method enabled to capture and document over 300 instances of worklife transitions.

Preliminary analysis on these Phase 1 life history interviews established that transitions are strongly shaped by domains of knowledge that need to be learnt by workers as they progress through their life course (Billett et al., 2021). These domains of knowledge may comprise not only (i) occupational skills, (ii) work-related knowledge, and (iii) worklife engagement, but also (iv) cultural practices and (v) language and literacy skills. From there, it appears that experiences related to language and literacy seem to play a significant role in the kind of learning required to perform worklife transitions.

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the role and place of language and literacy skills in the sorts of transitions reported by informants in the interview data, this chapter proposes to revisit some transcripts based on these interviews and to analyze the way language and literacy constitutes a significant domain of practice and knowledge involved in work and life transitions and trajectories. By borrowing from the theoretical frame of interactional ethnography, and the concept of "literate practice" (Castanheira et al., 2001), the chapter investigates the forms or shapes of literacy experiences in worklife histories and answers the following research questions: How is the topic of literacy experienced during transitions? What kinds of concrete and tangible situations exemplify literate practices? How do these experiences evolve across the work-life course? What unifies or distinguishes these experiences across working lives? In a second analytic move, the chapter reflects on the role or functions of literacy experiences in work-life histories: What role do these

literate practices have in the accomplishment of transitions reported in the data? What sort of learning might arise from such experiences?

To unfold these questions and research topics, the chapter progresses as follows. The first section explains the theoretical frame adopted to conceptualise literacy in relation to worklife experiences. It defines literacy as a social practice, materialized in tangible and situated events experienced by individuals in their working lives. The second section, dedicated to a presentation of the methodology, elaborates on the concept of literacy event and investigates how such events emerge across life history. The four consecutive analytic sections explore different facets of these literacy events as they are being referred to by informants in the interview data: (i) the situational characteristics of literacy events, (ii) their semiotic properties, (iii) their contributions to learning, and (iv) the ways informants position themselves in terms of agency when responding to literacy events. In a concluding section, the chapter discusses the qualities and significance of literacy events and their role in worklife histories and transitions.

Conceptualising Literacy in Relation to Worklife Experiences

Literacy, Literate Practices and Literacy Events

At theoretical the level, the concept of literacy is approached here from a specific perspective, that of New Literacy Studies (Barton, 2007) or interactional ethnography (Castanheira et al., 2001; Green & Bloome, 1997). Within these frames, literacy is not conceptualised as a cognitive capacity to master spoken or written language, nor as an abstract object, located in peoples' heads. Instead, literacy consists of multiple socially and culturally situated practices for the construction and appropriation of knowledge.

> Literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon that is situationally defined and redefined within and across differing social groups including reading groups, families, classrooms, schools, communities, and professional groups (e.g., educators, lawyers, administrators, and plumbers). (Castanheira et al., 2001, p. 354)

Literate practices can be defined and specified around three main features. First, they take the form of *situated actions* accomplished by individuals in tangible and specific contexts. As mentioned by Castanheira et al. (2001 p. 354), "what counts as literacy in any group is visible in the actions members take, what they orient to, what they hold each other accountable for, what they accept or reject as preferred responses of others, and how they engage with, interpret, and construct text" (p. 354). Second, literate practices are *dynamic constructions*, that are not the same for all people in all situations and that may evolve in time. They are dynamic processes "in which what literate actions mean are continually being constructed and reconstructed by individuals as they become members of a new social group (e.g., classes, families, professions)" (p. 354). And finally, literate practices are to be

conceptualised as *multimodal meaning-making realities* (Kress et al., 2001). They result from a combination of multiple semiotic resources comprising oral or written language, prosody, gestures, body positions, material objects and the physical environment. These semiotic resources include specific and distinctive potentialities that may afford possible forms actions for participants. But the ways these resources are designed, used and combined in specific contexts reveal situated choices made by co-participants and are forms of expressions of their agency. As pointed out by Kress et al. (2001) about the context of science teaching and learning, "we understand teaching and learning in the science classroom to be the material expression, the 'evidence', of the (cognitively and affectively) motivated choices of teachers and students from among the meaning-making resources available in a particular situation at a given moment" (p. 12).

Literate practices become visible in tangible events, called "literacy events". As mentioned by Burnett and Merchant (2020), the notion of literacy event can be seen as a foundational concept of New Literacy Studies. According to Street (2003), a literacy event is a situated instantiation of wider practices, patterned by power relations. For Heath (1982), literacy events are occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions' and in which those participants "follow socially established rules for verbalizing what they know from and about the written material" (p. 50). Although the category of literacy event has been defined initially around instantiations of written semiotic resources or texts, it has also been used recently in a wider perspective that includes all sorts of configurations in which individuals materialize a literate practice by engaging with any sort of semiotic resource, being it oral, written or simply material (Lambert & Veillard, 2017). From there, participants in social practices contribute to a literacy event as soon as they make use of any form of semiotic resource to engage in a meaning-making process involving other participants. To sum up, from the perspective of "literacy events", literacy is not a capacity but a practice. Beyond language acquisition and formal language teaching and learning, literate practices comprise a wide range of experiences, in which individuals are making use of semiotic resources to get things done and to engage in situated social practices requiring language use as an ingredient of action.

Literacy Events and Worklife Experiences

As evidenced by a large body of research in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, literacy events are now playing an important role in social practices related to work (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2009; Candlin, 2002; Sarangi & Candlin, 2003; Sarangi & Roberts, 1999; Vine, 2017). In the Francophone context, the relations between language use and work have initially been conceptualised through the expression "the linguistic part of work" – la *part langagière du travail* (Boutet, 2001a). This expression refers to the idea that language use should be regarded as a constitutive ingredient of professional activity. As observed by Boutet (2001b), "language skills of

'reading-writing-communicating' are now both a condition for the academic success of young people in school [...] and a condition for access to all occupations: all occupations, even low-skilled ones, and all occupational sectors, now require, to varying degrees and in various ways, the ability to read and write French and to have communication skills" (*our translation*, p. 38).

Since the emergence of a service-oriented economy in the 1980s' and the establishment of a so-called "new work order", being a competent worker requires the ability to mobilise and to develop "communicative competences" (Zarifian, 2001). These requirements and expectations have increased considerably in recent times, known as the "globalised new economy". Influenced by the rise of new technologies, a growing number of work-production tasks have quickly become "dematerialised" and now take the shape of symbolic actions in which workers produce and interpret "signs" and engage in a constant meaning-making process. In many respects, the contemporary workplace no longer sees literacy as a peripheral ingredient but as a production resource and as a mediating tool through which productivity occurs. These changes have significant consequences in terms of vocational and professional education, which has to prepare and adapt the workforce to specific technical and work-related skills and also, more widely, to multilingual, globalised and language-mediated professional practices (Mourlhon-Dallies, 2008).

In recognising the configuring role of literate practices in contemporary workplaces, specialists in language and work have also highlighted the multiple roles endorsed by semiotic resources in workplaces. These roles include practical, social as well as cognitive functions (Lacoste, 2001). First, literacy events at work have often been reported as serving *practical* or *operative* functions. Through engaging in discourse and interactions, workers "get things done", and they plan and anticipate future actions, perform them and provide accounts and evaluations about past events. Second, literate practices are used by workers as resources for accomplishing the *social components* of professional practices. These are means through which workers position themselves in groups, endorse specific identities, produce or reproduce cultural norms or establish power relations. Semiotic resources also serve cognitive processes related to memory, problem solving and learning. It is by engaging in literacy events that workers share and negotiate a joint understanding of the world (i.e. intersubjectivity), that they take decisions and reflect on their experiences and that they may learn from more experienced workers (Filliettaz, 2022).

These multiple roles associated to literacy events in workplace contexts underline the richness, the complexity and the diverse ways through which language use may be related to work activities. Building upon early distinctions introduced by ergonomists, literacy events can be seen as being used "at", "as" and "about" work (Lacoste, 2001). Literacy may be used "at" work, when it interrelates with practical actions and physical interventions in the material world. It may be used "as" work in situations where professional practice is primarily accomplished through literacy events. And it can also be used "about" work when it produces anticipatory, contemporary or retrospective accounts about work activities. This variety of contributions stresses the strong interdependences that may characterise the contributions of literate practices and events to worklife experiences and transitions.

Methodology and Empirical Approach

To investigate the role and place of literate practices and events in worklife experiences, the corpus of data from life history interviews has been considered and examined in detail. Amongst the 66 life history interviews collected during the first phase of the research design (*see* chapter "Investigating Learning for Employability: Method and Procedures"; Le et al., this volume), 14 informants were selected because of the existence in their life-course of an experience related to migration. The hypothesis behind this selection was that such profiles would be candidates for a rich and wide range of literacy experiences.

Amongst the 14 informants selected for inclusion in the data set, 7 were males and 7 were females. As for the entire cohort, life-history interviews took place in two steps, the first interview being general and the second more specifically organised around key transitions identified during the life-course. Short narrative vignettes were produced to summarize key information and transitions for each of the informants. These vignettes were produced according to the methodology presented in Le et al. (this volume, chapter "Investigating Learning for Employability: Method and Procedures") and can be found online for consultation (https://vocationsandlearning.blog/practices-and-policies-for-sustaining-employability-through-work-life-learning/).

Based on a detailed transcript of these interviews, references to literacy events were extracted from the interview data. A reference to a literacy event can be defined as a sequence of transcript in which the informant mentions an experience related to a literate practice as defined in the theoretical section of this chapter. This mention can refer to explicit forms of language use or to more implicit or wider situations in which semiotic resources are described by informants as being required or used in a particular context mentioned during the interview. This mention may also be experienced in a variety of formal and informal contexts, related to work or to educational institutions.

Distribution of literacy events across informants ranged between 0 and 17, with an average number of literacy events reported by informants establishing at 5.57 per informant. Interviews with Freda, Salim and Nathan generated a large number of references to literacy events (11 and 17), whereas, in Bob's case, no mention of any literacy event could be observed. Altogether, 78 literacy events were identified in the entire corpus of data and served as starting point for a qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Literacy events were coded and analysed along four topics related to the research questions: (i) situational characteristics of literacy events, (ii) semiotic characteristics of literacy events, (iii) learning involved in literacy events, and finally (iv) agency and roles involved in literacy events. For each of these topics, specific variables were generated, coded, and applied to each of the 78 literacy events available in the data base. The following sections present in detail the research results derived from this analysis.

Situational Characteristics of Literacy Events

The first topic under examination focused on situational characteristics of literacy events. As indicated in Table 1, four main categories were examined here: (i) the gender of the informant referring to literacy events, (ii) the sort of migration experience during these events, (iii) the time of life when these events occurred, and (iv) the sort of context in which they were experienced.

Gender

Amongst the total of 78 literacy events identified in the interviews, 36 were mentioned by female informants and 42 by males. A relatively even distribution of utterances comprising reference to literacy events could be established between females and males (46.2% vs. 53.8), replicating the equal number of informants included in the subset of data considered for this research.

Migration Experience

A majority of literacy events reported in the interviews were related to so-called "inbound migration", where informants are moving to Australia from a foreign country (N = 33). This is the case for instance when Salim migrated from Iran to Australia as a refugee or when Andy left Indonesia to find better job opportunities in Australia.

Table 1 Situational characteristics of literacy events

Situational characteristics		n	%
Gender	Female	36	46.2
	Male	42	53.8
Migration experience	Migration to Australia	33	42.3
	Migration from Australia	6	7.7
	Migration not involving Australia	7	9.0
	Not related to migration	32	41.0
Time of life	Youth	21	26.9
	Adulthood	57	73.1
Context of literacy event	Formal educational	28	35.9
	Formal work	26	33.3
	Informal educational	6	7.7
	Informal work	11	14.1
	Ordinary life	7	9.0

But in some instances (N = 6), the reverse migration process took place and informants performed an "outbound migration" in which they experience migration from Australia to another country. Freda provided an example of such an outbound migration, when she left Australia as a young adult to join her husband in Geneva, Switzerland.

Examples from the data also comprised migration experiences not involving Australia at all (N = 7). For instance, Ingrid migrated from Sweden to Slovenia during her academic training in architecture. And Nathan moved from Fiji to Sri Lanka when he joined a volunteer program hosted by the United Nations.

Finally, in 32 cases (41%), literacy events were not related to any form of migration experience. This includes literacy events mentioned by native Australian citizens living in Australia, like for instance James, or by migrants before the time of migration, when they were living in their home country. In sum, what appears in the table is that a majority of literacy events reported in the interview data were somehow connected with migration. It was the case of 46 of the 78 instances, namely 59%.

Time of Life

Another variable examined the time of life at which specific literacy events mentioned by informants were reported to take place. These may take place during the youth, comprising the life course until completion of formal education, including university programs. Or these may take place during adulthood, referring to the stage of life following initial formal education. In the data considered here, 21 literacy events reported by informants took place during youth time (26.9%), whereas 57 were located during adulthood (73.1%), namely a large majority of cases.

Context of Literacy Event

Finally, one last situational characteristic of literacy events considered here referred to the sort of context involved. This context can be either formal or informal. It may also be related to workplaces, to education institutions or to ordinary everyday life.

In our data, a large majority of literacy events referred to formal contexts (69%). In 28 cases, these formal contexts pertained to the sphere of education (35.9%), and were related for instance to school teaching and learning, to university programs or to assessment centres. And in 26 cases, these formal contexts were related to work organisations (33.3%) in a wide range of economic sectors (*see* Choy & Le, this volume, chapter "Worklife Learning: Contributions of Tertiary Education").

But literacy events were also reported to take place in more informal settings within such institutions. In 6 instances (7.7%), informants reported literacy events experienced in informal educational settings. And there were 11 examples (14.1%) where informal circumstances in the workplace served as context for a literacy event.

The case of Freda provides an interesting illustration of a literate practice related to education taking place in an informal context. As a teenager, Freda was tutoring a boy from a Vietnamese family. She visited him at his house regularly and helped him with his English skills and homework. She also quickly realised that her role went beyond language support and included a more global sort of guidance.

> *I mean, yes, I think I was coping but I think I knew that I had some – I think I knew that I perhaps didn't have the exact skills that would have been most beneficial to the student. But then I thought well I think probably for the boy it was just important for him to have a reference and I think it went beyond talking to him about his English and what he had to do at school. It was maybe just providing him a bit of a support because I felt that that was more important and I felt that maybe that was more important for him.* [Fre-5, 294–300]

Similarly, the life history interview with Nathan illustrates how a workplace can also include informal spaces and moments, that go beyond production. Nathan reported that during lunchtime at work in Fiji, he used to visit the library to gain access to a computer and to learn from the librarian how to use it. He explored the possibilities of informal times at work to expand his learning in digital literacy.

> *So I started breeding things and while I was doing that at that time there was only two sets of computers. It was the dot matrix thing - printer. So one was in the library, one computer, and one was in the chief fisheries officer's office. So at lunchtime I would go and sit in the library and talk to the librarian and say "just show me how to use this thing" and he showed me this and that and to write a few things and how to print it. But it was very restrictive because not everybody had access to it.* [Nat-4, 313–322]

Finally, everyday life circumstances can also provide contexts for literate practices. This was the case in 7 instances in our data set, equivalent to 9% of the total. One interesting example of such circumstances is the case of Salim, living in Iran as a teenager, and using the opportunity of the presence of foreign visitors in bazaars to engage conversations with them and improve his English as L2 skills. Here, the informal context of everyday life created the condition of a literacy event.

> *Actually, so many visitors back then used to come to Iran, and to our city, because it's very famous city, and they used to go here and there, and we meet them always in the bazaars, and in the shops, and they needed help. I used to, as a teenager, go to them and say, hello, can I help you? Oh, someone knows a bit of English. I didn't know much English, but yeah, that's when I started. Yeah, can you – what do you call this in Persian? I look at it – I knew what they say – okay, this is, for example, I say the name in Persian. Oh, okay, thank you, thank you, and they go to the shopkeeper and say, we need four of this, say it in Persian. Anyway, that's when I started learning English.* [Sal-6, 358–403]

Semiotic Characteristics of Literacy Events

The second topic under examination focused on semiotic characteristics of literacy events. Here, the intrinsic qualities of literacy events were examined in more detail, along two main categories: (i) the languages involved in the literacy events observable in life history interviews, (ii) and their semiotic nature.

Language Involved

One first semiotic characteristic considered here related to the sort of language used in the literacy events available in the data set. As indicated in Fig. 1, this language can be specified by its origins: (i) English, (ii) Indo-European language other than English, and (iii) Asian language. It can also be described as (i) a language first spoken by the informant (L1), (ii) or as a second language (L2).

By combining these variables, it appears that in the data available, a large majority of literacy events reported by informants took place in English. Only 7 instances of literacy events out of 78 were accomplished in a language distinct from English. Amongst the 71 literacy events taking place in English, 48 involved experiences in which the English language was used as a second language (L2). This is the case, typically for the large number of examples where informants experienced an inbound migration to Australia and were originated from a non-English speaking country or where English is not an official language. However, 23 instances referred to situations in which literacy events were accomplished in English as L1. Examples of these can be found in Sarah's life history interview, when she read books to get prepared for a practicum in youth justice in the UK, or in the case of James, when direct interactions with engineers were used as resources to become a production controller in the car building industry.

Within the data set, literacy events were also reported to take place in Indo-European languages other than English (N = 4). These events were accomplished as L2 experiences exclusively. This was the case for Freda, for instance, when she moved to Geneva in Switzerland and had to learn French. And this was the case also for Ingrid, when she moved to Slovenia to undertake a Bachelors program in architecture, and had to attend lectures in Slovene.

Finally, in the interviews considered here, literacy events also involved Asian languages (N = 3). Salim for instance spoke Farsi as L1 to his children to maintain their connection with the culture of Iran. And Nathan was learning the Tamil

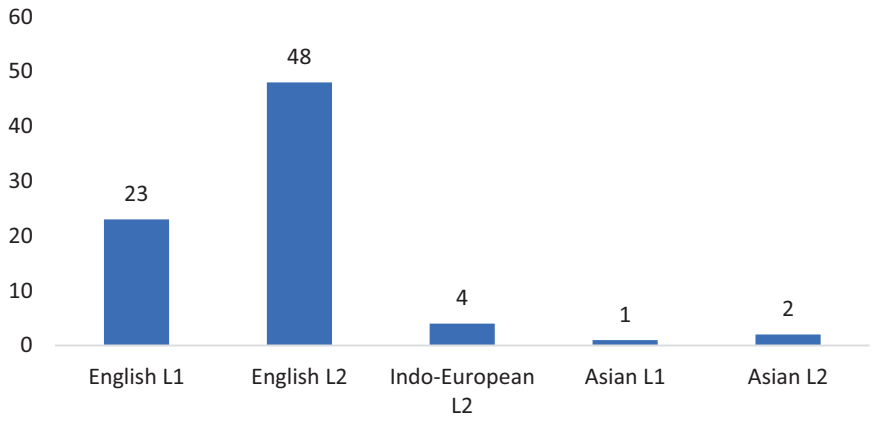

Fig. 1 Semiotic characteristics of literacy event – Language involved

language as L2 to be operational with the local community when he visited Sri Lanka.

Nature of Literacy Events

Literacy events as they take place in formal or informal contexts may be diverse in nature and involve a wide range of semiotic experiences. In our data, these events were coded as referring (i) to language in general, (ii) to oral language, (iii) to written language, (iv) to teaching and learning experiences, (v) or to other sorts of semiotic experiences.

Language in General

As indicated in Fig. 2, in 7 instances, informants referred to language as a global experience when mentioning literacy events during the interviews. This experience can be monolingual, but it can also be seen as related to the combination of multiple languages. Salim's linguistic strategy to combine English and Farsi within family communication provides an interesting example of such rich references to language in general. In the presence of his two boys at home, Salim spoke Farsi with them so as to provide a bilingual capacity. But when his children went to sleep, he spoke English with his wife to "teach English to each other".

> *When she wanted to learn, we always helped each other, after the kids go sleeping, because another concern we had, we wanted our boys to be bi-language, so we want them to learn Farsi, to be able to speak Farsi, even if they can't write, that would be a bonus, but even just talking, we were happy. So, in front of them, we always trying to speak Farsi, and they learn Farsi very well, both of them. They can understand perfectly. Actually, the younger one, who was born here, he even can read some Farsi. But when they were sleeping, we would talk in English, and we taught each other so much – whatever we learnt during the day.* [Sal-8, 419–431]

It can be observed here how a local linguistic strategy may be designed and enacted on an everyday basis within the ordinary family context.

Oral Language

In most circumstances, literacy events may refer more explicitly to oral language (N = 28). Informants sometimes mentioned experiences related to speaking (N = 3) or to understanding (N = 4). But in a majority of instances, they considered literacy events as oral interactions, consisting in a form of reciprocal conversation and organised dialogue (N = 21). Here again, Salim's life history provides a relevant illustration of an oral interaction described as a literate practice. This occurred when Salim mentioned his activity as a taxi driver in Brisbane, when he improved his English skills by having discussions with customers.

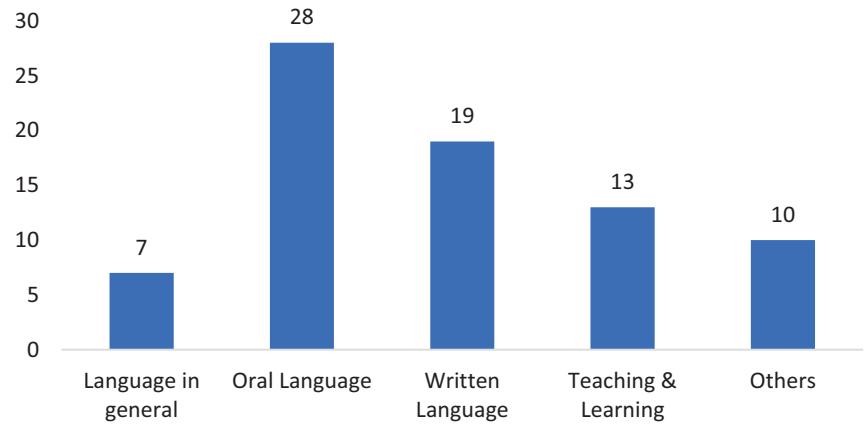

Fig. 2 Semiotic characteristics of literacy event – Nature of literacy events

> *So, I said to my wife, I start driving taxi until I find something. I didn't know the city. I learnt, my English is good, and I'm friendly with people. I remember, first cab I got, and the guy at Holland Park, in Marshall Road, they got into the cab and they said, we're going to the city. I said, very good, which way is the city? They said, what? Because, you know, Holland Park is straight down the thing, and turn right into freeway, and I said, yeah. He said, I'm new to this city, I don't know. I said, I don't think you're newer than me, I've been here just two weeks. Oh, he said – oh, okay, go straight down under the freeway, turn right, straight to the city. Thank you. That was my first fare.* [Sal-5; 169–178]

It was also through these oral interactions, reported as an organised turn taking speech, that he learnt about local geography and names of streets in the area.

Written Language

In 19 instances, informants referred to literacy events related to written language. Specific writing experiences were mentioned in 13 cases. These experiences took shape in a variety of discourse genres. Freda and Ingrid referred for instance to *academic writing* when they had to write assignments related to academic learning. Sarah and Nathan were confronted in their professional lives with the production of written reports or logbooks when taking actions as social workers. Susan produced pedagogical material when working for a TAFE college. Nathan wrote a curriculum vitae and application letters when he became interested to find a job overseas. And Salim became used to writing down the "new words" he learnt at work by discussing with his colleagues or staff members.

In 6 cases, relation to written language was categorised as reading experiences. Reading can refer to formal educational activities or be goal-oriented to academic learning, like for instance in Sarah's case, when she read lots of books in social work to get prepared for a practicum in youth justice. This was the case also for Felicia, when she mentioned reading a lot in preparation of a job interview. But reading can also serve other goals as developing academic learning. Nathan for

instance mentioned reading newsletters in the library during lunch time, while waiting for the Telex technology to send his application letters. And Freda mentioned reading lots of books of different genres when she worked in a bookshop in Sydney after her Masters' degree in creative writing.

> *But because it was a specialised bookshop most of the clients wanted very specific recommendations so basically I had to read a lot. Read a lot of children's books so I knew exactly what I could recommend to these clients when they were coming in looking for a new book for their child. So I did a lot of reading in different genres so science fiction and not only the old kind of children's fiction but also the new stuff that was coming out. That was the main thing I think is basically finding out what was in the bookshop, reading about it.* [Fre-8, 342–349]

In her case, reading was seen as a condition for servicing clients and deliver adequate advice to them about books.

Teaching and Learning

In 13 instances, informants referred to literacy events related to teaching and learning practices. In most cases (N = 10), such teaching and learning practices were related directly to language. These were mainly language classes or courses taken or delivered by informants. But in 3 cases, teaching and learning was concerned by content other than language. Salim for instance took classes in building when developing activities in that particular sector. As mentioned already, Ingrid enrolled in courses at university in Slovenia to be trained in architecture. And Freda enrolled in a distance Masters' program in Linguistics when she worked as a teacher in Geneva.

Other Sorts of Literacy Events

There were 10 instances in the data set for which literacy events did not fit in any of the preceding categories, but referred to other sorts of literate practices. For instance, Maree referred to *code-switching* when she mentioned her interactions with colleagues at work. Felicia used *instructional videos* when she learnt about job interviews before applying for a job as medical representative. Susan typed the doctoral dissertation of her husband in marine biology to help him in his academic work. And finally, Ingrid undertook an interesting *translation work*, when she studied architecture in Slovenia.

> *And I didn't understand the lecture. So I would record it on my little recorder and I would sit next to people who could speak English and they would help me and I would write in English and translate it in my head and then come back at night time and do it in Swedish.* [Ing-3]

As she did not understand the Slovene language, she produced recordings of the lectures and sought the help of English-speaking students to gain access to the teaching content and have it finally translated into Swedish.

Learning Involved in Literacy Events

The third topic under examination focused on learning processes involved in experiences related to literacy events. Here, the qualities of learning associated with literacy events were examined in more detail, along two main categories: (i) the conditions in which learning experiences associated with literacy events emerged in worklife histories, (ii) and the sorts of learning outcomes that resulted from such literacy events.

Affordances and Engagement

In reference to conceptualisations of learning through work, it is commonly recognised that learning is not associated to mere professional practice (just doing work) but is shaped by social and individual conditions associated with cultural, material, intersubjective and intrasubjective elements. In Billett's model of workplace learning (Billett, 2001), these conditions have been conceptualised as a duality between social *affordances* an individual *engagement*. Affordances refer to the range of resources that may (or may not) be available in the environment as facilitating conditions for learning. And engagement refers to how individual elect to make use (or not) of these resources as they access the practices associated with a specific workplace. Affordances and engagement are seen as interdependent conditions; they influence each other in specific and contingent contexts.

In our data set, literacy events were analysed through the *lens* of these conditions. Affordances were characterized, depending on (i) the availability of resources for the learning of specific literacy events, (ii) the self-construction of such resources, (iii) the perception of a lack of resource, and finally, (iv) the absence of such resource. The level of individual engagement was also coded, depending on the degree of engagement mentioned in the data.

Availability of Resources

In a large majority of cases (N = 50), informants referred to resources available when they described literacy events associated with their life course. These resources were very diverse in nature and may be materialized through a range of symbolic, human or material realities.

A primary resource available for the learning associated with literate practices was the *provision of formal education*. In 6 cases, informants found in such formal education programs resources for the learning of specific literacy events. Salim, for instance, took English classes when he arrived in Australia as a refugee, and Nathan was provided with a six-weeks language training course delivered by the United Nations when he arrived to Sri Lanka as a volunteer worker. The *local work context*

could also serve as a resource available for learners (N = 10). Freda for instance used her language teaching practice when working for the United Nations in Geneva as empirical material for writing her assignments related to her Masters' program in Linguistics. She benefited from a rich work environment that facilitated the learning of the content encountered in her university program on language.

In many instances (N = 24), *other individuals* were seen as affordances and provided guidance and assistance to informants as they experienced a literacy event. To name a few examples, Freda was tutored by an "experienced lady" working in the same office as her in the United Nations, and who helped her with her assignments in Linguistics. Salim initiated discussions with the receptionist of a hostel in Adelaide to practice his English. And Sarah received guidance from a supervisor to prepare her practicum in social work.

Material affordances may also serve as useful resources for the learning of specific literate practices. *Digital objects* (N = 6) were sometimes mentioned as tools for learning. For example, Andy used resources available on YouTube to get prepared for the IELTS examination required for visa applications. Randall used the internet to learn English in Hong Kong. And Ingrid visited websites available in Sweden to learn about academic writing in law. Mere material objects were also referred to as useful ingredients for learning. James for instance learned to become a car production controller not only through reading and discussions with engineers, but also through everyday observations of car driving on highways: "Even driving down the highway I look at it and go who did that. They've done the wrong thing there" [Jam-5, 405–424]. And Salim used the material work environment to facilitate the learning of the English language.

> *When I started working actually, I remember one of my carpenters, he was doing the frame, one of the very first second houses that I was doing one of the carpenters was doing the frame. I flipped back and was looking at him and he said, are you learning as a builder? are you learning how to do the job? I said, yes mate, I learn every day. Even now that you said a few words of those. Thank you very much for teaching that and thank you very much for teaching the frame. What is this part called? What is and I started asking him question and he became a friend with me*. [Sal-16]

In specific circumstances described above, he was guided by an experienced English-speaking carpenter to learn how to name the objects he was using in his practice as a builder. His agency enabled his literacy practices and learning.

Self-Construction of Resources

Resources for learning were not necessarily pre-existing and directly available in the local environment. Sometimes, they had to be produced and shaped by participants themselves (N = 6). For instance, referring to Freda's experience in tutoring work with a young Vietnamese boy, she mentioned that she did not have any formal skills at that time, but learnt from direct interactions with the boy and from iterations of successive actions.

> *In terms of the content I mean the student himself he provided the content. He just said what he needed help with. So, I pretty much just - I mean I didn't have any formal skills but I just kind of went by what I thought might be helpful and figured it out. Then the more times we interacted perhaps the more I kind of modified how I did things depending on what happened last time and that type of thing. So the professional kind of training I just remember it being a good support group more than anything else.* [Fre-2, 262–268]

In such an example, Freda drew on her past experiences and problem-solving skills. Resources emerged dynamically from encountering similar experiences over a period of time and from the individual's reflexive capacities to modify his action "depending on what happened last time".

Lack of Resources

In other circumstances, resources for learning literate practices were reported by informants as missing. Such a lack of affordances appeared in 8 instances in our data set. For instance, Randall faced linguistic misunderstandings in the multicultural environment of the restaurant he was working for, and nobody was able to provide adequate guidance to assist him in understanding recipes. Nathan learned on his own how to write reports when he became a social worker. There was nobody to train him on that particular competence. And Ingrid faced a very difficult situation when she had to study law as a mature student in Australia.

> *I guess even the whole study path of being a mature age student, English is my second language, doing it online where you actually didn't have much support. When I did my whole law degree I was on my own. I didn't have study buddies. I did my assessment. There was no way of checking your assessment. You actually just did it. It was very hard. Very, very hard. I did it completely on my own.*

At that time, she did not have any form of support available regarding the English language.

Absence of Resources

Resources may be reported as missing. But in other circumstances, they may also simply be absent, this absence not being necessarily be perceived as a lack of support. In 14 instances of the literacy events included in our data set, no reference to any form of affordance could be identified.

Engagement

Finally, beyond social and material affordances available in the local environment, individual forms of engagement in learning particular literate practices were also examined. Here, a distinction was introduced between (i) high level of engagement, (ii) low level of engagement and (iii) neutral level of engagement.

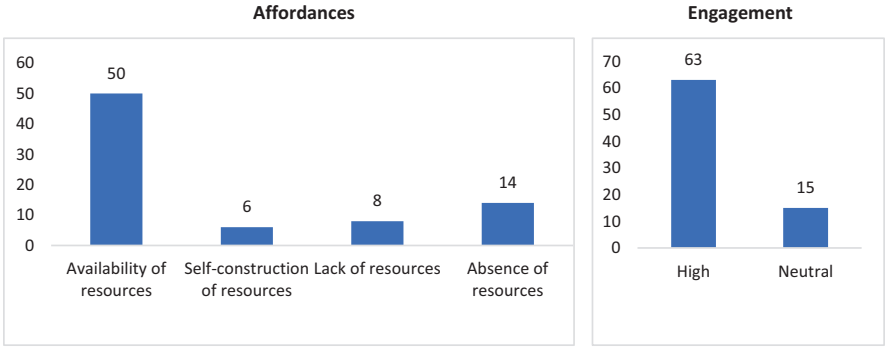

Fig. 3 Learning involved – Affordances and engagement

As visible in Fig. 3, 63 literacy events out of the 78 available in the data set were related to a high level of engagement of the informant and none of them illustrated the category of low engagement. In 15 cases, no particular specification of individual engagement could be identified. Engagement was then coded as being neutral.

Learning Outcomes

The learning experiences associated with literacy events can be characterised not only in terms of conditions in which they may emerge and evolve, but also in terms of results and outcomes. When mentioning literacy events during her worklife history, informants referred to various sorts of learning outcomes, including (i) language competences, (ii) work-process knowledge, (iii) academic knowledge, (iv) everyday practical knowledge, (v) social knowledge, and (vi) knowledge about self, related to the formation of identity. In 8 cases out of 78 literate practices, no reference to any sort of learning outcome was explicitly mentioned.

Language Competence

As indicated in Fig. 4, the dominant sort of learning outcome related to literacy events involved language itself. In 30 instances of the data set, engagement in literacy events resulted in the development of the language competence of informants. Depending on the circumstances, this language competence can focus on diverse and specific aspects or levels of language use. In seven instances, encountering literacy events resulted in the development of a *linguistic competence* (Chomsky, 1965). It involved an appropriation of the linguistic system, including for instance lexical or syntactic categories: vocabulary and grammar. In other examples, a broader *communicative competence* (Hymes, 1972) was involved in the literacy events mentioned by informants (N = 13). Salim for instance learned to make jokes when discussing with a carpenter who became his friend. And Ingrid had

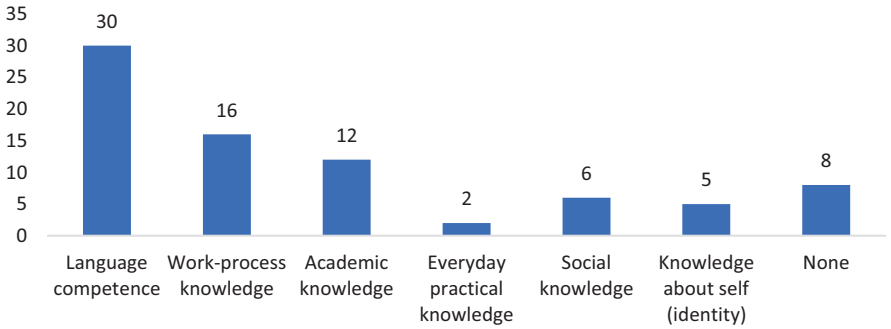

Fig. 4 Learning involved – Learning outcomes

conversations in English with students, who became her friends and who helped her in preparing academic assignments. *Writing skills* were also sometimes mentioned as possible learning outcomes resulting from literate practices. For instance, Nathan learned to write scientific texts and reports by reading newsletters and research papers in the library of his office in Fiji. Later in his life, when he lived in Australia, he learned to write in logbooks and other sorts of written reports by engaging in reporting activities. And finally, in other circumstances, informants experienced a development of a broader *interactional competence*, defined as "the set of knowledge and skills that participants in interactions deploy to collectively configure the resources they need to engage in specific social practices" (Young & Miller, 2004, p. 520). Salim provides a rich illustration of how engagement in literacy events may develop ingredients of an interactional competence.

> *Actually, my boss he says whenever he gets into a difficulty with one of the clients he calls me and says, Can you go and talk to this client please? Because he knows the way I can talk to people and I can convince them what is best for them and what would be the best way. And I have done negotiations in so many of his jobs for him that he knows all about this and he's very happy about it because my personality is always - this is something I learned from coffee shop actually, when I had someone come into a coffee shop and say "Mate, your coffee is not good". "Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that". Why is not good because such and such and I was always either refunding their money or requesting their coffee until they become happy from the coffee that they get. So with this sort of people, that's what I learned in my working experience. It's one of the best ways you can improve your business or your relationship with people, you've moved yourself into other people's shoes.* [Sal-17]

By experiencing negotiation tasks throughout his life course, Salim became recognised as a "good negotiator" and developed a theoretical thinking about good negotiation, namely the capacity to "move oneself into other people's shoes".

Work-Process Knowledge

In 16 instances of the data available, learning outcomes were not materialized in language competences per se, rather in the acquisition of knowledge directly related to work. From engaging in literacy events, Freda was for example learning about

tutoring or management of a bookshop. When working in the UK and later in Australia and having discussions with experienced workers, Sarah was gaining expertise in goods distribution, medical work and youth justice. And Nathan learned to use computers by visiting the library and seeking guidance from the librarian. In all these examples, encounters with literacy events went beyond the development of a language competence but contributed to the broader development of professional competence.

Academic Knowledge

Academic knowledge may also be targeted by literate practices and be expanded as results of literacy events (N = 12). Freda, for instance, learned about Linguistics when enrolling in her Maters' program. Susan learned about marine biology while typing the doctoral dissertation of her husband. Salim learned mathematics when trying to attend university courses in Australia. Ingrid learned about architecture and then law by enrolling in university programs in Slovenia and Australia. And Danim referred to basic school content knowledge when he mentioned his difficulties in reading.

Everyday Practical Knowledge

It may also be the case that literacy events lead to expand the register of everyday practical knowledge, that is not particularly related to any professional or academic practice (N = 2). When for instance Salim started to work as a taxi driver and engaged in conversations with clients (see above mentioned example), he encountered an opportunity to learn not only English as a second language, but also about practical geography and how to orient himself by car in the city of Brisbane. Here, literacy events may go beyond language and work and lead to the acquisition of knowledge involved in ordinary life.

Social Knowledge

There are also examples in our data that show that literate practices may result in an in-depth understanding of social realities. In six examples of the collection available, informants draw from specific literacy events encountered in everyday life or work situations some form of reflexive thinking about how language may connect to social hierarchy. Salim for instance became aware of the importance to "speak the local language" as means for integration into the Australian society after having been insulted by a rude car driver in Adelaide. Felicia, his wife, experienced a social prejudice "when you don't speak the same language" and she responded to this social prejudice with a high motivation to become competitive in preparation of a job interview.

> *To be honest with you, sometimes there are a lot of prejudice, as well, especially when you don't speak the same language. But if you start thinking that way, and if you focus on that way, then you go that way. So, I decided to not even think about the challenges, and I just said, every time I wanted to get to one role or do something else, I just prepared myself, to see what was the requirement to get to that job, or to that role, and get it*. [Fel-2; 198–210]

As for Freda, she learned about hierarchy and social injustice when working in a restaurant as a teenager and being treated badly by the manager and the clients.

> *So when I went into this paid job I had some sense of my place being lower than the manager's place. I did not come in thinking that I was there to challenge him. I came in knowing that I was there to serve. I think this also became the obstacle because I think sometimes I found it hard when your clients let's say of the restaurant, people you were serving, treated you badly. I found that very unjust. So it was also the first time I was made aware perhaps of this idea that there's different positions in the social world and people can treat you badly because they assume that they're superior. I think I did have a bit of trouble with that. Sometimes I remember being really offended by the way people spoke to me and realising I couldn't speak back because I was in this position and I didn't really have a voice and I had to just shut my mouth and I definitely had trouble I think with that*. [Fre-1; 160–172]

She realised what it means not "having a voice" and not being able to "speak back".

Knowledge About Self (Identity)

Finally, there were also examples where the learning outcomes associated with specific literacy events materialized in forms of knowledge oriented to the person itself. These cases were often related with the development of personal identity and experiences of self-consciousness in which informants became aware of who they are or who they wanted to become. For instance, Freda understood that she wanted to become a language teacher when working as a manager of a tutoring centre in Brisbane. Nathan perceived himself as a "marketable" person by writing his CV and starting to send application letters overseas. Later, when living in Australia, he developed his own professional style by giving a "different twist" to the sorts of reports he was writing when working for a public administration in Queensland. Also very insightful is Ingrid's example, drawn from her narrative of her first visit to Australia, when she was working in an architecture office to practice her English skills, and undertook a range of marginal tasks. Beyond English and work, what she learned through the rich interactions with colleagues was the importance to become "excited".

> *Well I think because I was there because of my English skills so as a condition from the English-speaking school we all had to go and mingle with the community and I ended up in this firm […]. So I didn't really learn per se in the office but I did reflect on wow this is something that - I got excited going there. Not so much about learning English but I actually got excited. I hopped out of the bed and I went there. It was an exciting time and I think from that little excitement I just picked up the phone and I got "mum, I'm not doing medicine. I'm doing architecture instead" and it's just "hello, mum? Mum?"* [Ing-8; 365–282]

From this experience of "excitement", she understood that she did not want to become a medical doctor anymore and that her plans for the future had definitely changed.

Agency and Roles Involved in Literacy Events

The last topic under examination focused on agency and roles involved in literacy events. Here, the qualities of individual engagement in literate practices were explored in more details and the degree of actions and contributions of informants in the reported literacy experiences were described according different categories: (i) the role of informants in the reported literacy events, (ii) the degree of agency expressed, (iii) the forms of expression of agency, (iv) the sorts of emotions experienced, and finally, (v) the contributions of literacy events to worklife transitions and trajectories (Table 2).

Role of Agents

One first category that deserves attention when examining the continuities between literacy events and agency is related to the specific role endorsed by agents as they engage in specific literate practices. When reporting about their experiences associated with literacy, informants can be placed as participants benefiting from support provided by other agents. In such configurations, they are seen as *targets of support* within a specific literate practice. Such configurations appeared in 37 occasions

Table 2 Agency and roles involved in literacy events

Agency & Roles		n	%
Role of agent	Target of support	37	47.4
	Source of support	14	17.9
	Reciprocal source and target of support	3	3.8
	Not involved in any support	24	30.8
Level of agency	Very strong sense of agency	30	38.5
	Strong role of agent	25	32.1
	Neutral level of agency	7	9.0
	Low level of agency	14	17.9
	Very low level of agency	2	2.6
Expression of agency	Taking actions	18	23.1
	Using opportunities	24	30.8
	Reflexive thinking	5	6.4
	Perception of self	13	16.7
	None	18	23.1
Emotions	Negative	14	17.9
	Positive	12	15.4
	None	53	67.9
Contributions to transitions	Continuity in worklife experience	11	14.1
	Discontinuity in worklife experience	5	6.4
	None	62	79.5

within our data base. Examples of situations in which informants were targeted as beneficiaries of literacy events can be found, for instance, in experiences reported by Andy, Freda or Salim. Andy, for example, prepared his IELTS examinations with the help of a private tutor. Freda was taught by very good teachers in Australia how to teach in an ESL context. She also experienced a position as a learner when she moved from Australia to Switzerland and had to learn French. A true "inversion of roles" took place then, when she became a student again instead of endorsing a teaching position. And Salim experienced many literacy events in the position of target of a literate practice. He was taught English language when he arrived in Australia, and then talked to different sorts of people to have conversations and improve his language competences.

In other circumstances, different agent roles were observed and informants experienced the reverse role of being a *source or a resource of support* targeting other participants (N = 14). In his early years in Iran, Salim for instance helped his school mates with their English skills and is was seen by others as a "translator". Freda provided linguistic support to a Vietnamese boy of a refugee family. Susan prepared pedagogical material for a TAFE college. Migay expressed willingness to offer a new language program in TAFE for Aboriginal students. And James taught literacy in jail while writing his doctoral dissertation. In such configurations, informants saw themselves as resources that provided guidance and support to other participants.

Interestingly, informants experienced various agent roles depending on the time in life and the specific literacy event reported in the interview. In some instances, a combination or reciprocity of roles could also be observed (N = 3). In Ingrid's case for instance, a so-called "agentic bargaining" took place, in which a combination of roles as *source* and *target* of a literate practice emerged in her narrative. When reporting about her university program in architecture in Slovenia, she mentioned that she used her English-speaking skills to make friends, and that she used this friendship to gain some help for preparing her assessment. In such a configuration, a reciprocal position of source and target of support was experienced simultaneously by Ingrid.

> *So I did my first year in Slovenia. Because I was the only Englis- speaking student there people were happy to be friends with me to practice their English and I was happy to be friends with them because I was hoping they could translate the assessments for me. So the peer support was great there.* [Ing-7, 254–262]

Finally, in 24 instances of literacy events collected in the data set, informants did not mention any particular agent role related to the literate practice involved.

Level of Agency

Another category that deserved attention relates to the level of agency, referring to degree to which informants see themselves as exerting an influence on the literacy events considered. Depending on the circumstances, this level of agency

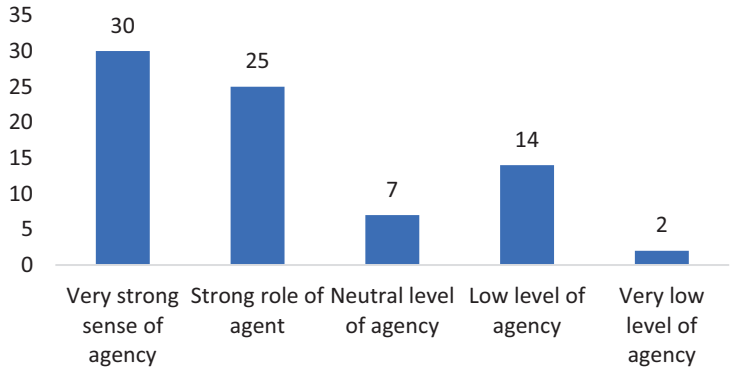

Fig. 5 Agency and roles – Level of agency

could be reported as being (i) very strong, (ii) strong, (iii) neutral, (iv) low, or (v) very low.

As visible in Fig. 5, a large majority of example (55 out of 78) pertained to the categories of a very strong or strong sense of agency expressed by informants when referring to specific literacy events. Freda's interview provided a rich example of a very high level agency expressed in reporting about literate practices. When commenting about her move from Australia to Switzerland, she was very confident about her teaching skills and was convinced that her experience gained in Australia would be transferable in her new context of life.

> *But, yes, I can't remember how I figured out - I had a lot of confidence though from Australia and my ESL. I maybe came in very confident that I could do this. So I wasn't afraid to offer my skills. I tried to get paid work. That wasn't possible so then the volunteer work - and I just thought it's good just to maintain my skills as a teacher even if it's putting on my CV that I was a volunteer. I wanted to practice my skills as an ESL teacher as well because it's something that I like to do*. [Fre-13, 562–568]

In contrast to that, Danim's worklife illustrates very low level of agency related to specific literacy events. When commenting about his early years at school, Danim was not seeing himself as exerting a strong agentic influence on the practice of learning and reading.

> *Yes even now, I've never really worked for anyone. I think after high school I think during that time I was a little bit lost. I didn't really know what I wanted to do, I guess because I wasn't focused in school. I didn't really have the mind for it, I opened a text book and I'd fall asleep. I'd rather be out there doing something, more hands on, yes, I probably regret it now. […] If you ask me to read something and you show me a text book I'm like oh no. I think I fear reading, I like to be shown something how to do it and then I'll do it*. [Dan-2, 159–170]

Examples of low or very low levels of agency were observed in only few reported cases (16 out of 78). 7 instances of literate practices included in the data set were seen to be neutral in the sense that they did not provide comments about the level of agency involved in the reported event.

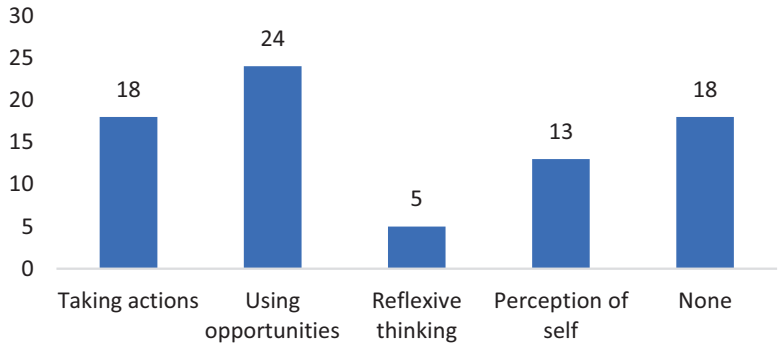

Fig. 6 Agency and roles – Expression of agency

Expression of Agency

Agency and roles in relation to literacy events can also be described through the specific forms of expression used by informants to exert an influence on the course of action considered. Depending on the circumstances, agentic roles can be expressed through (i) specific actions taken by informants, (ii) the use of opportunities available in reported circumstances, (iii) reflexive thinking, or (iv) self-perceptions by informants. In 18 literacy events included in the data set, no direct reference to any form of expression of agency could be identified (Fig. 6).

Taking Actions

A common form of agency when reporting about literacy events is to refer to specific sorts of actions accomplished in the context considered (N = 18). These actions can consist for instance in (i) help-seeking actions from other participants (N = 3), (ii) helping actions offered to other participants (N = 3), or (iii) decisions taken by the informants (N = 2). James for instance expressed agency by seeking advice from sales persons and engineers to learn the job of production controller in the car industry. Susan, offered help to her husband by assisting him in his research tasks and typing of his doctoral dissertation. And Salim and his wife decided to improve their English skills actively to be better integrated into the local Australian community.

Other sorts of actions taken by participants are related to the degree of mastery perceived by informants about the specific literacy events commented during the interviews. Informants also reported about difficulties they encountered and how they overcame these difficulties through their personal actions (N = 1). Ingrid for instance compensated the lack of guidance available in her studies in law by reading books and using resources available online. Informants also expressed a sense of mastery, by considering that they were able to mobilize and demonstrate the skills required in a specific literate practice (N = 6). Nathan felt “pretty good” in talking to the local community in Sri Lanka, and James found it easy to become a sales

person in the cardboard industry, just by observing colleagues on the phone and being guided by them in direct interactions. These skills were also sometimes addressed to designated recipients and recognised by them (N = 1), as was the case with Nathan becoming a "marketable" worker, seen as competent and employable by international companies.

Response to institutional demands and norms appears as another way for informants to express agency through specific sorts of actions. Informants may align to institutional norms and become agentic through an action of compliance (N = 3). Or, on the contrary, they may exert a strong agentic role by acting against prescribed institutional practices (N = 1). Andy for instance, aligned with institutional requirements by preparing for his IELTS examination as a condition for applying for a permanent visa in Australia. But Nathan defied organisational norms by using computers in the workplace as a resource for applying for job opportunities overseas, against the approval of his hierarchy and management.

Finally, agentic forms of actions can also be accomplished through the development of a personal style at work (N = 1). This was evident, for instance in Nathan's experience in writing tasks, when he developed a "personal twist" in writing reports, that resulted from his longstanding experience in institutional writing in different contexts.

> *Like some of the reports I would write there's a very set format in Australian with the ATO and Office of Trade Revenues and all this. But I gave a different twist to my reports. It was more if any average person read it they would understand fully. But even if a lawyer read it he would understand it also because it had all the legal implications. […] So my previous experience I think was really, really useful.* [Nat-11; 138–147]

Using Opportunities

Another way for participants to express agency in the literacy events encountered during their life-course is to use opportunities as they emerge in local contexts (N = 24). Freda, for instance, used the opportunity to work in a bookshop in Sydney to do a lot of reading in a variety of genres and develop creative writing activities. Salim initiated conversations with the receptionist of the hostel he was living in Adelaide to practice his English skills and developed his communicative competence.

> *She was the head person in Pennington hostel, I never forget her face. I went to her office with my very broken English I said thank you very much for giving us this opportunity. These facilities here is very good for us. I just wanted to make some kind of conversation. I just wanted to say a few English words so I can start. And she started correcting me - you know you should have said this and this. And I said, can I come to your office every now and then and say a few words if you can correct me she was saying yes, yes, anytime that's why we are here. Okay, that's good. That was the first week.* [Sal-12]

Opportunities may be used through different forms of expression in the data available. They can be materialised for instance when (i) taking initiatives, (ii) asking questions to other participants, (iii) transferring resources across different contexts, or (iv) adopting creative learning strategies. Migay for instance took the initiative to run a new language program for Aboriginal students at TAFE. James reported

questioning his colleagues regularly when becoming a sales person in the cardboard industry. Freda reused the content learned during her first ESL course in her practice as a preschool teacher in Geneva. And, as already mentioned earlier, Ingrid developed a creative translation strategy when studying architecture in Slovenia, in which she used English as lingua franca to translate her courses from Slovene into Swedish.

Reflexive Thinking

Agentic roles can also be expressed through reflexive thinking and a visible capacity of informants to elaborate on their experiences of literacy events (N = 5). Freda, for instance, learned to work as a tutor by reflecting on her everyday experience of tutoring the Vietnamese boy from a refugee family. Sarah reflected on the differences in social work and the role and place of written reports between the UK and Australia. And Salim decided to become better integrated into the local Australian society after reflecting about an incident with car driver in Adelaide, during which he was unable to fully understand what was said to him. As shown earlier, Salim also expressed agency by producing a theory about negotiation based on his past experience as manager of a coffee shop.

Perception of Self

In some circumstances, self-perceptions by informants can also be regarded as forms of expression of agency (N = 13). In the data available, such self-perceptions could be expressed through different forms, including (i) motivation, (ii) vocation, (iii) self-confidence, or (iv) inter-personal or relational skills. Freda "loves books" and declared a high level of motivation when applying for the job in a bookshop in Sydney. When working in Geneva as a language teacher, she considered that enrolling in a Masters' program in Linguistics "made sense" for her because it gave her the opportunity to improve her teaching skills and "become a better teacher". Felicia built on a strong sense of self-confidence when applying for a job in the pharmacological industry. And Salim considered that his good relationships and friendly relations with his staff members and clients in the coffee shop provided good conditions for asking them questions about "new words" and learning the English language at work.

Emotions

Another way to look at the data from the perspective of agency is to describe the sorts of emotions expressed by informants when referring back to literacy events encountered during their life-course. Though, in a majority of cases (N = 53), no explicit emotions were reported concerning literate practices mentioned in interviews, there were a number of cases where literate events were related to negative

emotions (N = 14). Freda, for instance, experienced injustice when having encountered clients in a restaurant. She also felt challenged when working as a tutor, and later frustrated when teaching privileged adults instead of refugees in the United Nations in Geneva. Sarah felt anxious and unprepared when getting ready for a practicum in youth justice. Salim felt homesick when attending English classes at his arrival in Australia, and Felicia felt upset when being badly spoken to by a car driver in Adelaide. As for Randall, he was challenged by language barriers when working in a restaurant, and concluded that language was "playing a trick on him".

> *The most important thing was the language barrier. I couldn't understand it. I couldn't understand to communicate with them because sometimes they talked about something different and I lost track. The language played a trick on me*. [Ran-2]

However, there were also a number of instances in the data where informants expressed positive emotions when referring back to specific literacy events (N = 12). As mentioned earlier, Freda loved books and considered the work in a bookshop as interesting. Susan also had an interest in science while typing the doctoral dissertation of her husband. Sarah experienced self-confidence when writing reported as a social worker in Australia, and Ingrid felt excitement when doing a linguistic experience in a company in architecture in Australia. Salim also reported to "feel alive" when he learnt something from discussions with ordinary people met in public spaces.

> *One way I learnt my English is through just talking to public. Different jobs I had, I never was sure, I would say, sorry mate, what do you call this, what do you call that, how do you say this? If I say this, is that right, or not? Many people corrected me, and I said, thank you, I learnt something today, so I feel alive. That's what I was telling everyone who was teaching me something. I said, thanks mate, I feel alive today, I learnt something today, so it's a very good day for me. That's the way I always dealt with people to learn my English, actually*. [Sal-9, 432–443]

in Salim's narrative, a sense of gratitude was associated with learning experiences.

Contributions to Transitions

Finally, agency and roles in relation to literate practices can also be described through the specific contributions of literacy events to the sorts of transitions experienced by informants across their working lives. These contributions were not necessarily made explicit or visible in the interviews available (N = 52), but they were sometimes described as facilitating a process of continuity in worklife experiences (N = 11). For instance, Susan referred to a pre-existing interest and background in science before assisting her husband with typing his dissertation in marine biology. Salim experienced a continuous interest for learning English as a second language, that referred back to his early school years in Iran and that was recurrently established after his migration experience, and across his life course. Nathan developed expertise and practice in writing reports, drawing on experiences across many

different work contexts, such as marine biology, social work and public service. And, as visible in the example below, Freda was able to make use of the knowledge gained about English grammar in her Masters' program in Linguistics for teaching adults at the United Nations, and later for teaching young children in a private primary school.

> *I think I used it a lot. Yes. So, for example we had one module that was about grammar, English grammar. We had to go into detail about analysing English grammar. That was extremely helpful when I was faced with some of these people who work at the UN who already have a high level of grammar. I found pretty much all that Masters' degree extremely helpful. Yes. I think it made me a better teacher. Yes. I think it did because it had - ESL's very practical. It's all about the practical techniques where's the Masters' degree gave me the knowledge that I needed about language and I even use it today and it seems odd to use it with six year olds but I can use some of the grammar analysis even at that level without saying that it's a grammar analysis*. [Fre-16, 654–663]

There were other examples in our data set indicating that literacy events can lead to forms of discontinuities in worklife experiences (N = 5). Sarah for instance encountered very different ways to write and use reports in social work when moving from the UK to Australia. As already mentioned earlier, Ingrid was having a disruptive experience when visiting Australia as a student and decided to move away from the field of medicine after learning English in a workplace context of architecture. And Freda encountered role inversion, when she moved to a Francophone country and became a foreigner – "somebody from the outside" – instead of a person teaching and assisting refugees.

> *Well the first challenge was not knowing the language so it was becoming a language student so reversing my role. I was no longer a teacher. I was now a student. That was more challenging that I expected but I thought it would be a good experience to have as a teacher. Then it was taking time to understand how the whole work thing worked in Geneva because I had no idea where to work, how to work, who to work for, all of these sorts of things. So it took time in figuring out how everything worked in Geneva. Then just being in that position of being a foreigner so that was really challenging being somebody from the outside*. [Fre-12, 553–561]

All these examples show that for one same informant, literate practices can result in forms of continuities or discontinuities with pre-existing experiences, depending on the specific forms and functions of each literacy event. Regardless of circumstances, they do not leave the life-course unaffected, rather exert an influence on transitions across working lives.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to identify and analyse a subset of experiences reported in worklife history interviews, and that relate to literate practices and tangible and situated literacy events. Based on this identification, it has reflected on the forms and functions of such literacy events in relation to learning across working lives.

The qualitative and quantitative analysis resulting from the empirical observations stress the richness and diversity of experiences in literacy across worklife. Literacy events encountered by informants were experienced in their first (L1) or second language (L2). They materialised through different semiotic resources, including spoken or written language, but also a wide range of symbolic resources, such as digital or material artefacts (i.e. books, computers, online resources, etc.). And, most importantly, they were encountered in formal or informal contexts, and not only in formal educational institutions such as language classes or courses. From there, it appears that literacy events are strongly connected to workplace environments and practices. As evidenced in the many examples reported above, literate practices can sometimes be regarded as a condition for accessing work opportunities. Nathan for instance needed to learn how to write a CV and application letters before being able to become a "marketable worker"; he also needed to learn how to use the Telex technology and computers to find adequate and legitimate communication methods and tools to establish contact with an international work community. But workplaces also act as a repertoire of formal and informal contexts in which literate practices develop and in which literacy events can take place. Nathan again found in the workplace in Fiji the resources that made it possible to apply for a job overseas. As such, workplaces can also be regarded as opportunities for the development of literate practices.

From the analysis, it appears that literacy events can be considered in general as potentially rich learning experiences. They are not just static or pre-existing resources but evolve as a dynamic process of engagement and appropriation of knowledge from participants themselves. From the accounts produced in the interviews, informants were often not immediately competent in mastering literate practices. They had to learn them over time, and often across the entire life course. Salim for instance illustrated a large-scale trajectory of learning English as a second language. Freda learnt to become a better language teacher in several different countries, times and contexts. Nathan learnt to produce written reports in many different genres and occupations. All these learning outcomes are individual experiences but are based on motivations of the individual and supported by a wide range of resources afforded by the social environment. In the data, such resources are predominantly perceived as existing and available. They are not related exclusively to language and language competences, but include a wide range of knowledge, related to work processes, to academic contents, to social order and to self-reflexion. From there, it appears that the learning of literate practices involves a combination of linguistic, practical, societal and personal facts. Essentially, how these resources are utilised is determined by the interests, motivations and agency of the individual, and how and for what purposes they are used.

The collection of literacy events presented and discussed in this chapter also stresses the importance of individual engagement and creativity in the mastery of literate practices across the life-course. Informants may act as "targets" or as "sources" of literate practices, but most of them can be regarded as strongly agentic and actively involved in the development of their literacy skills. As evidenced above, forms of expression of agency appear as rich, broad and diversified. Informants

were often displaying creative strategies to respond adequately to the numerous and complex conditions in which literate practices emerge. This is well illustrated by the example of Ingrid, who used her English-speaking skills as L2 in Slovenia to compensate for her limited mastery of the Slovenian language. And this can also be illustrated again with the example of Nathan, who explored the opportunities of informal times and spaces in his workplace to learn about computers and to find strategies for applying for jobs overseas. Interestingly, here again, creativity in learning literate practices appears as a collective experience, involving guidance and contributions from other participants, and accomplished through situated social interactions.

To conclude, the qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted in this chapter has also demonstrated that, based on the worklife interviews, literate practices can be considered as rich contributions to working lives and transitions. They are sometimes perceived as challenging or disruptive experiences, but, in many instances, are also seen by informants as opportunities to facilitate transitions and to develop a continuous and coherent path through working lives. Interestingly, such literate practices and their contributions to transitions are only marginally supported and shaped by public policies and formal educational programs. In many cases, they emerge outside any form of public policy and are encountered by participants in the local circumstances of workplace practices and everyday experiences. If literate practices are not beyond the range of educational policies, they are in many ways not restricted to the scope of formal education. It is precisely in this form of openness and diversity that the richness of literate practices in working lives and transitions can be fully expressed, recognised and understood.

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