

STRONG READERS' BEGINNINGS: IDENTIFYING THE AGENCIES AND INDIVIDUALS
WHO INFLUENCE READING LIVES

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ABSTRACT

Strong Readers' Beginnings: Identifying the Agencies and Individuals who Influence Reading Lives

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While there exists substantial research on struggling and developmental readers, few research-practitioners have sought to examine the histories and circumstances that result in strong readers. This study drew upon the reading autobiographies of doctoral students in an English Education program at an Ivy League institution, in order to discover what can be learned from first-hand narrative accounts of their reading lives about the early literacy experiences, reading practices, family, community, school and cultural influences of a group of “strong” adult readers. Also examined for comparative and contrasting data are the reading lives of remedial and honors first-year college composition students at a 2-year community college.

An understanding of how the environments, people, institutions, circumstances, and texts encountered in the literacy lives of the three different groups studied here can assist literacy educators in bridging theory with practice for the teaching of reading in early grades and for the teaching of college-level reading in first-year college writing classes. A central term and concept to help explain the trajectory of the reading lives of the populations studied here was Deborah Brandt's (1998) theory of “sponsors of literacy.” Brandt's terminology and the notion of sponsorship along with a sociocultural theoretical framework are used to interpret the reading autobiographies in this study. Methods employed were based on Connelly and Clandinin's narrative inquiry approach, a methodology steeped in the richness of the storied lives of the

participants. The three patterns that emerged in the strong readers' memories were: (a) being read to in the home prior to school age; (b) dichotomous attitudes toward in-school and out-of-school reading, especially around the middle school years; and (c) evidence of firm productive habits of mind toward complex reading that extends into the higher education years. The early literacy sponsorship and productive habits of mind were less evidenced in the remedial population. The findings of certain common characteristics and practices in the backgrounds of strong readers, many of which were not present at the same level in the remedial readers, can help literacy educators and caregivers re-examine their role as literacy sponsors and offer approaches for how we might sponsor literacy differently to create strong readers at any stage of their education.

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Chapter I

DIDN'T YOUR MOM READ YOU *GOODNIGHT MOON*?

INITIATING LIFELONG READERS

I live in gratitude to my parents for initiating me—and as early as I begged for it, without keeping me waiting—into knowledge of the word, into reading and spelling, by way of the alphabet. They taught it to me at home in time for me to begin to read before starting school. My love for the alphabet, which endures, grew out of reciting it but, before that, out of seeing the letters on the page. In my own story books, before I could read them for myself I fell in love with various winding, enchanted-looking initials drawn by Walter Crane at the head of fairy tales. In “Once upon a time,” an “o” had a rabbit running it as a treadmill, his feet upon flowers. When the day came years later for me to see the Book of Kells, all the wizardry of letter, initial, and word swept over me a thousand times, and the illumination, the gold, seemed a part of the world’s beauty and holiness that had been there from the start. (Welty, *One Writer’s Beginnings*, 1984)

Prologue: Setting the Scene: Falling in Love With Books at an Early Age

In *One Writer’s Beginning’s*, Eudora Welty (1984) recalled how, preceding her formal school education, her parents indoctrinated her into a magical world of reading. She shared her lived story through the creation of narrative scene, context, and plot, illustrating how early literacy sponsorship in her home was experiential and inspirational. Welty noted how she “learned from the age of two or three that any room in our house, at any time of day, was there to read in, or to be read to” (p. 5). This cognizance of the impact of a home book culture is one of the many literacy memories she narrated in her autobiography of how, through reading, she learned to listen, to see, and to find a voice, skills that paved the way to her career as a successful fiction writer. Still, though she is most renowned as an author of fiction, her autobiography adeptly delves into the world of the personal, revealing how her family and the surrounding Mississippi environment promoted her lifelong love of reading and writing. Welty, an award-winning fiction writer, understood the autobiography as a narrative genre suited for exploration of the storied self, culture, and society.

The House That Became a Home: Can Literature Feed the Soul?

As someone who grew up in a home where reading and books were ubiquitous and library visits were frequent, I had always privately wondered how influential my own early exposure to literacy was on my decision to become an English major, professor, and Ph.D. student in English Education. After all, I confess: I love books. I love their covers, their titles, their texture, their smell, and their place lining my shelves. I particularly love stories. I love the idea that someone had a tale to tell, took the time and effort to document it, and was generous and brave enough to share it. I love the window literature provides to bygone days, the invitation it offers me to engage in someone's past as part of my present, and the impressions it leaves me with, lasting long into the future. I love the heritage that accompanies storytelling, the notion that the writer or storyteller is connecting the past to the present and offering a bridge to the future.

I have another confession to make, one that I have only shared with my students, but never with my colleagues, administrators, peers, fellow classmates, or anyone connected to academia: I often hate reading. How can I love books and stories but hate reading? In my experience, the act of reading has always been grueling and time-consuming. I am a slow reader and find myself having to re-read words, phrases, sentences, and entire paragraphs multiple times and with frequent breaks. It takes incredible persistence, or grit (Duckworth, 2016) to get caught up in a book and to hit a stride where I do not crave an excuse for interruption. Yet, in the face of my own resistance, I persevere and, ultimately, reap the rewards of forging through the confusion and doubt I encounter when reading complex texts. When I consider my own reading history, and resultant attitudes toward reading, I am curious about which features of early and continuing literacy experiences could compel an individual to become an avid reader, or to wax and wane or to choose to renounce reading altogether?

In her novel *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, Muriel Barbery (Barbery & Anderson, 2008) wrote, “When something is bothering me, I seek refuge. No need to travel far; a trip to the realm of literary memory will suffice. For where can one find more noble distraction, more entertaining company, more delightful enchantment than in literature?” Truthfully, only a select number of books have ever had that magical appeal to me of companionship and comfort where I reached the kind of aesthetic state described by Rosenblatt (1983) as being “centered directly on what [I am] living through during [my] relationship with that particular text” (p. 25). Yet, those that brought me to that transcendent state resonated with me, altered my perspective, helped me work through my own “real” emotions, and reminded me to dream a bit.

Even more powerful is the transformative potential I have witnessed literature have on others I know: my formerly distant, apathetic teenage brother discovering *Siddhartha* and all the wisdom and spiritual guidance that it offered; my daughter, quirky and imaginative beyond her mainstream peers’ acceptance, finding a “home” and friends in the Harry Potter and Hunger Games series; my ADHD/autism spectrum son detecting parallel antisocial and impulsive behaviors in the Big Nate books; my student realizing that “they” identified as transgender after reading Hemingway’s *The Garden of Eden* and empathizing with the same complicated and taboo desires as Catherine Bourne. If only more of my students, more middle school, high school, and college students on the whole, could engage in reading at the same aesthetic level as those aforementioned fortunate few.

How I Came to This Study

In my graduate work as a doctoral student in English Education at a prestigious university in New York City, one of my first courses was a Doctoral Seminar in the Teaching of English. Part of the description of the course stated, “The broad subject or topic to be examined in this

course will be reading—reading as a practice, as an instructional problem, and as a theoretical construct in English language arts classes mainly at the secondary and tertiary levels and for the field of English education.” I had not thought about the significance of this goal, and the specific language used to describe it, for a doctoral-level course at the time, but in my preparation and research for this dissertation, I have become more conscious of the inadequate amount of attention given to the teaching of reading in many undergraduate and postgraduate environments.

The first assignment in the course was “Write your Reading Autobiography—Your life in reading.” As a participant in this exercise, I was excited and overwhelmed by the charge put to my classmates and me. With a looming legacy of strong readers and writers in my own family, my 18 years as an English educator, and new peers and a professor to impress, I had a triplicate pressure placed upon me with this task. I had previously written about this heritage in my personal statement for admission to my Ph.D. graduate program during my application process. Speaking to my own desire to become an English educator, I had explained:

But I instinctively knew that I was positioned in a special place, a space I hoped to occupy for years to come. For some people that instinct is labeled a vocation, a calling, not really a conscious choice at all, but a voice that summons one to a profession. In my case, there were two voices that both carried an inherited affinity and passion for language, impelling me toward teaching English. One voice, my grandmother, a teacher at Morris and Grace Dodge High Schools in the South Bronx, who infused in me her appreciation for the written word, for the fascinating worlds it could create; the other voice, the power of rhetoric in my mother, who read me *A Little Princess* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, while other parents were reading their children Dr. Seuss and *Goodnight Moon*. Therefore, I chose to follow these calls, especially of my grandma Frances by pursuing a Master’s Degree in Education with the goal of becoming a high school English teacher.

While I had in essence already begun to write my reading autobiography years before our professor assigned one in our class, when I sat to write the autobiography required of us in the doctoral course, I thought first about how my new classmates would perceive me when reading it

online in Moodle, and second about the truth of my reading history. I decided to start with a timeline, bulleting chronological facts only and then to work in prose later.

Ultimately, my reading history became more of a revelatory metacognitive journey than a vehicle for impressing my classmates and professor. After I posted my writing, I innately gravitated toward reading all of my classmates' autobiographies, with fascination and curiosity. What occurred next (I instinctively began coding the other reading autobiographies) was either a result of providence or of scholarly intrigue and is what constituted the pilot work for this study.

Nurturing Lifelong Readers: Do Habits of Mind Start in the Home?

This dissertation grew out of my sense that reading autobiographies like Welty's might be rich resources for learning how more ordinary readers, like me and my doctoral colleagues, came to be the readers we were—though our stories may not be ordinary at all, since my colleagues and I are English teachers and therefore in our own ways persons who, like Welty, have devoted much of our adult lives engaged in and thinking about reading and writing. Nevertheless, I began this study with the hope and expectation that a careful analysis of the reading lives of a group of persons who are highly competent readers might yield fruitful stories and some subsequent insights into how to foster the development of literacy in wider populations of students in schools and in the homes of parents who might seek guidance about how to promote literacy in their children. Whatever its promise or limitations, this dissertation is a study of reading autobiographies, the lived stories, produced by a group of 18 English teachers during a doctoral seminar on reading practices in the teaching and learning of literature. However, once I found myself deep into the study, I realized that questions about the kind of readers I was excluding needed to be addressed to give weight to any conclusion I might be inclined to draw about the development of readers like myself. Therefore, this dissertation also looked at two

other populations of readers, remedial freshmen and honors freshmen at a 2-year community college.

In addition, as one of the subjects as well as the author of my study, I used the opportunity I had to expand and reflect on my own reading autobiography, thereby making my own story a kind of enhanced case study that will confirm, contradict, and qualify generalizations that seem to be emerging about typical or necessary conditions for fostering or discouraging the development of literacy in children. I also drew upon my experience as a mother and teacher to present literacy stories from my family and classroom that will illuminate or challenge the stories of the ultra-successful students who are the central focus of this study.

Representing Strong Readers in Research: What Can We Learn From What Works?

No recent study comes to mind that has investigated the reading lives of individuals who would most aptly be described as aesthetic readers by Louise Rosenblatt (1983) and as performatively literate readers manifesting the habits of mind that drive and sustain strong readers and learners as described by Sheridan Blau (2003). Most of my own general education students at the private liberal arts college where I taught for over 20 years did not possess similar mindsets and practices towards reading as Welty, my colleagues, and I did, a disparity of which the effects were evident but the causes were not. While an abundance of research can be found to explain why “Johnny” *cannot* read, there is a dearth of literature that asks how and why “Jane” *can* and *is* reading and engaging with the text as a lived experience. A search for texts on strong readers predominantly yields instructional “how-to” workbooks offering standardized strategies for teaching students *how to become* strong (and close) readers (Allington, 2001, 2013; Beers & Probst, 2017; Beers, Probst, & Rief, 2007; Wilhelm, 1997).

While these are valuable resources, a closer look at the individual reading histories that span extended periods of time and various stages of strong readers' education can provide deeper insight into how they became proficient, lifelong readers. Research in the field of teaching English seems more often to focus on reading "deficits," on "struggling and reluctant readers," and on methods for enhancing comprehension. Further research on the factors that might explain "successful" readers who possess the necessary habits of mind for edifying reading could inform parents and educators on how to help "struggling" or illiterate readers participate in high-success reading experiences that also lead to more wide-ranging academic successes.

Studies of strong and successful readers are unusual, if not unheard of in the research literature on reading, where reading specialists have focused almost exclusively on the factors that might explain why some children do not learn to read in school or seem unable to learn from their reading or seem to know how to read but refuse to do it. My study was centered on an examination of the reading lives and experiences of persons who became more than highly proficient readers, but expert readers, at least on the evidence of their academic accomplishments and careers as teachers of English (which is to say teachers who teach writing and the reading of highly complex texts), who had graduated from respected colleges, having majored in English literature or in an allied field of study, acquired a Master's degree in English or English education or a related field, and were, in the Fall of 2014, enrolled as doctoral students in English education in an internationally respected program in English education at one of the most prestigious universities in America.

It would not be easy to find anywhere, outside of the faculty in literary studies or English education at America's leading universities, any collection of adults who could be said to rank higher than the subjects in my study in their proficiency and expertise as readers. Thus, treating

that unique population as a principal lens, I conducted a second and third study of current college freshman, both at the remedial and honors levels, to emphasize the ways that home and school environments might promote or hinder the development of readers who come from different academic levels.

Questions That Drive This Research

Three logically related questions drove this study of the reading lives of expert adult readers:

1. What can be learned about the early literacy experiences, reading practices, family, community, school and cultural influences, personal attitudes and habits of a group of “strong” adult readers through the first-hand narrative accounts of their reading lives?
2. How might a study that compares and contrasts the reading lives of adult strong readers with remedial and honors freshman 2-year college composition students serve to highlight experiences and contexts that may foster or obstruct the development of highly competent readers?
3. What are some pedagogical, curricular, and cultural implications of the findings from these studies for families, teachers, and schools?

It is my hope that reading autobiographies hold some answers to why some students can and some have not yet experienced a synergistic relationship with reading and that I might locate some clues to what it would take to get my own students there. It is incumbent upon those of us responsible for students’ literacy to consider principles of practice that produce the sort of reading that is part of successful readers’ backgrounds. Why? Because performative and aesthetic reading of literature results from a specific mindset that is open to exploration and willingness to engage in meaning-making, a mindset that can lead to more growth and curiosity

of the sort described by Maxine Greene (2001) as “an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what there is to be noticed, and to lend works of art to their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful” (p. 6).

The Social and Cultural Influences of Literacy Events and Sponsors on Learning: A Theoretical Perspective

As I have revealed, even prior to my career as an educator, I had intuited that early reading experiences are integral to the motivation, success, and long-term habits of one’s literacy and they are socially and culturally influenced by people and practices. Later, after years of teaching at the high school and college level, I began to think about the connections between literacy events and the people and institutions that sponsor them. In my own classroom, it was evident that cooperative learning exercises and read-aloud experiences provided natural social activities that kept students engaged and promoted their affinity for literature.

An introduction to Deborah Brandt’s (1997) theory of sponsors of literacy provided me with the terminology to examine and explain more concretely what had previously been abstract hunches about the ways in which literacy practices and attitudes are shaped. Discovering her work had a powerful influence on my thinking and generated the connection between sociocultural theory and my approach to my research and eventual findings for this dissertation. Brandt defined sponsors of literacy as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, or model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 2). This range of potential sponsors and their effects on literacy learners leave open a wide array of cultural and social opportunities for determining and transforming literacy practices. An agent holds the power to introduce literacy tools and to

provide access to literacy events; this agency is largely dependent on the sponsored party's social and cultural contexts.

Brandt's work, especially when conjoined with sociocultural theory (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2000; Heath, 1982; Street, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978), can substantiate conversations about the circumstances and functions of the people and institutions that promote or hinder literacy. Vygotsky (1978) theorized that social interaction is fundamental to cognitive development. He observed:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57).

Participation in sociocultural and mediated activities positions learners to acquire the mental tools of their culture and to construct meaning through their interaction with others.

The learning processes and influences acknowledged in sociocultural theory reveal the psychological, cultural, and social significance behind the cognitive and developmental relationship to literacy learning practices that can help shape and define thought. I predict that the reading autobiographies offers prolific accounts of socially and culturally situated literacy events and practices. Thus, I used Brandt's terminology and basic definition of sponsorship along with a sociocultural theoretical framework to interpret the reading autobiographies in my study.

Preview of Chapters to Come

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters, a bibliography, and appendices. Chapter I introduced the rationale and motivation behind this dissertation and my interest in the study of the reading histories of strong readers. In Chapter II, the Literature Review, I share examples of

research that have incorporated literacy narratives as an instrument for study and pedagogical purposes. I also explore the major theorists whose works served as the foundation for my research and the theoretical lens I employed. The literature of sociocultural theory and research provided the groundwork for the crucial terms and concepts that guided my research, explained existing phenomena in the data, and analyzed the findings. Sociocultural theory studies the social, cultural, psychological, and cognitive influences on an individual's development. A sociocultural interpretation of the events in the reading autobiographies might help to account for the situatedness of the participants' literacy learning and the other influential factors in their reading development. In addition, in Chapter II, I contextualize important terms and definitions as well as discuss some pedagogical theories and practices used in the teaching of reading at the adolescent, young adult, and college levels.

In Chapter III, Methodology/Research Design, I explain my research paradigm of narrative inquiry and discuss my transition from English Educator to Research Practitioner. I also detail the approach to my three studies—describing the participants, instrument, materials, procedure, and process of narrative inquiry. Additionally, I present my methods for data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

My dissertation is built on three separate studies, which were analyzed and explained across four separate chapters. In Chapter IV, I present five case studies of strong adult readers from Study 1 as a starting point for determining the emergent patterns that were more universal across all 18 of the participants in Chapter V. Then, I explore and analyze three main themes that became prominent and categorized after coding the reading histories of all of the participants in the first study. Chapter VI offers findings and analysis of Study 2, a comparative study of a remedial population of readers in a first-semester accelerated learning freshman composition

course at a 2-year community college, while Chapter VII presents findings and analysis of Study 3, a study of honors freshman composition students at a 2-year community college.

In the final chapter, Chapter VIII, I put all three sets of data (adult Ph.D. students, remedial freshmen, honors freshmen) into conversation with each other so as to offer some more generalizable conclusions about the most common factors that contribute to individuals becoming strong readers. Here I also explore implications for parents and teachers, especially at the college level, and propose ideas for further study.

Chapter II

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TENETS OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT:

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sociocultural theories have refocused education researchers away from often well-intentioned, yet deficit-orientated, research agendas to research programs that seek to understand the social and cultural practices of people from many different backgrounds and experiences. (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 3)

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is twofold: first, I outline the basic tenets of sociocultural theory and its approaches to learning and cognitive development in an effort to create a theoretical framework for this study on the reading histories of what I call “strong” and “successful” readers; here, too, I offer some history of literacy narrative practices in research. Second, I review recent pedagogical theory on helping secondary and young adult readers become stronger readers so as to establish a theoretical framework for discussing implications of the findings in my study.

Reading autobiographies contain the layered memories of the writer’s past experiences with reading. The work of interpreting and making sense of the social and cultural influences on people’s reading attitudes and practices requires the narrative researcher to mediate his or her participants’ lived human experience and their later storied memories as they appear in their narratives. The study, then, of human literacy learning and practice, specifically utilizing narrative as research methodology, can be effectively analyzed through a sociocultural lens. A sociocultural framework can help to explain the social, cultural, communal, familial, and educational influences on the participants’ literacy acquisition and their relationship to educational practices. Here I discuss foundational works on sociocultural theory and research

that can help to explain some of the emergent themes in my data, starting with Vygotsky (1978) and then moving into the early 1990s and up to the early 2000s.

I then address how these theories have facilitated the evolution of English educators' approaches to teaching reading and literature within the last several decades. In addition, I explain the concept of literacy sponsorship (Brandt, 1998), a term significant to my work, and then relate its precepts to the significance of how, where, when, and why literacy, specifically the reading of literature, has been sponsored both in and out of school. Through continued research on how literacy is promoted and hindered through literacy events, practices, situated literacies, communities of practice, and apprenticeships, I hope to expand the dialogue surrounding the prospects for productive 21st century literacy sponsorship that position novice readers to become successful, aesthetically engaged readers who possess long-term disciplined literacy habits.

Brief Overview of Sociocultural Theory in Literacy Research

Sociocultural Theory (SCT) builds upon the formative works of Lev Vygotsky, most notably *Thought and Language* (1962) and *Mind in Society* (1978). Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist who perceived the processes of learning and development as mediated by social interaction and who emphasized the role of language, cultural artifacts, and adult assistance as essential tools for children in achieving higher-level mental functioning. Much of the most influential and groundbreaking contemporary research on literacy and literacy development is built on Vygotskian theory, most notably perhaps in the field of writing studies (Bizzell, 1992; Gee, 2004; Nystrand, 1989, 2006; Shaughnessy, 1977). In the field of reading, Vygotskian theory has also been powerfully influential, though it seems to have focused largely on understanding students with reading problems and deficits, including “struggling,” “at-risk,” “ESL,” and “aliterate” readers and the cultural, economic, and educational factors that may have

disenfranchised particular populations of students (Alvermann, 2001; Beers, 1998; Gee, 2001; Moll et al., 1992).

My appraisal of the literature reveals a silence in sociocultural studies that accounts for strong readers; what we do have is studies of the behaviors and practices of strong readers (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012). Moreover, even in the scholarship where strong readers appear, they are frequently used as a model for helping struggling readers *behave* like strong readers (Allington, 2009; Beers, 1998; Krashen, 2004). But how do we account for the environments and circumstances in which those strong readers came to those behaviors and practices?

Rather than restricting my lens to the performances of strong readers, my research was a sociocultural theory-based investigation of those factors that contribute to building strong readers. In the existing literature, the behaviors of good readers are often treated as the gold standard to which teachers should aspire to help their developmental readers achieve. Here, assumptions are made about good readers, ones that presume that those skills exist thanks to effective teaching. Then, research-practitioners build on those assumptions by devising classroom strategies to help struggling readers read like strong readers. Visualization and apprenticeship approaches are just two examples of classroom practices where students are encouraged to build academic competencies by using their own “powerful resources” that pave the way for teachers and students to “begin to build a reading inquiry partnership or apprenticeship” (Schoenbach et al., 2012, p. 13). In this learning environment, visualization is treated as a reading comprehension technique that can transform passive readers into active ones (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997), simply by having students describe the images they see in their mind.

Yet, visualization is a reading move that results from an arsenal of other strategies and linguistic abilities that must be in place before visualization, and especially a description of that visualization, can occur and be articulated. Classroom reading apprenticeships, too, rely on the teacher's and strong reading classmates' visible reading processes. In both cases, poor readers are being put on the spot to draw on prior knowledge and processes that already exist for their teachers and their strong reader peers, but that might not yet exist for them. Strong reading does not just happen when poor readers try to read like their teachers or their more adept classmates. My work sought to illustrate the sort of apprenticeship that can begin in the home with parents and that can account for how many strong readers came to be the readers they are.

Much of the scholarship on the teaching and learning of reading and literature has concentrated on elementary and adolescent populations (Appleman, 2009, 2010; Langer, 2000; Wilhelm, 2008). Expanding the scholarship on reading development and instruction beyond adolescence into college and post-graduation can provide a lens into the long-term effects of sponsorship and of how early sponsorship functions in the lives of more advanced learners. In so doing, I hope to help span the qualitative studies research gap with regards to high school and college readiness that I find in the literature and in practice. It is my intention to augment the conversations about the implications of sponsorship beyond the developmental stages of infancy through young adulthood by including the transition of literacy sponsorship into and during higher education.

Establishing a Niche for the Study of “Strong” Readers

While it is tempting to critique formal literacy practices in education and to censure the system for inhibiting (or even ruining) reading through various assessment instruments and standardized expectations of students, it seems a more constructive venture to investigate what

HAS worked to encourage successful, engaged, and lifelong readers. There is a need for more research on the backgrounds of strong, successful readers and how they developed both in and out of the English classroom, especially into and after higher education levels.

Since the aim of my study was to discover how strong readers become strong readers, let me begin by addressing the question of what it means to be a strong reader. Vladimir Nabokov seemed to have had a lifelong interest in this question and characterized what he identified as an ideal reader as one who is an active, creative, rereader (*Lectures on Literature*, 1980). He also played with possible criteria for use in determining a “good” reader. During his lecture tour in the fall of 1942, he designed an exercise on definitions of a good reader for some college students, which appears in his *Lectures on Literature*. The exercise entailed the following:

Select four answers to the question what should a reader be to be a good reader:

- *The reader should belong to a book club.*
- *The reader should identify himself or herself with the hero or heroine.*
- *The reader should concentrate on the social-economic angle.*
- *The reader should prefer a story with action and dialogue to one with none.*
- *The reader should have seen the book in a movie.*
- *The reader should be a budding author.*
- *The reader should have imagination.*
- *The reader should have memory.*
- *The reader should have a dictionary.*
- *The reader should have some artistic sense.*

Interestingly, the students to whom Nabokov gave this quiz felt that “emotional identification, preference for action and dialogue, and concentrating on the social economic or historical angle” were the valuable characteristics of a good reader. However, the preferred answer, claimed Nabokov, was a combination of imagination, memory, possession of a dictionary, and some artistic sense. These, he believed, were the characteristics or traits we should develop in the process of reading a book, and he equated this process with appreciation

for art more generally. We must take the time to see and re-see, not just with our eyes but with our minds.

The sort of imagination that Nabokov (1980) valued in a reader was not the “lowly kind which turns for support to the simple emotions and is of a definitely personal nature.” He did not want the reader to treasure a book simply because he identified with one of the characters; he preferred a more authentic sort of connection where there is a harmonious balance between the reader’s and the author’s minds (p. 4). According to Nabokov, the good reader is the passionate reader, while the unimaginative reader lacks passion and thus will also lack enjoyment. He maintained that “A good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader is a rereader.” Nabokov’s depiction of good readers described the traits of strong readers, but did not address the ways in which they came to be strong readers.

My own definition of a strong reader is a fusion of Nabokov’s (1980) traits of good readers, Blau’s (2003) descriptions of what disciplined readers do when reading, and Rosenblatt’s (1983) mental positioning of the reader as engaging in a transaction with the text. I envision a reading paradigm where readers are central to the process of reading. In this way, strong readers are engaged, curious, active, imaginative, determined, fearless, open to multiple interpretations, and mindfully metacognitive. But for purposes of my study, I have also added “lifelong” to my framing. By this, I do not mean readers who consistently read at every stage of life, but readers who, despite initial or subsequent longer-term obstacles to reading, ultimately return to reading, engaged aesthetically and with reinforced highly literate habits of mind.

The kind of strong reader I am imagining is the sort for whom reading becomes an event, an activity in which the reader participates by doing something, engaging the senses, and individualistically interacting with a particular text at a particular time (Rosenblatt, 1983). I also

want to define a strong reader in pragmatic terms, which is to say a person who can enjoy reading and can read “difficult” texts and reads often. This type of reader can learn from reading and regards reading as having had a powerful role in shaping his or her intellectual and ethical life, and preparing him or her for, as Kofi Annan said in his message for Literacy Day in 2003, “democratic participation and active citizenship.”

My study, however, is not about what strong readers do or what capacities of mind, will, or character they possess, but about what kind of literacy events, parental support, familial conditions, and sociocultural contexts appear to have fostered or cultivated in them whatever traits may account for their demonstrated success as readers in or out of school.

Part 1—Sociocultural Theory: Zopeds, Literacy Events, Literacy Practices, and Situated Literacies

My own previous conception of reading was as an isolated practice, one conducted in private or quiet spaces. However, my research, scholarship, and classwork brought me new insight into the social and interactive nature of literacy acquisition and practices. Sociocultural theory has enabled me, along with most contemporary literacy educators, to appreciate the correlation between an individual’s development, behaviors, and attitudes, and his or her social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. As this literature review will substantiate, “In learning from Vygotsky, we have learned new ways to extend him” (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000, p. 2).

Reading Autobiographies as Artifacts for Sociocultural Study

Sociocultural theory has expanded our understanding of learning and development from the solitary individual to the individual as part of and influenced by a larger societal culture. This shift centralized social (interpsychological) and cognitive aspects of learning and development, creating a need for learning theories and practices that could access and assess both the internal

and external abilities of students. In the English education classroom, teachers can more overtly gauge explicit forms of knowledge; more difficult to ascertain, though, are students' tacit and embedded knowledge, especially as they evolve in non-school settings.

Thus, reading autobiography research is an addition to this underrepresented body of research because it provides written insight into the individual memories of literacy activities and the people with whom those events were shared. Reading autobiographies are powerful tools for accessing embedded memories, mindsets, experiences, interactions, biases, achievements, practices, and values in participants' reading lives. In short, reading autobiographies serve as rich artifacts for literacy research and can be used in the English classroom as a vehicle for the student's metacognitive awareness of his or her own reading attitudes and habits.

Literacy narratives in research. Reading autobiographies, a form of literacy narrative, are narratives that provide occasion for a researcher's and author's reflexive examination of the events and influences that have produced certain literacy proficiencies, mindsets, and habits. Literacy narratives have been used in educational research (Brandt, 1998, 2001; Carstens, 2014; Chandler et al., 2013; Clark & Medina, 2000; Corkery, 2005; Cushman & Emmons, 2001; Nielsen, 1989; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004) and across a variety of professions, such as health care (Thompson & Kreuter, 2014), technology (Chandler & Scenters-Zapico, 2012; Eyman, 2015), and criminal justice (Berry, 2018). The research and practice incorporating literacy narratives in the writing classroom span multiple educational levels, from first grade (Miller & Mehler, 1994) through graduate school (Boggs & Golden, 2009). Literacy narratives are, in simple terms, the memories of an individual's experiences with literacy development. In addition to the value it provides the researcher, the personal, storytelling nature of this genre of writing offers a space

for writers of all levels to come to know their own relationship with literacy and to “theorize their lives” (Tinberg, 1997, p. 287).

Eldred and Mortensen (1992) contributed to the field of literacy studies by suggesting a move from formal scholarship to the study of “literary texts” such as literacy narratives which can be studied for construction of a “character’s ongoing, social process of language acquisition” (p. 512). Using Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* as an example of a literacy narrative that feeds into the literacy myth (Graff, 1991), Eldred and Mortensen showed the politics of language acquisition. In literacy narratives, we might find distinct depictions of texts, teachers, schools, and attitudes toward them that conflict with and support “culturally scripted” notions of literacy (p. 513).

The notion that stronger literacy leads to social mobility is what motivates *Pygmalion*’s Henry to take on Eliza as his student and it is a literacy myth that has taken on its own narrative—one that I admittedly fall into at times too. It is difficult to resist when one feels so passionately and has first-hand evidence through research and nearly a quarter of a century of classroom practice that often supports this correlation. Still, Eldred and Mortensen urged us to ask: “What if education [and more education] does not necessarily mean better lives”? (p. 515). Their definition of literacy education, however, seemed to refer to the kind of literacy that emphasized learning a new language and skills building. This is not the level of reading and literacy that I am looking at in my research of strong readers, but their example of Bernard Shaw’s and other coming-of-age fiction dealing in a character’s literacy acquisition remind us that these “narratives of socialization” serve as archives for how individuals negotiate the social and discursive aspects of literacy.

Literacy narratives are acts of self-translation that foreground the author's language acquisition and use across a variety of social and cultural interactions. The narrative agency that comes from the empowering act of recording, interpreting, and sometimes reclaiming one's literacy identity makes the literacy narrative a popular pedagogical tool for basic writing classes. Soliday (1994) elucidated how "In focusing upon those moments when the self is on the threshold of possible intellectual, social, and emotional development, literacy narratives become sites of self-translation where writers can articulate the meanings and the consequences of their passages between language worlds" (p. 511). Soliday was interested in the way literacy narratives can be used to interpret the cultural potency of language use in everyday lives, especially the competing multicultural differences experienced by nontraditional students. She advocated assigning literacy narratives in the writing classroom as a means of self-representation and self-definition (p. 512) and supported her recommendation with evidence drawn from an "Enrichment Curriculum" developed as a pilot project at her own college.

The "Enrichment Curriculum" initiative was aimed at addressing cultural and linguistic diversity within a two-semester writing course where remedial and general education freshman students were heterogeneously placed together. Literacy narratives were used in the classroom as opportunities for reflection and exploration of how students used language in a variety of cultural settings. By engaging in an examination of their own, their family members', and their peers' language use and history, students became attuned to how they and others navigated the passages between multiple language worlds; they saw the connection between identity and language use. They were also asked to read professionally written narratives such as Richard Rodriguez's and Amy Tan's autobiographies so as to have a framework for sites of linguistic and cultural translation.

One student, Alisha, transitioned from basic summarization skills to a more critical interpretation of the multiple identities and literacies with which many nontraditional students struggle. Alisha was just one example of the many students in this project who discovered that reading and writing are “culturally situated, acquired practices” and whose thinking, reading and writing abilities improved through the process of composing their literacy narratives (p. 520). The teachers who assigned and assessed these narratives benefitted, too, from reading about their students’ everyday literacy practices. Soliday noted how these students’ stories heightened their teachers’ awareness of the multicultural differences that exist in their students; this awareness can lead to curricular changes that are more inclusive of diverse voices.

Soliday contributed to our understanding of how literacy narratives can help educators honor diversity and empower students’ voices by offering an avenue for self-representation of the multiple cultures that can conflict with or enhance school cultures. They are a byway for bringing the outsiders of the academy into the conversations and contemporary debates surrounding curricular and pedagogical approaches to literacy education. But we need to be careful not to put literacy narratives on a pedestal by assuming that they are infallible instruments of study and that all students will invite this opportunity to write about their personal experiences with glee. In his article “Heroes, rebels, and victims: Student identities in literacy narratives,” Bronwyn Williams (2004) cautioned that while this genre of writing is a valuable pedagogical tool, and he confessed to being a “fervent advocate of literacy narratives” who “assigns them in almost all the courses” he teaches at every level, we must be aware of the archetypal identities that students are prone to portray within these stories. Thus, when reading their narratives, we should keep in mind these tendencies for students to portray themselves as the hero, rebel, victim, or other self-stereotyped literacy identity.

Williams began by highlighting some of his own students' memories with reading and writing that have left an imprint on his own thinking and teaching. He then provided an overview of studies in which literacy narratives have been assigned for various cultural, linguistic, political, and attitudinal purposes (Clark & Medina, 2000; Fleischer, 1997; Kamler, 1999; King, 1997; Soliday, 1994). Addressing issues of identity and their shifting nature, Williams defined the kinds of identities student construct when authoring a piece *for* their teachers of reading and writing, *about* their own reading and writing, and he cited how these student authors adopted narrative structures. One of these identities was that of the hero (Carpenter & Falbo, 2006), an individual who possesses the perseverance, self-reliance, and self-confidence to triumph in literacy despite the adversities faced. Some narratives, as Paterson (2003) showed in her research, portrayed "child prodigies," those individuals who excelled at writing and reading from an early age. Other students adopted the literacy "winner" persona where they successfully consumed literacy and resultantly attained prizes and awards for their literacy prowess. In addition, there were those who bought into the literacy myth of hard work = improvement and success, identifying their own diligence as the means to bettering themselves.

In addition to these empowering personas, there were also negative depictions that appeared in student literacy narratives (Paterson, 2003). There was the victim of school stigmatization and the rebel against literacy values or bureaucratic conventions; teachers, too, were created as prototypical archetypes (i.e., the buffoon, nurturer, hero). Williams, however, offered a literacy narrative pedagogy to counteract these stereotypical portrayals: teach students to consider the power they have over the construction and portrayal of themselves and the individuals who appear in their literacy memories. He claimed, "If we begin to make students aware of the kinds of identities they adopt when writing these narratives and of how they might

be able to change them in print as well as in their lives, we offer several important opportunities for student writers” (p. 344). Williams proposed practices with literacy narrative assignments that afford students more agency over their own literacy lives; he encouraged students to try on new positionality to avoid falling into the victim or rebel pitfall and instead to be more proactive about their literacy actions, attitudes, and emotions.

Cynthia Selfe’s joint literacy project with faculty from The Ohio State University and Georgia State University’s, the Digital Archives of Literacy Narratives (DALN), brought this personal genre of writing out of the classroom and into a public sphere. The home page for this internet site devoted to sharing individual stories about literacy narratives invited anyone to contribute to conversations about reading, writing, and communicating: “The DALN is an open public resource made up of stories from people just like you about their experiences learning to read, write, and generally communicate with the world around them. If you have a compelling story to share (it can be text, video, audio, or a combination of formats), we’d love to hear it.” In this forum, literacy narratives cover a more expansive scope of a variety of written, digital, symbolic, semantic, and compositional literacies (<http://daln.osu.edu/>). The existence and proliferation of narratives produced at this site serve as evidence for the appeal and value of literacy narratives as a means of expression.

Though *literacy narratives* have been a popular trend in the classroom, in digital realms, and in research, the *reading autobiography* is exclusive to experiences with the act of reading. I have opted, then, to refer to the documents I have collected for study as “reading histories” and “reading autobiographies.” Whether written in a classroom or posted in an online forum, literacy narratives show the social and cultural situatedness of literacy learning; therefore, sociocultural

theory goes hand in hand with efforts to explain the findings within those archives of literacy acquisition that served as my data.

Sociocultural learning theories. In this section, I introduce essential sociocultural literacy terminology, starting with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development; trace the major theories in family and community literacy research as presented in Heath (1983), Street (1984), and Barton and Hamilton (1998); and examine Moll et al.'s (1992) study on funds of knowledge and Gee's (2000) parsing of the concept of identity. These theoretical constructs all contribute to our capacity to understand and think about the nature and acquisition of literacy, the uses of literacy in their daily life, and the highly social nature of literacy practices (Street, 1984).

Mediated learning, Zopeds, and learning potential. Lev Vygotsky (1978), the "father" of sociocultural theory, posited:

To study something historically means to study it in the process of change; that is the dialectical method's basic demand. To encompass in research the process of a given thing's development in all its phases and changes—from birth to death—fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for it is only in movement that a body shows what it is. Thus the historical study of behavior is not an auxiliary aspect of theoretical study, but rather forms its very base. (pp. 64-65)

Vygotsky offered new ways of thinking about the processes and relationships of thought and language and their development in young children. His work was concerned with the social, cultural, psychological, and historical influences on the individual's growth and development, which in his framework are non-linear and constantly emerging and transforming. Reading autobiographies are windows into the history of how one has developed, and is continuing to develop, as a reader. In a sense, these documents are literacy events (Heath, 1982) that provide occasion for "the historical study of behavior" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 65) of an individual's reading history, including the development, evolution, and core attitudes and treatment of one's reading life. The narrative nature of this genre of writing makes it inherently fluid and prone to

dialectical analysis, where the internal (individual) and person-to-person (social) dialogues surrounding the teaching and learning of reading are embodied in the writer's memories.

Vygotsky introduced his theory of the relationship between child learning and development by explaining "That children's learning begins long before they attend school is the starting point of this discussion" (p. 37). One of the effects of Vygotsky's studies on early childhood learning and development was the discovery that non-systematic preschool learning serves as prior experience and knowledge for the systematic methods of formal school learning.

In the reading autobiographies that served as the data for my research in this dissertation, non-systematic early literacy sponsorship, prior to school attendance, might be identified as a "starting point" for learning how to read. Vygotsky explored the cognitive distinctions between "learning" and "development," and explained that learning can occur before development but is not the same as development. Thus, though one might "learn" how to read before entering school, "development" of reading abilities might require a different form and pacing of interaction and adult guidance. The reading histories of strong readers could offer some insight into the circumstances and processes that lead one to become a more "developed reader" who is capable (and perhaps, willing) of forging through more complex texts.

The Zone of Proximal Development (Zoped or ZPD), a learning development theory, is the most profound aspect of Vygotsky's contributions to our understanding of how a child's social situation of development is contingent upon adult mentors or capable peers, and upon the creation of new modes of learning. The Zone of Proximal Development is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). By identifying the "actual

developmental level” and the “zone of proximal development” in children’s learning and development, Vygotsky generated an entirely new way of understanding and approaching the relationship between a child’s actual level of competence and the developmental possibilities that are in the course of maturing. Vygotsky’s Zoped can also be described, then, as the space between novice and autonomous performance, where learning and action are possible with assistance from a more experienced guide. ZPD offers a theoretical tool for grasping these nuances of individual development in different contexts and focus on the kinds of social interactions that contribute to the potential growth and ultimate competence of the child.

Vygotsky asserted that prior to his research, the relationship between learning and development had not been clearly defined. Thus, ZPD accounts for what the student is capable of accomplishing *independently* (the actual development) and what can be accomplished with the *facilitation or guidance of an adult or peer* (the potential development). The implications of these discoveries about the social aspect of learning are essential to English educators and to my research on reading. It is incumbent upon teachers to recognize that though a student might not show visible signs of independent aptitude, there are abilities that, when performed with adult assistance, can be fostered and developed to a point of internalization and autonomous competency. More simply put, “What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 81). Vygotsky’s description of Zopedes intimated that schools can promote learning contexts where with effective mediation, students play an active role in their own development.

The literacy event, family, and community literacy. In *Ways with Words*, Shirley Brice Heath (1983), an anthropologist and linguist, provided a narrative of her longitudinal ethnographic research conducted in Roadville and Trackton, in the Piedmont region of the

Carolinas during the mid-late 20th century. These two communities, though located in close proximity to one another, and having similar economic, class, and workforce demographics, were racially disparate from each other. Roadville was a White, working-class mill town, and Trackton, an African American, working-class mill town with a history of farmers in the previous generation.

Heath's seminal work studied the influence of home and community environments on children's language development, the complexities of literacy in schools and workplaces, and the relationship between oral and written literacies. She maintained that it is imperative to examine literacy events that occur in *informal* learning environments in order to understand the expectations, behaviors, and actions that transpire in those spaces, as opposed to in the formal milieu of schools. Heath described a literacy event as "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interaction and their interpretive processes," indicating that in order for the instance to constitute an "event," in literacy, "a piece of writing" must be involved (Heath, 1982/1988, p. 350). This can mean that a recurring act of reading, writing, or interpreting can constitute an event.

In addition to the context required for a literacy event, according to Heath, there are criteria for interactive social circumstances surrounding the event. Heath (1982/1988) elucidated, "A literacy event can then be viewed as any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role" (p. 350). Thus, key aspects of a literacy event are that it involves "interaction," "interpretive processes," "production," and/or "comprehension" of a piece of writing. Heath did not stipulate, however, where and how these events can occur, leaving open a plethora of possibilities for literacy occasions, or any event

concerning a piece of writing where the parties involved have some form of interaction with literacy on a fairly regular basis.

The sociocultural context of these literacy events indicates that various manners and forms of literacy are culturally available in homes and home communities, but they are modes that educators might be failing to recognize or might be rejecting altogether in formal literacy instruction. In her interviews with Roadville families regarding the role of schooling, parents of teenagers warned parents of preschoolers to “Enjoy it while you can, teach ‘em all you can now. When they get on up in school, you can’t teach ‘em anything” (Heath, 1983, p. 44). The impetus for this claim was the parents’ sense of loss of control over their children’s learning and literacy at the hands of the institution.

As a linguistic anthropologist who conducted an ethnographic study of the use of oral literacy in Trackton in her article “Protean Shapes in Literacy Events: Ever-shifting Oral and Literate Traditions” (1988), Heath drew on anthropologist Jack Goody’s explorations of the societal functions and history of oral and written literacy. Heath’s study focused on oral literature, and her findings in Trackton, combined with the Roadville findings, were important to my research questions. While the Roadville community valued books and print reading, the oral traditions of “reading aloud” in Trackton demonstrated that literacy should not be viewed on a continuum of orality to literacy, but instead as a fluid practice closely related to its essentiality in any particular community and shifting over time. Heath further developed Vygotsky’s (1938) conceptions that literacy events are propelled by social activities, adult assistance, and communal engagement. When applied to the teaching of reading and of literature, these foundations are beneficial to curricular and pedagogical design and assessment.

Family literacy: Predictors of long-term habits of mind? Even more relevant to my own research study was Heath's (2010) discussion of "family literacy" in "Family Literacy or Community Learning? Some Critical Questions on Perspective," a follow-up article to her studies in *Ways with Words*. Heath cited historian Christopher Lasch:

As the chief agency of socialization, the family reproduces cultural patterns in the individual. It not only imparts ethical norms, providing the child with his [sic] first instruction in the prevailing social rules, it profoundly shapes his character, in ways of which he is not even aware. The family instills modes of thought and action that become habitual (p. 3). (p. 16)

Lasch attributed early family literacy events, practices, and sponsorship to a child's first exposure to social, cultural, ethical, and cognitive conventions. Moreover, Lasch identified these early influences as architects and predictors of long-term "habitual" thoughts and actions.

Heath (2010) reaffirmed the integral role of family in early literacy development, explaining how traditionally, and still in the 1970s when she conducted her research, families were expected in their communities to be the main literacy resources where values were instilled through a collective domestic activity revolving around books and reading:

Implicit in promotions of literacy in the home was the idea that reading together should be a core family activity, because books instilled values. Books and reading brought the literate ways of thinking that were highly prized in school into habitual practice and gave family members common ground for talking, joking, and cross-referencing observations of everyday life. (p. 16)

In this paradigm, the responsibility of literacy preparation is placed on the family, with the expectation that children would arrive at school already possessing some standard literacy habits and practices. In Heath's description of the communal attitudes toward family and home reading practices, the inherent culture of social interaction, dialogue, and community of practice are directly correlated with formative habits of mind.

Literacy practice: Social and cultural underpinnings. In “Literacy Practices,” the first chapter in their book *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, Barton and Hamilton (2000) outlined the framework for a social theory of literacy. They investigated the culture, construction, and cognition of literacy as a social practice, expanding upon Shirley Brice Heath’s notion of literacy events by repositioning them among literacy practices and incorporating the study of texts as a crucial component of studying literacy. Read in conjunction with Brian Street’s (2003) “What’s ‘New’ in New Literacy Studies?” one can acquire a strong sense of the social, cultural, and historical contexts of literacy and the significance of the terms “literacy practices, literacy events, and discourse communities.” According to Barton and Hamilton (2000), “Literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (p. 7). The authors examined domains of life where literacy is embedded in and influenced by society and culture. They also identified diverse literacies: film, computer, culture, language, home, school, and workplace.

In addition to Heath and Street, who offered a theory of literacy that examined ways in which literacy was used in students’ everyday lives, Barton and Hamilton (2000) illustrated the link between reading and writing activities and the social structures in which they are rooted. They cited James Gee’s sociocultural approach with respect to literacy and identity: “The home is often identified as a primary domain in people’s literacy lives, for example by James Gee, and central to people’s developing sense of social identity” (p. 11). Barton and Hamilton’s ethnographic studies linked the particular environmental contexts where literacy can be located (i.e., in the home, as per Gee) to the more expansive social applications of literacy.

This particular piece in Barton and Hamilton’s (2000) series on literacies presented fundamental components for my own research on the link between how literacy is sponsored and

the social practices and implications of people's literacy lives. Barton and Hamilton's terms, theories, and intent to "examine how literacy activities are supported, sustained, learned and impeded in people's lives and relationships, and the social meanings they have" (p. 12) lay new groundwork for further investigation of literacy theory and practices. In addition to understanding the contextuality and situatedness of how literacy practices are supported, it is essential to investigate what people DO with these literacies. This breakthrough was important to my study because through coding and analyzing the reading autobiography data in my research, I aimed to identify which literacy events and sponsors of literacy have been most influential in the participants' reading lives and how particular literacy practices are socially, culturally, and familially situated and applied.

Communities of practice. In *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation (Learning in Doing: Social, Cognitive and Computational Perspectives)*, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) provided a theoretical account of learning in what they referred to as a "community of practice." The authors explained learning processes as occurring within social practices and communities of people who shared similar practices. Members of such a community did not perceive learning as an independent, isolated act, but instead as a situated one. Nevertheless, community members' prior experiences can influence the pace of their transition from "legitimate peripheral participation" into "full participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In a community of practice where the shared enterprise is literacy, it is advantageous to know the prior experiences and attitudes of members' reading lives.

As Lave and Wenger (1991) asserted, humans think, understand, and learn best when utilizing their prior experiences and when they have an opportunity to first engage on a peripheral level before transitioning to more central participation in the community of practice.

In more direct terms, the act of writing down one's memories of reading provides occasion for self-reflection and, if spurred, opportunity for connecting one's thoughts and memories of reading to the reading acts they are asked to perform in school and in society. Through a sociocultural framework and a narrative inquiry methodology of narrativizing and examining students' and teachers' reading histories, we (and they) can make connections between personal literacy experiences and the social, cultural, familial, institutional, and educational forces that influence literacy development.

Situated literacies: Creating meaning through contexts. In "Reading as Situated Language: A Sociocognitive Perspective," James Gee (2001) argued that human languages serve multiple functions but can be most effectively investigated as always occurring in some context (p. 715). An important contribution to the sociocultural nature of how we understand reading and writing was Gee's claim that literacy practices are not just mental achievements; *reading and writing are socially and culturally situated*. Gee (2009) explained how the New Literacies Studies advanced the sociocultural underpinning that rejected traditional psychological treatments of literacy as a mental process that occurred internally. Instead,

The NLS saw literacy as something people did not inside their heads but inside society. It argued that literacy was not primarily a mental phenomenon, but, rather, a sociocultural one. Literacy was...about ways of participating in social and cultural groups.... Thus, literacy needed to be understood and studied in its full range of contexts—not just cognitive—but social, cultural, historical, and institutional, as well. (p. 2)

Reading autobiographies provide the ability to study the external contexts that influence literacy practices through the directly observable narrative accounts of those practices both in and out of school.

Through analysis of the individual reading histories of successful readers, it is possible to explore the social, cultural, psychological, and linguistic ways that we can design a pedagogy for

“reading the word and reading the world” (Freire, 1995) that channels the purposeful nature of literacy acquisition and application as it occurs in more natural contexts. Gee echoed Heath’s assessment of the many conflicting ways with words that students and workers encounter in attempting to make meaning in their personal, academic, and professional lives: “On this account, the meanings of words, phrases, and sentences are always situated, that is, customized to our actual contexts. Here context means not just the words, deed, and things that surround our words or deeds, but also our purposes, values, and intended courses of action and interaction” (Gee, 2001, p. 716). In later chapters where I present my data analysis of each study, I catalog my own and my research participants’ specific descriptions of not only WHO read to us, but also WHERE and in what context we were read to, paying attention to the “purposes, values and intended courses of action and interaction” that were situated in these literacy events.

Gee (2001) concluded his article by maintaining that research has clarified what constitutes the essential early language abilities for success in school:

What appears to cause enhanced school-based verbal abilities are family, community, and school language environments in which children interact intensively with adults and more advanced peers and experience cognitively challenging talk and texts on sustained topics and in different genres of oral and written language. (p. 724)

In my studies of three different populations of readers, I also looked for signs of this correlation between non-school (family and community) and school language environments and practices.

Funds of knowledge: A window into the home literacies of students. In an effort to connect home and school literacies, Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonzalez (1992) conducted a qualitative ethnographic analysis of an agricultural Latino community in Tucson, Arizona to document the extensive networks of knowledge (funds of knowledge) that are the common possession of the families of the local Latino community, but that are neither recognized or appreciated by the culture of the school, yet could be utilized as

resources for classroom teacher who wish to create socially meaningful literacy activities for the children of the Latino families. Moll et al. (1992) used the term “funds of knowledge” to refer to these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133).

The aim of the study was to demonstrate how a sociocultural approach can assist teachers in creating mutual trust (*confianza*) with students and their families, and thereby establish a more collaborative relationship between teachers and parents and between the school and the community. The project also sought to enable teachers to draw on the funds of knowledge available to the children from their home life for use in the classroom in literacy lessons and activities, thereby rendering those children immediately more competent as readers and writers who were engaged with topics about which they had a degree of familiarity or even expertise.

The concept of funds of knowledge and its implications for the development of literacy in children are integral to my work. I suspect that much of the data uncovered through the reading autobiographies I have collected are related to the participants’ “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133) through household literacy practices. The appeal of the reading autobiographies is that they can disclose the authors’ school and non-school literacy practices through an accessible method of research without requiring the researcher to physically enter the home. Through these narrative accounts, a researcher (and the writers themselves) can acquire a strong sense of how literacy has been sponsored in the writer’s life.

Literacy sponsorship: Relationships among agency, apprenticeship, and acquisition.

When I was a boy everyone in my family was a good storyteller, my mother and father, my brother, my aunts and uncles and grandparents; all of them were people to whom interesting things seemed to happen. The events they spoke of were of a daily, ordinary sort, but when narrated or acted out they took on great importance and excitement as I listened. (Doctorow, *Ultimate Discourse*, *Esquire Magazine*, 1986)

In his book *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, James Gee (1996, 2007, 2009) explained how New Literacy Studies, or NLS, a newly emerging interdisciplinary field in literacy (Street, 1984) rejected traditional psychological approaches to literacy in favor of a new paradigm where reading and writing were viewed as more socially situated phenomenon. Rather than previous conceptions of literacy as an internal mental achievement, NLS viewed literacy from a situated-sociocultural theoretical perspective, focusing less on literacy and language acquisition that happened inside the brain, and more on literacy as a social practice that occurred within a range of social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts.

Deborah Brandt's (1998) work on literacy sponsorship, which added a focus on writing to New Literacy Studies, examined how people learn, develop, and practice literacy through the influence of discernible or indiscernible sponsors. She began her article "Sponsors of Literacy" by historically framing the role of apprentices of reading and writing through print apprenticeship. Using over 100 interviews with diverse multigenerational adults, Brandt traced the social, cultural, and economic influences responsible for creating inequitable access to literacy. She defined literacy sponsors as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, or model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 2). Next, she addressed the question "who and what can be a Sponsor?" She noted how cultural attitudes toward writing and reading could be illuminated through tracking which individuals or agencies became literacy sponsors. Particular sponsors in

people's literacy lives have ranged among older relatives, teachers, priests, supervisors, military officers, editors, and influential authors.

These sponsors affect what, why, and how people write, read, and acquire literacy, but they are not always aware of their own influence on their subjects. The sponsor/sponsored relationship has complexities and benefits. For instance, the sponsored party might feel obligated to the sponsor and the sponsor's literacy preferences, which might be politically or economically motivated. On the other hand, economic and political demands have made it necessary for individuals, particularly the disenfranchised, to have adequate sponsorship. Unfortunately, as Brandt revealed, there is an inequity of sponsorship across a caste system of race, economics, and patriarchal political privileges.

Through her case studies, Brandt also illustrated transformational potential for sponsorship, both for the sponsor and the sponsored. I anticipated that my research can promote reflection on ways in which educators can create more accessible, equitable spaces in and out of the classroom where participatory learning spaces are fostered, where definitions of literacy are transformed to become more inclusive of diversity, and where a closer investigation of the literacy influences in an individual's life can assist us in expanding the role of libraries, digital literacies, media, communities, and schools.

By examining the dynamic between the brokers of literacy and the recipients, educators and curriculum planners can recognize disparities in power structures, economics, and access routes affiliated with literacy instruction and endeavor to create a more nonpartisan literacy culture and practice. Brandt's focus in her early work was on identifying and defining how sponsors of literacy operated in encouraging and hindering literacy, but other sociocultural theorists argued for more critical research methodologies to accompany theories on the social

and cultural constructs involved in literacy. In their book *Reframing Sociocultural Research on Literacy: Identity, Agency, and Power*, Lewis et al. (2007) advocated for sociocultural research to take a more critical approach to questions of identity, agency, and power.

Similarly, in a later work, Brandt (2009) noted that “An analysis of sponsorship systems of literacy would help educators everywhere to think through the effects that economic and political changes in their regions are having on various people’s ability to write and read, their chances to sustain that ability, and their capacities to pass it on to others” (p. 32). For the purposes of my own research, I was mainly interested in Brandt’s definition and explanation of the roles of literacy sponsors in our lives and the potential for affirmative sponsorship. In fact, my preliminary reading of the research autobiographies yielded substantial evidence that preschool exposure to reading, guided by family members and visits to the library, were the most influential factors in encouraging aesthetic engagement in the participants’ reading lives.

In another article, “Remembering Writing, Remembering Reading,” Brandt’s (1994) analysis of the 45 interviews she conducted on the participants’ memories and attitudes towards reading and writing prompted her to profess, “What most surprised me in the interviews was how differently people described the settings of early reading and writing and the feelings surrounding their early encounters with each” (p. 461). In this way, Brandt anticipated both the method and some of the findings from my study of reading autobiographies, but such findings are no longer a surprise.

Part 2—The Teaching of Reading and the Role of Reading in the Composition Classroom

Empowering Student Readers: Embracing 21st Century Literacies in the Classroom

In her recent book, *Adolescent Literacy and the Teaching of Reading*, Deborah Appleman (2010) wondered whether she should label herself an English teacher or a Reading teacher,

noting that teachers of English (including herself) have traditionally resisted the idea that they must also become teachers of reading, since reading was the business of elementary teachers. Yet, Appleman, who is notable for her work on teaching critical theory to adolescents, has come in recent years to recognize that even in teaching critical theory, she has been teaching students how to read.

In her introductory chapter, she recalled her experience with teaching an introduction to literature course in a maximum-security prison, where, as in all of her other recent classes, she began with a reading autobiography assignment: “When did you begin to read? I asked. What did you love about reading? Were you a successful reader in school? What books do you remember most vividly?” Not surprisingly, the responses were indicative of remediated, struggling, and eventually non-active reading lives. Appleman found herself discouraged and guilt-ridden at the prospect of having been part of a failing pedagogical approach to literacy that problematically and systematically dichotomized the teaching of literature from the teaching of reading. The intention of her book was to investigate and propose possible approaches to unifying the teaching of literature and the teaching of reading skills under one umbrella of the teaching of literacy.

With a shifting literacy landscape where our students’ affinity with digital literacies far surpasses our own, but with the onus on us as their educators to lead their literacy practices, the challenge is to bridge the literacy gap (in both traditional and digital skill sets) on multiple levels, and to do so quickly. Appleman astutely noted that the end goal is the same for all teachers of English, whether one considers oneself a specialist in the teaching of literary analysis or in the teaching of decoding: we are all interested in promoting the reading and interpreting skills of our students. And that interest intersects with at least one of the aims of my dissertation, which is to uncover the persons and institutions that sponsored literacy in individuals who developed into

strong readers. This also means recognizing successful strategies, whether intentional or unintentional, that can help English educators and parents to shape approaches to teaching literacy in ways that support and foster the development of strong readers. Appleman contributed much to my search for such strategies both in her book on reading and in her even more influential book (2009) on teaching critical theory to adolescents, where she demonstrated how teachers can successfully help students make meaning as they read by helping them understand that reading is not just an academic act; it is a social, cultural, political, and global act.

Donna Alvermann's (2001) position paper on effective literacy instruction for adolescents (middle school and high school students) promoted strategies for more student-centric, diverse, and participatory means of engaging students in their own literacy learning. Alvermann's stance is that the efforts of many interested parties to prepare middle school and high school students for societal literacy demands are not substantial enough in this swiftly progressing information age, and so it is incumbent upon literacy educators to broaden traditional classroom mentalities that focus on transmission model, teacher-centric instruction, and basic academic literacy skills. Rather than the "skill and drill" emphasis where the teacher is the authority figure, the text is a depository, and the student is the receptacle, Alvermann espoused a participatory model that engrosses and motivates students by incorporating varying forms of texts and literacies, both formal and informal, as "tools for learning" and for engagement. She offered specific strategies for applying her suggestions to classroom practice and valuable reasons for doing so. One method she recommended is a form of critical literacy instruction, involving students in higher-level thinking, not just about what the text says but about the production process of what they read and write, such as how an author creates and represents the ideas and presentation of the writing.

Alvermann (2001) proposed that we can reconcile student frustrations or shut-down, stimulate student motivation, and encourage literacy self-efficacy if we acknowledge that students' daily social practices of language and literacy, and their preparation for the challenges of the information-age, should dictate the curricular direction of literacy instruction. It is time to accept that "Despite the work of conscientious teachers, reading supervisors, curriculum coordinators, and principals in middle schools and high schools across the country, young people's literacy skills are not keeping pace with societal demands of living in an information age that changes rapidly and shows no sign of slowing" (p. 3). While acknowledging the importance of academic literacy, Alvermann also accounted for the needs and interests of students whose multiple ideas of "texts" need to be considered in classroom instruction. Adolescents' multiliteracies incorporate technology, multimedia, and digital texts; thus, educators should encourage student-generated literacy tasks that assist them in using these forms of literacy in the classroom for critical thinking and production.

Alvermann (2001) also cautioned that a narrow view of literacy "risks disenfranchising students who may learn better in more socially interactive settings or whose literacies (e.g., visual and computer) span a broader range than those typically emphasized in school literacy" (p. 10). I was interested to see whether the participants in my study represented some of these disenfranchised students who could have benefitted from a more inclusive form of literacy instruction in school. Most notable in her article, with respect to my own research, was Alvermann's probe into the benefits of incorporating new technologies into literacy instruction at a more extensive and prevalent level to establish a more inclusive educational environment. This is a viable 21st century method of bridging the gap in forms of sponsorship and in what "counts" as literacy between in school and home reading skills. Alvermann, like Appleman, has helped to

shift the paradigm of how literacy is taught in schools, and they each augment our understanding of the need to redesign the consumer/producer dynamic of the traditional container classroom by inviting students to be co-collaborators in the learning process.

Discourse in the Literature Classroom: Student-Driven Dialogue

The advantage of a sociocultural approach to literacy instruction is that it helps to dispel the “blame the kids, not the schools” attitude by acknowledging the social and cultural factors that influence behaviors, attitudes, discourses, and practices that contribute to the individual’s development. We can begin to understand how to best teach our students when we recognize that they are part of a larger culture, one that is not universal, and one that is not always represented or invited into the classroom. One place where these tensions between culture and classroom can arise is in the discussion of literature. In their National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) report *The Language of Interpretation*, Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995) conducted four studies of different populations and the discourses used in discussions of literature. They interviewed students to gain an understanding of how discourse about literature shapes how students read literature across various contexts.

The exploration of ways of talking about literature across various groups—both in and out of school—revealed that typical inevitable patterns of discourse are employed in literary conversations. One of their conclusions was that even when the teachers intended for large-group discussions to be student-led and dictated by student interests, their vision was not in sync with the actual execution. Instead, what resulted was that the teacher still dictated the patterns of discourse in group discussions of literature.

A chief complaint of my own students has been that too often, their high school English teachers had imposed interpretations of literature on them, making them feel “wrong” or

invalidated for having an alternative way of seeing the text. This is one way in which we might be “killing” reading for our students. Marshall et al. offered (1995) pedagogical alternatives to counteract these concerning approaches to facilitating discussions of literature. By assigning students new roles in the literacy activities in which they are engaging, educators can enhance students’ “social semiotic toolkit” (Gee, 1996).

Marshall et al. (1995) posed important questions about what constitutes effective literacy instruction and confirmed the overlap in literature and reading theory. This interdependence of literacy and reading instruction, also acknowledged by Deborah Appleman (2010), means that talking about one instructional process can assist in knowledge of the other. Marshall et al. determined that “it seems important to ask if and how discussions of literature help shape reader-text transactions by fostering specific ways of talking and thinking about texts” and they sought an understanding of the assumptions about teaching, learning, language, and literature that inform discussions about literature (p. 128).

Reading autobiographies of English educators provide narrative accounts of the participants’ assumptions about reading from a teaching perspective AND from a learning perspective. Chronicles of successful readers can indicate which dialogic approaches to literature create tensions in reading experiences and which foster a spirit of aesthetic engagement. Marshall et al.’s (1995) findings about the similarities and differences in how literature is discussed across in-school grade ranges and in out-of-school contexts might assist in explaining data in the reading autobiography that reveals discrepancies in the participants’ attitudes towards school and non-school reading experiences.

Critical Literacy and Habits of Mind: Exploring the Link Between Early Literacy Experiences and Reader Mindsets

I had just taken to reading. I had just discovered the art of leaving my body to sit impassive in a crumpled up attitude in a chair or sofa, while I wandered over the hills and far away in novel company and new scenes.... My world began to expand very rapidly...the reading habit had got me securely. (Wells, 1934)

H. G. Wells described the experience of reading in the idyllic ways that teachers of reading and literature dream for their students and that Louise Rosenblatt intended when she portrayed what it means to read “aesthetically.” Even if our students come to us with prior reading experiences as transcendent as Wells’ image and as Rosenblatt’s intentions for reading convey, there is a need for serious consideration of how we can help students maintain this divine bond with literature into and throughout their academic and post-academic lives. While some of the individuals responsible for the architecture of English education focused on theory, others focused on curriculum, others on political reform, and still others on teaching methodologies. As a college teacher of literature and composition, I am interested in how early literacy sponsorship, attitudes, and behaviors influence or possibly shape long-term reading mindsets, behaviors, and habits.

In “Performative Literacy: The Habits of Mind of Highly Literate Readers,” Sheridan Blau (2003b) suggested that we teach literature as a process of text construction; link teaching of reading with the teaching of writing; encourage re-reading; create assignments where students record and reflect; model how students can use flagging and underlining of text they do not understand; practice cold reading; and collaborate with the teacher and student on new material. To begin, he provided an overview to Myers’ (1996) five designs of literacy that have prevailed from colonial times to the late 20th century: signature, recording, recitational, analytic, and critical (Myers) or disciplined (Blau). Disciplined literacy, according to Blau, is more active,

responsible, responsive; it includes self-selection of texts, independent interpretations, and an ability to “recognize, criticize and resist imposed values.” Disciplined literacy entails the three major literacies: textual, intertextual, and performative, which include skills such as critical thinking, cultural literacy, prior knowledge, and comprehension of signifiers.

In addition to the review of prior formal literacy notions, the outline and qualities of disciplined literacy, and the explanation of the essential skills for disciplined literacy, Blau illustrated “performative literacy in action.” He listed and described seven traits or “habits of mind” necessary for performative literacy:

1. capacity for sustained focused attention,
2. willingness to endure confusion,
3. courageousness in taking intellectual risks,
4. motivation to read, re-read and experience failure
5. willingness to endure confusion and doubt.
6. independence and flexibility in interpretation,
7. self-monitoring when reading and employment of metacognition.

Next, Blau offered recommendations for classroom practices that encourage and provide multiple opportunities for students to acquire these traits. Moreover, the best context for such instruction, Blau asserted, is a classroom that operates as a “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where students are participants and collaborators in workshops that take up genuine problems in interpreting and critiquing difficult classic and modern texts. His award-winning book *The Literature Workshop: Teaching Texts and Their Readers* demonstrated how such a classroom operates and elaborates the theory behind his practices. This Vygotskian

socially mediated learning approach is also evident in reading apprenticeships, which can offer valuable prospects for individual and communal literacy learning in the classroom.

Collaborative Literacy Sponsorship: Reading Apprenticeship, Communities of Practice (or Uncontaining the Container)

Metacognition, mindfulness, disciplinary literacy...this is the rhetoric du jour in the teaching of reading. In *Reading for Understanding*, Schoenbach et al. (2012) illustrated the value of encouraging student readers to practice thinking about how, what, and why they read, or in simpler terms, “thinking about their thinking.” Metacognitive conversations built around personal, social, perceptive, and knowledge-building dimensions assist students in understanding their own reading attitudes and perceptions and can improve their prospects for participating in disciplinary literacy habits. Reading apprenticeships provide a collaborative social context for making meaning of texts. Through this “toolkit” of reflection on and conversation about their own mental processes, students develop cognitive tools necessary for the kind of performative literacy and habits of mind which Blau explored in his works.

Pre-dating Schoenbach et al., Carol Lee’s (1995) article, “A Culturally Based Cognitive Apprenticeship: Teaching African American High School Students Skills in Literary Interpretation” presents her study on the value of cognitive apprenticeships in the English classroom. Lee offered a culturally responsive pedagogical approach to discussing literature in the classroom, specifically urban classrooms of the underserved impoverished students of certain ethnic and racial backgrounds. Traditional approaches to teaching reading comprehension, she argued, are devoid of intellectually challenging and culturally situated strategies. Instead, she proposed that engaging literature discussions in the classroom might be prompted by a culturally-based cognitive apprenticeship, as per the definition supplied by Collins, Brown, and Holum (1991), where the distinction between traditional apprenticeships (producing observable

tasks) and cognitive apprenticeships (making a complex idea visible) relies largely upon the school setting as the domain where the apprenticeship occurs. Lee (1995) asserted that “Appropriating the model of a cognitive apprenticeship challenges teachers of literature to study not only expertise among literary critics, but also to study themselves as readers” (p. 613).

Utilizing mixed methods as a teacher-researcher, Lee provided background research and conducted her own study on reading comprehension strategies and how they are currently and can ideally be taught. She inverted the perspective of the “literacy problem” as an issue of cultural deficit thinking by proving that it is in fact the approaches to teaching reading comprehension that are culturally irresponsible. She revealed that there is a gap between what students know and how teachers incorporate that knowledge into their pedagogical approaches. Lee provided a definition for cognitive apprenticeship that requires modeling particular skills in order to assist the students in critical engagement that helps them to improve on novice abilities.

By applying a sociocultural model to her classroom pedagogy, Lee allowed those who are new and inducted to that learning environment to have immediate access to all that membership implies. The process of students and teachers sharing what they are thinking as they collaboratively figure out what is going on around them helps all involved feel a sense of belonging in that community. In my own research and analysis of the reading autobiographies, I aimed to propose ways in which we can design spaces where the same form of home literacy sponsorship and practices (apprenticeships, communities of practice, funds of knowledge) mentioned by the participants can be invited into the classroom in a way that allows students to feel like contributing, involved members in a community of readers.

The Role of Teaching Reading: Promoting a Place for Literature at the College Level

There exist competing theories of composition vs. literature, and the prevailing concerns in the teaching of literature over the last century are rooted in dichotomous pedagogical and theoretical underpinnings: text-centered vs. reader/student-centered; independent vs. collaborative; product-oriented vs. process-oriented (Blau, 1993, p. 1). Prior and subsequent to the formation of NCTE in 1911, the democratic mission of which was to “promote[s] the development of literacy, the use of language to construct personal and public worlds and to achieve full participation in society, through the learning and teaching of English and the related arts and sciences of language,” literacy education was grounded in the ethical, classical, and non-academic traditions. The first (ethical) focused on moral and cultural development; the second (classical) on intellectual, disciplined, and close textual study; and the third on non-academic reading for enjoyment and appreciation (Applebee, 1974, p. 1). In the latter two forms, texts were essentially vehicles for reading instruction, grammar, rhetoric, and oratory; it was only in the non-academic tradition where literature was not positioned as a tool for other literary skills. The implementation of standardized college entrance requirements by 1900 (Graff, 1991, p. 99) was impetus for establishing literature as an independent area of study, but also created some backlash, which resulted in diverse and often competing alternative narratives for teachers, students, theorists, researchers, and scholars, some still rooted in formal approaches and others seeking more progressive models for teaching English.

Literacy educators can help students to recognize that there are multiple ways to analyze texts, that their own responses TO texts also constitute texts, and that all forms of texts (the ones they produce and the ones to which they are responding) are interrelated. But, in order to do that, many teachers of writing need to understand that they must also become teachers of reading,

even in higher education. More recently, Ellen Carillo (2015) pointed out how “the majority of scholarship on reading is almost 20 years old, instructors are at a loss for current research and scholarship to support their teaching of writing” and has argued for current research and conversations about the teaching of reading becoming more prominent in composition classrooms. She contended that “Abandoning reading as a subject worthy of sustained attention and research in the field puts composition instructors in an untenable position wherein, although reading undeniably plays some role in first-year composition, these instructors lack the resources to develop reading pedagogies that will complement their writing pedagogies” (p. 11). Scholes (1985, 2002), Blau (1993, 2001, 2003a, 2003b), Carillo (2015), and other researchers like Nancy Morrow (1997) who understood the integral nature of reading and its relationship to writing offered compelling arguments about the need for more research and attention to making necessary pedagogical changes in the field.

Toward a Democratic Pedagogy of Textual Interpretation

In his 1871 essay “Democratic Vistas,” Walt Whitman referred to reading as a democratic “process” that requires exercise on part of the reader, a mental alertness, an engagement, an active transaction. He metaphorically described how, as a nation, a change in reading habits can serve as a prototype for a transition towards democracy, where the reader has as much authority of imagination as the author. Likening the reader to an athlete, Whitman hoped to make reading an egalitarian sport:

Books are to be call'd for, and supplied, on the assumption that the process of reading is not a half sleep, but, in the highest sense, an exercise, a gymnast's struggle; that the reader is to do something for himself, must be on the alert, must himself or herself construct indeed the poem, argument, history, metaphysical essay—the text furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or framework.

Here, the relationship between the reader and the text operates on a dynamic, individualized constellation of meaning.

Similarly, more than half a century later, Louise Rosenblatt identified reading as an “event” that necessitates the awareness of one’s emotions and reactions; the open-mindedness, willingness, and confidence to have an “experience” through literature; and the determination to sift through provided clues and details to access and reconstruct the text in a thoughtful, socially meaningful way. Rosenblatt (1983) claimed that “The process of interpretation is more complex than that, however. The reader must remain faithful to the author’s text and must be alert to the potential clues concerning character and motive. But he must do more than that: he must seek to organize or interpret such clues” (p. 11). Rosenblatt was explicit in her goals for the reader, the teacher, the text, and the interplay among them. Whether they use the same terminology or not, Whitman and Rosenblatt identified the transactional nature often existing in effective, engaged, and meaningful reading.

Rosenblatt (1983) recognized that strong readers have a healthy curiosity about how human behaviors and social conditions are produced, and they are inclined to see and re-see the world and literature through a cause-and-effect lens. She incisively noted that “The student still needs to acquire mental habits that will lead to literary insight, critical judgment, and ethical and social understanding” (p. 71). In order for this acquisition to occur, though, the student needs to be motivated enough to work through the essential steps toward the process of attaining the necessary “mental habits.” This begs the question: What features in a student’s background nurture or inhibit this curiosity that seems an essential condition for becoming a successful reader of the caliber of the adult strong reader participants?

Is it the school's place to involve itself with the student's mental, emotional, and personal well-being? Rosenblatt (1983) posed the question for the reader: "Why should the school or college be concerned with the development of emotional attitudes or with preparing the student for his personal as well as his broader social relationships?" (p. 161). The answer she provided is even more relevant today than it was at the time of the book's publication. Changes in community, economy, home life, society, culture, politics, and international affairs require changes in attitudes, habits, goals, notions of success, and self-reliance which all require a support system for youth that can "help in attaining his own intellectual and emotional base" (p. 163). Rosenblatt promoted schools as sites of opportunity and the genre of literature as sites of emotional and intellectual exploration.

One Size (and One Test or Text) Does Not Fit All

In the early 1990s, a new language arts assessment exam, designed by approximately 25 teachers on behalf of the California Department of Education, assessed the reading and writing of all 4th, 8th, and 10th grade public school students in the state (Blau, 2001, p. 183). For the reading portion of the reading and writing assessment, the development team designed a reading scoring guide reflective of a 6-point scale based on various levels of reading performance. Aligning with Sheridan Blau's criteria for performative, disciplined literacy, the "exemplary reading performance" included taking risks, calling the text and/or author into doubt, situating the text amidst their own history and experiences, filling in gaps of meaning, acknowledging contradictions, and engaging in insightful, reflective meaning making. Operating under the premise that "powerful readers require complex and challenging examples of writing in order to demonstrate their accomplishments as readers" (p. 186), the reading selections were more "literature"-centric instead of informational.

Despite the professional experiences and opinions of the test creators that the CLAS (California Learning Assessment System) test was innovative and successful on multiple levels, the test and its creators were met with potent and widespread opposition. According to Blau (2001):

The fact that the test honored reading as an experience and therefore invited students to describe their own responses to literary works and that the scoring guide directed assessors to evaluate the thoughtfulness and complexity of a student's engagement with a text was all seen as evidence of an attempt on the part of the state educational apparatus to control the thoughts and feelings of students. (p. 191)

The common perception among parents, public officials, and even more traditional literacy educators was that inviting personal response to a text is an invasion of privacy and borders on playing psychiatrist and serving as a moral barometer.

The literary selections, too, engendered hostility toward the content, themes, attitudes, and language expressed by the authors of those creative works (the excerpts were largely taken from already approved textbooks). An outcome of this "experiment" with reading assessment was the discovery of vastly paradoxical notions of reading that exist between language arts professionals and the general public (for more details, see Figure 10.2 in Blau, 2001, p. 202). At the heart of this conflicting conception are questions of culture, tradition, humanity, and agency. Who are our students and what is our goal for them? And how much of our own ideologies as literacy educators comes in direct conflict with the layperson's expectation for our students? How we position reading in our classrooms becomes a tenable issue when we must consider reading as both "a private activity and as an academic discipline to be taught and evaluated" (Blau, 2001, p. 202).

At the college level, too, exists an array of contentions among those in the field; Erika Lindemann (1993) claimed there is "no place" for literature in freshman composition because

literary language inhibits student writing and immersion into the language of the academy; Gary Tate (1993) responded to Lindemann's provocative assertion with an expansively polar opinion that no text should be excluded and that students should learn how to engage in a variety of discourse modes, ones that reflect an "educated" background; Bartholomae (1996) argued that the place for reading is not an ideological, but a developmental issue in the composition classroom, and confesses that "The problem for me, at least for the moment, is not whether or what students should read, but how" (p. 201).

Gerald Graff (2003) offered the suggestion to "teach the conflicts," and similarly Scholes (2002) advocated modeling for students the many perspectives available in critical texts, enabling students to "situate their own readings in relation to those of the critics" and to teach students critical reading (p. 170). The act of reading is positioned here as a process by which students learn to understand and begin to interpret the feelings and thoughts of others, by paying careful attention to the words and intentions of the writer. In this scenario, the desired pedagogical approach is to change our definitions of "literature" and "reading," to transform our curriculum to include differing perspectives, and to move our students toward a culture of participatory democracy where the common referential becomes an appreciation for differing viewpoints rather than the seeking of commonalities in the language of a text.

E. D. Hirsch (1996) advocated literacy instruction based around a core knowledge curriculum. He asserted that "the principal aim of schooling is to promote literacy as an enabling competence" and argued "For effective classroom learning to take place, class members need to share enough common reference points to enable all students to learn steadily" (p. 24). Hirsch called for educators to enable their students to be competent, literate individuals with a shared body of knowledge as a starting point for learning. In *Validity in Interpretation*, Hirsch (1967)

referred to teachers as “educational technicians.” This carries with it a subtext of teaching as a business, devoid of creativity and individuality. Another solution, rather than unifying the curriculum, is unifying literacy practices, especially through effective methodologies for teaching how to read literature.

Why Read? And Why Literature?

But before we can address the question of “how” to read, we must first address the fundamental question “Why read?” Even more specifically, in light of the resurgence of nonfiction as part of standardized testing and students’ preoccupation with a digital culture, the looming question is “Why continue to read and to teach literature?” In her recent book *Why Literature?: The Value of Literary Reading and What It Means for Teaching*, Cristina Vischer Bruns (2011) offered a less clinical answer to the question by proposing that the novel is an agent of self-discovery and potential transformation. She discussed the individual and societal value of literary reading as an effective occasion for re-working our conceptions of ourselves and others.

What Bruns called “immersive” reading incorporates Rosenblattian aesthetics and reinforces the possibility that reading instruction, in its conventional modes, is often antithetical to “literary appreciation.” Problematic too, she contended, is a culture in which literary reading has lost its value and is not perceived as worthwhile. This mentality leads to frustrations for students and for teachers of literature and deprives them of an important formative experience with literature. Without the intellectual and emotional investment in the text, students cannot get caught up in (immersed) or reflect on the literature and on their own reading in critical ways. Bruns defended the value of reading literature and offered recommendations for how to teach literature, especially in an environment where there is a problematic distinction between personal

and academic reading. This brings us back to the conundrum of private vs. academic reading; how do teachers of reading (and writing) prevent what Kelly Gallagher (2009) called “Readicide” in the classroom?

It is possible that even the most well-intentioned teachers of reading have been part of “the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 2)? A valuable resource for ascertaining the resultant attitudes, habits, and applications of formal reading instruction is the object of the instruction itself: the student. Few studies have invited adept readers to recall, in narrative form, their memories with reading. Reading histories of strong readers who have transitioned from literacy student to literacy teacher (of course, we are always still students of literacy, no matter the level of mastery) presumably bespeak volumes about the writer’s memories of reading instruction and unveil first-hand responses to various pedagogical and curricular approaches to teaching reading.

Concluding Thoughts

This review of literature revealed some of the pioneering developments in sociocultural theory and literacy instruction, as built upon Vygotsky’s foundational discoveries about the development of the learner through social practices. It was my intention to establish the conceptual framework of my study and to elucidate “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs [my] research....” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 33). The broad-ranging definitions of literacy affiliated with a sociocultural paradigm must be acknowledged here as both advantageous and potentially too wide-ranging to be meaningfully contained to practical uses in English education.

Still, by intersecting Heath's (1988), Lave and Wenger's (1991), Barton and Hamilton's (2000), Gee's (2009) and Moll et al.'s (1992) innovations on literacy events, literacy practices, communities of practice, situated literacies, discourse communities, and funds of knowledge, respectively, with Deborah Brandt's (1998) progressive application of sponsors of literacy, I established a scaffolded lens through which to analyze the origins and effects of non-school and school-related literacy sponsors on my participants' reading attitudes and habits as conveyed in their narratives. In conjunction with Appleman's, Alvermann's, Marshall et al.'s, Schoenbach et al.'s, and Blau's innovative pedagogical applications of these socially and culturally grounded theories with an emphasis on cooperative meaning-making processes, I hope to unearth possibilities for alternative, forward-thinking, and equitable literacy practices in English education.

Further review of literature on current practices in the teaching of reading and literature could reveal transformational domains where circumstances for literacy occurrences and sponsorship are more universally accessible and are offered through 21st century modes that are not constricted to the boundaries of a container classroom. These transformed practices will necessitate new ways of seeing and utilizing concrete and virtual spaces inside and outside of the classroom. In order to situate sociocultural theory and practices in the context of my research on the histories and habits of successful readers, I endeavored to construct a narrative inquiry-based research methodology that accounts for the various social and cultural conditions, and the formal and informal literary sponsors who have influenced the narratives of my participants both in and out of school.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the methodology of the three studies, including the study design, research subjects and sites, data collection, potential ethical limitations, and procedures for data analysis and interpretation. Drawing from the scholarship of Connelly and Clandinin (2006) and their seminal book *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, my methodology involved narrative inquiry, the study of how

people shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 375)

As a design for inquiring into and understanding the experiences, over time and space, of a particular group of strong readers, narrative inquiry serves as an effective paradigm for acquiring and examining first-hand the reading attitudes and practices of English educators who are representative of strong readers. I also explain what I did as a narrative researcher and how I went about applying narrative inquiry as a method for analysis and interpretation in my study. I account for the ethical limitations of interpreting narrative data, as well as the fact that through narrative, we can organize experiences and assess the cultural significance of our own and others' narrative discourses.

Gee's framing and interpretation of discourse analysis were also used to read my data more effectually for codes, language, and culture and to interpret emerging themes of time,

setting, and place situations that appear as themes from my participants. Using Gee's (1996) definition, Discourses are:

...ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and, often, reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or 'types of people') by specific groups of people.... Discourses are ways of being 'people like us.' They are ways of being in the world...they are, thus, always and everywhere social and products of social history. (p. viii)

Though there are other scholars of narrative inquiry and of discourse analysis, with their own distinct and useful approaches, I elected to apply Clandinin and Connelly and Gee, respectively, for their integration of theory and research methodology. Sociocultural theory and terminology served as my theoretical frame for analyzing, exploring, and explaining the multiple ways in which the reading practices and accomplishments of my research subjects were shaped by particular social and cultural factors.

Autobiographies of Life as a Reader: Layered Stories and Rich Resources

Autobiographies of Life as a Reader, or Reading Autobiographies are layered stories—of one's personal life, of one's interaction with family, of one's introduction to text, and of one's reaction to a lifetime of reading. As a tool for discovery and self-reflection, these narratives assist in locating the people, places, and environments that encourage and discourage our reading habits. Students, parents, researchers, and English educators can learn how they initially attempted to decode written text, how they first encountered reading for pleasure, and how they came to view themselves or be viewed as readers and non-readers.

Reading autobiographies can inform us about the environments, spaces, and contexts in which we learn best and feel most comfortable. The library, a couch, a corner of the classroom, can have a significant impact on the frame of mind with which we read and on our feelings associated with the act. We can also get a sense of the internal and external motivating factors that

lead to our resistance or willingness to read. Narrative research of strong readers' literacy histories might yield propitious material to assist researchers, educators, curriculum planners, and parents in understanding the influence of these early literacy experiences and the implications of in-school reading practices that both align and conflict with home reading practices.

In addition to evaluating and interpreting what the reading autobiographies say, I observed both what the participants recall and the fissures in their narratives, the moments where questions arise for the reader and possibly for the writer too. After all, narratives are comprised of reconstructed memories. Therefore, the attitudes expressed toward their literacy sponsors during the process of writing and recalling these instrumental moments and persons might not be reflective of how they felt about those significant persons at the time of the originating event. There are, admittedly, subjective aspects to and gaps in memory, which certainly need to be assumed and acknowledged in the process of analyzing the reading histories that constitute the data for my study. The narratives are subject to distortion, as is the necessary act of restorying them as I attempt to chronologize and categorize those memories.

Not to be ignored, either, is the residual opposition to employing the first-person voice in research. Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) argued against the critics of this narrative style, citing the fact that "There is simply no case to be made against the use of first person writing in research that seeks to see life from the eyes of its participants, that rests on the assumption of multiple meanings, that shares with the readers the stance and process of the researcher, that is produced within an interactive vision of language" (p. 86). Though Ely et al. accepted, even perhaps advocated, forward-thinking approaches to the nature of qualitative research and the use of first-person narration in it, there still exists a bias among some publishers, professional organizations, and researchers (even two decades after the publication of Ely et al.'s book)

toward more traditionally objective writing and research styles. Constructing a strong narrative methodology and utilizing a theoretical framework, though, can reconcile these concerns. My methodology and theoretical framework were essential for apprehending the reading histories, positionality, and sponsorship of the participants.

Research Questions

1. What can be learned about the early literacy experiences, reading practices, family, community, school, and cultural influences, personal attitudes, and habits of a group of “strong” adult readers through the first-hand narrative accounts of their reading lives?
2. How might a study that compares and contrasts the reading lives of adult strong readers with remedial and honors freshman 2-year college composition students serve to highlight experiences and contexts that may foster or obstruct the development of highly competent readers?
3. What are the pedagogical, curricular, and cultural implications of the findings from these studies for families, teachers, and schools?

I used three sets of case studies to answer these questions: adult doctoral students in English education at an Ivy League university, remedial freshman composition students, and honors freshman composition students from a 2-year community college.

Defining Narrative Inquiry

We are, in narrative inquiry, constructing narratives at several levels. At one level it is the personal narratives and the jointly shared and constructed narratives that are told in the research writing, but narrative researchers are compelled to move beyond the telling of the lived story to tell the research story.... Narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10)

In Ruth Vinz's (1993) *Composing a Teaching Life: Partial, Multiple, and Sometimes Contradictory Representations of Teaching and Learning Literature*, a narrative inquiry into three literature teachers' experiences, she identified storying as "a process of inquiring into ourselves, an attempt to make sense of our lives. Selecting, comparing, organizing, and revising these stories are ways to illustrate and explain what we believe and why. The transformation of lived experiences into words is one way of beginning to understand" (p. 11). Vinz acknowledged the saliency of narrative writing as a means of articulating past and present experiences and positions narrative inquiry as a valid, open-ended form of qualitative methodology. Her description of the processes entailed in selecting, writing, reading, translating and re-constructing narratives characterized the reflexive and reflective nature of dealing in narrative structures.

What starts as self-inquiry in the composition stage can begin to be explained through a narrative researcher's analysis of the commonplaces of narrative inquiry: time, social conditions, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This narrative mode of construing the ways human beings view the world can reveal the "shifting, changing, personal and social nature of the phenomenon under study" (Clandinin & Huber, in press, p. 9) and may lead to new theoretical conceptions of people's experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explained this multilayered interaction as being "refined into the view that education and educational research is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; learners, teachers, and researchers are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories" (p. 2). As a research methodology, narrative inquiry situates the researcher-participant to examine how meaning is constructed, how lived experience is understood and recreated in the mind, and how narrative language can be used to re-story the meaning and interpretation of these experiences among the participants and the researcher.

In narrative inquiry, the researcher's relationship to her own experiences is integral to the restorying of the stories that serve as the field texts. Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) elucidates how "In the restorying of the participant's story and the telling of the themes, the narrative researcher includes rich detail about the setting or context of the participant's experiences. This setting in narrative research may be friends, family, workplace, home, social organization, or school-the place in which a story physically occurs" (p. 332). During the process of sequencing the settings, characters, actions, and phenomena of the field texts, the researcher accounts for past, present, and future experiences and situations of the storyteller.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) further distinguished between narrative storyteller and narrative researcher, explaining how "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (p. 2). In addition, they elucidated how as researchers inquiring into worlds of which we have played a part in constructing, "we are complicit in the world we study" (p. 61). It is, then, incumbent upon the researcher of narrative documents to consider our own and our participants' internal, external, past, present, and future dimensions of how these worlds are situated in stories of our experiences. In narrative inquiry, the story is the subject of study, but narrative is also an effective mode of expression for the humanities-based researcher who studies human culture and the means by which humans process and document the human experience. Story helps us to construe our lives, our learning, and our teaching; narrative inquiry provides a means of understanding and analyzing the layered nature of these stories, including time, place, events, and themes.

A narrative inquiry approach to research requires the complex task of engaging in meaning making while studying the meaning-making processes of the research participants. In

Acts of Meaning, Jerome Bruner (1990) explored the cognitive psychology of narrative, delineating it as an alternate mode of discourse with various psychological and educative functions and properties. He proposed a culturally-based psychological epistemology for understanding human thought and behavior, demanding that “we be conscious of how we come to our knowledge and as conscious as we can be about the values that lead us to our perspectives” (p. 30). Such an epistemology asks that we be accountable for how and what we know. But it does not insist that there is only one way of constructing meaning, or one right way (p. 30). Narrative inquiry relies on the interpretivist process of “knowing” through translating and describing the world of human experience, demanding the researcher’s ability to elucidate the correlating phenomenon or story.

Narrative inquiry involves an honest and open reflection and probing of the researcher’s own positionality, including values, beliefs, and cultural context. For this reason, I included my own autobiography as a case study amidst the data I collected for the first study. I also included myself in the study to immerse myself in both mindsets—the researcher and the participant. Because narrative serves as phenomenon *and* method, one of the critiques of narrative inquiry is the potential for the researcher to construct biased or authentic meaning rooted more in the researcher’s mindset than in the perspective of the participant. This tendency of intersubjectivity requires precarious navigation of the narrator’s story and the researcher’s narrativization of meaning.

There are implicit ethical implications associated with the act of interpreting other people’s life stories; in the process of composing my own research text, I worked to avoid disrupting the participants’ own life stories and refrained from co-opting their voices in an attempt to substantiate my own research claims. Despite the stated ethical concerns, given the

autobiographical nature of the instrument being studied, narrative inquiry is a well-suited paradigm for the methodological framework and research design of this study. Narrative accounts offer a window into the ways cultural contexts, habits, attitudes, and identity are shaped by experience.

Putting on a New Coat: Transitioning From English Educator and Administrator to Research Practitioner

Finally, I realized that I had taken on a literature teacher's identity, like putting on a new coat. I was reproducing what literature teachers from my school experiences had done or what I assumed they were supposed to do. It wasn't until I began to look at myself as the subject of my own history and to read theorists and practitioners' accounts that I questioned this socially constructed image of the literature teacher and began to negotiate the image and identity of the literature teacher that I was becoming. (Vinz, 1993, p. 2)

Ruth Vinz recalled the moment where the researcher-practitioner-participant relationship spurred the convergence of her pedagogy, practice, and personal experience, resulting in the identification of the external and internal influences of her own multiple identities. I too had an epiphany while engaging in the assessment of student writing placement essays. But my discovery was about the epidemic level of apathy toward reading. As Director of Writing for the small liberal arts college where I taught for decades, I read hundreds of writing placement essays a year as they were required of each admitted student for assessment of the appropriate-level writing class. The writing prompt was, for nearly 8 years, based on the Eudora Welty passage about her introduction to the *Book of Kells*; the excerpt appears as the epigraph to my introductory chapter. The questions for the essay in response to the reading passage were:

1. What did reading and writing mean to Welty?
2. What has reading and writing meant to you?
3. Has there been any particular reading in your own life that you would identify as “illuminating” or that had a similar influence in your world?

Students were able to clearly identify from Welty's passage just how transformative and long-lasting the influence of reading and writing had been in *her* life.

Yet, the second question, asking them to shift to their own association with reading yielded nearly the same answers every time: "Reading has not been influential in my life at all" and "My parents used to read me stuff like Dr. Seuss and *Where the Wild Things Are*, but I don't really enjoy reading now. I'd much rather spend my time doing other things." What were those "other things," I wondered, and what would books and reading (and we English educators) need to offer that could compete with those other activities? Or, were "other things" a euphemism for their own acquired mindset toward reading?

Despite the blatant apathy toward reading (who admits this on a writing placement essay for their prospective college anyway?), I did notice a trend over time of particular texts that were commonly noted as having an effect on the reader. *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Of Mice and Men*, *A Child Called It*, *Life of Pi*, *Five People You Meet in Heaven*, and *The Lovely Bones* were frequently mentioned, and with enthusiasm, even among the most confessedly resistant of readers. It is quite possible that those texts were identified because students were saying what they thought an assessor of their writing and potential college placement would want to hear. I would like to be more optimistic that some other possibilities might explain those literary selections. Were those authors offering features in their writing that were competing with "other things" in teenagers' lives, or resonating and relating to their own worlds, enough to spark passionate responses on par with Welty's excitement about her discovery of *The Book of Kells*?

Another positive trend in these placement essays was the identification of friends, family members, and occasionally teachers who introduced the students to many of these memorable texts. Deborah Brandt (1998) coined the term "sponsors of literacy," for those mediators of our

literacy who underwrite or deter literacy processes. Perhaps it was that initial transaction with a trusted literacy sponsor that primed the reader for an aesthetic awakening by providing cooperative access and a positive attitude. Is there hope, then, after all? If there do exist books and influential literacy sponsors in our lives that have these widespread enchanting factors, and if there were a time when the students DID enjoy reading, how can we identify the provenance of that allure and channel it in our classrooms?

The placement essays reaffirmed what I and many researchers in the field already recognize about reluctant and non-proficient readers. What they did not explain was the phenomenon of aliterate students, those readers identified by Kyleene Beers (1998) as capable but unwilling. These narratives of entering college students enlightened me to the individual attitudes behind the epidemic level of apathy, unpreparedness, and even resistance English educators face. However, they did not reveal the ways and contexts in which literacy is deliberately and unintentionally sponsored. The EFFECTS of sponsorship were evident, but not the CAUSES.

If English educators, parents, administrators, and policymakers could have a window into HOW literacy has been sponsored, especially in adult readers who exhibit performative literacy habits (Blau, 2003), then we might gain some clarity on how to formulate effective domestic, pedagogical, and curricular strategies for supporting these reluctant, non-proficient, and aliterate students in our homes and schools. My study of the reading histories of three different populations of readers can provide some of that deeper insight. In the next section, I review my data collection methods, research subjects, and site; describe the instrument of study; confirm consent and elaborate on ethical limitations of the study of adult strong readers.

Methods of Data Collection

In performing this initial part of my qualitative research, I followed these steps:

- selecting participants
- obtaining informed consent where needed
- collecting autobiographical texts

Participants were selected from three different fields or classroom sites. The participants from Study 1 were enrolled in a graduate-level course on the teaching of college English at an Ivy League institution. Study 2 participants were enrolled in a remediated section, or “module” of first-semester freshman composition at a 2-year community college. Study 3 participants were students in a competitive honors-level first-semester freshman composition course at a 2-year community college. All sets of data were collected at the respective field sites in which the courses were taught and students were enrolled.

Upon collection of the reading autobiographies, I accessed each narrative online, which were shared in Moodle, Blackboard, or Google Drive. I then created a separate Google Doc and labeled it “compiled results” for the purpose of consolidating the narratives into a series of categories. I created domains, labeled (1) early literacy sponsors, (2) middle school dichotomies of required vs. pleasure reading, and (3) significance of reading in participants’ lives.

Subsequent to copying and pasting the quotes according to the three aforementioned categories, I began what Wolcott (1990) called “winnowing” (Eli et al., 1997, p. 188) by generating a chart through SmartArt to graph the literacy sponsors mentioned. I then prepared a table to log the quotes that directly reflected the existence or void of sponsors in the home.

Research Subjects and Sites

Participant selection. I studied three different populations of readers from three different classroom sites. In my first study, the selection of subjects was simply decided by the circumstances of the course and my own interest in the assignment we were given to record our memories with reading. My goal was to assess what commonalities might exist in the backgrounds of strong readers.

Selection of subjects for the second study was more deliberate. In order to allow my study to produce generalizations or tentative theories about early reading experiences that are associated with the development of strong as opposed to struggling adult readers, I wanted to collect the reading histories of a population of students who were very different from the largely privileged, academically elite, and highly accomplished readers who were my colleagues in my doctoral seminar. Hence, for a contrasting population, I selected students from my section of freshman English reserved for students whose test scores and high school records identified them as underprepared for college-level reading and in need of remediation. But I also wanted to avoid the variable of a changed educational landscape across the recent generations in American schooling.

Therefore, I wanted to study a student population that resembled my doctoral students in their status as strong readers, but would at the same time represent a different and more contemporary population of students. Fortunately, I had archived a previous set of literacy narrative assignments from an honors freshman composition course the prior year. Thus, I decided to return to those previously collected reading histories from a class of freshmen whose placement in my “honors” freshman English class was based on their identification by the college as advanced and highly accomplished students (who were not privileged in SES like the

doctoral students were) but were in age on the average at least a generation (20 years or more) younger than my doctoral seminar colleagues.

The participants. The first population, doctoral students at an Ivy League college, was comprised of my classmates and the professor. I was a student enrolled in the course at the time and, as such, a participant in writing my own reading autobiography at the same time as the rest of the participants.

The second population contained remedial students who were part of my first-year composition course. They were students who were enrolled in a credit-bearing FYC course (English 101) but who met with me for additional weekly modules that lasted 1 hour and 40 minutes and typically capped at 12 students.

The third population also hailed from the same 2-year community college where I teach but who were enrolled in my honors freshman composition course. These were students who, in my own estimation and experience, were fit for acceptance to competitive 4-year colleges, but who for a variety of reasons (financial, socioemotional preparedness, family resistance, and so on) opted to start their college careers at this 2-year college, with its widely known highly rigorous honors program. I found these students (generally) to be strong readers and writers who possessed a robust sense of curiosity.

More specific demographics by population.

Study 1. In an effort to gain a better understanding of what “strong” readers do and how they would describe their reading lives and histories, I collected and examined reading autobiographies from 18 Ph.D. students enrolled in an English Education program at a highly esteemed institution. In addition to the students’ reading autobiographies, I included the reading autobiography written by the course professor who also happened to be head of the Program.

Participants ranged in ages from approximately 25-72, but were mainly clustered in the 30- to 40-year-old range, both for the 7 males and 11 females. In all three studies, I used pseudonyms for the people and places associated with the narratives under study.

Study 2. The nine participants (3 female and 6 male, ages 18-21) in this second study, came from a writing course that had been identified (through a campus-administered test) as academically unready for a regular first-semester freshman writing course, yet they were included in an English 101 freshman writing class as part of an accelerated learning pilot program at a community college, whereby developmental writers can take the credit-bearing FYC course (English 101) while simultaneously receiving individualized support in an additional weekly supplementary class (designated English 098) conducted exclusively for them. This population offered the most contrasting background to that of the participants in my doctoral student study, allowing me to examine literacy sponsorship and its effects on a vastly different set of literacy learners.

Study 3. The honors freshman composition students from a 2-year community college included 14 participants, also ages 18-21, 5 males and 9 females. Students enrolled in this first-semester honors writing course were expected to be capable of “staking out their own positions on a topic” and to possess “strong” reading skills.

Description of the Instrument

Study 1. A prompt for a reading autobiography assignment was provided in the Moodle site for the doctoral course:

Please post your reading autobiography here. If you are willing to allow your autobiography to become part of our... archive of reading autobiographies, please add the following statement or its equivalent:

I am happy to have my reading autobiography added to the current archive of such materials collected by Professor ***** for researchers in English education at *****

College. In granting permission for the use of my reading autobiography for research purposes, I do so with the understanding and on the condition that no part of my reading autobiography will be used in any publication or academic presentation in a way that might reveal my identity or compromise the principle of confidentiality in the use of student writing.

In your posting of your reading autobiography, you may want to provide a headnote indicating how finished or unfinished your piece is.

Also feel free to write replies or commentaries in response to the autobiographies of classmates and replies to commentaries written by classmates about your commentary. In other words, don't hesitate to write to initiate or participate in or sustain a discussion of an autobiography or of the reading autobiography exercise or assignment.

Study 2. Note that in formulating the prompt for Study 2 with the remedial group, I added more structure and guiding questions than the more open-ended prompt assigned in the course where I obtained my data for the initial study of doctoral student adult readers.

Reading Autobiography Prompt English 098

Directions:

Please answer the following questions as best you can. You will be given 45 minutes to write.

Learning How to Read:

What are your earliest memories of reading? When and how did you learn to read? Was most of your reading done in school or out of school?

Youth Reading:

How have your reading habits evolved over time? Has there ever been a time when you stopped reading for pleasure, or stopped reading completely?

Reading Now:

What are some of the reasons you read now? What are some of the types of reading you do now? How do you feel about reading?

Overall:

What has been the significance of reading in your life to date?

Study 3. The instrument for this study of the honors students was already in place as part of regular course assignments in that class, a literacy narrative essay, one very similar in nature to the prompt provided in Study 2. As part of the semester requirements, students were asked to

write a literacy narrative, recalling the people, places, and moments in their reading and writing lives. Brainstorming questions were provided, calling upon their earliest memories, the kind of reading they have done, particular teachers who may have had an impact, current attitudes toward reading, and significance of reading in their lives.

Explanation of instrument. Through literary narratives of their reading lives, which I call reading autobiographies, all three populations in these studies engaged in a writing activity which consisted of archiving their literacy experiences by recalling their memories of reading throughout their lives. This qualitative method afforded rich, detailed, personal, and subjective accounts for study.

Methods of Data Analysis

With narrative as our vantage point, we have a point of reference, a life and a ground to stand on for imagining what experience is and for imagining how it might be studied and represented in researchers' texts. In this view, experience is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others, including the young and those such as researchers who are new to their communities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi)

I would like now to speak briefly of the sociocultural and cognitive nature of the reading autobiographies and offer an intuitive lens for analyzing them. As a framework for examining qualitative data of this nature, narrative inquiry provides a valuable mode of representing and describing internal and external cognitive phenomena that involve a process of social interaction. In Chapter IV, the first of two chapters presenting the findings and analysis for Study 1, a study of strong adult readers, I used the narrative form of vignettes to restory and provide a detailed discussion of five of the participants' individual representations of these two domains. As I explain there, reasons for selection of those five were random, except for an attempt at representing male and female participant voices to avoid any gender bias.

I elected to create vignettes around the narratives to portray the participants' stories of early literacy memories and to establish emergent themes. Ely et al. (1997) explained, "Vignettes...are narrative investigations that carry within them an interpretation of the person, experience, or situation that the writer describes" (p. 70). The composite sketch provided by vignettes seems a fitting means for analyzing and explaining the personal reading histories of the participants. For my discussion of our in-school recollections, I attempted to interpret participant responses through more traditional narrative modes of inquiry, letting the lived and told stories speak for themselves and allowing for ways of knowing through discovery (Ely et al., 1997).

On What Narrative Researchers Do

It seems necessary to address the question "What do narrative researchers do?" The short answer is find people, ask them to tell their story, collect the stories, and learn from the individual and social experiences revealed in those stories. Using Connelly and Clandinin's Dewey-influenced narrative approach, I attempted to investigate the areas outlined in Table 1. As I analyzed the reading autobiographies, after conducting initial analysis for emerging themes, I engaged in more intricate secondary analysis, paying close attention to time, place, people, and situations, or as Connelly and Clandinin (2000) labeled them, Interaction, Continuity, and Situation. In one specific case study of a remedial student in Study 2, I applied the chart in specific ways to investigate more deeply patterns that helped to explain some of the anomalies in her reading history.

There exists a long history of storytelling as an act of composition and reflection on teaching and learning. As a means of inquiry, narrativizing one's experiences provides occasion for delving into the personal and social (Interaction); examining the past, present, and future (Continuity); and identifying the role of place (Situation) (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). This

composing process allows for “Thinking through the ways in which past and present experiences inform each other, and recognizing that ‘no teacher is free of history and context’” (Vinz, 1993, p. 6). The English educator’s “history and context,” in particular, the influences on reading attitudes and habits, contribute to identity formation.

Table 1

The Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure

Interaction		Continuity			Situation
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Situation/place
Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions	Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view	Look backward to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times	Look at current experiences, feelings, and stories relating to actions of an event	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters' intentions, purposes, and different points of view

Source Adapted from Clandinin & Connelly (2000) by Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002)

Those formative social, cultural, and emotional experiences are part and parcel of their identities as educators. Vinz (1993) surmised that “all teachers are constrained and emancipated by their places of experience as well as by the challenge of possibility” (p. 6). In Deweyan terms, education, experience, and life are intertwined. The stories of educators’ real-life experiences with reading, then, should be revelatory, ripe for reflection and rife with possibilities for understanding how home, school, and community cultures influence learning and teaching

practices. The acts of writing, sharing, and analyzing reading autobiographies involve experiences of critical self-reflection, elaboration of existing frames of reference, and occasion for discourse.

Data Interpretation: Beyond Textual Boundaries

Telling, reading, and interpreting stories are discursive activities, ones that are informed by the cultural and social discourses surrounding the speaker and the reader. Bakhtin (1981) told us that the utterance cannot be separated from the sequence in which it occurs—in other words, the events occurring outside of the speaker’s mind. Therefore, in creating first-person narrative, we can write in the first person, but our ideas and language are always informed by the events and people who have influenced them in the world outside of us.

The discourse of the social spaces where people, environments, and institutions have contributed to our attitudes about reading needed to be unpacked and explained throughout the data analysis of the reading autobiographies in my study. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) adeptly summarized Gee’s version of discourse analysis:

Discourse analysis deliberately draws attention to complex relationships in language use, social systems and social structures or institutions. Hence, discourse analysis can provide insights into operations of power, interests, coercion, identity constitution, ideology and so on at a *political level* in ways that may not be possible within other forms of sociolinguistic analysis. (p. 290)

Thus, discourse analysis is a viable interpretive lens for qualitative study of narratives because it focuses on meaning-making structures, processes of language, and the discourses that shape how we act, communicate, establish values and attitudes, socialize, and formulate our identities (p. 291). Discourse analysis helped me to interpret the multi-voiced nature of the worlds where reading events occurred. Conjoining a discourse-based analysis of cultural, historical, interactional, and institutional contexts in the individual construction of the narratives with

narrative inquiry as my analytic and interpretive strategy, I focused on what the stories revealed about the characters, settings, themes, discourses, and motivations that shape our cultural and social narratives about reading. I was interested in the relationships between their individual experiences and the social and cultural contexts that have influenced and shaped those experiences.

Here, I elucidate the value of discourse analysis as helpful in further investigating the details of my initial findings when analyzing autobiographical accounts of people's reading experiences. The literature has shown these research modes' specific applicability in studies related to the field of education (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Due to the social and cultural roots of storytelling and of the subject of my data—the reading histories of strong readers—it is intuitive to merge methodology with the theory that helps to explain the origins of and expressions of those stories. In *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, James Gee (2005) argued:

I hasten to point out that the whole issue of research methods is, as far as I am concerned, badly confused. First of all, any method always goes with a theory. Method and theory cannot be separated, despite the fact that methods are often taught as if they could stand alone. Any method of research is a way to investigate some particular domain. In this case, the domain is language-in-use. There can be no sensible method to study a domain, unless one also has a theory of what the domain is. (p. 6)

Gee maintained that discourse analysis operates on multiple levels—first on the meaning and purpose of the entire text and how discourse reflects and informs “social, cultural and cognitive processes and outcomes,” and second on the complexity of relationships in language use such as “operations of power, interests, coercion, identity constitution, ideology” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 290). In this study, I analyzed the patterns of language, culture, and interactions that contribute to and are used to describe reading experiences in both school and non-school related contexts. The sociocultural nature of discourse analysis and narrative-based research makes these

valuable approaches for studying human activities and behaviors. These tools of inquiry and the sociocultural theories covered in my literature review provide a strong foundation for discussing the reading autobiographies as cultural artifacts that can be informative about the reading habits, attitudes, and practices shaped by the participants' experiences.

The interpretivist paradigm frames reality as a social construction that is a result of interactions between people over time in specific spaces, or, in other terms, social settings. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) defined "Place" as "the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place" (p. 480). School, home, and community are all social settings where literacy sponsorship might be identified in my participants' narratives. The storying of those social aspects can reveal many truths about how the participants' literacy was acquired, significant social interactions that fostered or hindered literacy, and reading attitudes that evolved over time at home and in school. Thus, I would assert that more specifically, my data analysis reflected the principles of phenomenology in that the data analysis involves a reality that was generated by the participants and by the meanings they ascribed to the social settings in which literacy sponsorship took place (Schensul & LeCompte, 2012).

I anticipated that a focal point of the reading histories would be on the agencies and individuals whom we maintained were influential in our reading lives, both in encouraging and detrimental ways, specifically in the home and school settings. As a starting point for the more nuanced discussion of my findings, I addressed what we can learn from the reading autobiographies about the significance of those who appear in our early literacy experiences. While teachers and friends might have served as sponsors, I was interested too in the

participants' early memories and the potential link to lasting effects of reading with family members.

In Chapter VI, where I analyze the remedial students' narratives, as I did in my study with adult strong readers, I adopted a narrative inquiry methodology as my lens for interpreting the reading histories of remedial English college freshmen. It seemed the most apropos method for understanding the students' experiences and written renderings of those lived involvements with reading (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). As part of the study procedure, I considered what insights could be gained through analyzing these students' narratives and identifying recurring patterns and themes, by immersing myself in the data and keeping a log of certain words and phrases used to describe reading attitudes. Due to their underdeveloped narrative, attempting to write vignettes around those documents would be nearly impossible without bordering on fictionalizing the gaps in those participants' histories. I had to rely more on quantitative than qualitative methods of interpretation for this population. I also provided a case study of a student who appeared to be an anomaly among the other participants, returning to more qualitative methods of analysis, and using Connelly and Clandinin's paradigm.

My approach for the analysis of the honors students, presented in Chapter VII, was influenced by the rich, complex nature of their highly developed responses. Here, I integrated the qualitative act of composing vignettes and the quantitative act of collecting statistics on early literacy sponsors for a mixed-methods approach. Drawing from Creswell's (2013) "Steps in Conducting a Scholarly Mixed Methods Study," I accounted for the closed-ended quantitative database (i.e., percentage of mothers, fathers, teachers who sponsored literacy, determinants and factors), and the open-ended qualitative database (attitudes about reading, narrative discourse,

personal experiences) of Study 1 and Study 2, and in this final, third study, attempted to integrate these two databases (p. 16). Further analyses and interpretations are offered in later chapters.

Chapter IV

A STUDY OF STRONG ADULT READERS

What Lies Beneath? The Making of Strong and “Avid” Readers

Faced with 18 rich, dense, memory-laden reading autobiographies from writers who themselves teach writing, any attempt to represent their stories will likely fall short of what they say best themselves. For that reason, this chapter includes direct sections from the participants’ autobiographies, so that the integrity of self-representation remains intact. I selected five autobiographies that I treat as case studies. I did not establish any criteria or procedures for this smaller pool of autobiographies and, for the most part, chose them at random. There were no significant stand-out aspects among these five participants that made them more fit for closer analysis than the other 13, except that I attempted to provide a diverse picture of both male and female participants who had very different experiences but became motivated, strong readers through early literacy sponsorship that occurred prior to the elementary school years.

Around the actual stories and original language of the narratives I collected, I built another form of story, the vignette, to locate and connect themes that tell a larger “story” about the circumstances that created strong readers. Ely et al. (1997) defined vignettes as:

narrative investigations that carry within them an interpretation of the person, experience or situation that the writer describes...vignettes are compact sketches that can be used to introduce characters, foreshadow events and analyses to come, highlight particular findings or summarize a particular theme or issue in analysis and interpretation. (p. 70)

As an interpretive tool, vignettes helped me to consider how I was characterizing the participants, what I was learning in the process, themes that arose, and the significance of the story they told. I deliberately took some liberties with these stories, in some cases restructuring the non-linear aspects of the autobiographies to reveal a more organized understanding of cause-and-effect relationships as well as incongruities. In others, I filled in gaps and connected

disjointed parts that could be strung together to reveal another layer of narrative meaning that might go undetected in the original telling. After the five vignettes, I interspersed several relevant highlights from various other participants' autobiographies that reinforced one of the themes that began to emerge from the five vignettes.

Let us begin by looking closely at five participants: Saul, Alex, Julia, Carrie, and Maya. Saul opened his reading autobiography rather ominously, and not predictive of someone who would become a strong, successful reader: "The first fact worth recording about my history as a reader is that I was almost required to repeat first grade, because I hadn't learned to read well enough. My parents were told that I would have to be held back..." Fortunately, thanks to his parents, who, though they could not afford it, sprang for a tutor, and thanks to that tutor, Miss Disbrow, Saul was not only caught up by 2nd grade, but he felt confidently ahead of most of his classmates. Saul also attributed his interest in reading to a peer he met at a birthday party. He described how he "was sitting on a couch reading a comic book" when he was approached by another child who inquired whether Saul was actually reading the book or simply gazing at the pictures. When Saul confessed to the child that he could not read it, the boy encouragingly said, "Sure you can. Just try." From there, Saul believed that his avid comic book reading and collecting were inspired by this young man's prodding and a realization that reading was not an act exclusive to school or for the purposes of impressing others with his "reading prowess."

Still, despite these positive early literacy sponsors, Saul recalled that "My mother never read to me, claiming she didn't know how to read English, which turned out not to be true." This lack of home sponsorship meant that Saul did not "learn" how to read, in the traditional schooling sense, until he started formal schooling and that his reading experiences were reliant on influences outside of the home. For much of his elementary school time, Saul was inspired by

comic books, *The Hardy Boys*, biographies about American heroes, and a few fantasy novels, so much so that he would even save his allowance to purchase his own books.

The Hardy Boys were mentioned in many other reading histories too, along with *Nancy Drew* (in the female participants' narratives); interestingly, neither of these series fall into a category of "high literature" and certainly are not complex enough to build literary "prowess." But, the relatability of the characters has made them iconic and the books have become firmly ensconced in popular culture, even up until current times. At the time of their initial publication in 1927, "Adolescents had only recently begun to emerge in the public consciousness as a distinct group occupying a place somewhere between childhood and adulthood. Rail links had made distribution easier, and a new market had emerged for series books, shipped weekly to teen-agers hungry for adventure" (Smith, 1998). With features such as adventure, suspense, young detectives, problem solving, fictional towns without much social conflict, cliffhangers at the end of each chapter, and little violence, these books offered escape for young readers like Saul.

However, it seemed the grips of adolescence did not evade Saul and "Just before I turned 13...I seemed suddenly to lose interest in the Hardy Boys or any books, and to devote my attention much more to girls." Fortunately, this was right around the time a trusted, revered older cousin gifted him a box of books that Saul claimed "I now see as life-changing in its immediate impact on me and in the way it seems to have determined the future direction of my academic and professional history." A powerful claim indeed.

Vignette 1 (Saul): Treasure Comes in Cardboard Box From Cousin

Imagine the Scene:

"Hey, I have something for you." My father sets down a cardboard box the size of a small refrigerator, explaining that my college-aged cousin has left me this box of books

that he no longer needs. It's just before my fourteenth birthday, and I secretly hope it's the good kind of magazines, the ones my parents won't let me read, or model airplanes that still have all the pieces. I pull apart the interlocking panels of the box top to reveal a treasure trove of books.

This description is a short composite of what Saul described in a more elaborate way in his reading autobiography, and in his recollection of this event, Saul defined this as a moment of epiphany, a life-altering course of events highly responsible for his academic and career directions. While this intense account of the transformative value of literature sounds more like the adult English educator's impression of the memory, and while we can question the 14-year-old Saul's actual recognition of "its immediate impact," what was evident was that Saul's cousin served as powerful sponsor of literacy. The connection he had with his cousin might have made him more intrigued or motivated to want to try out some of the books gifted to him on this occasion.

His relationship with his cousin, as Saul explained it, was one steeped in admiration and respect for his "hero": "Wayne had always been my hero for his athletic and intellectual accomplishments, as well for as his strength of character and commanding personality (not to mention his reputation as a sharp gambler in card games in the local parks)." When presented with the box of books, then, Saul considered it "a gift to be prized," and was so motivated that he even lugged the oversized, heavy carton upstairs himself. Even more than "a gift to be prized," Saul described his anticipation of being able to inspect his "legacy" in the privacy of his own room.

This gift of books and all that sponsorship brought with it was responsible for Saul's return to his life as an avid reader, and potentially for the direction this passion continues to drive him toward—English major, revered and renowned English and Education Professor,

groundbreaking literacy scholar, and prolifically published author. This is the potentiality of literacy sponsorship.

When we consider Saul's age at the time of this event, by age 14 and given his background as a young man growing up in the New York City school system, Saul had already had exposure to books, to reading, and to formal literacy education. Yet, earlier in his autobiography, and with a less exhilarated tone, Saul had shared how alienated he felt from the literate practices of school, which he identified as feminine and genteel and therefore having nothing to do with him, a young Jewish male. The form of sponsorship offered by Saul's cousin offered something that school did not—a shared familiarity situated by the context of his relationship with his cousin. As Gee (2008) stated, “We never just read or write; rather, we always read or write something in some way.” Saul's belief that the introduction to his cousin's books “seems to have determined the future direction of my academic and professional history” stemmed from his sense of belonging to an affinity group of readers, as given entrée to and represented by his family member.

What Did Lie Beneath? A Portal to Linguistically Fitting In

Saul's curiosity triggered my curiosity, and I was excited to discover the authors and titles contained in that gift. Fortunately, I did not have to wait long, because Saul was just as eager to share those details as I was to read them. He descriptively wrote:

The box included some anthologies of stories and essays, a volume of Hemingway's short stories, and a number of novels, among which two stand out in my memory: Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, and Hemingway's *Across the River and Into the Trees*, one of Hemingway's last and least successful novels, but an utterly compelling introduction to Hemingway for me...

Yes, the box, I soon discovered, included titillating fodder for a teenage boy, “especially in one forever memorable scene in a gondola in Venice, where an American military officer in

the years just after the war made love to a tough-talking woman, who worried about his war-wounded hand” and juxtaposed with his prior reading of *The Hardy Boys* was indeed “shocking.”

But, Saul swiftly redirected where his true passion resided, and that was in the intellectual discoveries he made with the Mailer encounter: “...the Mailer novel, without even one sexy scene or, as far as I remember, any woman character... transformed my understanding of what defined literary language and the world of intellectual discourse, and my sense of my own potential relationship to such discourse and such a world.” What Saul described, but did not state directly, was that Mailer the author and his novel became another source of literacy sponsorship for him. Saul’s connection with Mailer’s voice and content firmed up his membership into an affinity group of readers and fictional characters who found a place to “fit” amidst an alienating school environment and diction.

Mailer’s book left Saul feeling

struck as if by a thunderbolt with the recognition that the language of real intellectuals and the language of the real literary community was more connected to the language I used than it was to the language of school, where the only models I knew for what passed as intellectual or at least academic discourse (outside of our thoroughly boring school books which sounded like teacher discourse in extremis and to which I paid no attention anyway) was the language of my teachers...

Saul could not identify with the heavy rhetoric and diction used in school books and by teachers; this sort of formulaic language did not serve as model language that he could take up naturally himself. Saul claimed, “I knew that the language they spoke and the language that seemed to be sponsored and privileged by the institution of the school was not one I was able or willing to inhabit.” Fortunately, the books gifted by his cousin offered him alternate universes and discourses, ones more inviting than those offered by his school.

Access to an Affinity Group, or Mein Literary Kinsmen

Saul seemed to have identified his own initiation into an “affinity identity,” which was a result of “access to a participation in specific practices that give each of its members the requisite experiences” (Gee, 2000, p.105). The term “requisite” refers to a required skill, one that becomes essential and valuable in a particular community. An affinity identity is one built on a shared, desired experience; thus, membership in an affinity group as per Gee’s model must be voluntary. The fact that Saul made no mention of pressure or coercion from his cousin to actually read or use the books might be indicative of the moment in Saul’s narrative where he felt initiated into the world of books and reading, allowing him to participate informally as an apprentice.

In contrast to what he earlier described as obligatory methodological approaches toward reading in his school context, Saul was becoming an active agent in his own literacy, thanks to his shared bonds and goals of entering this new domain of literature that felt a more natural fit for him. Saul described:

I remember the sense of adventure and wonder I felt as I opened the box and took up the books one at a time, hefting and smelling them, and flipping through their pages, and I also remember the strong sense that somehow through these volumes I was coming into contact with the sophisticated intellectual and social world that my cousin was inhabiting in college and that I would never otherwise have access to in my own school or among my neighborhood friends.

The added element of feeling invited into the characters and language of the stories held within that box and those books reinforced the social discovery with the cultural and literacy realizations Saul made through this multilayered encounter with sponsorship. The out-of-school context of his interaction with his cousin and with the books provided alternative ways of accessing and perceiving literacy, one that stemmed beyond what Gee (2000) called the “I-identity,” or institutional identity.

In his own words, Saul astutely concluded by commenting on the effects of being introduced to the kind of reading that felt more in sync with his own thoughts, language, and self-perception. He explained how

with that discovery I felt somehow authorized to use the language in which I thought—or a judiciously edited version of it—as a language fit for writing about what I thought. And this also meant that my thoughts, shaped and instantiated mentally by my own language, were also worthy of being expressed in writing, and worthy of being communicated to an audience that was itself more literary and intellectual, and more possessed of male virtues and power than any school audience I had heretofore known.

Confident reading lead Saul to confident, authoritative writing, a link that we will hear more about in other narratives to come.

Vignette 2 (Alex): Home Literacy Environments = Reading Incubators?

In a 2007 *New York Times* article that explored “How to Grow a Super-Athlete,” the writer Daniel Coyle investigated patterns that might help answer questions about what, where, and how talent exists as a phenomenon in sports. Was it a superior gene pool that explained the overwhelming number of Slavic tennis pros? The tireless commitment of top-trained Moscow Institute of Physical Culture coaches in Russia? The driven parents to whom many attribute a rise of South Korean tournament winning female pro golfers? After sharing multiple theories, Coyle exclaimed, “It’s enough to make you wish for a set of X-ray glasses that could reveal how these invisible forces of culture, history, genes, practice, coaching and belief work together to form that elemental material we call talent...” This question of talent brings me to consider the words I have heard used to describe the acts reading and writing; it is not uncommon to hear of “talented writers” and “skilled readers.” Is there such a thing, though, as a “talented reader”?

Given the multiple academic and professional successes of Alex, the individual around whom this second vignette is based, we may consider whether his proficient reading is one of the many talents he possesses or whether his talents are partially a result of his strong reading

abilities. He is an award-winning author, featured performer at a Presidential Inauguration, presenter on a variety of major television channels, and Founder/Director of several renowned diversity initiatives, and so much more that were I to list here I would risk putting his anonymity in jeopardy. Alex's story is one of multiple stories, the ones he has read, written, and helped others shape. His own story started, according to his reading autobiography, "In the household I grew up in" where:

literacy was everything. Books were everywhere—lining the walls in bedrooms, stacked on tables, shelved along the perimeter of entire rooms, buried in boxes and chests and in attics from previous years and generations of readers in my family. My mother, a high school teacher, read entire books in single sittings and my brother plowed through novels in mere days—a kind of commitment that was handed down from my mother's parents, and her parents before her.

In Alex's home, literacy was ubiquitous, multigenerational, and rife with opportunities for what Shirley Brice Heath (1982, 1988) called a literacy event: "...any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interaction and their interpretive processes.... A literacy event can then be viewed as any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role" (p. 350). The sociocultural and environmental factors that have contributed to Alex's literacy occurred in a domestic context and have had a critical influence on his reading behaviors and attitudes. What began as mimicking reading simply to gain entry into what he perceived made the other members of his family "normal" included behaviors such as creating a pretend-reading station in the corner of his bedroom and placing pretend bookmarks in books that he was not actually reading. These external actions made him feel closer to achieving the image of someone who enjoyed reading, someone worthy of the esteemed family name.

Eventually this simulated behavior evolved into real reading performativity, motivated largely by a desire "to appease my mother." Thus, Alex read more "because I knew it was

important to her, and thus important in the world.” He trusted his mother’s guidance and he followed her lead, exclaiming that “When it was time to read, I read.” What started off as extrinsic incentive—“It was at her direction and encouragement that I remember reading and ultimately enjoying *The Hardy Boys*, *Encyclopedia Brown*, *Superfudge*, *My Side of the Mountain*, *Hatchet*, *Summer of the Monkeys*, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, *Goosebumps*, sports books by Matt Christopher, Alfred Slote, adventures by Roald Dahl, and many more”—led to intrinsic activities and ultimately self-efficacy.

His father, too, contributed to his early home literacy, as Alex fondly recalled “Some of my earliest memories are of being read to by my father—*Harold and the Purple Crayon*, *Owl Moon*, *Goodnight Moon*, *the Hungry Caterpillar*, *Corduroy*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Curious George*, *Amelia Bedelia* and more.” He also had vivid memories of his father’s entertaining, humorous campfire-like tales that made Alex consider the significance of his “own small life” and allowed him to catch glimpses into animated versions of his father that he rarely experienced. Alex moved to more autonomous reading and then to later crafting his own creative writing. Here we see first-hand how the home literacy environment (HLE) influenced Alex’s reading acquisition, skills, perceptions, enjoyment, frequency, and development (Hamilton, Hayiou-Thomas, Hulme, & Snowling, 2016; Wiescholek, Hilkenmeier, Greiner, & Buhl, 2018).

His passion and many successes with reading notwithstanding, Alex owned up to what he referred to as stand out memories of “resistance to reading” spanning from the third grade to high school. He stated, “Despite the live-in presence of books and literacy and language, however, and although I certainly see myself now as a skilled and avid reader, many of my earliest memories surrounding the practice of reading are of moments—or indeed full stages of my life—during which I was a resistant, uninterested reader.” A source of embarrassment to Alex and his

mother was his failure to earn a sticker on the sticker wall in Mrs. H's third grade classroom, where students were encouraged to read and then produce a written response in exchange for the coveted stickers. The problem, it seemed, was that Alex never conceived of reading as a requirement until that defining classroom moment after which his mother felt compelled to design a 5-point reading plan to be completed within a certain timeframe. This new ritual also involved constant communication with Mrs. H. and with Alex's grandmother, and left Alex feeling for the first time that not reading was an offense.

Later on, in high school, Alex again showed "resistant" behavior by reading the Cliff's Notes versions of *Taming of the Shrew* and *Scarlett Letter*, an act that saved him time on reading while leaving extra time for personal writing, attending open mics, poetry slams, and writing workshops with peers. It was Alex's belief that these recollections of "resistance to reading" were conspicuous in his memories because they were not the norm, and because they framed how he now viewed "resistant readers in high school settings" and "alternative literacies in young people." As Alex observed, the times in his life where he was resistant to reading were also often the times when reading was treated as an external skill that required evidence to an outside entity of one's capability. Another viable explanation for this resistance might simply be adolescent rebellion against authority.

Once he reached college, and for the rest of his young adult life, Alex enjoyed what he called "reading for pleasure," which he defined as reading "for purpose outside of appeasing a syllabus, parent or class instructor." This pleasure reading expanded to an "obsession" with reading literature of identity formation, a consumption of fiction, and an "insatiable appetite" for poetry. At the end of his reading autobiography, Alex reflected on the "many moments of triumph and fear and curiosity and isolation that have fueled" his reading life. He determined that

the “most important common factor” in his reading history was “the role of community” and explained how “As a younger, resistant reader, I felt ashamed to be the only one of my peers without any stickers on the wall for having read, and that shame translated into a forced sense of accountability.”. Then, later, “As an adult writer, the community surrounding my own writing and the constant pressure to consume and consume and read new work by new authors became an important sense-of-self for me, one that inevitably translated into how I taught high school English...and led me into a Ph.D. program...”

If reading can be a “talent,” Alex’s accomplishments serve as evidence of the potential of that talent. But the word “talent” is problematic, isn’t it? It implies something innate, and moving past a certain stage in both reading and writing requires motivation and discipline. Hemingway wrote of the art of writing, “*First, there must be talent, much talent. Talent such as Kipling had. Then there must be discipline. The discipline of Flaubert.*” Discipline can be taught. As it turns out, in Coyne’s *New York Times* study of how to grow an athlete, the common factors in the backgrounds of the strong athletes were

1. Driven Parents
2. Early Starts
3. Powerful, Consistent Coaches
4. Cultural Toughness

Both of Alex’s parents offered him an early start; served as powerful, consistent coaches; and, as it turned out, a heritage of cultural toughness that stemmed from his grandmother’s difficult early start, which he believed led to a treatment of reading not just for entertainment, but as a matter of socioeconomic, regional, and political survival:

I can’t speculate as to how and why reading became of such importance to my grandmother’s family, but given the social and political context of southwest Detroit in the 1930’s as well as her family’s deep and personal connection to World War II, I might guess that its significance extended well-beyond mere entertainment. In fact, as I am

writing this, the history behind my grandmother's stake in literacy interests me a great deal.

The fluctuating nature of his feelings and conduct within Alex's reading life demonstrated that the path to becoming a strong reader is fraught with internal and external complexities, including inspiring and encumbering socio-educational forces. Still, it becomes clear that none of these complications prevented Alex from arriving at a place of success. Though Alex now writes and lectures on how *writing* can change the world, his reading autobiography revealed the multiple ways in which reading has shaped and changed his and his family's worlds.

Vignette 3 (Julia): Finola Fusspot

Finola Fusspot was a little girl with long curly hair that passed her waist. As her name implies, Finola was very fussy. Every morning before school, as her mother carefully untangled her long unruly spirals, Finola demanded her hairstyle of the day. When she wanted a pony tail, it couldn't be too "up" or too "down." It had to be centered just perfectly. And if she wanted a braid, it had to be a French braid, but never just an ordinary French braid. Some days it had to go right down the center, and on other days, it had to go across the front and then down the side. And she wouldn't leave the house if even one hair was out of place. Finola would not put on her shoes if her socks were too high or too low and the only way to solve that dilemma was to allow her to wear tights, no matter the weather. She also demanded her mother tie and re-tie her shoes until each bow was perfect with two symmetrical loops, each pointing in perfectly opposite directions. Finola was very fussy. She even hated when her food touched and would carefully examine the edges of her mashed potatoes or spaghetti, ready to refuse it until the day her mom found a perfect plate divided into sections, having grown tired of constantly throwing away perfectly good food.

Finola Fusspot is not my own narrative creation, though I wish I could claim it were the case. Finola was introduced to me by Julia, one of the doctoral students in this study. The opening paragraph of Julia's reading autobiography immediately revealed the creative and literary environment in which she was raised. Her inclination to narrate herself as a character in her own story about her reading history was inspired by her mother's creation of Finola during Julia's kindergarten years. It was no wonder, too, that Julia's life and writing are steeped in

storytelling; she described the various fictional characters and scenarios her mother composed on her keyboard in an effort to keep Julia and her four brothers and sisters entertained.

Not surprisingly, Julia attributed her love of reading to her early interactions with her mother, describing her as a “reading superhero”:

I thought—and still think—she was the coolest woman on earth, like a reading superhero. She consumed books in a single bound, turned pages faster than a speeding bullet. The smile that crept across her face when she thought no one was watching was one of pure joy. Perhaps my love of reading began as a love of my mother and a deep desire to become someone she could be proud of.

Julia has identified how extrinsic motivation leads to intrinsic motivation, and ultimately, to self-efficacy with reading (Schiefele, Schaffner, Möller, & Wigfield, 2012).

In addition to her mother’s model as a writer and a reader herself, Julia and her siblings were engaged in reading activities throughout their childhood, by way of outings to the library, reading nursery rhymes aloud, enacting Dr. Seuss and fairy tale characters, and then transitioning to independent reading of

The Giving Tree, A Light in the Attic, The Twits, James and the Giant Peach, every Goosebumps book there was, Charlotte's Web, The Pinballs, The Indian in the Cupboard, The Giver, Alice in Wonderland, Number the Stars, every single Judy Blume, Beverly Cleary and Reading Rainbow book, all the Sideways Stories from Wayside School, and every single book in the Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging collection.

All of this reading motivated Julia to begin writing her own fictional piece at 10 years old, of which she shared a summary in her narrative, and described as the catalyst to her becoming a profuse writer of poetry and song lyrics. She changed her approach to reading too, as she found herself studying writing styles and “reading like a writer.”

This shift prompted Julia to “forget everything I’ve ever learned from any other writer and just follow the ticking rhythm of my own human sound.” But the process of shutting out other writers’ styles also led Julia to “resent reading.” She explained how “I feel like it restricts me as a writer. It sometimes leaves me feeling like I can’t write what I want because it’s too

fundamentally different from everyone else, and how will I ever be published or listened to as a credible writer if the literary world doesn't have a category to fit me in?" Nancy Morrow (1997) studied the way reading is used in writing instruction, and described how in Michael Berbe's and Cary Nelson's *Higher Education Under Fire*, she recounted a story told by her own son, who avoided reading the texts on which writing assignments were based, "on the grounds that reading would unnecessarily complicate his understanding of the assignment and increase the difficulty of producing the kind of essay [characterized by verbal fluency] that his teachers wanted (222)" (p. 455). What Morrow was describing was the student's disconnect between reading and writing and, even further, a belief that reading would complicate his writing.

Julia, too, expressed that she rejected reading, despite a passion for it, because she felt it was too restrictive to her own writing goals and inhibited her creative expression. Though this feeling of being a "misfit" amidst established genres felt confining to Julia, and at some point she was determined to find her own voice; she decided that "I will always be called back to the mystery of the thoughts of another, and will make time to submerge myself in the oceans of other writers' inner thoughts set to paper. Because as good as it feels to write and perform your own writing, nothing will ever compare to the rapture of losing yourself in someone else's."

Whether it was as Finola or Julia, reader or writer, no matter what identity this participant inhabited, all roads led back to her mother's influence, so much so that the reading autobiography served as a tribute to her. So, too, did Julia's chosen academic and career path. "Recently, I asked my mother how Finola's story ends. She smiled as she said, 'She's in grad school at -----, of course. Being a fussy, she demanded nothing less than Ivy League.'"

Vignette 4 (Carrie): Reading, Sensation, and Carrie's Self-Perception

Like Julia, Carrie has fond recollections of her induction as a reader. She claimed, “I remember clearly not so much the image as the sensation, of my mother reading to me...she does insist that she began reading to me before I could even sit up on my own (long before reading to your child became a virtue second only to godliness and cleanliness).” These early reading experiences launched Carrie into more autonomous forms of reading, and she credited the Dick and Jane series for further propelling her reading abilities. She admitted, “I became hooked first on the now much-maligned Dick and Jane series of books. Despite, or perhaps because of, their repetitive narrative, I loved them and, ironically given the criticism the books received, my mother credits the series for helping both me and my brother learn to read.” Thus, like Saul, Carrie found early literacy sponsorship in the books themselves.

From Dick and Jane, she moved on to obsess over the *Nancy Drew* series. She observed, “Growing up in a rather traditional Italian family, the expectation was that, while school was important, my main purpose in life was to get married and have children. Smart and independent, Nancy Drew offered what seemed at the time to be an appealing alternative; I claimed for a time to want to become a detective.” This alternate identity that Carrie was able to “try on” through reading these books spurred her imagination and opened her mind to new ways of viewing herself and the possibilities for her future, ones that were not being offered by her traditional Italian family.

Just as Finola/Julia's shared early reading transitioned into independent adolescent reading, Carrie recalled how “By the time I was twelve, we'd moved to Queens, and although I could no longer walk to the library, I ventured solo every Saturday morning, by bus, to the Jamaica library to study, to read, and to browse the endless aisles.” And, as did Finola/Julia,

Carrie list/ed specific authors and titles that became her favorites during those years, such as “*The Grapes of Wrath*, and then everything I could find by Steinbeck; *An American Dream*, and then the works of Dreiser; *Anna Karenina*, and then Tolstoy; *The Brothers Karamazov*...and Dostoyevsky.” While her mother praised her literary fancies, her father derided her addiction to reading. Some might be skeptical about a teenager reading these “mature” titles prematurely and before being capable of understanding them. Yet, literary appreciation does not always equate to literary comprehension, and the way Carrie described her passion for reading, she seemed to have been moved by the stories, characters, and settings. These experiences fueled her inclinations to read more and even become an English major in college.

Another commonality Carrie had with Finola/Julia was the magical appeal of the library, a habit also sown by their mothers who made those trips to the library adventurous and inviting. As her literacy sponsor, Carrie’s mother ensured that her reading experiences were situated in contexts both inside the home and in communal milieus (Gee, 2001). Carrie determined:

The fact that I chose to major in English as an undergraduate is a direct result, I’ve concluded, of a childhood punctuated by weekly treks to the public library. Early on, living on the Lower East Side, my mother would take my brother and me each Saturday morning, shopping cart in tow, not to shop for groceries, but to return and borrow an ever-changing mountain of books. First, she’d help us find the ones we wanted in the children’s section, and then we’d carry them over to the adult side where she’d sit us down to read while she looked for her own title to take home.

Libraries are valuable places responsible for promoting good reading habits in young children. Even when those visits are punctuated by less positive circumstances than those described by Julia and Carrie, the library is a magical realm of reading opportunities and a golden gateway to diverse worlds. Just ask Maya, whose mother used the library as a depository for her and her siblings when she desperately needed a respite from her dyslexic contractor husband and endlessly screeching children.

Vignette 5 (Maya): “I Guess This Is What Happens When We Let Our Daughters Write Our Histories”

When she learned to drive at age 35, her first priority was to get herself to the library. The children's annex was just far enough down the street to give her a break while she browsed the adult books in the main building. She dropped us, ages 6, 8, and 9, at the front door, her tires screeching toward the main building. Though nervous at being deserted, I was quickly distracted by the aisles of books, scanning the shelves for my ten, the maximum we were allowed to borrow. Piling the lucky chosen texts on the floor next to me, my anticipation grew for the future reading I would soon enjoy. I could not wait to get those books back to my room and spread them across the bed, deciding which to read first.

Maya's reading history was framed by a generational hope that the next generation of women would fare better than the previous one. With an alcoholic grandfather and a dyslexic, blue-collar worker father, pressure to be happier and more successful than her miserable and disappointed mother and grandmother was a pall surrounding her. One of the ways her mother tried to lift her own spirits was to read to her children. Library trips, too, as evident in the excerpt above from Maya's reading autobiography, were attempts at lifting the spirits of a family oppressed by socioeconomic stress. Maya described, too, how, with anticipation, she “triumphantly exited the library, my arms laden with ten perfect books” and how “those library books offered a sweet escape for me at home.”

Unfortunately, elementary school reading did not hold the same charm as could be found at the library. Maya's description of the way “the elementary school program called S.R.A. killed everything beautiful about reading” hit straight at the heart of the “What are we doing wrong in the English classroom?” debate. Maya elaborated on the problem, explaining,

We were to read paragraphs and answer the accompanying comprehension questions before moving, “at our own pace” to the next color level of stories. “At our own pace” quickly became a contest as we compared colors and pushed to the next level, rushing through the stories, bombing the questions, and aiming for the elusive and elite Olive colored section. Thanks to S.R.A., even reading could become a competitive activity.

Even. Reading. Could. Become. A. Competitive. Activity. This was neither the first nor the last time I heard about the reading “color wars” and their detrimental effects on the psyche and reading habits of students (my own students regale me with their own stories of how they attempted to outsmart these color systems and how demeaning they felt). Foregoing the actual reading in an effort to earn badges quickly was simply not the way to build strong readers. This practice of cutting reading time short continued into high school for Maya too, and even the teachers left her “completely unsatisfied with hasty and superficial discussion[s]” of literature she was enthusiastically hoping to debate at length in class.

Maya’s assessment of her middle school years indicated a parting of ways with assigned school reading in favor of outside of school choices like Judy Blume, whom she claimed taught her about the “birds and the bees,” a brief stint with some horror (i.e., Stephen King’s *Carrie*), and the haunting “diary” of a teenage drug abuser, Beatrice Sparks’ *Go Ask Alice*. By the time Maya started high school, though she found her reading time drastically reduced, she did return to in-school reading and enjoyed “*The Lord of the Flies*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet*...*The Crucible* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.” She felt the pain of *The Lord of the Flies*’ beloved Simon’s death and was rattled by the boys’ treatment of him, so much so that she spent a night crying over his death and anticipating the opportunity to discuss these responses in class discussion the following day. Sadly, the ensuing “discussion” left her “completely unsatisfied” largely because the teacher was incapable of facilitating an engaging dialogue, resorting instead to simplistic “answers” about the characters and themes.

Still, Maya reported that “I did not read much outside of school, but devoured the assigned texts while trying to absorb the less than interesting discussions from my teachers and classmates.” Maya’s love of reading, of story, prevailed in the face of what felt in her narrative to

be a disappointing case of a victim of poor pedagogy. Fortunately, her reading experiences in college proved fulfilling, life-altering, and formative as she drew on them for her own curriculum when she became an English teacher.

Maya left teaching, however, to raise her own three children and described her determination to NOT do as her mother did, having found her relationship with her too complicated and often hostile. Yet, she confessed:

One block from the library, I would pack the children in the stroller when I could fetch not one more sippy cup.... Once there, the three would toddle or crawl to the cases, beginning their own peaceful searches, perhaps pulling out *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* or *Cars and Trucks and Things that Go*, and dropping down to the floor for a hearty read.

Indeed, the next generation seems to be faring better than the previous one in this scenario. Maya concluded her narrative with this reflection:

Though my greatest fear has always been that I will replicate the mistakes made by my mother, I understand that this love of reading in myself and now in my children originated directly from her. Though she was not able to give me much emotionally, she exposed me to the ways that reading serves to inspire, teach, bond, entertain, and, yes, even to heal.

Despite some questionable pedagogical and curricular approaches Maya had to endure in her formative years, she had, at the core, positive memories of reading with her mother, as did many of the participants, whom I begin to connect here with Maya's story. She described the profound effect of the feelings she experienced when her mother proclaimed "She is reading" during her early preschool years. Maya chronicled the ensuing moments when she realized what those words "she is reading" represented. She explained:

Slowly, I realized what she meant. I recognized these words, these representatives of the ideas about which we were singing. Each unit had an individual meaning, and as I read one word after another, she "oohed" and "ahhed" and squeezed me tightly. I rarely saw her this animated, and her excitement touched me deeply...this rare attention from my mom solidified my interest in reading.

The Power of Parent Attention

The five vignettes in this chapter helped demonstrate the contexts in which these strong adult readers first came to love reading. More often, it was the connection with a mother that sparked the literary fascination. I briefly highlight here several other participants' commentary on memories of reading with a parent in an effort to begin branching out the conversation about this overlapping theme of early familial sponsorship, which is largely maternally based, among all of the adult readers in this study.

Christina had fond recollections of the context surrounding her mother reading to her: "My earliest memories include being snuggled in bed with my mother while she read Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* and Dare Wright's *Edith and Mr. Bear* to me over and over until I eventually fell asleep." Christina's, like Carrie's (in Vignette 4) memories of reading, are based on the embodied perception of their feelings about their mothers.

Ryan, another participant, recalled when, where, and how his mother read to him: "what I loved most was my mother's sing-songy reading of the book. Both my parents were 2nd generation American born children of immigrants. My mother's musically inflected voice is a vestige of her Italian heritage. Her reading of Dr. Seuss accentuated the lyricism of the writing." Stella, too, reminisced about how "I used to read most with my mother and younger brother, usually in his room, and occasionally with my father, who came home late from the city."

Other participants also acknowledged early family literacy sponsors in the home who valued reading as more than skills acquisition or a "time-filling" activity:

Perhaps my love of reading began as a love of **my mother** and a deep desire to become someone she could be proud of. Of course, with a mother like that, reading was vital.

My mother reads me Poe's "Annabel Lee" which feels sad, sounds majestic and significant in a way I can't access, but causes an overpowering emotional reaction. I

don't understand this poem or why I'm reacting to it... I love it because my mother loves it, and her mother loved it before her.

My mother was unhappy most of the time...but she always brightened up when she read to us. The little extra money she had was spent on a subscription to a book club called Parent's Magazine Press.

My earliest memories of reading (and writing) were to gain the attention of my parents—mostly my mother because she was the one who was home raising us.

Some of my earliest memories are of being read to by my father.

I used to steal my brother and sister's English textbook and I "read" the colorful pages.

What made these family literacy interactions successful? Most of the participants viewed their shared bookreading experiences as opportunities to explore their curiosity, enthusiasm for learning, and positive attachment to a parent. Research on early literacy in the home emphasized joint parent-child bookreading frequency as a predictor of reading achievement (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995); however, little research exists on the effects of the affective quality of parent-child reading interactions (Bergin, 2001). The unique value of the reading autobiographies and their qualitative nature is that they transport the writer and reader into the socioemotional sphere of a shared reading experience. The link between parent reading and reading achievement is well known; less, though, is known about the kind of reading interactions that lead to not just successful, but strong and lifelong readers. The doctoral students' narratives indicated that positive, encouraging, and affirming exchanges certainly support the desire to read, but they also routinely emphasized the attachment to a mutually shared interest in reading.

In most of these students' homes, a culture of literacy pervaded the environment, one that went beyond simply putting a book in a child's hand or merely focusing on attaining a skill. A mother's unique voice, a parent's pride, time with a hard-working father, emotional and financial investment in a book club—these were the real bonds offered by books. The five vignettes

combined with Christina's, Stella's, and Ryan's quotes about their fond memories of family reading painted a clear composite of a set of strong adult readers whose early reading experiences set them on a path toward a fulfilling and life-long habit.

Emergent Themes

The socioemotional aspect of early literacy sponsorship was a common thread in the participants' autobiographies. There is a direct correlation between kids who loved reading and the way reading was experienced in the family as an occasion for physical and psychological closeness. The familial solidarity and enjoyment of stories as a shared activity provided satisfaction on several levels: feeling like the member of a family, being treated more maturely, and experiencing inclusion reinforced the participants' love for reading. Barton and Hamilton (1998) told us that "Literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people" (p. 7). The memories of sitting on a parent's lap, snuggling in a bed, cozying up on a couch, even being coerced to pay attention while being read aloud to are all interactions described in the reading autobiographies. More careful examination of the type of interaction that occurred in the histories of strong readers can help to explain the averse and avid forms of reading that developed in their lives. In the next chapter, I explore the themes that emerged across all 18 of the reading autobiographies of strong adult readers to log and assess their mindsets, feelings, values, and social relationships and then examine how each factor participated in the shaping of their literacy.

Chapter V

SPONSORSHIP, ATTITUDES, AND ACQUIRED HABITS OF EIGHTEEN STRONG ADULT READERS

In this chapter, using sociocultural literacy theory as a research lens, I identify and interpret some of the overlapping themes from all 18 of the adult strong readers' narratives. With the five case studies from the previous chapter in mind, I begin with a focus on the agencies and individuals who were influential in the reading lives of all the study participants. These forms of literacy sponsorship are looked at for both the encouraging and detrimental ways they operated, specifically in the home and school settings. Here, too, I investigate what the reading autobiographies in my study revealed about attitudes, academic endeavors, and self-perceptions related to reading both in and out of school.

Part 1—Confirming the Obvious: Reading Begins at Home

Saul, Alex, Julia, Carrie, and Maya were not exceptional cases among the 18 narratives; they were simply a sampling of voices and memories that occurred in strong readers' histories. Moreover, they were not exclusive in their emphasis on having learned to read or having been exposed to book culture in the home (and library). In total, 16 out of the 18 participants (89%) in this study of adult strong readers recalled their initial and early exposure to reading having occurred in the home and with family members.

A common theme of seeking affirmation was immediately evident in many of the autobiographies, as was vivid recollection of the environments in which the participants read or were read to. Some examples of these attention seeking behaviors can be found in Gary's and Rick's autobiographies. For instance, Gary waxed nostalgic about being able to

see vividly my father's office, with a shabby green cot where he'd take his afternoon nap in one corner, and the rest of the study filled with books from floor to ceiling. I had been hoping to prove my skills with the bright yellow hardback book, and since I had not made much headway with reading it, I worked on memorizing it. And initially it worked wonderfully, and I basked in the warmth of my father's approval.

Rick, in his narrative, recalled initially being engaged more by the people who connected him to books than the books themselves, and a simple sensation of "my mother's warm lap as I nuzzled in her arms to listen to her reading." These were just two of many instances describing moments of intimacy created around books. Whether naturally or deliberately, parents provided circumstances where "The reader, writer, and the text are involved in the dynamic interplay that is the act of reading" (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl, & Holliday, 2014, p. 31).

In all, the breakdown of sponsors mentioned included mother, father, grandparents, teachers, siblings, friends, and cousins, with only two narratives indicating there were no early sponsors (preschool) to their literacy, or at least not that they recalled. I tallied the percentages of each form of sponsorship out of the 18 participants reporting, which, along with Figure 1, provide more quantifiable numbers. Many participants cited more than one early literacy sponsor; hence, in averaging percentages of sponsors cited, the numbers of sponsors did not equal the number of participants. The specific breakdown of the individuals mentioned in the reading autobiographies as those who read with the participants in the home, school, or library during their preschool years is as follows (note: numbers are rounded off to nearest percentile):

Mother: 10 (55%)
Father: 5 (28%)
Grandparent: 5 (28%)
Teacher: 2 (11%)
Siblings: 4 (22%)
Cousin: 1 (.05%)
None: 2 (11%)

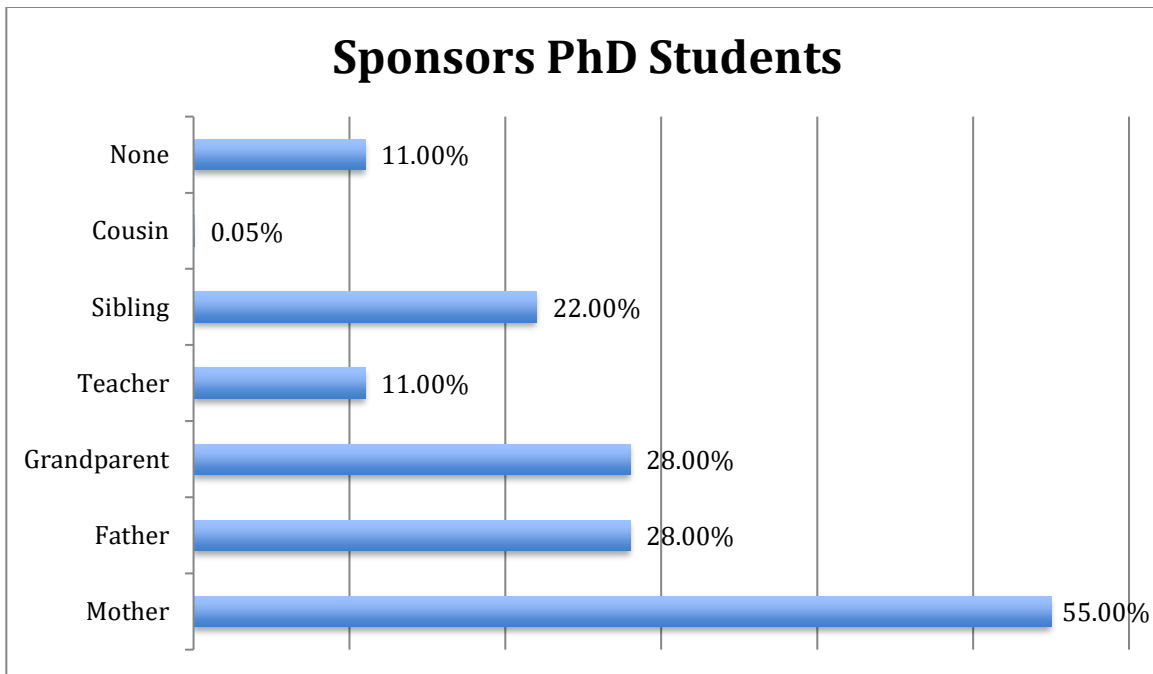


Figure 1. Number of sponsors of early literacy in doctoral students

More than half of the participants described being read to by their mothers. This might simply be explained by the era in which this population grew up. Even without exact demographics, we can generalize, given the approximate ages of the group, that most would have been in their preschool years during the early to late 1970s and 1980s. While there was a surge of women in the workforce as never seen before in the United States prior to that time, the number of two income-earning homes in the 1970s was still significantly low (Waldman, Grossman, Hayghe, & Johnson, 1979), compared with today. Therefore, one explanation for the prominence of mothers as sponsors is the likelihood that they were the primary caretakers, though we cannot assume that just because they were home with them, they read more. The numbers in the chart reveal the quantifiable results, but the benefit of narrative research is that it can teach us much more about what these numbers represent as far as meaning, experience, and context for the

participants. We can start to assess what family members offered through these early literacy events and practices.

Teachers and Friends as Literacy Sponsors

Teachers and friends were also important figures in several of the accounts, though more so in post-elementary school years. They appeared sporadically and were not sufficiently developed enough to create vignettes or narrative modes of presentation. Instead, I offer two tables, quotes about teachers (Figure 2), and quotes about friends (Figure 3). In five narratives, teachers were noted for some form of positive impact on those participants and their reading habits, as shown below.

Maya: “In sixth grade, I was lucky enough to have a <u>handsome young teacher, who brought not just his good looks, but some solid literature into my life.</u> ”
Asher: “My freshman year of <u>college my writing professor</u> said that the most important thing about writing was reading. She said that the really great writers were really great readers. <u>I started reading short story after short story.</u> ”
Sara: “My junior year of high school is when I met the <u>English teacher who made me realize that my love of reading could be powerful..Mrs. M. introduced us to academic writing but, more importantly, she treated us as adults during discussion.</u> Much of what we read for AP American Literature with her I did not care for in the slightest.... However, I remember our discussions in that class.”
Renee: “In my senior year of high school I become a student of Miss L., the English teacher whom <u>I feel privileged to have as my guide</u> through Joyce’s Ulysses, Shakespeare’s Macbeth and Oedipus Rex. <u>I want to read for her class</u> because I want to try out my theories under her tutelage.”
Tania: “So, Linda was the first person that knew what I was trying to do and <u>could explain to me the most effective ways of reading, communicating, and understanding language....</u> Then <u>she said that my paper was beautiful,</u> and from that moment I knew I would be irrevocably hooked to writing as well as reading.”

Figure 2. Teachers who influenced reading

It is encouraging to see words like “powerful,” “privileged,” and “beautiful” in tandem with memories of in-school English instruction. Especially reassuring are the diverse stages of

education at which these positive influences appeared: 6th grade, college, junior and senior year of high school, respectively. Varied, too, were the reasons these teachers stood out in the participants' memories.

Though Maya did not elaborate enough to give clearer attribution to the "handsome young" 6th grade teacher, she did acknowledge that he "brought her" a cache of "some solid literature," including "the floor to ceiling coat closets that lined one wall of his classroom as we discussed Ray Bradbury's eerie close to 'All Summer in a Day.'" For Asher, it was the connection between writing ability and reading, emphasized by his college professor that spurred him to read "short story after short story." In Sara's case, Mrs. M engaged students through facilitating mature discussion about the reading, and even though Sara confessed to *not* enjoying the reading assignments for AP English, the inspired discussions about the literature motivated her enough to stay with it.

Renee described her senior year of high school with Miss L. as an advantaged journey into complex texts and welcomed occasions to test theories. Under Linda's tutelage, Tania realized the interconnectedness of communication, comprehension, and reading; she also had a boost of confidence in being recognized for "beautiful" writing. The immutable link between writing and reading was cemented for Tania in that moment. While these five testimonies of advantageous in-school literacy sponsorship provided a glimpse into the ways English teachers have influenced reading attitudes and habits for these strong adult readers, further discussion later in this chapter will uncover less promising exchanges.

As for friends, they were rarely mentioned, but I record here the five comments relayed by five different participants regarding friends who in some way came into contact with their literate lives.

Renee: “My friends initiate my Judy Blume phase.... My emergent friends and I subversively share copies as contraband.”
Jessica: “I was later obsessed with V. C. Andrews’ books...and would read them in secret.... I wish I could remember who told me to read them, but I’m sure I was passing the books with my female friends.”
Jada: “When my boyfriend tries to force me to do book club with him, I can engage in conversations about the books with him in a different way. He makes time to read, and therefore I have to make time to read.”
Sara: “I spent a lot of time in school [writing horror stories for and about my friends] and not paying attention to classes I considered boring such as calculus and organic chemistry.”
Asher: “When I was in tenth grade, my friend gave me a book with a long note in the front of the book. It was called ‘The Alchemist’.”

Figure 3. Friends who influenced reading

Friends appeared mainly as conduits to genres and authors who were typically “forbidden” in school and in their homes. For Renee, Jessica, and Asher, their friends introduced them to books that excited them for both what they represented and what was in them. In her article “Horror: To Gratify, Not Edify,” Randi Dickson (1998) explored young readers’ fascination with the R. L. Stine Goosebumps series and offered this explanation for the pleasure these teen readers take in reading popular fiction: “On some level, these stories may be helping to shape these preteen students’ views of themselves as they begin to work out their own identities” (p. 120). Dickson cited horror, specifically, as a genre that offers a safe space for testing out adventure, suspense, thrill, and an edifying sense of defeating the monsters faced in these fictional realms. In Figure 3, Sara stated her enthusiasm about writing horror for and about her friends, acts she contrasted with the “boring” school subjects she was escaping.

Another reason that friends can be a compelling source of literacy sponsorship is attributable to the bandwagon effect (Dickson, 1998, p. 121). In Jada’s case (Figure 3), her

boyfriend's desire to have her join him in reading and then discussing in a book club compelled her to make time for what became a shared activity. Renee, Jessica, and Asher all described the interest they took in books primarily because their friends were reading them. These were the main examples of friend-related literacy experiences that appeared throughout the 18 reading autobiographies, but they did give us a sense of the potential friends have for motivating interest and changes in literacy resources.

As seen in the figures above, teachers and friends did serve as sponsors; however, the majority of the participants discussed their early memories and lasting effects of reading with family members as the most favorable influences, largely due to the joy and socioemotional gratification it brought them. The excerpts about teachers that I culled from those five out of 18 participants offered some understanding of the characteristics of teachers who did motivate and inspire readers too. One factor /was boosting student confidence, as seen in Tania's anecdote where she was told her writing was "beautiful." Another factor was treating students "like adults" during literature discussions, as Sara noted about Mrs. M. One more positive teacher behavior was shared by Asher, for whom the lightbulb connecting reading to writing skills was turned on by his college professor. Other than these five examples, attributions of positive teacher interactions were sparse—a discouraging finding. Friends, too, were infrequently referenced. Still, while a few trends in the narratives were related to these categories, they were not sufficiently developed enough to explore further at this time.

Other themes, too, began to emerge among the backgrounds of the doctoral students. During my initial transcription and preliminary re-reading of each narrative, I observed five overlapping domains in reading experiences among the participants' reading histories, the first of

which I already analyzed in the Chapter IV vignettes, and subsequent analysis of a series of quotes from other participants' narratives. The reoccurring categories are:

- family influences,
- school influences,
- particular books mentioned,
- resistance to reading,
- stand-out literacy events (ny “stand-out literacy events” I mean activities affiliated with literacy that occurred in non-traditional modes, i.e., theatre, comedy, music).

The list above illustrates that in addition to writing about their home and school sponsors, the adult strong readers often mentioned specific book titles and authors, their own resistance to assigned reading, and other forms of literacy or discourse that stood out to them. Still, the predominant features in nearly all of the reading autobiographies in this group of readers were the early familial sponsorship in the home, which I have discussed, and the dichotomous attitudes between out-of-school and in-school reading, which I explore in the next section.

Part 2—Context, Space, and Literacy in School and Non-school Communities

Many of the narratives transitioned from constructive and sentimental early memories in the home to joyless, sometimes hostile depictions of school classrooms and assignments. By positioning the participants' memories of in-school reading alongside their memories of out-of-school reading experiences, we can ascertain the sort of discourse they used to articulate these differences. The terminology of outside/inside used to delineate the differences between school and non-school reading carried connotations and implications that, through closer examination, I now begin to unpack. I highlighted in red the negative language used to refer to reading done for

and in school. I highlighted in blue the positive language used to refer the reading done outside of or even *instead of* the requisite reading for school.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In School • “Though those library books offered a sweet escape for me at home, the elementary school program called S.R.A. killed everything beautiful about reading... • “We also read O’Henry’s “The Gift of the Magi,” a short story which I’m totally in awe of until my 7th grade English teacher ruins it for me, and the magic is gone • “Reading for school takes so long that I am not able to do much pleasure reading” • “... It was difficult for me read, and I always hated the books that my teachers wanted us to read.” • “I went to class the next day, expecting to discuss his death, and wanting to understand desperately why the boys killed him. My teacher...tried to address our questions...and I recall being completely unsatisfied with her hasty and superficial discussion of the scene.” • “I spent a lot of time in school [writing horror stories for and about my friends] and not paying attention to classes I considered boring...” • I also remember being read to at the library in elementary school, but I also remember the librarians being real bitches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out of School • “I quickly became an avid comic book reader and collector. It was the first time I realized that reading wasn’t just for school and for the display of my reading prowess” • “It was not until college and well into my young adult life that I actually started reading for pleasure, and for purpose outside of appeasing a syllabus, parent or class instructor” • “I did not read outside of school until 4th grade, when I became obsessed with Encyclopedia, and I remember for the first time, then, loving the sensory experience of reading, or rather, losing one’s sensory self-consciousness during an escapist experience of reading” • “But my real passion was in my outside reading, which provided a deeply valued escape from my intense alienation from my high school society” • Outside of school, I found myself reading a lot of horror tales, mostly by H. P. Lovecraft and Stephen King. I read Edgar Allan Poe’s stories for school, but I did not find him as terrifying.
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Figure 4. Comparative chart of in-school and out-of-school reading memories

The language used by these writers reflected how they built and recognized their activities and identities related to reading; the significance of particular word choices, especially the polarizing expressions of “in-school” and “out-of-school” experiences, begs closer examination. The attitudes and habits expressed in the wording surrounding their memories of reading also show how those around them built and shaped their reading activities and identities. The participants’ thoughts, beliefs, and values are reflected through their diction.

Pulling from the clauses I earlier highlighted in red to indicate reading done for school, I now look more closely at the sort of discourse involved in the students’ relationships with their teachers. Then, in the next section, I juxtapose that analysis with descriptions used by participants to designate out-of-school reading. I urge you, reader, to look carefully at the language used to describe these school-related interactions before I offer my own analysis:

- killed everything beautiful about reading
- my 7th grade English teacher ruins it for me, and the magic is gone
- Reading for school takes so long, I always hated the books that my teachers wanted us to read.
- completely unsatisfied with her hasty and superficial discussion of the scene
- not paying attention to classes I considered boring
- I also remember being read to at the library in elementary school, but I also remember the librarians being real bitches.

“Killed,” “ruins,” “hated,” “unsatisfied,” “superficial,” “boring.” Remember that this population of students was not raised in the digital age, so any attempts to explain boredom, impatience, and dissatisfaction away by blaming technology does not hold up for this generation of learners. We need to account for such adverse representations of their school-related reading experiences if we want to understand how and why, even in the most avid readers, the place where readers should have been cultivated was impeding them. We can begin by examining these attitudes side by side with the contexts and spaces in which the strong readers continued to foster a love of reading, despite the undesirable school-related experiences.

Seeking Refuge in Non-School “Pleasure” Reading

What was acquired in school through the teaching of and the act of reading? In the home? How did the participants identify themselves as readers in each of these contexts? The answers to these questions can teach us (and them) about the attitudes, values, learning processes, and influences on habits of mind that arose from family, teacher, environmental, contextual, and institutional literacy sponsorship. From there, we might better understand the various conceptions of and purposes for what it means to “be a reader” and how those conceptions are shaped by literacy sponsors.

The participants’ ideas and terminology had significant overlap with each other in their descriptions of in-school and non-school memories. There were critical connotations of the language used by the participants to distinguish between “inside” and “outside” of school reading, as well as what they labeled “pleasure reading.” They labeled any non-required school reading as “outside reading” and expressed very distinct preferences for what they described as an aesthetic type of reading (Rosenblatt, 1983) in that realm. For instance, one participant described her extracurricular reading as a “sensory experience.” She recalled, “and I remember for the first time, then, loving the sensory experience of reading, or rather, losing one’s sensory self-consciousness during an escapist experience of reading.” This depiction of her reading experience echoed Muriel Barberry’s sentiments to which I alluded in my introduction: “When something is bothering me, I seek refuge. No need to travel far; a trip to the realm of literary memory will suffice. For where can one find more noble distraction, more entertaining company, more delightful enchantment than in literature?” While it would have been helpful for curricular and pedagogical reasons if the participant who wrote about her “sensory experience” had mentioned a specific book title that

elicited this aesthetic experience, the fact that a book can bring this sort of “refuge” needs to be stressed. Is it possible to replicate this phenomenon IN SCHOOL? I address this question again in Chapter VIII, where I discuss the implications of my findings. First, however, I want to examine other participants’ assessments of their out-of-school reading experiences to locate overlapping “pleasurable” reading occurrences and their possible sources.

The notion that one needs “refuge” and “escape” has implications of its own; one must seek refuge *from* a stressful or oppressive condition. Another participant in my study offered one of the circumstances that would help to explain the need for escapism through literature. She claimed, “But my real passion was in my outside reading, which provided a deeply valued escape from my intense alienation from my high school society.” Borrowing from Gee’s (1996) notion of literacy as a highly social act, we can see how this participant’s identification of feeling socially alienated raised a conundrum for English educators who are attempting to teach a text in the classroom, which is a collective setting.

Inviting students to discuss and analyze a text within a classroom environment seems, from an educative standpoint, a positive and interactive experience that should conceivably result in further engagement with a text. However, in light of this participant’s revelations about feeling alienated in the school setting, we must consider that our attempts to bring students into a conversation about a text in very public ways might actually have the opposite effect of turning them off to reading. Cooperative learning and critical reading approaches can leave some students feeling insecure, vulnerable, and incompetent. So, too, might those pedagogical approaches leave students feeling that reading is being imposed upon them, thus wrenching the joy from reading. We can work to mitigate these discomforts, and I offer successful practices

(Blau, 2003, 2017; Gallagher, 2009; Wilhelm, 2008; Wilhelm, Baker, & Dube, 2001) in my final chapter where I discuss implications.

What would account for the participants' common determination that outside reading is an activity allied with "pleasure"? If you recall Alex from Vignette 2, Chapter IV, he offered this illuminating observation: "It was not until college and well into my young adult life that I actually started reading for pleasure, and for purpose outside of appeasing a syllabus, parent or class instructor." What does it mean when we read "for" a purpose, syllabus, parent, or class instructor? It means that we are reading for obligatory, externally driven, and simulated intentions. This invites superficial and manufactured ways of reading that are predicated upon acquiring a skill set rather than a heuristic, lifelong appreciation for literature. There is little room in this scenario for the kind of aesthetic reading à la Rosenblatt (1983), or for fostering "habits of mind" of highly performative literate readers, as per Blau (2003). Alex identified how "reading for pleasure" was an act that was done "aside from" reading done for school.

Consequently, school becomes a space designed for the kind of reading that requires toil, interruption, and assessment. It is an environment where students are commanded *what* to read, and even according to several of the autobiographical accounts, *how* to "correctly" read. As evidence, another participant remembered:

Having my "good" work noticed meant a lot as a kid, because I was always in trouble for behavioral things at school. I remember getting a time-out, where I had to sit on the floor in front of the classroom. The crime: When asked to read a paragraph from a short story aloud to the class.... I read it with a silly voice. This was a real learning moment for me. I learned that in school:

SILLY VOICES? NOT ALLOWED.

But at home, where being annoying was considered a little more endearing, silly voices were one of the main reasons for doing anything. Looney Tunes were very important to me, and that Rooster that talks really slow and sounds like he's from Arkansas was a portal into the world of the great American Dialect. The best way to exercise the opening of this portal, I quickly found, was to read anything aloud, often, with confidence, and in the silliest of voices.

The “lesson” that this participant was taught in school was that “silly voices are not allowed” and the consequence was being ostracized and publicly humiliated. Yet, at home, the “silliest of voices” were invited as an opportunity to acquire confidence and enjoyment through the act of reading. This individual’s interpretation of the incongruent reception by school and by home forces when reading aloud illustrated how literacy was treated in the varying contexts of school and home communities.

Clearly, the context of reading outside of school was a more liberating and encouraging space that all participants in this study recalled more vividly and specifically than they did their in-school reading histories. In all fairness, though, a select number of teachers were mentioned who did succeed in replicating the gratifications of home reading within their classrooms (see Figure 2 above). Unfortunately, none of those accounts left as vivid, moving, and powerful an image and outlook as the descriptions of exultant reading that occurred outside of school. One writer, Rick, maintained:

I spent many hours reading. I remember many summer afternoons in which I’d lounge on the lawn furniture of my backyard, reading. The whispering summer breeze would fan the pages of my school sponsored summer reading. The cicadas would hum in the trees as part of a soundtrack for those lazy days. Reading was what I did for fun. It had become a part of me.

The value that reading assumes in this individual’s world was signified by the amount of time spent doing it (“many hours”), the relaxed sensation while doing it (“I’d lounge”), and the enjoyment that stemmed from it (“fun”). I became so enamored by this description of the setting and aesthetic involvement within it that I overlooked the phrase “school-sponsored summer reading.” Until this point, I had interpreted the negative attitudes toward in-school reading as a problem of imposed text selection and lack of freedom to choose. In this instance, however, the

participant was extremely content while reading a school-related book. It is possible that there was still some room for personal choice within the school requirements, as it is common for schools to provide an extensive summer reading which from which the student can pick a title. Still, the image of this reader relaxing on a summer day and having a transcendent experience with an assigned text is hopeful.

Unfortunately, the next statement in the participant's reading autobiography belies that optimism, not because of the text but because of "school" and "teachers." Rick proclaimed, "School, however, challenged my identity as a reader. While some of my teachers in high school made me feel like an accomplished reader, there were times when the opposite was true." One of those times, he wrote, was when Mrs. S. diminished his newfound hero, Holden Caulfield, by adhering to her very rigid "correct interpretation" of Holden as a "kook!" Even now I hear from my own college students the tragic stories of having a favorite author, book, or character derided, even destroyed by a junior high or high school teacher's limited and righteous interpretation. The message to student readers is that literature is like math—formulaic and wholly dependent upon correct and incorrect interpretations.

Let us turn now, then, to more issues that arose in the in-school reading memories of the adult strong readers, the ones that were *not* identified as "pleasurable" in any way. To begin, I provide Figure 5 of the dichotomous attitudes expressed in the reading autobiographies regarding in-school and out-of-school reading:

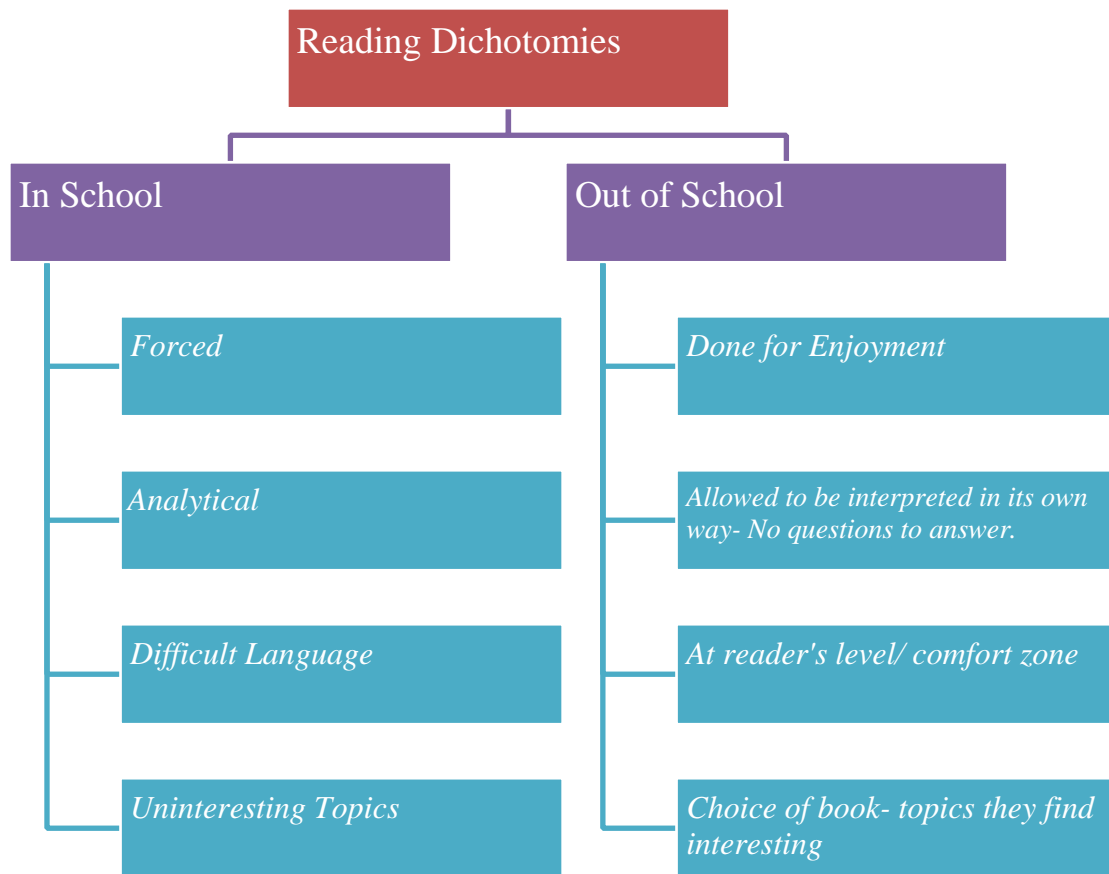


Figure 5. Dichotomous attitudes toward in-school and out-of-school reading

Four main issues with school reading contributed to the ensuing attitudes and habits described in the reading histories. The recollections of being forced to read, expected to analyze, thrust into difficult language, and assigned boring topics dominated the reading histories during the middle school and high school years. At the same time, non-school reading was favored for the enjoyment it offered, the ability to subjectively and unreservedly interpret, the flexibility of the reading level, and the freedom of book selection.

In their own words, the participants recalled being labeled as “lazy,” struggling with language complexity, feeling ashamed at not being on par with their peers, and correlating their hatred of a teacher with their resistance to anything assigned by that detested person, as can be seen in the following excerpts:

Saul: “The only models I knew for what passed as intellectual or at least academic discourse (outside of our thoroughly **boring school books** which sounded like teacher discourse in extremis and to which I paid no attention anyway).”

Austin: “As a younger, resistant reader, I **felt ashamed** to be the only one of my peers without any stickers on the wall for having read, and that shame translated into a forced sense of accountability.”

“Indeed full stages of my life-during which **I was a resistant, uninterested reader**”

Renee: “I read nothing that’s **required of me** in Honor’s English, but everything V. C. Andrews.... Occupied by my “trash” reading, I opt to skip the 10th grade assignment of *Wuthering Heights*, and read the Cliffs Notes in lieu of the actual book.”

Sara: “I started college with very limited knowledge of the English Language, which made it very **difficult** for me to read what was **assigned in school**.”

Gary: “I loved *Le rouge et le noir*, while **detesting the course**, and Swift likewise. (I **hated** both *Tristram Shandy* and the professor who taught it, so there was a synchrony there.)”

Amy: “When time comes for reading texts that are longer than a sentence or a few, I show no aptitude and **resist**. Reading out loud is a major issue.... I am labeled “talented but lazy.” **I hate reading** but am fascinated with books.”

Amy: “reading out loud is just as hard in English as it is in Polish and my **teachers** continue to **see me as a lazy student** who is **squandering her potential**.”

“**I hate reading**. My issues continue and become more severe”

Asher: “I didn’t like books when I was younger. it was **difficult for me read**, and I always **hated** the books that **my teachers wanted us to read**.”

Is there a difference between these school-related social situations and the ones described in the non-school reading memories? The pattern of resistance to school assignments hits at the heart of what might be a problem of pedagogical framing. Willingham (in Bauerlein, 2010) told us, “The mistaken idea that reading is a skill—learn to crack the code, practice comprehension strategies, and you can read anything—may be the single biggest factor holding back reading achievement in the country.” Willingham offered one possible explanation, but when the same individuals who talk and write about reading in their early years with such enthusiasm and

passion shift tone and diction so drastically to describe reading done for and in school, something is amiss and demands attention.

Of course, the classroom environment itself is not equivalent to being in a library or a home in the aesthetic sense. It differs, too, in the number of people involved in a classroom setting as opposed to a home setting, where more direct, individualized, and affectionate attention from a guide or mentor is possible. There seems to be another factor to consider—that of the external versus internal motivation to read. School reading in its traditional sense is externally mandated; the “pleasure” reading described by the participants was reflective of an internal drive, the purposes of which were usually self-motivated, ever-changing, and often conflicting with the external forces of school. Are there examples, though, of externally mandated forces motivating internal drive rather than competing with it?

Analysis of the Dichotomous Sponsorship in the Home and in School Contexts

Figure 5 reveals an undeniable disparity between in-school and out-of-school literacy sponsorship and attitudes. How do we account for this polarity? Why is it that a place such as school, where community and shared literacy practices should be most available, was the environment where we were most resistant to reading? There are several possible explanations for opposition to school reading: teachers who impose literary interpretations; skills-based approaches to literature; standardized assessments that emphasize proficiencies over appreciation; forced writing assignments attached to reading; lack of variety in curricular offerings; failure to incorporate texts that are relevant to students’ lives; diversity of student populations and needs; daunting text complexity; over-teaching analytical approaches to text; a disconnect between teacher-based understanding of being “well-read” and societal and student desires to read well. Ultimately, I think there is a consensus among English educators,

researchers, parents, administrators, and students that whatever, however, wherever, and whenever time is spent reading, it should be meaningful. The question remains, then, “what makes reading meaningful?” While I could spend time critiquing teaching approaches and educational institutions, I believe a more valuable endeavor is to return to where the joys and lifelong habits of reading were initiated for most of the participants in my own study: the home. Then, we can make connections between those early literacy experiences and preparation for school literacy expectations.

Shirley Brice Heath’s (1982) article “What No Bedtime Story Means: Narrative Skills at Home and School” examined the social and cultural implications of bedtime stories as home rituals and their effects on preparing children for preschool literacy expectations. She claimed that those early literacy experiences, particularly in American middle-class families, are foundational for learning “ways of taking” meaning from books and from the environment around them. Though she analyzed three diverse communities and preschool reading approaches by parents (Trackton, Roadville, and Maintown), her work and the backgrounds of the participants in Maintown seemed to most resemble the population of strong adult readers in my study. The Maintown parents engaged in the ritual of reading bedtime stories with their children, including conversing about those books, and through this habit, assisted their children in acquiring the mainstream habits and values necessary for successful participation in school.

Heath’s (1982) study on the effects of reading a bedtime story proved the value of this routine as an inductive act that leads to kids’ success in school; by developing traits that can teach them about “labels, features, and what-explanations, and prescribe listening and performing behaviors for preschoolers” (p. 54), parents are priming their children for the demands of the classroom. She argued that these socialization practices and skills are preparatory

traits that are favored in American school environments. Heath believed that “children learn not only how to take meaning from books, but also how to talk about it. In doing the latter, they repeatedly practice routines that parallel those of classroom interaction” (p. 56). She added that time spent interacting in situations where reading is an event helped them to develop “habits of performing” which will assist them in the demands of in school literacy practices. Unfortunately, as Heath also observed, “... teachers (and researchers alike) have not recognized that ways of taking from books are as much a part of learned behavior as are ways of eating, sitting, playing games, and building houses” (p. 49), making them socially and culturally situated and not simply “natural” occurrences.

This might help to explain part of the prevalent disparity in home and school literacies that appeared in the reading histories of the doctoral students. If a student’s literacy orientation was primed by one cognitive or learning style in the home, it is possible that school practices and expectations differed, or even conflicted with those early home socialization experiences. Still, the value of bedtime stories remains important in our understanding of the cognitive, social, cultural, and linguistic advantages this home practice brings to strong readers. The Maintown students had those extra years of learning to read and reading to learn and all that came with those foundational tools prior to entering school.

So, was this true for the participants in my study? Did their early literacy experiences parallel those of the participants in Maintown and, thus, the same parallels can be drawn between early literacy preparation and later habits of mind (Blau, 2003)? Interestingly, only one of the participants in Study 1 identified bedtime stories in her memories of reading. While most participants did recall specific locations, environmental factors, and literary works, they did not mention the “bedtime story.” In addition, none of the participants mentioned a heavily dialogical

engagement during the fond reading times evoked in their narratives, though it is likely that those socialization practices occurred. Heath emphasized the value of the questions posed by parents in the context of the bedtime story ritual and the multiple benefits the Maintown students acquired through the early exposure to stories. This placed them at an advantage over the working-class children like the ones in Roadville and Trackton as far as school preparation.

If the Ivy League doctoral students' backgrounds most resembled those of the readers in Maintown, and if early exposure to books in the home offered so many advantages for school preparation, why was so much in-school versus out-of-school reading conflict expressed in the strong adult readers' narratives? Heath's study made a correlation between home reading and preschool preparation. In the reading histories, the disparities appeared somewhere around the middle school years where school and social expectations seem/ed to shift and emphasis on print literacies over orality often prevail/ed. One of the most enjoyable and beneficial aspects of early reading in the home was reading aloud and engagement in dialogue, as well as the ability to learn to answer "what" questions. Some of these rewarding features of early home reading seemed to be eclipsed in later school years by standardized assessment instruments and a freeze-out on the opportunity to engage in gratifying classroom conversation about the reading. Still, for the Maintown and doctoral students, the early habits acquired in the home set them up for success in extending those habits into other domains and into larger sociocultural patterns (Heath, 1982, p. 72).

Another possible explanation for the disparate views of in-school and out-of-school reading is a standardized approach to complex texts that might do better at teaching students how to navigate text complexity. In her article, "A New Way Forward? Or Two Steps Back?" Sherry Sanden (2014) investigated how English education mandates under the Common Core demand

that students “read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently” (p. 7). She posed a crucial question, one that is essential to understanding the implications of the findings in the reading autobiographies for my own study: “What effect does an ongoing connection between reading and struggle have on individuals’ desires to ever pick up a book again?”

As noted in Vignette 5 in Chapter IV, Maya claimed “the elementary school program called S.R.A. killed everything beautiful about reading.... Thanks to S.R.A., even reading could become a competitive activity.” S.R.A. stands for “Successful Reading Assessment,” a standardized reading assessment module that was built around “corrective reading” instruction designed with the intent to accelerate the reading skills of below-level readers (www.mhe.com). If an English educator herself revealed the detrimental effects of a particular standardized reading instruction approach on her own reading state of mind, what potentially deleterious effects are we missing in our own practices, particularly in the age of Common Core and with the emphasis on nonfiction? More importantly, how do we negate these unfavorable effects and focus, instead, on providing encouraging, productive sponsorship?

Final Thoughts on the Study of Strong Adult Readers

With an initial understanding of how this specific pool of 18 participants in my first study came to be the strong readers they are, I now present a second study, one of the “opposite” sort of reader, the kind of reader who has fallen under the label “remedial” and who at the time of this second study would, by virtue of being enrolled in freshman composition at a community college, still be in the process of formal school literacy acquisition. I situate the phenomena revealed in the strong adult readers’ history among the chain of experiences of a more diverse population of students whose histories with reading have led them to be placed in English

courses designated for individuals who need more reading (and writing) support than the “general” student. Of course, the terms used to define and categorize the non-proficient reader, as well as the criteria, can be contested; still, in the formal education institutions, we cannot deny that there are “stronger” and “weaker” readers, in whatever form that might look like.

Chapter VI

STUDY 2: REMEDIAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE FRESHMAN READING HISTORIES

Introduction

When I started teaching at a 2-year community college after 23 years of teaching at a 4-year liberal arts institution, I expected a return to remediation in the classroom. The gap, however, between the private school freshman composition students and the community college population was not nearly as significant as I had anticipated. In fact, there was less apathy among my new students than my previous ones. This could be attributed to a newfound enthusiasm on my part, but even after several years of teaching at the community college, I found my students more engaged and amenable to learning how to improve their reading and writing skills. If anything, they are more driven, likely by their recognition of the value of the education they are getting and the work ethic many of them have been forced into out of economic circumstances. Still, while apathy is less of a “battle,” the students’ apprehension and unpreparedness are amplified, especially at the developmental reading and writing levels. The value of collecting reading autobiographies from remedial freshman composition students is manifold; the opportunity to get at the root of some explanations for why and how a student can make it to college and be underprepared for the rigors of reading and writing is held within these memories.

Let me take a moment here to address the issue of socioeconomic status, or SES, as it relates to this population of readers and the question of reading readiness. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), “Socioeconomic status is the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation.” According to the College’s demographic records, nearly half of the students enrolled in these remedial sections received tuition assistance (TAP) during the semester I

collected these reading autobiographies. The reading histories of the remedial learners offer some social and cultural explanations for the contrast between them and the strong readers' behaviors and attitudes toward reading. However, we also should account for the socioeconomic differences that seem to exist between both sets of readers.

In addition to the limited content of their reading autobiographies, it will become evident in the remedial students' sparse style, too, that they possess different literacy skills and thus did not elaborate on even their own personal memories. It would be impossible to create vignettes in this case, as I had in the first study of strong adult readers, because there is insufficient detail to even "fill in the blanks." Any attempts to do so would be too fictionalized and would deviate so far from the students' original material that it would be unethical. Thus, the findings and analysis presented in this chapter are more quantitative in nature, and I intersperse more research studies and literacy theories to help explain what appears on the page, and what seems to be missing in the students' reports as well as possible reasons why.

The three categories I discuss are: (a) early literacy sponsorship, focusing largely on the mothers, as they were most prominent, when sponsors were even mentioned at all; (b) the in-school and out-of-school dichotomies, which largely seemed to occur during the middle school years; and (c) the significance of reading in the students' lives, according to their own account of it. Later in the chapter, I juxtapose some of the findings from the study of strong readers with the findings from this second study, where possible, after I interpret the remedial students' experiences in each of the three categories. To be fair, with only half the number of participants in this study (9) as were available in the doctoral student study (18), it was more difficult to acquire generalizable knowledge, but, coupled with my background knowledge of hundreds of other students to whom I have taught this course, and the general demographic

information of students enrolled in the accelerated learning program course at the college, I think I can provide a good sense of how sponsorship has operated among this population of students. I also include a case study of one remedial student who appears to be an anomaly, standing out among all 27 participants across both studies.

FINDINGS

Part 1—Sponsors of Literacy

I start with some of the general numbers, the more quantifiable findings, and then share parts of the narratives, engaging in more qualitative inquiry. Unlike the strong readers in my first study, the nine participants in this comparative study rarely cited an individual or source that sponsored their early literacy. In fact, more than half (67%) cited no early literacy sponsors, making no mention of individuals who either introduced them to books or read to and with them in the preschool years. The outline of percentages and figure below indicate the lack of sponsorship, or at least recognition of sponsorship, and when compared (later in this section) to the same type of figure from the strong readers' data, further reveal a significant disparity in sponsorship between the two populations. The coding here can reflect an overlap in sponsorship, so the numbers will exceed the number of participants due to multiple sponsors mentioned in some narratives. The numbers out of 9 participants:

Mothers: 2 (22%)
Fathers: 0
Grandmothers: 1 (11%)
Family: 1 (11%)
Teachers: 0
None: 6 (67%)

In Figure 6, the numbers appear as follows:

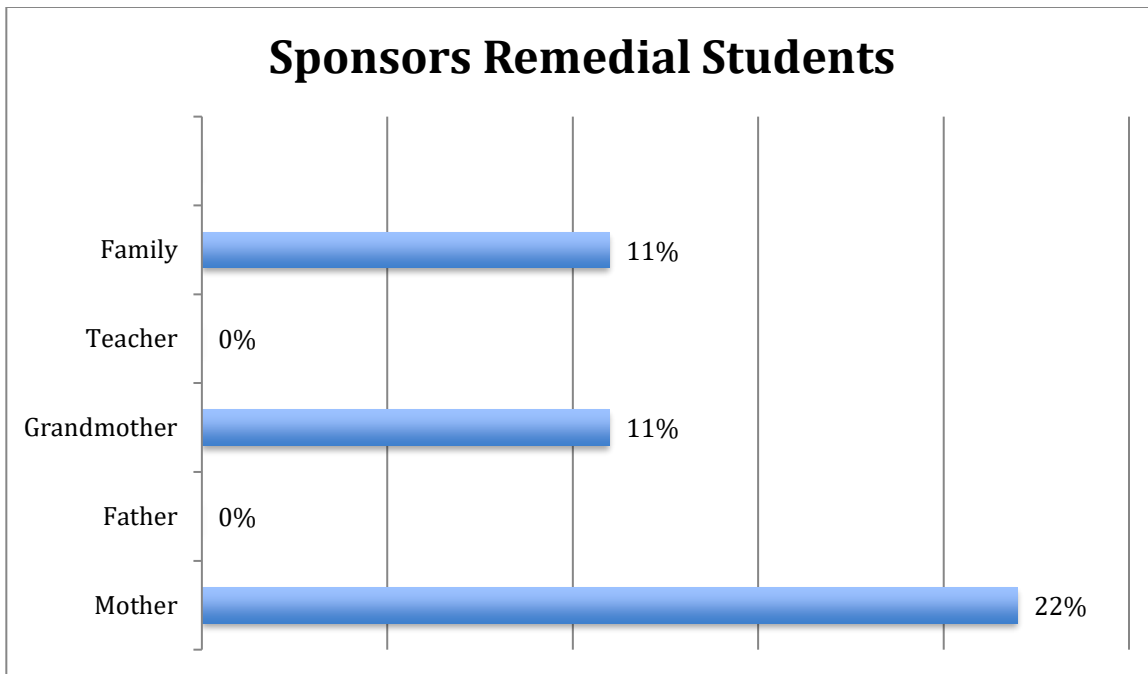


Figure 6. Sponsors of early literacy in remedial student reading autobiographies

Family Sponsors

Mothers. As Figure 6 indicates, two students (22% of the 9) cited their mother as having read to them in the home:

Student #3: “My earliest memories of reading was [sic] being read to by my mother when i [sic] was very young cloudy with a chance of meatballs.”

Student #5: “My earliest memories of reading were when my mother would read to my sister and I at bedtime. I don’t remember her reading to us all every night but I recall some nights here and there. She would read to me my favorite book “Goodnight Moon” or she would read a story book about Princesses.”

Grandmother. One student (11% of the 9) recalled being read to by her grandmother:

Student # 2: “The earliest moments I remember reading was when I was in preschool and my grandmother used to read books to me.”

Family. Another student noted her family would read the Bible together, but did not mention any other reading:

Student #9: “As a child my family was very religous [sic], and the only thing that was read to me was the Bible, which I did not understand that well as a kid.”

None. The other six students (67% of the participants) stated that they did “not remember” or indicated that reading was not happening in the home and did not commence until they entered elementary school. I have organized in Table 2 below the sections of the remedial students’ autobiographies where the writer either had less vivid memories or made mention of school-related early sponsorship. In response to the query “What are your earliest memories of reading?” the following five research subjects claimed as follows.

Table 2

Remedial Student Responses to Earliest Memories of Reading

Student	Response to “What are your earliest memories of reading?”
#1	<i>I can’t really recall any early memories so that should say something right there but I do know that I was read to in the home just not a lot.</i>
#4	<i>I can’t remember my earliest memories of reading.</i>
#6	<i>My earliest memories of reading was back when I was in elementary school, I always loved reading back then because most of the books or stories we read then were interesting and fun to go through. I learnt how to read back then through pictures of comics and other exciting books that display colorful images that drew my attention as a kid.</i>
#7	<i>Some of my earliest memories of reading was back in the 4th grade where I won an award for reading the most books in the class.</i>
#8	<i>Earliest memories of reading has be third grade. Coming from a hispanic family, I was never read to in english. I think it was mid-fourth grade, when I learned how to read. I think it was reading in class and the activities that my teacher made us do that I learned how to read.</i>

School-related sponsors. Three of these five students (60%) stated that they remembered reading in elementary school, and two mentioned 4th grade specifically as a time they most recall reading in their formative years. It was encouraging to see with Students #6 and #8 that their elementary school reading experiences were positive, with words like “interesting,” “fun,” “exciting,” “colorful,” “loved reading,” and “drew my attention” appearing in Student #6’s memories.

Though none of the remedial freshman participants mentioned a teacher prior to 3rd grade, a still mere 7 % of them mentioned teachers in general, but these encounters did not occur “early” in their literacy lives. By “literacy sponsors” in this context, I mean individuals who were noted as having introduced the participants to reading and/or books, sometime around the 4th grade, so they would not fall into the category of “early literacy” as I earlier defined it and used it to code the doctoral students’ sponsors. Still, these memories were recorded by the students themselves in the “earliest memories of reading” category of the reading autobiography prompt, indicating that the elementary school years were the first exposure to books and/or reading for many of the remedial students.

With this as the case, I now analyze the diction and tone of the students’ comments about learning how to read in school. As Table 2 of responses on earliest memories of reading related to school illustrated, Student #6, whom I call Nate, wrote about how he “loved reading back then,” referring to his elementary school years:

My earliest memories of reading was back when I was in elementary school, I always loved reading back then because most of the books or stories we read then were interesting and fun to go through. I learnt how to read back then through pictures of comics and other exciting books that display colorful images that drew my attention as a kid.

In addition to using the term “loved,” this student called books “exciting” and identified the aspects (“colorful images”) that raised his interest and made reading “fun.” Not reflected in the table is the rest of his response to the question about early memories of reading:

Most of my school readings were mostly done in school, but when I have homework to do my parents or siblings walk me through them at home, and sometimes i do them by myself. Other readings were done during my leisure time just for fun or to keep myself busy at that time.

Here I am reminded of Estefan, Caine, and Clandinin’s (2016) article “At the Intersections of Narrative Inquiry and Professional Education,” where the authors examined how story functions

in collaborative process of narrative inquiry. They spoke to the difference between “thinking *about* stories” and “thinking *with* stories” (p. 1; Morris, 2002). As they explained it, “Thinking *with* stories is a different approach that embeds story and reader in a reciprocal relationship” and they asked the important question: “How do stories operate among other stories as they are lived, told, retold, and relived?” (p. 1).

I mention this methodological mindset here because as I re-read Nate’s excerpts, I could not help but picture him in my classroom and recall my confusion after reading his first draft of Essay #1. To be honest, I thought he had plagiarized the paper because the writing was so superior, not only to the remedial writing I typically see, but even the general English 101 level writing to which I am accustomed. He was so quiet that it was difficult to ascertain his cognitive abilities and his “voice,” so I struggled for a good part of the semester with determining whether the writing he was submitting was a product of his own abilities and, if so, what might account for his being placed in a remedial writing class designated for students who “*would benefit from additional reading and writing support.*”

I must note here that it was not just that his writing was strong; it was reflective of close reading skills and highly insightful analytical ability, which led me to believe that he is a strong reader too. Yet, as is evident in the above excerpt from his literacy narrative, his grammar and syntax are problematic, particularly his incorrect usage of tenses: “*I have homework to do my parents or siblings walk me through them at home, and sometimes i do them by myself.*” If I simply analyze what the story is *about*, from a researcher standpoint of attempting to extract meaning from only what appears on the page, and by separating myself as a reader of that story, I would be engaging in what Estefan et al. (2016) described as potentially “reductionist” (p. 1). For example, I might make assumptions that this writer is lacking basic grammatical skills and is

representative of a student who struggles with writing. I might also comment on the lower-case “i” as symptomatic of low literacy functioning. Or, I might conjecture, that the writer was rushing to get the assignment “over with” and made careless errors out of haste, or even worse, apathy. Connelly and Clandinin’s version of narrative inquiry offers the researcher a more multilayered analytical standpoint on stories of experience.

If, instead of thinking *about* Nate’s narrative, I think *with* his story, it presents a challenge for me as a researcher who was also this student’s teacher, but it offers a valuable opportunity for considering how this story operates within my story as a teacher, his story as a student before he reached the college classroom, his story as it was unfolding in my classroom, and the relationship between his story and the many other stories shared in all of the reading autobiographies. There are so many layers to this story that contribute to this student’s and my own conceptualization of his literacy experiences. Coming at this from a position of wonder rather than from a position of knowing supports the reciprocal nature of researcher-participant dynamic and allows for a richer interpretation of data (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Estefan et al., 2016).

So, how does a student who “loved” reading and found it “exciting,” “interesting,” and “fun” in elementary school end up in a remedial college English composition class? To answer this thoughtfully, and to resolve the discrepancy between Nate’s writing for this survey and his other submitted assignments, I return to this question and this student’s literacy background in the Part 2 section of this study, “Middle school dichotomies of required vs. pleasure reading.” There, I organize and analyze the responses to the reading autobiography prompt questions about “Youth Reading” and explore the topic of in-school vs. out-of-school reading. For now, I offer some discussion of the findings in Part 1 as related to the power of literacy sponsorship, and the

possible implications of the absence of sponsorship in the homes of the remedial students in this study, and other remedial students like them.

Discussion of Literacy Sponsorship in Remedial Freshman Students' Backgrounds

The numbers and narrative renderings revealed that the remedial first-year composition students did not experience encouraging, foundational literacy sponsorship until much later than the strong adult readers. This raises an important question at this point in the research study as it relates to preparation, college readiness, and beyond: What happens to students who are not exposed to books and reading until they have reached later school ages (i.e., past 1st grade), and who lack the early home literacy underpinnings frequently present in the backgrounds of the strong adult readers? It might seem an odd question, given the prevailing belief that school IS the place where we learn to read and write. But, as the study of strong readers revealed, that population of strong readers did NOT first learn to read in school or, at the least, did not come to first love books in that environment.

So, a more honest and direct question that cannot be avoided but will surely invite contention is “are students whose primary exposure to reading occurs in school at a disadvantage to other students whose sponsorship occurred in the home, community or library prior to school age years?” Put another way, “Is there evidence that early exposure to books in non-school environments—especially through a parent and prior to entering preschool—creates advantages and further likelihood of becoming strong readers?” Research and the reading histories of strong and remedial readers point to “yes.” However, in casual conversations with friends, family, colleagues, and even my dissertation committee members, I see that this is not always the case. Some do report that they have no recollection of being read to in the home, and that their first memories with reading occurred in elementary school. Still, they became avid, strong readers.

This is why it is important to be cautious in jumping to larger generalizations about the causality of factors and environments responsible for creating strong readers. Still, there are strong indicators that parental bookreading does provide early advantages. In this next section, I share a pediatric research study that confirmed the efficacy of early parental book-reading interaction with young children and then put those results in conversation with my own findings about the limited maternal sponsorship of the remedial students.

Mothers as sponsors. Attention from a parent (really, positive attention of any form) is a powerfully motivating factor in young people's lives. In fact, authors of a recent study in the journal *Pediatrics* (April 2018) conducted randomized testing of a program called the Video Interaction Project, whereby parents in low-income families would engage in a pediatric parenting program focused on positive reinforcement of effective parenting strategies. This postnatal pediatric intervention technique consisted of videotaping parents reading aloud and playing with children (up to age 3 in the initial study, and then at age 5 in a follow-up study) for 5 minutes in a pediatrician's office. Parents were then provided occasion to watch a video record of their interactions with the children and to discuss the positive effects of those interactions with a coach who reinforced the potent role parents could play in their child's development. These pediatric interventions were an attempt to offer urban, low-income families the opportunity to enhance the social and emotional development of their children.

Dr. Alan Mendelsohn (2018), associate professor of pediatrics at New York University School of Medicine, and his fellow researchers on the project, found that, unlike the control group that was not provided these services, the results for the recipients of this early preventive pediatric intervention were reduced hyperactivity, fewer attention problems, and fewer disruptive behaviors, such as aggression (p. 9). This study affirmed that by reading aloud to their preschool-

aged children, parents promoted the social and emotional development of their children. As a result of these “positive parenting strategies” (p. 2), parents evened the socioeconomic gap of “poverty related disparities” (p. 2).

For now, rather than focus on the advantages of reading *aloud* with children, I want to emphasize the value of the social interaction offered when reading *with* young children. In an interview for *The New York Times* article “Reading Aloud to Young Children Has Benefits for Behavior and Attention” (April 16, 2018), Dr. Mendelsohn observed, “We think when parents read with their children more, when they play with their children more, the children have an opportunity to think about characters, to think about the feelings of those characters.” He added, “They learn to use words to describe feelings that are otherwise difficult and this enables them to better control their behavior when they have challenging feelings like anger or sadness.” Essentially, this beneficial mode of socially interacting with children has profound effects that put these preschool kids at an advantage in various social, emotional, cognitive, and educational ways that prepare them for the kinds of disciplined behaviors necessary for learning when they reach school age.

Immunizations, Breast Feeding and...Reading Aloud?! A Pediatric Intervention to the Literacy Problem

The availability of a parent—physically, temporally, and emotionally—is becoming more of a struggle in an era where two-parent working homes and high divorce rates prevail. This is one possible explanation for the significantly low percentage of mothers mentioned in the remedial students’ autobiographies (only 22%). Another guess as to why the sponsorship by mothers in these narratives is restricted might be that the economic factors in the remedial community college students’ homes prohibited those individuals’ mothers from spending much time with their young children. This is not to say that those mothers were less dedicated to their

children's welfare, but that due to circumstances beyond their control, they might have limited time and availability for activities like reading.

An article in *The Washington Post* (Hogan, June 25, 2014) cited an important statistic presented in the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health: "only 34 percent of children younger than 5 years old in families below the poverty threshold were read to on a daily basis, compared with 60 percent of children from affluent families." In 2014, the American Academy of Pediatrics responded to this alarming socioeconomic disparity by issuing a policy to its more than 62,000 members that, in addition to dispensing breastfeeding and immunization advice, they recommended that patients read aloud to their children, starting from infancy! Any and all explanations for the significantly low rate of reportage of having been read to by a mother in the remedial population led to the same fact: these students were placed at a disadvantage by being left behind in vocabulary, attention, behavior, and many other contributing factors to their literacy development.

Of course, my assumptions about the socioeconomic and social class differences of the remedial study participants could only be corroborated by data about the financial and home life backgrounds of each participant in my study, which I never collected. What I can confirm, though, is the general demographic of 2-year community college students, and as I mentioned earlier, the numbers provided to me by the College's Office of Institutional Research regarding tuition assistance. In a May, 2013 report by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), under the heading "Background Information on Community Colleges" is the following statement: "Students in community college come from all socioeconomic levels; however, 41 percent of all students enrolled in higher education and living in poverty go to our community

colleges, which is roughly proportionate to the percentage of all students who choose community colleges over four-year institutions.”

These statistics compiled by the American Association of Community Colleges suggested that a large number of underprivileged students attend community colleges. The community college that the students in this study attended and I taught is near an affluent area, but the majority of enrolled students face economic struggles. There is a food pantry on campus with a student voucher system, a move toward Open Educational Resources (OER) to defray textbook costs, a Campus Connection office frequented by students who are food and housing insecure, and many students who work multiple jobs. These factors make them consistent with the background information provided by the NCEE.

Another compelling statistic offered in the NCEE study is the number of community college students who are the first in their families to attend college: “Just 20 percent of students who receive bachelor’s degrees are the first in their families to attend college, as compared to 42 percent of community college students.” Thus, the education levels of the mothers in the community college students’ homes might be a factor for why so few of them read to their children in the home. This is why it is imperative that we pay careful attention to and immediately address inequitable sponsorship.

A Problem of Cause and Effect: The Cost of Parent Unavailability

If some explanations for the absence of early literacy sponsorship in the freshman remedial composition students’ homes and memories are absentee parents or low-level education of parents, then what literacy benefits were those students missing as a casualty of their socioeconomic circumstances? A Harvard University study conducted by Elisabeth Duursma (2014) as part of an Early Head Start Research Consortium (p. 283) examined bookreading

frequency by parents in 430 low-income families to determine whether paternal or maternal bookreading was an early factor in children's emergent literacy, language, and cognitive development. Her study affirmed the powerful influence of mothers as sponsors of literacy, concluding that "The age at which mothers started reading to their children was one of the best predictors of language and variance in frequency of bookreading (DeBaryshe, 1993; Raikes et al., 2006)" (p. 285). To reiterate, early sponsorship by mothers plays a crucial role in emergent literacy which, in turn, influences later linguistic and cognitive abilities. It is also a practice that sets the stage for how often a child will read as he or she continues to develop.

Duursma's comprehensive outline of the various factors that contribute to children's language and cognitive development supported the powerful and long-term value of the early practice of reading to children in the home, especially by a mother. Duursma's study also sought to examine the question: If early and continuous reading has been established as a practice that is considerably influential on children's early language, literacy, and cognitive development, then how much of a predictor of these outcomes is paternal reading? Let us look more intently at the role of fathers as literacy sponsors.

Fathers as sponsors. It is clear from the reading autobiographies in Study 1 and Study 2 that maternal bookreading was memorable and important in the lives of many of the participants. They recalled the exact locations, attention received, excitement surrounding, other actors involved, and, in some cases, details of the clothing they were wearing at the time of being read to by their mothers. Amidst the low percentage of overall sponsorship discussed by the remedial readers (33%), mothers (22%) still made up more than half of that percentage of people who read to the participants when they were young. On the other hand, NONE of the remedial student narratives mentioned a father. Even with the lack of early reading in the home, and though there

were only nine students in the study, the fact that none of the remedial students cited a father (0%) is noteworthy, especially when we consider that the study of an older generation of strong adult readers (most of whom would have been age 3 in the early to mid-1970s), showed that 28% had fathers who read to them.

Are there differences in a child's cognitive, linguistic, and literacy development that might be the effect of which particular family member (i.e., mother or father, grandparent or sibling) engages in reading with a child? More specifically, does paternal reading to a child have the same influence in the early childhood development of children's reading attitudes and habits as maternal reading? Lacking any evidence from my own study to help answer my question, I returned to Duursma's (2014) Harvard study which accounted for fathers, too, as influential in childhood literacy; she argued:

The changing role of fathers requires an examination of the effects of shared bookreading on children's development. Recent research in the U.S. has demonstrated that paternal bookreading, more precisely, the father's vocabulary use during a bookreading session, can contribute significantly to children's language development (e.g., Duursma, Pan, & Raikes, 2008; Pancsofar et al., 2010). (p. 284)

Fathers, then, can play a crucial role in a child's early literacy and language skills acquisition; the study also showed the cognitive, language complexity, and language development benefits of reading aloud with young children.

Duursma (2014) looked at low-income fathers and mothers participating in Early Head Start and the frequency of how often they read to their children at ages 14 months, 24 months, 36 months, and 5 years. Additionally, Duursma considered and explained the following about the participants:

- Family Characteristics
- Bookreading frequency
- Child cognitive skills
- Child language skills

- Emergent literacy
- Observed these categories at 14 months, 24 months, 36 months and 5 years
- At 5 years, they also tested for Book knowledge and Story comprehension

The study also accounted for demographics of fathers such as biological vs. non-biological, residential vs. non-residential, age, education, race/ethnicity, and language spoken at home, though “The fathers who participated in this study were often the child’s biological father, married to the child’s mother, and better educated than fathers who opted out of the study” (p. 298). Ultimately, this study of the intervention of paternal bookreading frequency illustrated that there were indeed productive effects on children’s language outcome, book knowledge, and story comprehension (p. 299).

Though the cause and effect of these benefits are clear (fathers read with their children; children’s language, knowledge and comprehension increases), and there is a blatant argument for shifting the paradigm of expecting mothers to take responsibility for children’s preschool literacies, some factors might prohibit low-income fathers from participating in their child’s early literacy at the level that their higher-educated and higher-income counterparts were proven to in Duursma, Pan, and Raikes’s (2008) earlier study, in which they “reported paternal education as a significant predictor of bookreading frequency” (Duursma, 2014, p. 286). In addition to paternal education, inequity of book access, home language, and children’s gender (low-income fathers in a previous study were found to have read with more frequency to daughters than to sons) (p. 286), are all influential factors in sponsorship. The reading autobiographies of the remedial students reflected these inequities and told the stories of the real lives and learners behind the quantitative data.

Non-Parental Sponsors—A Valuable and Often Available Resource

Grandparents as sponsors. According to a 2012 Census, 10% of the 65 million grandparents in the United States at that time were living with at least one grandchild. The number of grandchildren living with a grandparent saw a 3% increase from 1992 to the 2012 census that reported 10%. A Census demographer in the Bureau’s Fertility and Family Statistics Branch explained how “Recent trends in increased life expectancy, single-parent families and female employment increase the potential for grandparents to play an important role in the lives of their grandchildren.” While there was no evidence in any of the reading autobiographies of cohabitation with a grandparent, and only one of the nine participants from the remedial class mentioned a grandparent reading with her, we should not overlook grandparents as a valuable resource for literacy sponsorship.

The doctoral students in Study 1 mentioned grandparents’ presence in their reading memory as equally as they mentioned fathers (28% for both sponsors). Perhaps the third study will bring further insight into the role grandparents can play in the literacy lives of young children. The study of remedial readers in this chapter, however, helped us to better understand the early backgrounds and sponsorship of students who came to be labeled and tracked as “remedial” or “struggling” readers. We cannot ignore the research evidence that verified the importance of parental attention, reading aloud, and paternal bookreading. Despite socioeconomic factors, each of these forms of support in early literacy can become equalizers as far as future academic and career-related successes.

Part 2—Middle and High School Dichotomies of In-school vs. Out-of-School Reading

For consistency, I catalog the remedial students’ comments about their school and home reading mindsets by replicating the method I used in the strong adult readers study to log their

attitudes about school and non-school reading. As a reminder, by “in school,” I mean reading that is done FOR school, that is assigned BY school, and that is required by a teacher, curricular regulation, or standardized assessment. When I use the term “out of school,” I mean voluntary reading that is not done as part of a school-related assignment. As I did in the initial study, I create a split table with two categories and then highlight in color coding (red for negative or disinterested diction and tone; blue for positive) to distinguish attitudes and behaviors toward reading.

Table 3

English 098 In School vs. Out of School

In School	Out of School
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I never really read unless I was forced to... I mean even the books in class I barely read I would just kinda guess on the reading questions maybe read the cliffnotes the class before the test. 2. Around middle school maybe also end of elementary school when we had to read a certain amount of books before entering the new year. 3. I lost interest in reading, and overall didn't make time to sit down and read. 4. i believe school is place where you should be social instead of being anti social by reading a book. 5. I remember when I was in Middle School I enjoyed reading because i felt it was an escape from reality. I moved around for my Middle School years and went to 3 different Middle Schools for each grade so I didn't have much friends. I would skip lunch and read in the library...I stopped reading probably around 10th grade. I didn't enjoy much as I once did and found it to be boring over time. I completely 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I mean I will occasionally read an article if it has my interest but never really books for entertainment. 2. ...Also when I has found a series of books that I found interesting and actually enjoyed reading. 3. I stopped reading for pleasure when i got into middle school. 4. I stopped reading for pleasure when i was in middle school because I would've rather be doing something more productive; Such as play video games with cousins and my brother or even just going out with my friends. I guess that's when i started to lose interest in reading... I would like to say my reading habits has grown little throughout the years of reading. I would be fond of reading comics, fantasy books and even anime as a kid. I think i read most of the “Diary Of The Wimpy Kid” series as middle schooler.

<p>stopped reading after High School. I read my last book from start to finish about 8 years ago.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. During my period in high school, I only read books or articles that were given to us in class and most time i just i found it a little bit stressful and tiring. 7. Overtime I can honestly say my reading habits decreased because learning how to understand some of the upper leave [SIC] books has always been a struggle for me. 8. I felt forced to read something that didn't really interest me. Felt like was just reading words. Also feel like being called on to read made me dislike it. It wasn't because I couldn't read, it was because I had a hard time pronouncing words due to my hispanic background. 9. I never read often as a child...During my freshman year of highschool I had a class with a very blunt, strict, scary english teacher. The kind that makes a kid cry... In his class, we always had reading projects to do, and a book I was assigned was "Watership Down" by Richard Adams. It was one of the first books I ever completed to read. At first I hated the book. It was the same sequence over and over again...I told him it was boring my teacher said back to me "It's not the book that's boring, it's you." Which got me thinking...Who am I to say a book that is read and loved by millions is boring? Something is not wrong with the book if it can grab multiple other's attentions. It made me want to read more and figure out why these books are so interesting and loved by everyone else... 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. I used to enjoy reading about fantasy. Like vampires, witches and werewolves. 6. As i grew older my reading habits changed, i stopped reading for pleasure. Reading wasn't just fun to me anymore, i would say i just got lazy in reading... I would say reading fades away with time especially if you are not the type of person that grew up in a background full of prominent readers. 7. Because of the fact that I may pick up a few sometimes but most the times non is one of the main reasons why I stopped reading and another reason is I find it boring and hard to keep focus, I much rather be spend my time playing video games or texting rather than reading. and yes there has been a time where my reading stopped completely. 8. When I was 12, I use to be a big fan of the goosebumps books. I use to have a collection of them but once I started to get older that sort of faded away. I think during my middle school years reading stop for me. I didn't enjoy reading anymore.
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Even as I compiled this table, I was struck by how much red, signifying disinterested or negative attitudes, comprised the diction of the remedial community college students' narratives.

Another salient difference between the remedial readers' attitudes about middle school/ youth reading is that there was significantly less contrast, and much less of a distinct stance, on in-school versus out-of-school reading. If one examines each column in this table, adjectives like "forced" and "boring" appear in *both* columns—in-school and out-of-school reading attitudes—conveying a distaste for reading that existed in both environments. This was not the case in the study of strong readers; there, the attitudes toward reading were blatantly polarized, depending upon the milieu. However, I must add here that it does not seem to be a simple matter of location that affected the strong readers' attitudes toward reading, as contrasting terms such as "required" and "pleasure" were applied by the participants to distinguish between school and non-school reading. This terminology extended the notion of in- and out-of-school reading to something more emotionally and socially imbued than simply the physical space WHERE we do the reading.

In the remedial population's table, four of the eight who did mention out-of-school reading had fairly positive things to say about it:

Student #2: "Also when I has found a series of books that I found interesting and actually [enjoyed reading.](#)"

Student #4: "I would like to say [my reading habits has grown little throughout the years of reading.](#) I would be fond of reading comics, fantasy books and even anime as a kid. I think i read most of the "Diary Of The Wimpy Kid" series as middle schooler."

Student #5: "I used to [enjoy reading](#) about fantasy. Like vampires, witches and werewolves."

Student #8: "When I was 12, I use to be a [big fan of](#) the goosebumps books. I use to have a collection of them."

Sadly, however, of the four aforementioned students, two also pointed out that though there was a point at which they enjoyed reading for pleasure, one, Student #4 “stopped reading for pleasure when i was in middle school because I would've rather be doing something more productive; Such as play video games with cousins and my brother or even just going out with my friends. I guess that's when i started to lose interest in reading...” despite claiming in his narrative that he “would like to say my reading habits has grown little throughout the years of reading.” Student #8, who asserted that he was “a big fan of the goosebumps book” and “use to have a collection of them [Goosebumps books],” also confessed, “but once I started to get older that sort of faded away. I think during my middle school years reading stop for me. I didn't enjoy reading anymore.” In all, the phrase “stopped reading” was used six times and by six out of the nine participants (67%) in this study, with the implication that they ceased reading altogether from that point on, as Student #5 confessed, “I read my last book from start to finish about 8 years ago.”

The identification of the middle school years as a time when interest in reading waned was in accord with the attitudes expressed by the strong readers in their autobiographies. What differed here, though—and it is a vast difference—is the fact that the strong readers in Study 1 stopped reading the required school reading, but most still read and enjoyed books outside of school and on their own. The adult strong readers of the first study expressed finding an “escape” and “pleasure” in the literature they were independently seeking out and reading of their own volition. In contrast, the remedial students did not talk about reading with this sort of zeal, at least not past a certain point in their education, which mainly appeared to be from 4th grade on. It seemed, too, that the remedial readers came to identify themselves and to internalize notions of

themselves as nonreaders altogether, whereas the strong readers who did stop reading for a time all returned to reading and did so avidly by the time they reached college.

James and His Hazy Memories of Reading as an Anti-Social Act

What might account, then, for this massive disparity in attitudes and habits between the two study populations? Remedial Student #4, James, seemed to be onto something when he observed, “i believe school is place where you should be social instead of being anti social by reading a book.” One explanation for aliterate readers might be the competing interest in social interaction that conflicts with the time it takes to do what they perceive as an isolated act of reading. After all, this is the same student who blamed video games and going out with friends for his permanent departure from reading at the ripe age of adolescent middle school years, supplying yet another competing interest.

But, strong readers would have had similar distractions, and though they might have temporarily succumbed to them, they ultimately returned to reading despite them. Not James. His reading autobiography was the least developed of any collected out of all three populations of readers. His answers were in fragments and were filled with grammatical and mechanical errors. In response to the question “How do you feel about reading?” he acknowledged, “I can’t get myself into reading a book at all. Reading is the very last thing I would be doing in my free time. I don’t hate reading i just prefer do something other than reading a book.” I can attest to the veracity of this statement; in class, his attention was nonexistent and he rarely submitted written work; and, on the rare occasions where he did, they were too incomplete to warrant assessment.

James was one of the lowest-performing and most apathetic students I have taught in my entire career. This does not mean that his beliefs about social activities taking precedence over reading were exclusive to this student or that he was the only participant in the study to admit

that reading was competing with peer interaction. What stands out in James’s reading history, however, is that his responses to “What are your earliest memories of reading?” (“I can’t remember my earliest memories of reading”) and to “When and how did you learn to read?” (“I learned to read probably when i was in preschool”) were indicative of what was NOT happening for this student in his early literacy years. Only one other student (Student #1) in this study on remedial students stated that he had no early memories of reading, but then finished the same sentence by divulging, “...I do know that I was read to in the home just not a lot.”

Now I briefly return to the 18 reading histories of Study 1 on strong readers to consider whether any of those participants had the same lack of recall on their earliest memories of reading as James had. One or two mentioned that some memories were “fuzzy,” but every one of the Study 1 participants, the strong readers, recalled being read to, having books surrounding them, or being introduced to reading at some point. Unlike the remedial students’ histories, attention from a parent, grandparent, sibling, or cousin was a prevailing factor in the adult doctoral students’ memories of reading. While I will not presume that James was not provided the same familial connections as the other participants simply because he did not speak about this dynamic in his narrative, I maintain that though there are likely other factors involved too, this student’s literacy learning and development were influenced by—more specifically, hindered by—the lack of early literacy exposure in the home.

Nate Loses His Spark

Let me now revisit Nate, a student who, like James, sadly felt the fading light on his time with reading. Nate wrote about how stressful and tiring reading in high school became for him and confessed that his own laziness made it difficult to maintain any positive early reading habits. Remember, this was the same student who reported how in his younger years, he “always

loved reading...most of the books or stories...were interesting and fun to go through.” So, how did Nate perceive his shift in attitude and motivation in his reading life? In his words, “As i grew older my reading habits changed, **i stopped reading for pleasure. Reading wasn’t just fun to me anymore,** i would say i just got lazy in reading... I would say **reading fades away with time** especially if you are not the type of person that grew up in a background full of prominent readers.” As Sheldon from the television show *The Big Bang Theory* would say, “Bazinga!” and Emmeril Lagassi, the famous chef would exclaim, “Bam!” Nate recognized what much of the data in both studies, and what theorists, cognitive psychologists, doctors, and scholars are proclaiming: reading begets readers. Regrettably, Nate was actually an early reader who lost his spark when he reached high school and the reading became more complex.

An Unexpected Case Study: Student #9, The Non-Spark That Ignited a Flame

In contrast, one of my strongest students (Student #9), whose early literacy experiences were exclusive to family reading of the Bible, and who only began to commit to autonomous reading in freshman year of high school, stayed the course with reading rather than abandoned it like some of the other participants, despite her insecurity and lack of interest in the activity. She wrote of her early reading years, “I remember as a child having to read in a separate room because my reading skills were never that great. I felt different because all of the other kids got to stay in the class and I had to leave with a group of other students to read at a different pace.” Reading became so much of a chore for her that she later compared reading to eating vegetables—something you dread, but that you know is good for you. The perspectives expressed in Student #9’s reading autobiography reflected several social, cultural, educational, and institutional influences, ones that might help to explain the resistant and aliterate (Beers,

1998) attitudes of the other participants in this study on remedial freshman composition students at a community college.

The inherent narrative and storytelling nature of reading autobiographies as a form of data goes hand in hand with narrative inquiry as a process of bringing to light the personal, social, temporal, and situational strata of an individual's literacy history. Looking more closely at Ollerenshaw and Creswell's (2002) adaptation of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional space analysis approach to narrative inquiry, Interaction, Continuity, and Situation, provides an analytical lens for interpreting Student #9's internal and external experiences with reading. I chose to use this chart here because I was fortunate enough to get a substantial amount of background information on this student that I did not have access to with my other participants. She was my student for two consecutive semesters, was highly communicative, extremely amiable, developed her reading history significantly more in depth than the other participants, and was more than willing to provide me with follow-up information after the initial study. This opportunity to hone in on an individual case study and to use Clandinin and Connelly's methodological framework helped me to see that this would be a beneficial tool for future studies as well.

As Table 4 below indicates, Clandinin and Connelly advanced Dewey's three-dimensional theory of experience as follows: Interaction involves internal conditions, including personal hopes and aesthetic responses and social interactions with people and environments; Continuity relates to the temporal aspects of experience, providing lenses backward, current, and forward; Situation incorporates experience into the setting where events take place, with consideration to place and the characters and contexts involved in that landscape.

Table 4

Three-Dimensional Theory of Experience

Interaction.		Continuity			Situation—
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Situation/Place
Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions	Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view	Look backward to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times	Look at current experiences, feelings, and stories relating to actions of an event	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters' intentions, purposes, and different points of view

Source: Adapted from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002)

Through this framework, the researcher re-storied the participant's experiences and "develop[ed] a deep understanding of the diverse contexts that are embedded within the participant's life" (Wang & Geale, 2016). Student #9, whom I call "Rebecca," offered internal and external responses in her narrative that I have organized into Ollerenshaw and Creswell's table as follows.

Table 5

Student #9 Responses

Interaction		Continuity			Situation
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Situation/place
<p>“felt different” religious family, read Bible, didn’t understand i did not enjoy reading. After h.s. teacher offered different external perspective, internal thoughts changed: “It made me want to read more and figure out why these books are so interesting and loved by everyone else. What were they getting from the books, that I wasn’t.”</p>	<p>school “forced to read” asked others to explain what was going on in books; teachers who make kids cry; felt different when leaving class to read with “other” group.</p>	<p>evolved from not liking reading to figuring out a genre that worked for her (health-related articles) reading started to change in high school</p>	<p>“Who am I to say a book that is read and loved by millions is boring?” Acknowledges the value of reading, but still struggles with motivation.</p>	<p>Given her past responses to authority (elementary years being “forced” to read and leaving classroom despite discomfort, religious family making her read Bible h.s. teacher requiring Watership Down), Rebecca appears to need external motivation to read. She also needs a sense of relevance that is linked to a field of interest (health).</p>	<p>High school setting/teacher changed outlook on books; “blunt, strict, scary english teacher.” Teacher asked for feedback on <i>Watership Down</i>. Teacher reframed Rebecca’s “bored” perspective by taking her out of her lens and suggesting it wasn’t the book that was boring, but that it might be <i>her</i>. Became 1st book Rebecca ever completed.</p>

The reorganization of Rebecca’s experiences in this context revealed her consistent response to authority, which coincided with my relationship with her in the classroom, where she was a main participant and a strong performer. She was a highly respectful, honest, and open student who completed every assignment in a thorough and timely manner. If I had not had access

to her reading history, I never would have believed that she was at any time a resistant and non-autonomous reader. However, putting together the pieces of her history, especially what she recalled about teachers, I now realize that Rebecca exhibited a strong sense of responsibility and motivation in her first semester of college English that was largely linked to her connection with a literacy sponsor (later in life) and with her classmates. I suspect that this was the case in her K-12 education—that her comfort and connection with the teacher set the tone for her interest, but also for her motivation to push past her own comfort zone. Some will argue that this holds true for many student-teacher relationships, but in Rebecca’s situation, over time, she had developed an acute awareness of how powerful this sort of environmental tone was to her literacy.

Rebecca’s reading history and her placement in the remedial supplemental module course belie her strong close reading and adept writing skills exhibited in not one, but two semesters of freshman composition with me (she followed me to take second-semester composition in Spring 2018 after successfully completing this English Writing I course of Fall 2017). Knowing more of her capabilities in a higher-level course left me with more questions about the gaps in Rebecca’s narrative (such as “how did she get placed there in the first place?”), so, I availed myself of the active collaboration between researcher and participant that is involved in the reflexive nature of Clandinin and Connelly’s framework.

I e-mailed Rebecca to ask some follow-up questions and invited her to weigh in too, on helping us both come to a better understanding of how the student I knew, and the student reflected in her narrative account seemed so vastly different as far as reading attitudes and habits. Because much of her response included commentary on her college literacy experience, I will wait until the next section of this study where I analyze the remedial student participants’ responses to category

three, the “significance of reading” in their current lives to share and interpret Rebecca’s follow-up feedback. For now, I offer some final thoughts on the theme of in-school and out-of-school reading that is present in both sets of reading histories.

Conclusions About the Middle School Dichotomy

In my study of strong adult readers from an Ivy League Ph.D. in English Education program, I put forth some explanations for the overwhelmingly dichotomous reactions to school and non-school reading. I speculated that one justification for the extreme and polar diction pitting “required” and “detested” in school reading against “escapist” and “enjoyable” out-of-school reading might be, in my own words, the fact that “school is a space designed for the kind of reading that requires toil, interruption, and assessment. It is an environment where students are commanded *what* to read, and even according to several of the autobiographical accounts, *how* to read.” But, those were not the chief complaints among the remedial students in this second study.

The bulk of the remedial students’ narratives did not indicate that lack of text selection, reading assessment tools, or being interrupted from reading at their own pace were contributing factors to their negative attitudes toward reading. Amidst the two narratives that mentioned struggling with reading as a turn-off, the rest were, to be blunt (and they were), “bored” and unmotivated. What accounts for this boredom and lack of motivation with reading? Surely anyone who has experienced the kind of transcendental, aesthetic sort of reading described by Louise Rosenblatt and as illustrated in many of the reading autobiographies of the study on strong readers would say that boredom is not a characteristic of that experience. But, even the doctoral students, the strong readers, confessed to being bored and unmotivated when it came to reading for school.

We cannot ignore that boredom in English classes is a pervasive problem, and one that begs for solutions, or even further, an overhaul. Some possible reasons for general student disinterest are offered by the remedial freshman composition students; competition with social lives, consumption of free time, inattentiveness, feeling coerced, overwhelmed, even intimidated, are all factors identified by the students. It becomes evident in the next category, “significance of reading in my life,” that this disinterest spills over into their disconnect with the value of reading in their personal, academic, and professional lives. While many of them recognize the significance, they do not seem to have the will to apply it. It is hard to ignore the influence of community here: how much does the lack of a book culture, affinity group, or community of readers factor into this disinterest?

Part 3—Significance of Reading in My Life

I deliberated over the most effective mode of producing and organizing the findings of this category. I considered another table or pie chart. How does a researcher “package” and present such a meaningful finding without reducing it to a quantifiable number? Here is where I had to reposition my own biases and myself as their teacher and reframe this finding as a narrative inquirer who let the lived stories speak for themselves (Ely et al., 1997). I begin, then, by sharing this chart (Table 6) of statements from the remedial college freshmen about their assessment of the significance of reading in their lives. I have used blue font to highlight the language that implies or explicitly states the importance of reading in their lives, and red font to indicate ambivalent and negative diction:

Table 6

Significance of Reading in My Life

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm not sure. I think it has impacted my view on music reading about artists and reading the lyrics to feel a different perspective on the music.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading has made no major significance in my life to date. It is something that is done everyday so it is a good skill to have. Other than using reading for school or work purposes, reading has not been something that impacted my life in a huge way, something I have also never been to fond of doing throughout my life.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading has expanded my life more ways than I can imagine. Being able to read helps you communicate with other people on another level. In some ways it's harder to say what you feel, but what i felt is that it's easier to write down what you feel so another person can read it. With reading you are holding someone's attention on just what you wrote down, which i think is pretty special.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading does increase your vocabulary and that's something i would like to get up, but i find it hard to make time and effort of what i'm doing on daily basis to read a book that i can enjoy. Reading does help you out in writing, I don't read that much that's why i believe my writing skills are superb to the people around me.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall I feel reading has had significance in my earlier years of life. When my mom would take us to the library it was special because it was something we always looked forward doing with her. I felt reading had more of an impact for me in Middle School when I didn't have any friends. It used to make me happy and I used to feel a connection to the characters in the books. I always felt excited to move on to the next chapter. I would read in class or whenever I had the chance to. As of today I don't feel that way anymore. It doesn't bring joy to me as it once did. Even if I wanted to get back into reading I work too much now. Now that I have a social life I felt that I didn't need reading anymore.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I would say the significance of reading in my life to date is that it has allowed me to develop myself mentally and skillfully, and it has also allowed me to be aware of some things i barely knew before.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With reading I am able to keep up with the world, although I don't read books I do read when I use twitter, facebook or even instagram.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From a young age i remember reading has always been important because I can help my parents and family members understand. (He said he was Hispanic so understanding was hard).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading is significance to my life for so many reasons. If I could not read, I wouldn't be in college. Reading is literally one of the most common ways of how you learn, whether it be straightforward or in between the lines.

Of the nine students in this study on remedial readers, four of them—Students #3, #5, #6 and #9—responded most specifically and *positively* to the significance of reading in their lives. Interestingly, #6, Nate, our young man who lost his spark, was one of them. In the study on adult strong readers, I established that the strong reading habits and behaviors of those adult readers had been significantly shaped by early literacy exposure in the home. Does that correlation exist in this population too? How much of the positive attitudes of Students #3, #5, #6, and #9 toward the value of reading might have been influenced by earlier experiences with reading in the home? Let us recap what each of these students said about early memories of reading (I highlighted in pink any mention of parental sponsors).

Table 7

Early Memories of Reading for Students #3, #5, #6, #9

Student #3	Student #5	Student #6 (Nate)	Student #9
My earliest memories of reading was being read to by my mother when i was very young cloudy with a chance of meatballs.	My earliest memories of reading were when my mother would read to my sister and I at bedtime. I don't remember her reading to us all every night but I recall some nights here and there. She would read to me my favorite book "Goodnight Moon" or she would read a story book about Princesses.	My earliest memories of reading was back when I was in elementary school, I always loved reading back then because most of the books or stories we read then were interesting and fun to go through. I learnt how to read back then through pictures of comics and other exciting books that display colorful images that drew my attention as a kid.	As a child my family was very religious [sic], and the only thing that was read to me was the Bible, which I did not understand that well as a kid.

Of the four students in this study on remedial readers who claimed positive attributes about the significance of reading in their life to date, three (75%) also recalled being read to by family members early on. Two of the four specifically mentioned being read to by their mother.

The one student who did not mention being read to in the home, or by a parent, was again, Nate. His positive memory of reading occurred in elementary school. One of the questions that might remain even after completing the data analysis for all three studies is whether elementary school is “too late” to sow the seeds of literacy that are prone to enhance the habits of mind necessary to creating lifelong and strong readers. Of course, it is arguable that it is NEVER too late to ignite that spark to a very powerful aspect of their lives. What we do know, with a fair amount of certainty, is that those who are read to in the home during the preschool years are more inclined to become the kind of readers who commit to disciplined literacy habits and for whom reading becomes a voluntary activity in their postgraduate lives.

To account for the consistency of this connection between early home reading by a parent and later appreciation for the role of reading in their lives, of the remaining five students—those who did *not* claim a significance to reading—only one (Student #2) mentioned a family member reading to her (grandmother). Her response to the significance of reading in her life was:

Reading has made no major significance in my life to date. It is something that is done everyday so it is a good skill to have. Other than using reading for school or work purposes, reading has not been something that impacted my life in a huge way, something I have also never been to fond of doing throughout my life.

Interestingly, while she claimed that “reading has made no major significance in my life to date” she followed this statement with specific ways in which she has used reading—“for school or work purposes”—and, like Rebecca, she was a strong writer throughout the semester in my class, receiving an “A” on every assignment and for the overall semester grade.

These stories of the reading lives of remedial readers open a small window on how literacy sponsorship can inhibit and shape reading habits and attitudes. Of course, with only nine samples, I can only offer possible implications of sponsorship on remedial students’ lives.

Rebecca's case study, however, helped to explain inconsistencies that many teachers see across the in-school and out-of-school behaviors and attitudes of students.

Revisiting Rebecca (Remedial Student #9)

Let me now return to Rebecca, the student I identified as an anomaly in the previous section of my analysis of this second study ("Findings Category 2..."). As I mentioned there, I was so puzzled by the inconsistency in her classroom performance during the two semesters she worked with me, and the history and identity she projected in her narrative, that, as I previously established, I decided a follow-up conversation was necessary. I e-mailed her after the semester had ended and will provide here my initiating conversation, along with Rebecca's answers:

ME: I'm working on my dissertation and I'm using (totally anonymously) your reading autobiography materials as a small case study. You identify some really important points to my study that I am trying to use to explain how students develop reading attitudes and habits, but also how the system might be failing students of your caliber by identifying them as "struggling readers" when, quite honestly, you were one of my strongest readers and writers.

So, I was wondering if you'd be comfortable with me asking you some follow-up questions that would help me to better understand your early background with being taught how to read? If not, I understand, if so, thanks so much in advance! It's nothing complex. Some examples of what I'm wondering are:

1. You said you were pulled out of class to read with a small reading group who identified you as needing this work? what grade? and what was it like IN that group once you were separated from the class?

REBECCA: (e-mail May 29, 2018):

From second to fourth grade is when my teachers identified me as needing the help of working in a separate group. In elementary school, every student got pulled out of class to read a story that was provided to us by our teacher. We had to read it to our teacher and answer questions on paper and some out loud. How well we did, set what books I could and could not read. All of the books were labeled with a grade that determined the difficulty of the book in our classrooms. Once I was one of maybe no more than 5 students separated from the class, I felt embarrassed and almost left out to be away from my friends at that age, but the group itself was very helpful. In that reading group, things would be broken down and better explained. We would have extra time to complete assignments and even tests. We were asked various questions after everything that helped

us to understand the story better. I remember my friends wishing they were in our group to have the "easy" way out, but it still being difficult for me.

2. Did you attend public or private school, and what was the background/demographic situation of your elementary school?

REBECCA: I attended a very small public school with kids from all around the country because we live right next to a military base that had kids with very diverse backgrounds.

3. Your reading autobiography says, in several places, that you don't really have the willpower to read, but my experience with you was so different in this respect- you read the work for my class, and read it insightfully. Was this not the case for you in K-12?

REBECCA: Because I lose my focus, interest, and understanding of stories, I believe I do not have the willpower to read long novels. The stories we read in your class were shorter, so it made it easier for me not to lose focus. Because you read to us in class and talked with us about the work, I understood the stories better. It also helped that the reading responses we had to respond to in your class, related to the topic which helped me to stay interested. I enjoyed reading the responses and figuring out how to answer the questions throughout the story. In K-12 I never really cared that much about my education and never worked hard to achieve much. I did not take advantage of many opportunities to expand my knowledge throughout high school. I was also very shy and did not want to be judged by asking questions or answering a wrong one. In college for English, I'm in a room full of people that do not know me which kind of made it easier for me to not care what people think and really apply myself. During high school, I would have rather decided to not care about learning, than apply myself, be wrong and get judged (which probably was all in my head to begin with.)

4. I guess, that gap I'm trying to fill in for your "story" with reading is the difference in reading attitudes that you express in your reading autobiography from the reading attitudes you expressed in my class. You seem a much more resistant and reluctant reader in your narrative than you were in the two semesters of my class. Any sense you can help me make out of this disparity would be awesome!

REBECCA: A few things have made me change my attitude about reading. I became more aware of the reason I did not like reading and focused more on trying to fix it. I became interested in learning, but could never find a style that best suited me. Maybe it is because in your class it was almost like that group I was in during second to fourth grade where I received extra help and was read aloud to. Where online we could look at what others posted, almost like our reading group where we all shared our ideas to help us formulate our own ideas. It also helped that I was eager to learn in your class because of the way you connected things to real life scenarios. I also understood that I was in college now and had to put in more effort to receive a good grade, as opposed to K-12 where, unfortunately, I did not do much work but could pass with flying colors. A more emotional factor that has helped me want to do better in my English classes is my seventh-grade English teacher whom I was very close with, Mr. S., and an English

teacher I was close with during high school, Mr. P. Late April of my seventh grade school year, Mr. S. passed away of cancer. I never enjoyed English as much because it would remind me of him, but I soon realized I should be working hard in honor of him, instead of being scared to remember him. This New Years, Mr. P was killed in a car accident which also impacted the way I view English because of the fact that I knew how to deal with the loss. I think all together, the way I view reading/writing depends on what I know I will get out of it. For example, the way you connected how reading can benefit us in our everyday life is something I oddly never thought about. You taught us how reading can benefit us in ways such as getting a raise, how to act during an interview, or even how to get a refund for a terrible experience at a tattoo parlor. I knew I had a voice but never knew how to find it through literature until your course and that is something that really motivated me to work hard in class.

If you have any more questions or need clarification, that is not a problem!

---END OF CORRESPONDENCE WITH REBECCA---

I first would like to pause and honor the teachers in Rebecca's life who made the kind of imprint I think we all hope and believe a teacher should. Rebecca's forthcoming responses were also a reminder of who is in our classrooms; these students bring personal histories and experiences with them that color the way they receive and interact with us, their classmates, and the course materials. They deserve acknowledgment.

In that vein, I wonder what the inconsistency represented in Rebecca's background and narrative revealed about how and why remedial readers formulate their perceptions of their own reading abilities, their relationship with reading, and the place of reading in their world. How does any idea, person, place, or thing become "significant"? This spurred me to consider the wording of the prompt for this study; perhaps if instead of asking "What has been the significance of reading in your life to date?" I had asked "How has reading been meaningful to you up until now?", it might have yielded a more personally connected response. Perhaps the implication of the term "significance" is that it needs to feel momentous or formal, or traditional in the school sense. And by whose standards? I decided to do a quick Google search (I am aware

that this is not academic research) to see what the phrase “significance of reading” produces; most of the results included the words “skills” and “comprehension.”

The rationale for the question in my prompt for this second (and as seen in the next chapter, third) study arose from my analysis of the first study, the study of strong adult readers. All of those participants wrote, without being prompted, about the many significant ways reading had been and still is a part of their universe. For some, it is the very center OF their universe. In an effort to tease out specific ways that the freshman composition students found significance in reading and—now that I think about it—meaning, connection to, I asked the question overtly to make sure it was addressed in the narrative. Perhaps I feared they would not see reading as significant, so I tried to “push” them to find significance. Whatever the reason for the question and its wording, the fact remains that the strong readers in the first study inherently and organically spoke about—actually illustrated in detail—the many and various ways reading has been meaningful in their lives. So, too, did Rebecca.

There is so much included in Rebecca’s follow-up response here that I would like to address. I start with the statement that stands out to me the most from a pedagogical and practitioner standpoint and that supports the research findings about the value of reading aloud: “Maybe it is because in your class it was almost like that group I was in during second to fourth grade where I received extra help and was read aloud to.” I realize that reading aloud in the classroom at the college level might be met with disdain by some who perceive it as juvenile, or as a professor’s way of “killing time.” But Rebecca’s positive feelings about reading aloud and working in small groups, both at the elementary school level and in my college composition course, are evidence of how effective facilitating small-group work and low-pressure discussion opportunities can be in bringing out the more timid or insecure readers.

Sheridan Blau spoke about this in a 2010 interview with the National Writing Project, in response to a question about methods for kick-starting discussions with quiet students. Blau described how “Quiet students will usually participate actively in groups of three or four...they are much more likely to do so, if they have already worked on a problem and contributed to a discussion in a small group.” Rebecca confessed that she was “very shy and did not want to be judged,” yet she wrote about the confidence and inspiration she gained through prewriting and small-group discussion forum “where online we could look at what others posted, almost like our reading group where we all shared our ideas to help us formulate our own ideas.” This specific attribution to the “online” writing required in my class also supported Blau’s theories about ways that literature teachers can use student discourse communities to practice and enhance the conversations about literature:

Using student writing substantively as a critical text worth discussing raises the value of student writing for all members of the class and gives students the same kind of responsibility that scholars have when we write for audiences of our colleagues within particular discourse communities. Students take their own writing more seriously under such conditions and function as members of an authentic literary community.

Rebecca, early labeled a “struggling reader,” embraced literature, writing, and scholarship because she became part of an authentic literary community. Here is where a sociocultural framework coincides with the findings in this study.

The social and cultural underpinnings of many of the theorists and scholars covered in my literature review helped to explain Rebecca’s literacy experience. Vygotsky’s (1978) Zopeds, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) communities of practice, Lee’s (1995) cognitive apprenticeship, Blau’s (2003) literature workshop, and Schoenbach et al.’s (2012) cognitive reading apprenticeship supported Rebecca’s assessment of why she became a motivated and strong reader, despite the lack of early literacy sponsorship; the opportunity to engage in reading and

discussions about reading among a group of apprentices, working collaboratively, allowed her to move from guided skill to autonomous action.

Had I time, foresight, and room, I would reach out again to each of the participants in this study of remedial freshman composition students from the 2-year community college and e-mail them follow-up questions as I did with Rebecca. But, having spent nearly 5 hours a week for 17 weeks in course contact hours, and additional time reading their drafts, online blog discussions, in-class writing assignments, and major essays, I am not confident that their responses would have yielded the kind of fruitful insight as did Rebecca's. At least not in written form.

It is possible that verbal interview strategies would be effective with some of them in teasing out a few more details, but in general, they lacked the written communication skills to articulate and elaborate as in-depth as the adult doctoral students and the unique Rebecca. More importantly, were I studying the circumstances that create developmental-level readers, this would be a worthy endeavor and likely one for a future study. But my focus was on the circumstances, individuals, environments, and backgrounds that shaped strong readers, and so I would like to return to those readers, as a point of comparison, to end this chapter's discussion.

Comparing Early Literacy Sponsorship of Remedial and Strong Readers

How are my early insights into early literacy sponsorship as it appears in the doctoral students' narratives of strong readers informed by these new data from remedial college freshman readers and writers?

There are obvious differences in these populations that would naturally explain the differences in their attitudes and behaviors toward reading, and I start by listing those:

1. The participants in this comparative study were 15-40 years younger than the doctoral study participants, and thus had fewer years and experiences to recall.

2. This pool of participants consisted of undergraduate students, whereas the Study 1 data were compiled from advanced graduate students who were specialists in English studies and English education.
3. The younger participants were individuals who were at this point undecided or from a variety of college majors that were mostly not English or even Humanities-based.

Still, these factors do not explain the differences in early literacy sponsorship of the home environments. Thus, my first step in comparing the sponsorship at work in the two populations is to refer back to a bar graph I provided and analyzed in Chapter V of strong readers and to correlate it with the bar graph reflecting the breakdown for the remedial readers' sponsors, which I presented earlier in this chapter. In this bar graph, I determined the percentages of each sponsor mentioned in the reading autobiographies (i.e., mother, father, grandparent, teacher, etc.). In order to effectively frame the new data from this study on remedial readers and put it in conversation with the previous data from the strong readers, I revisit and juxtapose the types, frequency, and influence of home sponsors mentioned by each population.

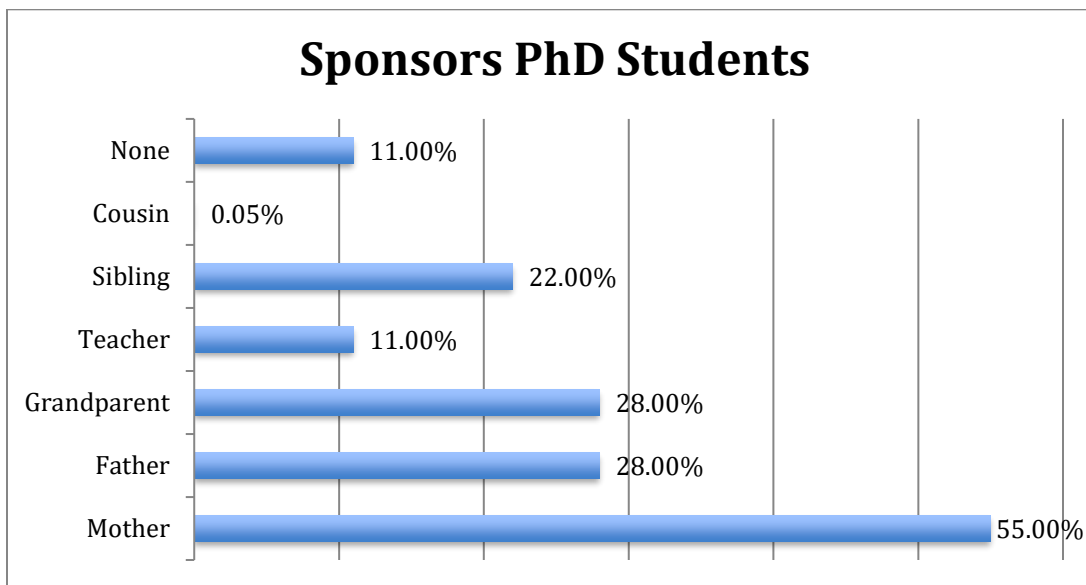


Figure 7. Early sponsors of literacy in strong readers' autobiographies

In total, as a recap of the sponsorship findings among strong adult readers, 16 out of 18 participants (89%) identified their first exposure to books as occurring in the home, more frequently through their mother (55%), but also with fathers, grandparents, siblings, and even cousins. It is important to note, as I did in the first study, that there is overlap in the percentages insofar as several of the narratives included references to multiple sponsors. Still, those were, again, primarily immediate family members.

In comparison to the nearly 90% of strong readers who reported early literacy sponsorship in the home, only 33% of the remedial readers recalled home sponsorship prior to attending school. Whereas 55% of the adult strong readers recalled reading with their mothers in their preschool years, only 22% of the remedial participants recalled reading with their mothers. The low percentage of mothers as sponsors of literacy in the remedial population as opposed to the strong readers raises vital questions about the sort of connection that is most powerful and long-lasting to propel the social and emotional development integral to strong reading lives. Even more notable is that 28% of the strong readers mentioned reading with their fathers, while 0% of the English 098 developmental students indicated that reading occurred with a dad. Interestingly, grandparents were cited more often in the remedial reader's histories (11%) than were fathers, but this was still only in 1 of 9 homes. Overall, it is clear that there is an incongruence of sponsorship between the strong and remedial readers and it would not be a huge leap to say that these differences had a major impact on the attitudes, behaviors, and abilities of each class of reader.

As I mention earlier in this chapter, these disparities might be partially explained by socioeconomic circumstances, a major focus of Deborah Brandt's work (1998, 2001) studying hundreds of Americans' literacy histories across a variety of contexts and backgrounds. Brandt

(1998) observed that “A statistical correlation between high literacy achievement and high socioeconomic, majority-race status routinely shows up in results of national tests of reading and writing performance” (p. 6). The problem of literacy access becomes a problem of literacy outcomes; those who have the privilege of early and ongoing sponsorship are more likely to see high achievement, while those who do not face limited opportunity and disappointing outcomes.

It was never my intention to investigate sponsorship within my research data from a racial, ethnic, or SES standpoint, as Brandt did in her work on sponsorship. Originally, I was attempting to focus on learning more about the ways that reading is taught and learned in and out of school so that I and my readers could have a better grasp of what has been happening in the discipline and how we can improve it. But in constricting the parameters of my study and its intentions, I was closing off opportunities to delve further into the sociocultural influence and impact of ethnicity and socioeconomics in my participants’ memories. To be fair, race or social class was never mentioned in the doctoral students’ autobiographies. Because I had not considered using the information in the first study, I did not collect any official demographic information for the participants in Study 1.

I did not collect the official demographic information for the participants in Study 2 either, as my aim when designing the comparative study was still focused on understanding who, what, and where their literacy was sponsored, without accounting for socioeconomic or racial influences. It just happened, however, that the students who were also the participants in this study had voluntarily revealed this personal information as part of their writing and discussion for the course, and even within the study instrument itself. Also, by virtue of just knowing them through my course, I learned of their home circumstances and that most of them came from

single-parent homes, had working mothers who were often unavailable to them, and lived in poverty.

On the other hand, one would have to make several assumptions about the socioeconomic backgrounds of the doctoral students to make the correlation between their reported access to books and sponsors and their resultant high academic achievements versus the lower rates of both in the remedial students' narratives. It is possible that some, if not all, of the Ivy League doctoral students were from socioeconomically challenged backgrounds too. Still, the contrast I am imagining presumes, for example, that the Ivy League graduate students were not themselves 2-year community college students prior to attending graduate school—a presumption that I would not confidently assert except as a tentative hunch. Thus, I must draw on my limited personal experience and available statistics about community college students in general as compared to Ivy League graduate students if I were to claim that this inequitable sponsorship and reading ability came down to a matter of socioeconomics. Accordingly, I cannot confidently assert here that the remedial students did not fail to be strong readers simply because they hailed from a different socioeconomic status as the adult strong readers.

I was also, as I mentioned earlier, not conducting a study of the circumstances that created remedial readers. My initial frame of reference, which was applied to the first study and then, as a point of comparison, to the community college student study, was reliant on the question of *how strong readers came to be strong readers*. The second study was helpful in illustrating the overwhelming commonality and positive impact of early sponsors on the strong readers by virtue of showing a population of non-strong readers who, for the most part, did not have this feature in their backgrounds. Hence, now that I have these two vastly different points of comparison, accessing the reading histories of students who are strong readers from the same

generation, same-level academic institution, and same community as the remedial ones, provides a much-needed connection back to the original point of inquiry.

Concluding Thoughts

My research data from the first study of strong readers revealed the not-surprising link between early literacy sponsorship in the home and long-term affirmative reading habits and attitudes. Another correlation among the autobiographies was a clear distinction, through tone and diction, of attitudes toward in-school and out-of-school reading, experiences which often occurred somewhere around the middle school years. I organized those attitudes by chart and color coding (red for negative attitudes, blue for positive). I noted, too, the dichotomy of the participants' perfunctory, passive reading of school required texts, and engaged, aesthetic reading of non-school, freely-chosen literature. I had not anticipated such a drastic polarity between what the doctoral student subjects identified as "required" vs. "pleasure" reading.

Locating the reasons behind their distaste for school reading and the appeal of non-school reading is pedagogically and theoretically important. The third main discovery in the study of strong readers also disclosed ways in which the participants personally valued alternative means and forms of literacy sponsorship, ones that were not mentioned in the remedial students' narratives. Activities such as theatre, comedy, and music that were repudiated in the classroom were valuable to the strong readers' self-esteem, social lives, and scholarship. Involvement in these activities offered those students a new kind of sponsorship in providing them a role as someone who takes on literacy tasks associated with those forms of membership. Traditional schooling and approaches to teaching literacy during the formative school years of the participants were centered on comprehension of print text, phonics skills, and "hasty and superficial discussions" (as per one participant) of the assigned literature. The commonalities

revealed in the reading autobiographies are highly suggestive of the need for a closer look at traditional practices in the teaching of reading and writing.

While I can derive several explanations and suggestions for my findings in the study of strong readers, I cannot ignore what I assume to be the “privileged” educational backgrounds of many of my participants. The Study 1 participants mainly hailed from an era where homes with two working parents were less likely than in the current generation of participants. This increase in two-working parent and single-parent homes during the more current generation could certainly justify a decrease in being read to in the home, as identified in the reading histories of the 2017 college freshmen. In addition, the adult strong readers were attending an Ivy League Ph.D. program, a vast contrast to a 2-year community college student!

I was not privy to the details of the economic backgrounds of my doctoral student study participants, but it is likely that the economic circumstances of at least several of the students attending a graduate program at a College that averages \$1,572 per credit/point, when compared to a community college tuition rate of \$384 per credit, reflects an economic and educational disparity in populations. Stephen Krashen, Professor Emeritus at University of Southern California, has published prolifically on the power of access to books in combatting adverse effects of poverty on educational achievement. It is not a surprise, though it is noteworthy, that “Children in low-income families have access to fewer reading materials than children of middle- and upper-income families” (Krashen, 2012). The literature has shown that access to books is highly contingent upon race, class, and educational backgrounds, and that “Children growing up in homes with at least twenty books get three years more schooling than children from bookless homes, independent of their parents’ education, occupation, and class” (Evans, Kelley, & Sikora, 2014). The advantage of growing up in a home with books is indisputable, as

is the rich/poor disproportion that has been identified as a major factor in the reading gap across classes (Allington, 2013). These prevailing disparities in my two research populations needed to be accounted for.

It is important, then, to establish whether another population of strong readers elicits parallels to the early backgrounds of the adult population in Study 1, as it has become clear that this was not the case for the remedial readers. The next chapter explores a third study, one that might position me to “close the loop” between the discrepancies among strong and remedial readers’ literacy sponsorship, attitudes, and behaviors in a way that spans generational differences, socioeconomic status, and diverse educational levels across all three populations.

Chapter VII

STUDY 3, AN ANALYSIS OF HONORS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

FRESHMAN COMPOSITION STUDENTS

My father opened a book, much larger than ones I was used to. He began to read Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone aloud to my family. At first, I wasn't interested, I preferred our usual books my father would read to me at night, like The Berenstain Bears or Where the Wild Things Are. At first, I just sat in the room coloring away; I wasn't too invested in the words my father brought to life. However, at one point I noticed how my mother was thrilled to be spending quality time with my family as she looked at each of us smiling. At that moment I realized how invested my older brother was in the story even though he normally wanted nothing to do with his embarrassing family. This was when I put my crayons down and I opened my ears to my future in the literary world. (Honors Student, Reading Autobiography, Fall 2016)

Introduction

The above description of the environment, family members, titles of books, and even the coloring activity in which this student was engaged is an example of what Barton and Hamilton (2000) would call a socially situated literacy event. In the domain of her home, the social and cultural power relationships, at least in this snapshot she provides, operated in such a way that each family member seemed to benefit from this socially supported experience of reading together. Using Barton and Hamilton's definition of literacy practices as "the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives" (p. 7), we can understand the act of creating a written autobiographical account of literacy events as a means to locating evidence of the influence of social structures on individual literacy.

With this third population of readers, students who have been accepted into a rigorous community college honors program and placed in honors freshman composition, based on a stringent and competitive application process, I again look at the three main categories that were explicated in the first two sets of narratives: sponsors of literacy, in-school and out-of-school domains, and significance of reading in their lives. Other themes, too, emerged in this third set of

reading histories, themes that expand our understanding of how literacy sponsorship operates in both proactive and counteractive ways. Not all are necessarily new themes, but thanks to the thoroughly detailed and developed writing in all of these narratives, we are given not a window, but a door that provides a more comprehensive view into them.

FINDINGS

Part 1—Sponsors of Literacy

General Findings

To demonstrate the principal outcomes of the honors students' reading autobiographies, I numbered the students and created a simple list of the entities mentioned as responsible for introducing the participants to reading. In cases where there was a specific bias mentioned toward those sponsors, I indicated with a "negative" or "positive" label to clarify that just because sponsors were mentioned, it did not mean it was in a beneficial way. Following this list, I provide a graph of sponsorship percentages, a replica of the one used in the first two studies, but of course, with percentages and sponsors reflected in this specific data pool. I elaborate more on the positive and negative aspects of sponsorship and on the spaces in which they recalled this sponsorship occurring (i.e., the library) as my analysis of this category's findings unfold. The list of sponsors mentioned by the honors freshman composition students is as follows:

- ❖ Student 1: "My parents"
- ❖ Student 2: "My teachers were incompetent" (Negative sponsors)
- ❖ Student 3: My mother
- ❖ Student 4: Video games/teacher angry for reading ahead in book
- ❖ Student 5: *Green Eggs and Ham*; enthusiastic 9th grade teacher (positive)
- ❖ Student 6: Dad, mom, library trips, Wattpad app
- ❖ Student 7: Embarrassing cousin; mother, 3rd and 4th grade teachers
- ❖ Student 8: Mother; parents; grandparents, specifically grandma; 3rd grade teacher

- ❖ Student 9: Mom (but did not speak English as first language); *Spanish Old Testament*; preschool teacher (positive); 2nd grade teacher (discouraging ranking system); 5th grade teacher (positive)

Note: This student comes from an ESL background, like many of the remedial readers, and the reliance upon teachers becomes so much more significant in these cases.

- ❖ Student 10: Mom, kindergarten teacher, challenging high school teacher; (negative) teachers and books middle school years
- ❖ Student 11: Strict Greek mother
- ❖ Student 12: Barnes and Noble and *Twilight* series
- ❖ Student 13: Father; interested older brother
- ❖ Student 14: Grandpa primarily; *The Cat in the Hat*; English teacher mother

A brief overview of this list revealed several interesting differences in this set of sponsors than in the first two sets. First, the two students who mentioned their ethnicity connected that background to the cultural influences in the home, specifically with parental approaches to literacy. Second, individual book titles and series were identified and discussed more regularly than in the other two populations. Third, and perhaps one of the most important discoveries of all three studies, these students recognized teachers frequently and in very specific detail. The sponsorship percentages in graph form appears in Figure 8.

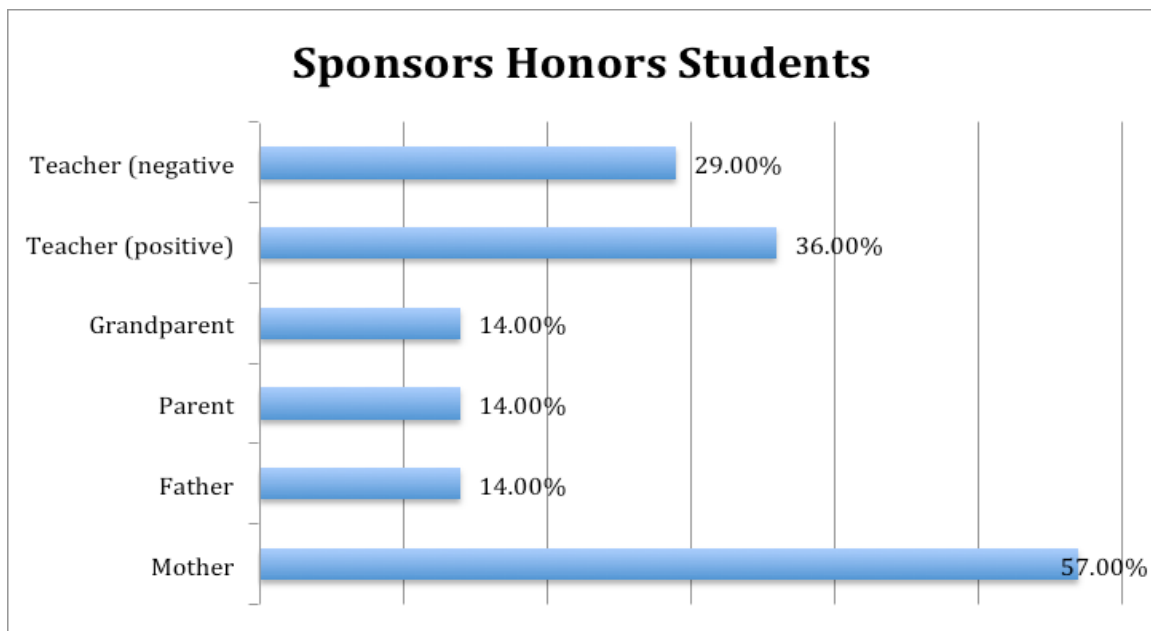


Figure 8. Sponsors of literacy mentioned in honors students' reading autobiographies

A more specific breakdown of the numbers reflected in Figure 8 is listed below:

- 8 out of 14 mentioned mothers (57%)
- 2 out of 14 mentioned fathers (14%)
- 2 out of 14 mentioned parents in general (14%)
- 2 mentioned grandparent (14%)
- 1 mentioned a sibling (.07%)
- 5 discussed positive teacher influences (36%)
- 4 discussed negative teacher influences (29%)
- 1 out of 14 did not mention any early sponsors (.07%)

New Themes Emerge

In Chapter I, I predicted that “the reading autobiographies will offer prolific accounts of socially and culturally situated literacy events and practices.” I outlined Vygotsky’s theory on the integral nature of social interaction in a child’s interpsychological and intrapsychological development. The early childhood relationships and interactions with parents and, in some cases, other sponsors, as discussed in the majority of the honors students’ reading histories supported Vygotsky’s theory of cognitive development. Among this third population of readers, new themes emerged as well:

1. The impact of a home library and access to books in the preschool years,
2. The power of reading aloud,
3. Familial reading apprenticeships,
4. Digital vs. print text,
5. The effects of illustrations in picture books, and
6. Definitions of reading for “pleasure.”

I further develop these themes by sharing more from the autobiographies and then connecting and explaining their significance as supported by current research in the field.

Student Vignettes: Defining Early Literacy Sponsors in Their Own Terms

In the doctoral student study, I demonstrated some of the outcomes and analysis of literacy sponsorship through a combination of letting the narratives speak for themselves, and through my own restorying of the narratives through vignettes. The honors students' reading autobiographies, of all the data sets, were the most detailed, rich and inherently story-like in nature, and thus already included vignettes. Hence, I did not create new vignettes around the reading autobiographies as I did with the Study 1 narratives, but I showcase the intrinsic vignettes provided by the students in their own narratives and, in some cases, offer a mosaic of several voices.

Vignette 1: The year *The Grinch* and cousin Angelina stole Christmas (Melanie, Honors Student #7). While the majority of participants in both studies of strong readers (Ph.D. and honors students) identified a parent as an early sponsor, a couple attributed being introduced to books by a cousin as an influential factor in their literacy. Like Saul in the doctoral student study, who vividly recalled being gifted a box of books just prior to his 14th birthday, honors student Melanie (Student #7) remembered her initial introduction to books through her cousin Angelina at the early age of 3. Unlike Saul's favorable experience, Melanie angrily described being provoked to read by a demanding cousin:

The brightness was non-existent, and the only visible object was [in my cousin Angelina's] dark shadow slowly slithering into the living room. In her hands she held something that she later passed onto me. I couldn't read it at first, but she did and it was a book called *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. "Read it," she commanded. Not wanting to embarrass myself in front of Angelina and the rest of my family members who had gathered around, I took the book and began to read with my mother by my side. My attempt was a complete fail, as a three year old my ability to read and recognize words were limited. Words such as "the," "it," "merry," and "shoes" came more easily than "Whoville" and "Mt. Crumpit," which were a lot harder to pronounce. By the end of the book I could feel tears streaming down past my boiling face and onto my lap. My throat was choked up and I could not bring myself to utter the last few words of the story. I was completely devastated and humiliated.

Sponsors of literacy, Brandt (1997) elucidated, “are a tangible reminder that literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or, at minimum, contact with existing trade routes” (p. 3). In Melanie’s situation, her cousin coerced her into reading aloud in front of other relatives before she was confident or capable.

This circumstance put her in a position to “succeed or fail” with reading, unlike other students whose early literacy memories did not entail a test or performance that could be judged as a failure. Melanie’s descriptions of her attempts at reading, and the resultant “tears streaming down past [her] boiling face...” leaving her feeling “devastated and humiliated,” could have turned her against reading for many years to come. Fortunately, her competitive disposition and other, more encouraging sponsors led her in a different direction:

Though this event had left me in an uneasy position, it ultimately helped to fuel and create a reader in me. It served to start off my continuing literacy journey. The fury that particular experience had left me with helped me to become a better reader. Afterwards, I would practice reading almost every single day.

Melanie proceeded to describe her 3rd and 4th grade teachers as establishing an inviting classroom environment with an enthusiastic tone and multiple avenues to success. She wrote, “They had this particular way of conveying and having the kids read and write that it never felt like an assignment or a requirement, rather it was a fun and calm activity through which the students could win prizes and be recognized.” Here too, she explained, her experience involved competition, especially in the art of writing, but the incentives of rewards and respect from the teacher and peers inspired and motivated Melanie, who remembered how “With every assignment, we all looked to improve ourselves, whether that be with the vocabulary we used, the way we wrote a certain detail, or by reading more to expand our knowledge on the book so that we could write more the next time.”

Sadly, Melanie's narrative took yet another turn when she reached high school, but I return to that aspect of her narrative when I later discuss the second coded category of this study, "In-School vs. Out-of-School Reading." In this case of her interaction with her cousin in the preschool years, we learn how even unintentional sponsorship can begin to shape attitudes about reading; we also see how positive classroom encounters can redirect negative attitudes formed through prior experiences.

Vignette 2: Building the Home Library (Student #8, Student #5, Student #1, Student #6).

The scholarly culture hypothesis holds that reading provides cognitive skills that enhance educational performance. A home with books as an integral part of the way of life encourages children to read for pleasure and encourages discussion among family members about what they read, thereby providing children with information, vocabulary, imaginative richness, wide horizons, and skills for discovery and play (Bus and Ijzendoorn 1995; Dronkers 1992; Persson 2012; Price 2012). (Evans et al., 2014, p. 3)

Several of the honors students mentioned access to books, including specific authors and titles, as a central aspect to their literacy and ultimately to their love of reading. Student #8, whom I call Kyle, noted how

My parents always made sure I never had an excuse as to why I could not read or write properly, which I now understand was because they wanted to give me an advantage over other children. An excuse that I never had was that I did not have enough books. Just after my third birthday my parents and I moved from our tiny condo into a much larger house where I had room to run around and play in our own backyard. When we moved into this house my parents bought me my own bookcase for my room. Both my parents and grandparents helped me build my collection of books which, I still have today.

Kyle's collection has literally and figuratively remained with him, serving as building blocks to a life of literacy that he will hopefully share with his children one day. In this library, Kyle said one can find "a different variety of books, anywhere from *The Magic Tree House* to Disney books." But it was not just the physical collection that had value, as Kyle illustrated when

he added, “I still have all of these books today which brings back nostalgia about when I enjoyed reading and writing and what it was like to open up a new book and start a new adventure.”

Kyle’s story typified what the research has shown about the effects of early exposure to books in the home.

Mariah Evans (2014), a sociologist from the University of Nevada-Reno, and her colleagues, Jonathan Kelley and Joanna Sikora, studied the academic achievement of students across 42 nations (most were age 15 at the time of study) and collected data on the number of books in the homes and family demographics. Like their findings in a smaller 2010 study of the effect of a home library on academic achievement, this expanded and more recent study confirmed that a scholarly culture, which they partially defined as “exposure to books” (they also raised the contested influence of “high culture”), “exerts a strong influence on academic performance in ways consistent with the cognitive skill hypothesis, regardless of the nation's ideology, political history, or level of development” (p. 1). These two important studies contribute to conversations surrounding the power of early literacy sponsorship. They also raise essential questions about which aspects of sponsorship are most effective.

The information from Student #8, and as I show next with Student #5, among many other narrative accounts across all three sets of data, suggested the significance of the tangible aspects that make a book indelible in the mind of a young child. So, too, does the experience of having a parent read that book to him or her. The term “Reading Apprenticeship” (I use Schoenbach, Greenleaf, and Murphy’s [2012] definition) includes social, personal, cognitive and knowledge-building dimensions (p. 25) and is based on the earlier “cognitive apprenticeship,” as explained by Vygotsky. The metacognitive engagement offered in these forms of reading interaction are enhanced by the proximity to books, and, as research has proven, a home library is an essential

tool in this process. Kyle is one of many voices among the two sets of strong readers who confirmed that being read to in the home (or in the library) and accessing books, especially during the preschool years, has far-reaching effects on attitudes and behaviors linked with reading. But, is it the people, the places, the events, or...can it merely be the getting books in the hands of children that matters most? Or, is it all of the above?

What constitutes owning a book in the 21st century? Considering the tactile nature of print books. Student #5, along with many other participants in all of the studies, had vivid memories of Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*:

The first book that I remember reading was *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss. I do not recall what grade I was in when I read it, but I do remember enjoying the book. My copy of the book was a thin, but wide, bright orange hardcover. I loved the feel of it in my hands. Each page had a drawing that took up about three-quarters of the page, and about two or three lines of text.

The phrase "I loved the feel of it in my hands" provokes thoughts about the current concern regarding print text versus electronic versions.

Student #1, on the other hand, credited the gift of a Kindle e-reader for re-igniting his reading passion while traveling for the army:

Around the beginning of 2014, I received a Kindle as a gift from my family. This helped tremendously with my reading, as constantly moving around didn't particularly allow me to have a library with me at all times. But this piece of technology afforded me the opportunity to keep all my books in one small, transportable place.

The ability to store a "library" of books all in one compact, portable device has its benefits too. Though this was not an early, preschool form of sponsorship, this gift from his parents served him in a similar way. It was not only during his military service that this student found satisfaction in this piece of technology. He followed up later in his narrative by showing how, after a several-year respite from reading, his Kindle lured him back into the world of literature:

And once again, my Kindle called out to me from my desk, yearning for attention that it had lacked for so long. I stood up and brushed off the dust as I hit the power button. It came to life and opened to the page I had left it on when in Africa, almost as if it had been a matter of minutes instead of over a year. I was instantly drawn back in, and before the day was over my book was complete. I sat it down next to me and thought for a moment about how much of an impact this Kindle, this tiny piece of technology, had on my life, and how grateful I was that something like it existed.

Unlike Student #1's encouraging interplay with technology, Student #6 explained how her discovery of the app Wattpad introduced her to a subpar community of readers and writers. She wrote:

Now for those who don't know what this is, it is a free app which writers can write books and stories for free and people can read them. The only problem with reading from this app was most of the writers were beginners, so I grew accustomed to reading books below my reading level. While my reading level never diminished, it also didn't flourish and grow the way it was supposed to.

This digital community of practice did not offer her expert practitioners or mentors who could help move her toward skillful autonomy in the desired practice (Schoenbach et al., 2012). Other, more positive apprenticeships in Student #6's background, tied to ownership of books in the home, however, prevailed, as I show next.

Family reading as form of apprenticeship. Fortunately, Student #1's family and home library did provide a community of practice, although she claimed that "as the years went on I discovered a giant obstacle to my reading...electronics" (she means the Wattpad). She declared, "I was very fortunate to be raised in a household which promoted reading and education" and she recalled trips to the library to add to her already substantial set of books she owned in the home. This same student excitedly reminisced about the allure of a book that became a staple in her family's home library of paper-based books and resumed an earlier discussion about the potency of collaborative family reading of these books. She recalled how a specific book became so much a part of the family that it was built into the nightly routine and was brought on

vacations—yet another reminder of the power of the actual physical book and not just the story it held within. She wrote, “My favorite childhood book was ‘There’s an alligator under my bed’ [sic]. My mom read that book to my sister and I so much that she actually knew the story by heart. That book was brought not only to bedtime but to every trip we took. The poor book was falling apart we read it so much.” Why bring the book everywhere if “she actually knew the story by heart”?

The family activity of reading together is a form of reading apprenticeship, one that has proven so effective that Nancy Flanagan Knapp and her colleagues (2016) designed a study in which they implemented a summer in-school reading apprenticeship, but instead of using teachers, they used parents as the reading partners. This 12-week in-school intervention program was aimed at preventing summer reading setbacks among 1st through 4th grade novice and struggling readers by inviting parents into the process.

As Knapp shared in her article “Reading Together: A Summer Family Reading Apprenticeship Program” published in a 2016 issue of *Literacy Research and Instruction*, in addition to the children increasing their reading level by anywhere from 2-5 months, “The majority of participating parents also reported substantial improvements in their children’s attitudes toward reading, and these improvements were reported as having positive effects on school performance and attitude for a number of children” (pp. 59-60). An added boon to this summer reading apprenticeship was that participating families also reported that the students initially receiving the intervention had gone on to serve as apprentices to other children, mainly younger family members. These were encouraging findings that showed us how access to books and apprenticeship models offer significant advantages both as a head start and as a way to catch up in reading performance and attitude. In addition to the emergent themes of book access and

family apprenticeship in the reading autobiographies of these strong honors-level readers, as seen with Student #1 and Student #6, the issue of print and digital texts arose in the narratives.

The digital “divide.” The controversy over whether one is actually “reading” if not in print form complicates teaching literacy and determining what is and what should be condoned “reading” in the home and in the classroom; this has become a battle not only among educators, but amid parents’ conflicting viewpoints on this issue as well. Students, too, have expressed a preference of print text over digital formats. For instance, from 2013-2015, the American University professor of linguistics Naomi Baron (2015) conducted a survey of over 400 college students from five countries (Germany, India, Japan, Slovenia, and the United States) in an effort to determine the comparison between print and on-screen reading. Over 90% of the college students surveyed reported a preference to print mediums for various reasons such as the aesthetic appeal, the smell, ease on the eyes, and ability to keep better track of where they were in the text. The respondents also noted that they were more likely to multitask when reading digitally, but that the digital format made it easier when reading in the dark and finding their place when getting lost in the book (Baron, 2015).

But can readers comprehend, learn, and build critical thinking skills better in one format over the other? The relevance of all the voices represented in this composite vignette about building a home library is critical to the characteristics of a “home library” in the 21st century. Does owning books on e-readers or other technical devices “in the home” constitute a “home library”? Another concern is the digital divide—the inequitable access to technological devices and online knowledge, a subject that has been taken up by a number of current research studies (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Slate, Manuel, & Brinson, 2002; Warschauer, 2003). I suspect

that, although worth mentioning, a comprehensive investigation into this issue is not within the realm of my study.

Vignette 3: The illustrative allure of picture books (Student #9, Student #14). For a few of the participants in all three studies—doctoral, remedial, and honors populations—the Bible was a memorable book that was typically passed on from parent to child and read together. Student #9 described in detail, much in the way Student #5 described the copy of *Green Eggs and Ham*, the physical appearance of a children’s Spanish Bible:

My earliest memory of reading is when my mother read the Spanish bible to me at home. She would sit me down and read to me the stories of God. We used to own a small Spanish Old Testament children’s picture book. The book was beat up and a lot of the pages were either ripped or missing. You could tell it was a well used and loved.

It is a common assumption that if a book is in disheveled condition, it is a sign of adoration and of having been repeatedly read. Flagged pages, highlighted passages, pencil-scratched notes, falling-apart covers...these are the marks of a valued and utilized text. How much, then, does the love of a book, the passion for reading, depend on the tactile aspects of a text? Or, is it the pictorial feature that resonates?

Student #14 described the moment he discovered a book hiding under the passenger’s seat of a car, as though he had just discovered an old and new friend simultaneously: “That’s when I saw it, dishevelled and caked with dust, a rather large blue book stuck under the passenger’s seat. After a considerable effort, I freed the unsightly book from its bondage, and there it was in bold white letters: ‘The Cat in the Hat.’” The creative adjectives (“dishevelled,” “caked with dust,” “unsightly”), alliteration (“blue book from its bondage”), and metaphor (“freed the unsightly book from its bondage”) used in this writer’s depiction of the moment led his reader to wonder what inspired such creativity. Despite his protestations that “It wasn’t the first book I have read, but it was the first time I had explored a book, not for their colorful

pictures or fun characters,” the features of the text that appealed to him were linked to the visual aesthetic.

Some reading experts have argued that illustrations impede the process of learning to read, while others have claimed that pictures can help facilitate information gathering and retention (Brookshire, Scharff, & Moses, 2002). Student #14 continued to declare that the appeal of the text was in “the situation, the setting and the lessons that the book could offer.” I am not convinced that this was what first caught his attention as a young boy reading it for the first time, but whatever did captivate him about the book, he claimed as a now young adult that “It was this spark that ignited a passion for reading, for absorbing knowledge of worlds crafted from words. It was then that I truly learned how to read.”

In his experience with his *Cat in the Hat* encounter, the student was describing a moment of independent reading, but around this autonomous act, he contextualized it with an incredible amount of support from his beloved grandfather and literary enthusiast parents. “Just like Tyler Joseph sings, ‘Wish we could turn back time, to the good old days.’ That period of my life was an era of happiness and acquisition of knowledge. It was the tender age of 3 that my Grandpa started to read to me. He would read to me these Korean children’s books, every day right after lunch.” His parents also read to him, and he summed up the impact of his sponsorship in this declarative, insightful way: “It all boils down to this; if I did not have my grandpa to teach me how to read and write, or my mom who fueled my passion for reading, I wouldn’t be taking this class today.” It seems that credit can be given to the time spent with his grandpa reading aloud, especially illustrated works. Research has shown that Student #14’s grandfather was providing him a significant advantage by engaging in this shared activity.

More about the power of reading aloud, especially with picture books. Dominic Massaro (2017), Professor of Psychology and Computer Engineering at University of California, Santa Cruz, studied the perceptual, cognitive, and neurological factors involved in written and spoken language acquisition, and he argued that these skills are not learned through direct instruction. In his article, “Reading Aloud to Children: Benefits and Implications for Acquiring Literacy Before School Begins, Massaro presented a study in which the goal was “to determine exactly what is available to the child in reading aloud that is not present in the other spoken language we direct to our children” (p. 64). I found myself wondering the same when re-reading excerpts from the honors students’ reading autobiographies. The visceral descriptions by both the honors and the Ph.D. students of moments when parents (and grandparents) read to/with them, especially picture books by Dr. Seuss, the stories *Goodnight Moon* and *There’s an Alligator Under My Bed*, among others mentioned, were striking. Perhaps these lucidly animated moments in the narratives were attributable to the environment in which the reading occurred, and the attention received from an adult. With this third set of data on memories with reading, it cannot be ignored that many of the memories specifically exemplified being read to as a highlight of the participants’ childhoods. Massaro’s (2017) findings corroborated and advanced previous research (Hayes, 1988; Montag, Jones, & Smith, 2015) that validated the powerful effect of reading aloud, especially picture books, to children:

1. “Children listening to a reading aloud of a picture book are roughly three times more likely to experience a new word type that is not among the most frequent words in a child’s vocabulary” (p. 64). This is because the vocabulary found in picture books is vastly different than spoken word, both at the child and adult levels.
2. Hearing a word at an earlier age makes it more likely that the acquisition of the term will become embedded as receptive and productive vocabulary that will be remembered and used in adulthood.
3. In a follow-up study, the comparison of a child-directed speech database (i.e., parents talking to children while playing with toys) to a picture book database (text-related interaction) reinforced the earlier finding that the vocabulary in picture books is more

linguistically and cognitively complex than the spoken vocabulary between adults and children, and even between adults.

The main conclusion of Massaro's (2017) research, and an important one to help me frame moments of the narratives where reading aloud of illustrated texts was described, was that "the language and content of prototypical picture books are more extensive in vocabulary, grammar, and content and therefore more cognitively challenging than their counterparts in prototypically spoken language" (p. 70). Putting Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory in conversation with this finding—increased mediated parental reading-aloud time with children optimizes the child's potential and skill base necessary for effective autonomous reading—it follows then that educators, too, should provide mediating occasions for the sort of social interactions that are integral to cognitive development and learning. At the elementary level, this certainly means curricular and pedagogical frameworks that incorporate these opportunities. I further address this pedagogical implication, especially at the college level, in my final chapter where I discuss possibilities for engaging students in socially situated literacy activities.

Analyzing discourse, discourse communities, and effects of reading aloud. With this research supporting the cognitive and linguistic advantages of reading aloud to preschoolers in mind, let us again look at some of the narrative moments where honors students recalled being read aloud to by a parent or grandparent. Now, too, consider the discourse groups and discourse communities each of us belongs to and how they shape our identity as readers (Gee, 1989, 1996):

Kyle (Student #8): During my time in elementary school I would spend a few days a week with my grandparents, specifically my grandma. This was a time where I enjoyed reading.... When I was a child she would, like my mother, read to me in the rocking chair next to my crib. I am not really sure what it was but the way my grandma read to me always kept me interested in the book we were reading. My grandma also used to read and write with me when I would go up to the trailer that they owned in Pennsylvania. My grandparents owned a little trailer up in Pennsylvania where they would take me

occasionally. There my grandma had a collection of about thirty or more books that we would read every time I went there.

Depicted in this excerpt are several of the aspects of sponsorship that existed in the strong readers' histories: being read to early, at home, and by a family member; existence of a substantial home library; experience of joyful feelings; specific recollection of where the reading occurred; interest being maintained by the manner in which the family member was reading. The social practices taking place in this scene coincide with the kind of ways of being that Gee used to explain what he calls capital "D" "Discourses." In "Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction," Gee (1989) delineates the difference between language learning—exhibiting concrete forms of grammatical perfection—and achieving an understanding of how and why we use literacies as a social practice. In learning "language," we might gain grammatical perfection, but we do not reach a true understanding of how to use that language that a particular social context expects or demands.

Gee maintained that we acquire an "identity kit" by virtue of learning how to talk, write, dress, behave, value, and believe in accordance with the social practices of each community in which we play a role. The acquisition of this "identity kit" is contingent upon interaction with and recognition by the social group of these literacies and one's "ways of being" in that world (Gee, 1989, p. 6). It is in the integration of these practices, consistent with the community practices, where mastery of the essential superficial features of language can lead to full mastery, which Gee defined as fluency and control over a Primary and Secondary Discourse (p. 9), thus necessitating the term "literacies" rather than singular "literacy." One must have entry into the Discourse, and for mastery to occur, interaction via apprenticeship with an individual who has already attained mastery of that Discourse.

From a pedagogical standpoint, often by the time one has entered school, one has not learned the superficial features of language necessary for mastery of the expected school-based modes of literacy, and it is usually too late for one to acquire them by that point and in a classroom setting. Gee (1989) alleged that “Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction..., but by enculturation (‘apprenticeship’) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse” (p. 7). Discourses, then, are first learned by saying and doing, followed by writing and reading, and are wholly dependent on membership in a Discourse community. One such community might be the one in which someone is born and raised, and where Primary Discourses are accessed “through our primary socialization early in life in the home and peer group” (p. 7).

With the understanding that homes can be training grounds for Primary Discourses, let us now revisit some of the moments in the reading histories of the community college honors students where they appeared to be describing access and interaction with the social practices essential to initial Discourse. Kyle spoke about both a grandmother and mother who initiated him by modeling and offering opportunity to imitate them while reading together. In addition to his earlier memory of his grandmother reading to him in her Pennsylvania home, Kyle described the process of how he was enculturated into the literacy practices that could pave the way for mastery:

When I would read these books to my grandma and I stumbled upon a word that I could not pronounce she would always help me sound it out. She would never just straight up tell me the word, always leaving me to figure it out which helped me establish the attitude of not just quitting and walking away from something. I do not think my grandma realized how much she was helping me but to this day I am very grateful that she made me sound out words instead of just telling me the word.

Phrases here such as “she would always help me sound it out,” “leaving me to figure it out,” and “helped me establish the attitude of not just quitting and walking away from something” reveal the benefits of positive mentorship and confidence instilling literacy coaching.

Student #3 (I call her Stephanie) also narrated, using strong storytelling characteristics of setting, character, plot, and dialogue, the constructive engagement between herself and her strongest sponsor of literacy—her mother. Like Kyle, Stephanie enjoyed the phonetic interplay that became a sort of “script” during reading time. She recalled how

At night I’d slip into my Pocahontas feety pajamas and lie horizontally on the Big Bed in my mom’s room. On my stomach with my feet in the air, I’d struggle through “The Fat Cat is Mad” and other similar titles. Slowly sounding out the words aloud, my mom would channel surf or finger a thick novel next to me.

“How do you say B-A-L-L?” I would ask, saying the letters one by one.

“What sounds do they make? Buh-ah-luh,” she would reply, giving me time to think about the noises.

“Ball?” I’d said questioningly.

“Yup!” she’d say, encouraging me. A hundred times we went through this script, with different words each time.

In addition to the memorable details she shared about her pajamas, positioning on the bed, and book selection, Stephanie described the interaction in this scene as “encouraging.”

Though she confessed to the fact that she would “struggle through” attempts at reading aloud to her mother, the sort of resistance or frustration expressed about school-related struggles with reading in many of the narratives were not evident in this domestic reading exchange. Stephanie revealed how her mother’s “motivation and attention never faltered, no matter how tired or stressed she was from her busy day at work.” She attributed her early motivation to learn how to read, and then her later perseverance through difficult reading, to her mother’s strong example as a reader herself who read every day for “personal pleasure”:

My mother was always reading, whether it be books or newspapers or articles. Her blonde hair floats around her educated brain and her blue eyes scan the pages with breakneck speed and intensity.... By watching her I understood that there were mysteries

and adventures to be unlocked within the pages of a book. This motivated me to learn to read so I could be like my mother. Her guidance over time as I grew and developed into a more mature reader was critical.

Stephanie witnessed her mother reading, yes, but the positive effect of watching her mother engage in this activity seemed to come from watching her mother *enjoy* reading. Let us then consider more carefully what it means to “read for pleasure.”

What does it mean to read for pleasure? Clark and Rumbold (2006) explained that “Reading for pleasure refers to reading that we do of our own free will anticipating the satisfaction that we will get from the act of reading. It also refers to reading that having begun at someone else’s request we continue because we are interested in it. It typically involves materials that reflect our own choice, at a time and place that suits us” (p. 6). It is interesting to note that their definition included reading that had “begun at someone else’s request.” The dictionary definition of a sponsor is “a person who makes a pledge or promise on behalf of another.”

I spoke earlier of Deborah Brandt’s definition of a sponsor of literacy and return to it here. Her definition expanded upon the social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of the traditional definition. She noted that these agents of literacy work in a multitude of ways, with a variety of benefits for their actions. Brandt (1997) observed, “sponsors seemed a fitting term for the figures who turned up most typically in people’s memories of literacy learning” (p. 3) and explained that “in whatever form, sponsors deliver the ideological freight that must be borne for access to what they have” (p. 4). Stephanie’s mother unintentionally and intentionally sponsored her reading by modeling joy during the act of reading and by engaging Stephanie in interactive ways of reading.

Stephanie credited her mother for providing “constant guidance and attention” when establishing a literary environment in the home, and she described how “When I began to read she encouraged me to not only see what was on the page but to question why. Why does this word sound like that? What other words do you know that are similar? How can you figure out what that means? I learned to break down words into pieces that could be more easily understood.” Frequent trips to the library integrated into family life also boosted this literacy sponsorship, as Stephanie fondly recalled that “When I was seven, at least one day every week my mother piled me, my three year old brother M----, and my infant brother B---- into our silver minivan for the library. We were let loose in the children’s section to do what we pleased. All the librarians knew us by name and greeted us welcomingly.” Once again, there was occasion for reading for “pleasure” in this scenario. This term has frequently appeared in the reading autobiographies for this study, and in the next section of this third study, where I analyze the in-school and non-school memories shared by the honors students, I further explore its connotations.

Final Thoughts on Home Literacy and the Influence of Socially Situated Sponsorship

A common characteristic in the narratives of the adult strong readers and the honors student narratives in this final study was the detailed description of where the participants were located, who they were with, and even what they were wearing at the time of these early reading memories. The activity of reading, as evidenced by the early reading memories of these students, was a highly social and mediated one, with a wide scope of factors that coincided to impact the activity of reading. Socioculturally minded frameworks (Heath, 1983; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) have helped to describe the various environments, people, motivations, histories, artifacts, and complex actions involved in learning to read. From the reading

autobiographies, we learn more about learning: who is learning, why they do or do not learn, what they learn, and how they learn. This knowledge helps English educators to account for the purposes and uses of what is learned, the motives or forces that promote or require learning, the relationships that are entailed in the learning, and the results from the learning.

As I move into the findings and analysis for the next category “Middle School Dichotomies of In-School vs. Out-of-School Reading,” I build on what we now know about social determinants of who, why, what, and how the honors students seem to have “learned” by also looking at the spaces in which their literacy has been sponsored. Through examination of the in- and out-of-school contexts in which this learning occurred or was hindered, we can better answer the question “Where do they learn?” I already established that literacy learning is not dependent on one “actor.” NONE of the participants in any of the three studies wrote about having come to books and reading on their own, in an isolated environment. Even those who did not identify a sponsor also did not identify themselves as having just “picked up a book and read” without another agent or in a remote context.

Part 2—Middle and High School Dichotomies of In-School vs. Out-of-School Reading

A glaring variant in the narratives for this third study materialized as I attempted to trace segments of the data that directly commented on in-school and outside-of-school reading experiences. The honors students’ autobiographies did not contain the diction of resentment vs. pleasure that represented the conspicuous contradiction between school and non-school reading, as was evident in the doctoral students’ narratives. Moreover, unlike many of the remedial students’ accounts, the honors students did not show an across-the-board disdain for reading in both environments.

However, those honors participants who did write about their school and non-school reading experiences had strong feelings about both, as adeptly represented by the student who sardonically asked of required school texts, “Who cares if you overcame a social stigma when there are other people in fantasy worlds slaying demons?” This students’ testimony pointed to the problem of the canon, and to the fact that those in the profession of English at the secondary level have historically felt responsible for teaching a set of texts that have been traditionally regarded as great literature (Applebee, 1974). The belief that this canon of knowledge is required for success in college and as a marker of social success often results in school reading being tied to these objectives and explains why the canon typically remains the same, despite renewed curriculum debates and students’ changing interests. I created the following table to organize and highlight the honors students’ attitudes and behaviors related to the problem of “required” reading versus “free” reading choice.

This table is extensive, despite the already heavy editing to winnow the material to this space, because I want to give my readers the opportunity to see first-hand the richness of the data yielded from this last study population, the cross-sectional (in- and out-of-school) positive and negative attitudes toward reading, and the elaborate framing and explanation provided by each of the participants. Note that only 12 of the 14 participants in this data pool are represented in this chart because the other 2 (Students #1 and #2) did not address their in-school and out-of-school reading experiences sufficiently enough for me to perform coding.

Consider, as you peruse this chart, the ways in which students chronicle the treatment by teachers, their attitudes about required vs. free choice reading, and the ways in which they sketch and position themselves, in some cases, as characters in their own stories.

Table 8

Honors Students' In-School vs. Out-of-School Reading Experiences

In-School	Out-of-School
<p>1. (Student #3): I would often get in trouble in class for reading my books under the table.</p> <p>2. (Student #4): I walked out and waited, my teacher in tow. She gently closed the door and forcefully asked me if I had read ahead. My first thoughts were of indignation, why was I singled out and brought to a private meeting for this?... I denied that I was ahead of the class. Dead silence. "Are you sure?", I was asked with a noticeable hint of disbelief... I sheepishly admitted my guilt, my deadly sin of over reading. I was scolded for a minute or so, what felt like an eternity in my head, and was escorted back into class. While I was punished for knowing the color red in this novel, it was only fitting that my face was the same shade as the apple of my downfall. Alas, the forbidden fruit of knowledge tempted me.</p> <p>3. (Student #5): This experience with <i>Green Eggs and Ham</i> is the only positive memory that I have of reading because I saw it as more of a game since I did it during casual class reading time. At this point in time, to learn to read,</p>	<p>1. From elementary through middle school I consumed every young adult novel I could get my hands on. As long as it had a young protagonist and was written for teens I would read it... I dreamed of the day when I too would be eighteen and able to live out the fantasies that captivated me so. That relationship I had with reading when I was very young has never quite been rekindled, but I definitely still enjoy it in my own way...</p> <p>2. The earliest memory I have of choosing a book to read of my own will, rather than my teacher's, was in 3rd grade. During that time, I was antisocial and chose to spend more time inside playing video games than socializing or participating in clubs and sports.... Due to my fascination with this setting and its characters I began to read Sun Tzu's <i>The Art of War</i>.... While Sun Tzu was beyond my reach, the act of wanting to read his work is what sparked a change in my reading behaviour. I began to ravenously read history...I was delighted to escape from my ordinary, boring life into vibrant foreign courts, massive battles that decided the course of history, and to witness the stories of extraordinary individuals. This change to enjoying reading was facilitated by another video game...</p> <p>3. I fully understood their importance and knew that, despite my dislike, I would need reading and writing skills for whatever I would end up doing in life.</p>

and to read that book specifically, was not an “assignment” or “requirement.”

4. (Student #6): I was a good kid in school, I always did my homework, did well on tests... But almost everyday I got in trouble for reading in class, and this happened all throughout middle school.

- It was in the beginning of high school, that the honeymoon phase of reading was over...Reading became a chore and too much effort on top of the stress of high school life. However, whenever I was assigned a book in class, I always enjoyed it and most oftentimes I was finished before everyone got to chapter two. There was just no need to pick up a book...it wasn't an environment which stimulated learning and encouraged knowledge. If you raised your hand too much in class, you were a know-it-all, if you read you were a nerd, if you did a great project you were an overachiever, and so on and so forth. People who strived for knowledge were put down and encouraged not to try...my peers and teachers didn't encourage lifelong learning and knowledge...

5. (Student #7): As I entered high school, however, something happened. Maybe it was...the crazy amount of work required for school. Whatever the reason, it ultimately inhibited my reading habits. A girl who enjoyed and cherished every single detail of a book could not even bring herself to even read the first page of a book. The eight and ninth grade had killed me. Dreary reading and writing assignments were assigned day by day...At many times I found by self barely doing the English assignments. Rather than reading through an article or a book I would just skim through it or look up the summary online. I probably

4. It got to a point when even at home that my parents would literally take away my books and beg me to do something... In my later high school years I began reading again but it was not the good stimulating intellectual books a kid my age should have been reading.

5. N/A

went through the two years without reading a single book.

However, the 10th grade shone a different light on me. After a rough year in the dark, overcrowded, ninth grade English classroom, I had moved to a much more free and lively room the following year...the atmosphere was set so perfectly that anyone could learn in the room without any distraction... Throughout the year in his class, I found myself paying more attention in class, writing more, and reading more.

6. (Student #8): Unfortunately, the required reading that I had to do in school burned me out...all the in school work took up all my time and destroyed the memories of the time where I once enjoyed reading.
 - ...I did not find anything about Julius Ceaser interesting I could not stand having to answer questions on the book and hand it in for a grade...This play did it in for me and I never touched a book outside of class again for the rest of high school.
 7. (Student #9): Assigned books for school are not my favorite. I do enjoy an assigned books from time to time, like Of Mice and Men, Frankenstein, Fahrenheit, and To Kill a Mockingbird. It is a little strange but the reading that was required for AP Spanish Literature was a lot more enjoyable to read than any of the works in my other English classes.
 8. (Student #10): Honestly, sixth- eighth grade English classes made me absolutely despise reading and writing... Nothing about my English classes appealed to me during these three years. I enjoyed To Kill a Mockingbird but all of the chapter questions and discussion
6. As I was entering high school I remember saying to myself that I am going to read a lot outside of school and educate myself on topics that I would not have learned in school.
 7. ...I love reading, but really only the books I choose to read. But I tend to forget details faster in those than in books I read for pleasure. I have a guilty pleasure of fiction and fantasy books, ...that's just so fascinating to me. I became inspired to write my own fanfiction.
 8. N/A

questions on the novel made it less enjoyable to read and more like punishment.

Ironically, Watership down was my favorite novel read that year, mostly because it was the last and there was little time to do any chapter questions or essays.

Lastly, and definitely my least favorite was Romeo and Juliet. This is definitely where my hatred for Shakespeare began... This was also the piece of literature where my confidence in my reading ability began to go down... I just sat there slumped in my seat embarrassed that I didn't pick up on any of it.

- My struggle in English continued through 10th grade and eventually into 11th when I dropped into a regular English class. My new regular English class was polar opposite of the honors English classes I've been in. No one really read for pleasure, no one enjoyed writing and the discussion about the literature we read was nothing compared to those of my past.

9. (Student #11): The tedious task of summer reading, which in my opinion at the time was very stressful and unnecessary did not bolster my desire to read at my older age... the two most crucial years in the development of my literacy are junior, and especially senior year in high school. For both classes, I had the same instructor, who really opened my eyes to the way in which the way we read...guiding us through the workload with positive and encouraging advice.... At this point in my literacy journey, I can say that I found the "rainbow", that being I had my "Aha!" moment in understanding how all of my previous experiences as well as the ones in this class would bolster my reading

9. N/A

and writing skills.... This small class allowed me to apply my opinions into reading and writing as well as look at not just books, but real life.

10. (Student #12): I didn't find reading so difficult in the classroom anymore since I loved it but Sometimes I found myself getting bored of the stuff we read in class...my 8th grade teacher handed me "The Help"... I was astonished that a novel type book was a book I clearly enjoyed reading.

11. (Student #13): My high school English classes turned reading into a chore and took the fun out of one of my favorite pastimes. I had been taught to focus extensively on symbolism and themes to the point that made it nearly impossible to simply enjoy the books I was reading. I distinctly remember groaning and crying of anger over Fahrenheit 451. I loathed this book. My teacher demanded at least three notations be made on every page... From that moment on, reading was exclusively a homework assignment rather than a fun activity.

12. (Student #14): What I abhor is reading under pressure...in the 9th grade, my english teacher assigned to us the dry and dull book, The Scarlet Letter. The setting was boring, Colonial New England, the drama was boring, even the main character was boring. Who cares if you overcame a social stigma when there are other people in fantasy worlds slaying demons? I find it extremely irksome when a teacher also tests me on reading material as well...the pressure I feel ruins the entirety of the book.

10. ...I didn't find it as intriguing as I did when I read at home... I found myself getting a little bored of the mysteries I was reading at home too.

11. As I got older, I began to do more reading on my own.... In my preteen years, I had discovered young adult novels. These stories captured my attention because the characters were so relatable to me.

12. N/A

Given the resistant and even hostile attitudes expressed by all three study populations toward school reading, I began to speculate about the causes of that resistance, and why those feelings seemed to arise around the middle school years. Is it because we are asking them to “do something” with the text (i.e., answer questions, analyze, predict)? In the early memories of parents and grandparents reading with them, though, many of the participants explained the process their parents went through when reading with them in the house or at the library. Indeed, in many cases, they were being asked to do something with the text, whether it be active listening or trying out words themselves, and still they seemed to love reading. What, then, is accountable for all of the RED highlighting of negative attitudes in the chart above, and in the charts of the other two studies when it comes to the issue of reading in school?

Students themselves are some of the best resources for these answers, and, if instead of asking them as “students,” we ask them as everyday citizens with outside interests of their own, those answers can help to bring together the in-school and out-of-school reading experiences in more relevant, practical ways. This is exactly Jeff Wilhelm and Michael Smith (2016) did in their study of the pleasure teens find in the reading they select on their own and outside of school. Wilhelm and Smith are educators and reading specialists who discovered in their own students and daughters the “secret” reading habits of teens, which as educators themselves, they found disconcerting but, for the teens, were sources of enjoyment.

Wilhelm and Smith (2016) interviewed male and female 8th graders who identified themselves as readers who passionately read books that were not condoned by their parents or schools. Students ranged in ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and school achievement (pp. 26-27). The findings were that these out-of-school reading experiences that included genres being marginalized by schools but embraced by teens, brought their adolescent readers “four

distinct kinds of pleasure: the pleasure of play, intellectual pleasure, social pleasure, and the pleasure of work, both functional work and psychological inner work” (p. 25). If these valuable sociocognitive rewards are the result of reading books by choice, why, then, the authors of this study asked (and I reiterate) is pleasure neglected as a goal in literacy research, pedagogy, and practices?

A common misconception among English educators, and parents, is that popular culture lacks the necessary complexity for “deep” reading and the opportunity for conventional intellectual engagement that schools and society prioritize (Sullivan, Tinberg, & Blau, 2017). The students interviewed in Wilhelm and Smith’s study self-identified as passionate readers of the kinds of genres not typically condoned in schools. These were the “students who would spend hours upon hours reading outside school even as they often rejected the reading they were asked to do inside school” (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016, p. 25). So, too, are the majority of the participants in my first and third studies, and some of the participants in my second study.

The data in each of these three studies unequivocally confirmed what Wilhelm and Smith, and many other English educators, already know through experience but still struggle to resolve: students, especially from the middle school years on, will opt for out-of-school reading over in- school reading and characterize the latter as “a chore” or some unpleasant synonym thereof. With a definition and some benefits of “pleasure reading” in mind, we can more carefully examine the excerpts of school and non-school commentary reflected by the third set of participants, the college freshman honors students.

When Reading Feels Like a Punitive Act

I feel it paramount to begin by discussing Student #4 who was humiliated, shamed, called out, and punished by his teacher for “reading ahead” in the assigned reading for class. This is a

recurrent refrain I hear from my students and my own children. The student in this study reported that “In order to make sure that every student understood the literary devices in the novel and to make sure that every student was under the illusion that we were equal, the class was told to only read until a given point and to discuss the assignment in class until continuing on.” While the teacher’s reasons, and sometimes even my own, for not wanting a student to get ahead of the class in the assigned reading are justifiable (we do not want the student to “spoil” the anticipation for others; we want a chance to “explain” essential contextual background information; we want to keep the pacing consistent with a writing assignment), this emphasis on quantifying and interrupting reading engenders the suppression of the reader’s autonomy and joy.

Donalyn Miller (2014), an elementary school ELA teacher and reading workshop expert, along with her middle school teacher colleague Susan Kelly, surveyed the habits of those individuals whom she labeled “wild readers” (adult readers who read fervently), and presented research findings and teacher resources in the book *Reading in the Wild: The Book Whisperer’s Keys to Cultivating Lifelong Reading Habits*. The common habits of “wild readers” in their study were that they:

1. dedicate time to read amidst hectic lives;
2. successfully self-select reading material that suits their interests, needs, and abilities;
3. share books and reading with other readers, creating a reading community;
4. have reading plans, anticipating what they will read next and why; and
5. show genre, author, and topic preferences;

Cultivating lifelong readers in the classroom, then, involves time, choice, opportunity for response, communal collaboration, and structure (Miller, 2014, pp. xxvi-xxvii).

A careful review of Student #4’s 6th grade ELA classroom experience demonstrated the characteristics inherent in the making of a lifelong reader:

In the 6th grade I was assigned The Giver in my English class....While I found the book boring at first, I thought, “I might as well read it”. to see whatever enjoyment I

could get from it. It seems that my arrogant mistake was reading too far ahead. I ignored the stipulation placed for my class and read ahead. I still remember that day in class, a very calm day with pleasant weather, a cool breeze entered the classroom periodically, fluttering the motivational posters in the room. The teacher asked a question, “What did the narrator see when he had an apple in his hand?” On a whim, because most hadn’t read and no one else wanted to answer, I answered that the narrator saw something peculiar and glimpsed the color red, as he was beginning to perceive reality differently than those around him.

Here, we find a student who is self-motivated, has made the time to read, and who has anticipated an opportunity to share information about what he has read with the community of readers provided. While his transgression of ignoring the teacher’s instructions would cause a challenge for many teachers, the nature of the “sin” of reading ahead and providing insight that surpassed his teacher’s expectations and his classmates’ abilities are signs of an interested, motivated reader. Sadly, the teacher’s response to his behavior discouraged these strengths and building blocks of a lifelong reader.

I walked out and waited, my teacher in tow. She gently closed the door and **forcefully asked me if I had read ahead**. My first thoughts were of indignation, why was I singled out and brought to a private meeting for this?... I denied that I was ahead of the class. Dead silence. “Are you sure?”, I was asked with a noticeable hint of disbelief.... I sheepishly admitted my guilt, my deadly sin of over reading. I was scolded for a minute or so, what felt like an eternity in my head, and was escorted back into class. While I was punished for knowing the color red in this novel, it was only fitting that my face was the same shade as the apple of my downfall. Alas, the forbidden fruit of knowledge tempted me.

It is possible that this student was hyperbolizing his experience with his teachers for creative effect, but these feelings of fear, shame, humiliation, and confusion that were allegedly engendered by a teacher are not unique to this student’s experience. They were also reported by participants in the adult strong readers’ study and in other honors students’ autobiographies. For instance, Student #10 reported a similar experience of being “punished” for excessive interest in a reading assignment: “I enjoyed *To Kill a Mockingbird* but all of the chapter questions and discussion questions on the novel made it less enjoyable to read and more like punishment.”

Though the student used the word “punishment” to describe the feelings that resulted, what happened in this scenario, a common one for strong readers in school, was that the pleasure in reading a good book was ruined by the teacher’s instructional interventions. The chapter and discussion questions used to “help” students derive meaning from their reading of the canonical texts elicited “anxiety of the right reading” and promoted student fear about providing the correct predetermined authoritative answers (Blau, 2017, p. 269).

When Reading Becomes a Chore

This theme has reared its ugly head so many times that it is beginning to evoke images of the bad, fire-breathing dragon that persistently wields its power and threatens to destroy anything in its path. Are there teachers who are metaphorically the fire-breathing dragon taking a torch to the imaginative appeal and to the desire to succeed at reading? Student #13, Sandra, reflected on the experiences in her high school English classes that “turned reading into a chore and took the fun out of one of my favorite pastimes.” She recalled how the hyper-focus on analyzing themes and symbols was so consuming that the teachers “made it nearly impossible to simply enjoy the books I was reading.” In addition to the emphasis on literary elements, Sandra was forced to compose a minimum of three annotations per page of *Fahrenheit 451*, causing her to “loath[ed] this book and determine from that point on that reading was no longer ‘fun.’” Sandra’s attitudes toward reading were reminiscent of Rebecca, the student in Study 2 on remedial readers, who likened reading to eating vegetables—something that you know is good for you but that feels awful going down.

Student #8 claimed that “the required reading that I had to do in school burned me out...all the in school work took up all my time and destroyed the memories of the time where I once enjoyed reading,” while Student #6, like Sandra, believed, “Reading became a chore and

too much effort on top of the stress of high school life,” adding that “There was just no need to pick up a book...it wasn’t an environment which stimulated learning and encouraged knowledge.” Some students, like Student #10, blamed Shakespeare for killing their love of reading because the complexity of his works led them to feel confused, frustrated, and inept. She brazenly declared of her high school years that upon the assignment of *Romeo and Juliet*, “This is definitely where my hatred for Shakespeare began.... This was also the piece of literature where my confidence in my reading ability began to go down.... I just sat there slumped in my seat embarrassed that I didn’t pick up on any of it.”

Summer reading, too, contributed to the disinterest in reading, as mentioned in Student #11’s narrative where “The tedious task of summer reading, which in my opinion at the time was very stressful and unnecessary did not bolster my desire to read at my older age.” Moreover, Student #7 attributed too much work as the explanation for how “A girl who enjoyed and cherished every single detail of a book could not even bring herself to even read the first page of a book.”

Final Thoughts on Honors Student In-School and Out-of-School Attitudes

As part of the final set of participants across three studies, none of this information from the honors students is novel by this point in the research; some of it is, however, still as disturbing as it was when the adult Ph.D. student in the first study revealed that teachers, curriculum, and instruction “killed everything about reading.” The composite provided by all three sets of participants regarding their in-school and out-of-school reading experiences, attitudes, and behaviors help us to initiate a larger discussion. These findings can help us to understand where English educators and parents might better serve middle and high school readers and do a more effective job of reinforcing positive literacy sponsorship at those levels

and beyond, into the college years. More immediately, though, the next section of this chapter reveals the findings for the honors students' beliefs about the significance of reading in their lives.

Part 3—Significance of Reading

The entire time I was re-reading the narratives of the honors students' memories of reading, I felt their sense of dedication to the process of recalling, pondering, recording, reworking, and attempting to make some metacognitive significance out of their literacy lives. It was exciting to see them summon and produce such meaningful writing. Still, I could not escape the feeling that, like the doctoral student study participants who prided themselves on their strong reading, thinking, and writing skills, the honors students were working hard to impress their aptitude upon me and their classmates.

There is, at some levels, the potential for a disingenuous aspect to writing, especially when the writer is aware that he or she will post the product in a public social media forum such as Moodle or Blackboard. This final category of coding is a reminder that writing, autobiographical or not, is still a creative act, and that the artist's relationship with the audience can certainly influence the message, discourse, and style of delivery. Still, the thoughts and memories expressed in the narratives were the participants' lived stories, and so are still theirs to tell and be trusted.

Of the 14 reading autobiographies collected in this third study, four students did not directly discuss the "significance" of reading. This did not mean that there were no moments in their narratives where reading was significant in their lives, but my interest here lies in how they perceived and articulated the role of reading in their lives to date. Again, due to the richness of the data, I opted to organize and cull the most poignant moments in the narratives related to this

final category for analysis. Students are numbered according to the same sequence of numbering used in the previous two categories.

Table 9

Excerpts on Significance of Reading in Honors Students' Lives

Student	Significance of Reading in My Life
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Throughout my entire life, literature and reading have played a crucial role in the development of my knowledge and personal identity ● This became an especially valuable skill as I transitioned into the rigorous schedule of military life.
2	N/A
3	N/A
4	N/A
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I fully understood their importance and knew that, despite my dislike, I would need reading and writing skills for whatever I would end up doing in life...in order to live life in the best way possible, people must be lifelong learners. Learning to its fullest extent is only possible through the extensive reading and writing of ideas.
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developing language and literature is the most profound advancement mankind has made. These give us a critical connection to the people around us today, the people in history, and access to the knowledge that these people have. ● Due to the fact that I read so much, my writing improved along with my reading, yet in a different way.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As the UN diplomat Kofi Annan once said, "Literacy is ... the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential." In my experience, the more I was exposed to literacy, the better I became at realizing and furthering my potential.
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Looking back upon what I read as a kid made me realize how much it shaped me into the type of reader I am today. ● Overtime our literacy changes for either better or worse, it all depends on how much we care about bettering ourselves and becoming more educated. ● My motivation to read and write has suffered many ups and downs throughout my life, but learning is lifelong and I plan to continue to read and constantly improve my writing.
9	N/A
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I didn't think all of my reading and writing experiences were significant in any such way until I saw them all on paper and traced the pattern. ● Through out my past eighteen years reading and writing have been prevalent in my life.
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As I conclude my reminiscent journey of my developing literacy, I have come to realize that every step of the way matters and has an everlasting impact on my knowledge.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As I sit in this college writing honors class, I can feel a sense of pride and confidence knowing that my past experiences can assist me in completing the best work than I can.
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading challenging books has and will help me become a better writer. I have found that reading and writing go together and I want to read in a diverse way to I can learn to write in a diverse way too. Looking back I would describe my literacy experience as a rollercoaster with many ups and downs. I think when someone realizes that learning is so empowering only then will he/she understand the power of writing and reading.
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Though I have currently stopped my active efforts to continue reading for the time being, I know reading is a love I want back in my life in order to continue enriching my mind and soul. ● The main reason I want to reconnect with reading is so that when I am older and have children of my own I want to enrich their lives the exact same way my father did, by reading. This is a legacy I want to live on through generations, and I do not intend to bring it to an end any time soon.
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading has provided the materials that make me into who I am today, whether that be good or bad is up to whoever is around me, and writing has allowed me to shape those materials and influence not only myself but people around me as well.

Amidst the stock and requisite statements students would be expected—or think is expected of them—when answering their first college English professor’s question about the significance of reading in their lives, one can locate genuine recognition of how and where reading has made an impact on them. One link that I have not sufficiently discussed yet, but that has been present in many of the narratives across all three studies, is the one between reading and writing skills. Student #5 knew, “I would need reading and writing skills for whatever I would end up doing in life.... Learning to its fullest extent is only possible through the extensive reading and writing of ideas.”

Student #6 made the direct connection between the progress of her writing as a result of her reading abilities when she stated, “Due to the fact that I read so much, my writing improved along with my reading, yet in a different way.” Student #10 recognized how “Through out [sic] my past eighteen years reading and writing have been prevalent in my life.” Student #12 stated a

similar sentiment but more eloquently: “Reading challenging books has and will help me become a better writer. I have found that reading and writing go together and I want to read in a diverse way to I can learn to write in a diverse way too.” Student #14 conceded that “Reading has provided the materials that make me into who I am today, whether that be good or bad is up to whoever is around me, and writing has allowed me to shape those materials and influence not only myself but people around me as well.”

The students intuited the interconnectedness of reading and writing; why, then, have so many teachers of composition and of literature worked so hard to forge a differentiation between the two? I discussed these dichotomies in my literature review where I traced the history of theories and practices in English education (see Applebee, 1974; Blau, 1993, 2017; Graff, 1991; Lindemann/Tate debate, 1993; Scholes, 1978, 1985, 2002). The narratives of current college students indicated the vital need for a bridge in the divide between composition and literature, especially at the college level where too many composition professors are prioritizing writing skills and de-emphasizing the teaching of reading. I delve further into this issue in my final chapter.

Another important aspect of reading that the strong readers in the doctoral student study and the strong readers in this honors group affirmed was the role reading has played in their identity formation. Student #1 proclaimed, “Throughout my entire life, literature and reading have played a crucial role in the development of my knowledge and personal identity.” One of the identities he was referring to was his status as former military personnel. Even there he found literacy invaluable, sharing how reading “became an especially valuable skill as I transitioned into the rigorous schedule of military life.” Though it is unlikely that he was familiar with semiotics (Gee, 1996; Scholes, 1982), this student recognized that meaning is entwined with the

communities in which that meaning is signified and shaped, and, as such, its “significance” is often tied to its value in a particular community. For Student #11, a community where reading took on value was in our Honors English class: “As I sit in this college writing honors class, I can feel a sense of pride and confidence knowing that my past experiences can assist me in completing the best work than [sic] I can.”

Reading as a Lifelong Endeavor

When I began designing the research questions for this dissertation, the phrase “habits of mind” was at the forefront of my thinking. How much of the early habits in the home primed me and my Ph.D. classmates for the attitudes and behaviors we had about learning? More specifically, how long-lasting are those foundational attributes and can we predispose students to engage in thinking and learning in such a fashion that those ways of approaching reading become internalized? Is there a way to foster habits of mind that last into adulthood, or that become so enmeshed in our ways of being that they stay with us throughout our lives? The data from this third study pointed to “yes” and several of the students provided a valuable lens into their own thoughts on how influential they believed early literacy sponsorship can be on later attitudes and habits. Here are some of the students’ statements related to the notion of lifelong learning:

Student #5: “in order to live life in the best way possible, people must be lifelong learners.”

Student #6 metaphorically illustrated the process of being initiated, parting ways, and then ultimately reuniting with reading:

Reading was the one who got away, and now it’s my second chance to not let her slip away again. I described myself as a trapped lion who was set free and that’s exactly how I feel. I once knew of the luscious forests, I knew where all the hunters were, where my prey laid and the beauty of what was around me. The lure of the electronics and the lack of intellectual stimulus trapped me, I was kept caged by my own accord. When I was captured, I forgot what some of the essential skills of being a lion was. However when I

set myself free, I am now able to rediscover my true love of the forest, and all of the secrets it holds.

Student #8 (Kyle): “My motivation to read and write has suffered many ups and downs throughout my life, but learning is lifelong and I plan to continue to read and constantly improve my writing.”

Student 11: “As I conclude my reminiscent journey of my developing literacy, I have come to realize that every step of the way matters and has an everlasting impact on my knowledge.”

Student #13, like Student #6, attempted to illustrate metaphorically her feelings on the current significance of reading in her life, but unlike Student #6, was still in the ambivalent phase of the process described by Student #6. **Student #13** lamented:

It is clear to me now that I don't want to sit down and read literature anymore, which is devastating. My literacy experience has been like a motorboat that once was racing forward and now has run out of gas and I am now deserted wondering how to propel myself onward. Reading transformed from a family activity, to a personal pleasure, to the bane of my existence.

On the brighter side, however, Student #13 also recognized that “Though I have currently stopped my active efforts to continue reading for the time being, I know reading is a love I want back in my life in order to continue enriching my mind and soul.” What she described here is a mindset with a bent toward intellectual growth. Her reason for this desire leads us back to the impact of early familial sponsorship: “The main reason I want to reconnect with reading is so that when I am older and have children of my own I want to enrich their lives the exact same way my father did, by reading. This is a legacy I want to live on through generations, and I do not intend to bring it to an end any time soon.”

Fletcher, Najarro, and Yelland (2015) investigated the processes that are most effective in bridging the college readiness gap that is widely lamented in the educational community.

Another important body of work that contributed to these college readiness efforts is the WPA, NCTE, and NWP collaborative “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” from 2011.

These texts acknowledged that preparation for college and career success cannot be limited to academic skills; there are particular intellectual traits and competencies that are consistent with success in higher education and in professional careers.

In the 2011 Framework, faculty from 2- and 4-year colleges and high schools addressed the question of college readiness and offered teachers approaches to fostering “habits of mind through writing, reading, and critical analysis experiences” (p. 1). These recommendations recognized a shared responsibility among teachers, schools, families, and students to prepare students for college-level writing. They emphasized the habits of mind essential to approaching learning and the kinds of writing experiences that lead to success in college-level courses.

I have always maintained that I can teach the underprepared learner, but that it is nearly impossible to teach the apathetic student. A main ingredient that is typically missing in the students whom I identify as “unwilling” is curiosity. This is one of the traits that Fletcher et al. (2015) also identified, along with other “soft skills” like involvement, motivation, persistence, flexibility, and resilience (p. 6) and is the first category in the collaborative Framework’s (2011) “essential” habits of mind necessary for succeeding at college writing (p. 1). The overlap of these qualities with those described by Sheridan Blau (2003) as necessary for “performative literacy” painted a fairly clear composite of the fundamental dispositions essential to well prepared, successful learners.

The good news is that these traits seem teachable and transferrable. Current trends in mindfulness and metacognitive exercises can assist educators in thinking about their own intellectual dispositions and in encouraging students to becoming conscious, “active, curious, self-regulated participants in academic discourse and structures” (Fletcher et al. 2015, p. 39). The reading autobiographies of the strong readers in Study 1 and Study 3 supported other theorists

and researchers who have recognized that intellectual growth is an accumulation of the various identities and behaviors that have been part of their social, cultural, and educational upbringing (Gee, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1997).

Concluding Thoughts on Chapter VII

The honors students' reading histories reflected the varied and sometimes conflicting domains in which literacy practices were embedded. What was not directly addressed, though, is how their own socioeconomic circumstances might have influenced their school and non-school literacy experiences similarly or differently than it had their remedial peers. In Chapter VIII, where I address implications and areas for further research, I take up the limitations of my own study as far as these important demographic details are concerned. What my studies did show in wide-ranging detail is that within diverse domains of activity, such as the home, school, and workplace, there exist multiple literacies. We must recognize and honor each of these forms of literacy within the English classroom.

Chapter VIII

IMPLICATIONS

At the outset, I established three guiding questions for my research. I would like now to return to those questions and conduct a comparative analysis of some of the prominent findings across all three studies presented. The first research question applied to one specific population of participants, strong adult readers, and the other two questions extended to remedial and honors community college freshmen, resulting in a three-part set of studies, with the final question focusing on implications:

1. What can be learned about the early literacy experiences, reading practices, family, community, school and cultural influences, personal attitudes and habits of a group of “strong” adult readers through the first-hand narrative accounts of their reading lives?
2. How might a study that compares and contrasts the reading lives of adult strong readers with remedial and honors freshman 2-year college composition students serve to highlight experiences and contexts that may foster or obstruct the development of highly competent readers?
3. What are some pedagogical, curricular and cultural implications of the findings from these studies for families, teachers, and schools?

To address these questions with clarity and proper attention to each, this chapter is divided into two parts: (a) Implications of Family Literacy Sponsorship, and (b) Implications for Practice.

Part I—Family First: Primary Sponsors

To productively drive further conversation about what can be learned from strong adult readers’ reading autobiographies, it would be helpful to juxtapose those findings with the

findings from the other two studies. I limit my comparative data here to the most prominent findings across all three populations, and ones for which I feel justified offering analysis and explanation without making presumptions. The different wording on the instruments for each study, though similar in ideas, would make it difficult to draw comparisons that could not be equally accounted for across the three sets of narratives. For instance, the open-ended nature of the doctoral student prompt that asked for a timeline and history of reading, when compared with the more structured prompts used for the freshman composition populations, could have influenced specificity levels in responses.

Different, too, are the numbers of participants in each study, and with the remedial student study containing only half the amount of narratives as the doctoral study, there are limitations to making generalized comparisons about a few of the features in the data. Still, several prevalent findings about early literacy sponsorship are worth noting and can be reasonably discussed here in a comparative manner.

As it turns out, not surprisingly, a principal conclusion or implication of this study was that early literacy sponsorship in the home is a crucial factor in providing multiple advantages and a massive head start for an individual's reading life. This does not mean that those who did not have this advantage of early home literacy were incapable of attaining the same skills and mindsets, but it did support the conversations surrounding the potency of those early forms of sponsorship.

Figure 9 shows the combined percentages of sponsors as they appeared in each population's narratives, with blue indicating the doctoral students, red representing the honors students, and green signifying the remedial students. This figure reflects the percentages of grandparents, fathers, mothers, and teachers mentioned in the reading autobiographies of each set

of readers. I did not include siblings and cousins in this final, merged figure because they were rarely mentioned overall and not significant enough to make a point of comparison. Though I included teachers in this figure, these sponsors were mainly present in the post-preschool years, while the family members appeared in earlier memories.

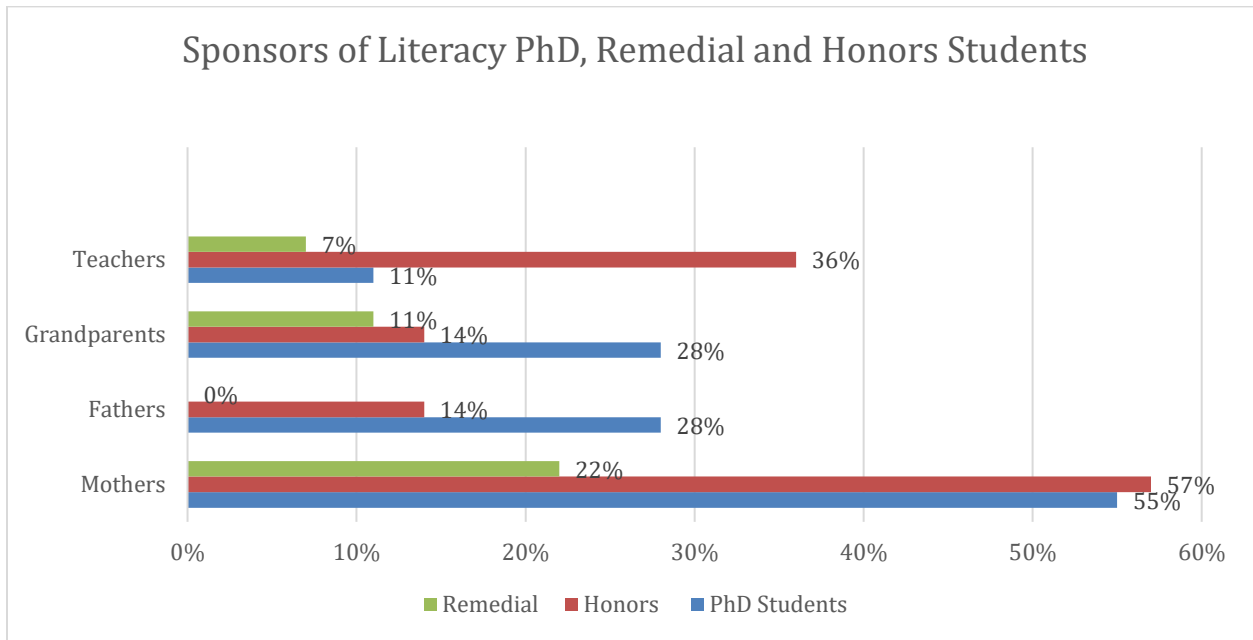


Figure 9. Category I sponsors of literacy in doctoral, honors, and remedial histories

With this figure as a starting point, I now attempt to highlight the effects of early sponsors, access to books, socioeconomic factors, and the link between writing and reading abilities.

The Prominent Factor of Mothers as Sponsors in Strong Readers' Backgrounds

Mothers were integral to the strong readers' attitudes and habits and appeared almost evenly in each set of participants' narratives, while they were much less frequently mentioned in the remedial readers' histories. The most conspicuous statistics in this figure appear in this grouping, with the honors (57%) and Ph.D. adult students (55%) within 2% of each other on the reported memories of reading with a mother. The more than 30% disproportion between those

two populations and the remedial readers' reportage of reading with a mother (22%) is consequential to our understanding of the drama of domestic literacy.

The significance of adding a third population of students who are the same generation as the remedial readers is evident here, as without this population, we might have been inclined to offer conjectures about generational differences reflecting changes in the numbers of working mothers. But the fact that the honors students, a contemporary generation, still report/ed reading with a mother obviates or at least complicates that simple conclusion. However, mothers were still the most significant influence on remedial readers too.

In Chapter VI, I raised the issue of socioeconomic factors that might help to explain some of the experiences of the remedial students and the differences between them and the doctoral students, and I briefly revisit it here as part of the cross-comparison study of all three populations. It could be that the honors students, like the doctoral students, hailed from more privileged backgrounds and, thus, their mothers might have been able to stay home with them. Today, however, mothers of every socioeconomic class work outside the home for multiple reasons beyond economic necessity, though it is possible that the mothers of the remedial students might have had economic demands that precluded them from finding the time to read with their children.

Additionally, their access to books might be another factor related to socioeconomic backgrounds. We would need to know more about the socioeconomic circumstances of all participants to go any further with this line of thinking. It is a valuable consideration for future studies. We must not assume, moreover, that mothers who stay home are more likely to read with their children than those who work, and as a working mother who has always read with and brought her children to the library and bookstore, I am not prone to making that assumption. I

might be more inclined to assume that the educational levels of the different groups of mothers impacted their understanding of and inclination to value early literacy experiences with their children.

It was originally my intention to also compare in this section the other sponsors who did and did not appear in the reading autobiographies of all three populations. Fathers, grandparents, teachers, and friends were viable sponsors who appear/ed across the populations (with the exception of no mention of fathers in the remedial group). However, beyond the obvious quantitative aspects, such as the higher percentage of teachers mentioned in the honors students' narratives, it would be difficult to analyze the significance of those numbers. I do not believe that I can offer more than conjecture about the lack of fathers in the remedial memories and the more frequent mention of teachers in the honors students' autobiographies. I return, then, to a broader exploration of the socioeconomic forces that might more generally explain how socioeconomic factors can affect home sponsorship and reading development.

Socioeconomic Inequities

Whatever the socioeconomic circumstances of the population of students in my study, we do know that in general:

Privileged children (children from well-off, educated homes) often get an important head start before school at home on the acquisition of such academic varieties of language; less privileged children (poor children or children from some minority groups) often do not. The privileged children continue to receive support outside of school on their academic language acquisition process throughout their school years, support that less privileged children do not receive. (Gee, 2004, p. 3)

Considering what a huge factor socioeconomic backgrounds may play in literacy opportunities, it would help in future studies to gather data about the socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of the individual participants and their parents. A 2013 study of Western New York high school students, however, offer/ed some insight into the effects of home literacy environments (HLEs)

in students hailing from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. The aim of the study was to assess the effects of low socioeconomic students' home environments (i.e., parental education levels, family attitudes toward education, literary resource access) on their literacy ability and reading interest. A home literacy environment questionnaire was administered to parents (including a question on how many books were in the home), a community literacy index was gathered, and student literacy assessments were conducted as part of the study. Not surprisingly, the findings were that students had limited reading abilities, low interest in reading, poor class participation, and lagging reading levels (Van Vechten, 2013).

These insufficiencies are not solely attributable to parental reading abilities, educational levels, and job affiliations; in fact, many studies have pointed, as I mentioned in an earlier chapter, to the availability of texts in the home as an essential factor in later success (Evans et al., 2014; van Bergen, Bishop, van Zuijen, & de Jong, 2015; for more, see Sikora, Evans, and Kelley's [2019] extensive International Assessment work). Children from low socioeconomic status circumstances should not be additionally disadvantaged in schools as a result of not receiving resources and early head starts in their homes. We also cannot assume that limited availability of resources equates with a student's lack of desire to learn. So, productive literacy sponsorship can be as simple as getting books into the homes and hands of children. Some researchers have shown, however, that it is not simply owning the books that helps with literacy acquisition; it is what is done with the books that matters (Kirby, 2008; Loera, 2011). Even more advantageous, then, would be interventions that help parents participate in interactions with these resources. But if those boosts are not possible, there are other ways for low-SES children to access resources and sponsors.

Libraries and Librarians as Allies and Socioeconomic Equalizers

It was a day that will forever be etched in my mind, and that has left a dark mark on my faith in the agents who have the power to supply and withhold literacy in the free world. As I descended the stairs to the basement of the library at the college where I had been teaching for decades, I watched in horror as librarians pulled and piled books from the multitudinous stacks that had served as their reliable, wooden, rectangular homes. The librarians' countenances revealed that though they were the ones doing the discarding, they were just as appalled and distraught as I was.

The "administration" had decided that they were going paperless and digital, and that required the extraction of thousands and thousands of books from all genres and disciplines. To be fair, they gave faculty, staff, and students the opportunity to select and take home books before they were to be cast off into the land of no-one-knew-where. The entire operation felt like the inverse of *Fahrenheit 451*, where the people (and environment, a liberal arts college) that most benefitted from print texts spearheaded the execution of those valuable resources.

I am not advocating for print over digital texts here, but I am advocating for a site of sponsorship where all of the features of positive, productive sponsorship are offered, and where people have access to the communal liaisons to that sponsorship, librarians. It is possible that print text might not have to be integral to those sponsorship interactions, and that digital and other 21st century forms of literacy can become part of the library/reader relationship. But books need a physical home; digital literacies only need a virtual one.

Libraries appeared in many of the reading autobiographies of strong readers, and in every account where they emerged, it was reported as a joyful, rewarding experience. The library was only mentioned, however, in one of the remedial readers' narratives, a fact which warrants

attention and response. The fact that eight of the nine students did not mention a library does not necessarily mean that they were not brought to the library, but when compared with members of the other two populations' vivid and more frequently mentioned visits to the library, it is worth mentioning this worthwhile and available literacy resource.

Admission to libraries and access to their contents within are free. Any socioeconomic barrier between access to a book and absence of a book is allayed by a trip to a library. Libraries are free and precious sites of literacy sponsorship, and perhaps if more parents become aware of the research findings about the advantages afforded by simply getting some books into the home and reading them aloud, they can also be inspired to visit the library. Even, or especially if, those parents cannot read themselves, there are so many opportunities at the library for children to be read to in afterschool programs, early childhood workshops, weekend and special events, and even books on tape. Libraries and librarians are important allies in the effort to provide book access and to engage with others around the shared activity of book reading.

Implications for Parents

In their 2016 *Reading Research Quarterly* article “Why Are Home Literacy Environment and Children's Reading Skills Associated? What Parental Skills Reveal,” Dutch researchers van Bergen, Bishop, van Zuijen, and de Jong studied the “familial effect,” which measured a combination of the genetic and environmental influences on reading transmitted from parent to child (p. 2). They found a significant correlation between parental reading practices and children's reading fluency in families in Amsterdam. In this 2-year study of hundreds of families, the researchers accounted for reading fluency, socioeconomic status, inclusive of parental education, and home literacy environment (parental reading frequency, magazine/newspaper subscriptions, and approximate number of books in the home). Nevertheless, their findings were

that while there was a significant correlation between parental literacy and children's reading, the most notable statistic associated with children's reading abilities was still number of books in the home. While this study assessed the effects of home literacy environments and student accuracy and fluency with reading, especially decoding skills, the findings in my own study expanded our understanding of the influence of home environment and access to books on reading attitudes and engagement.

The formative parent-offspring reading interaction is inarguably vital to children's strong reading outcomes as is the number of books in the home a "critical variable affecting reading acquisition" (McQuillan, 1998). Moreover, as the comparative data in the category of literacy sponsorship among my three studies revealed, there is a reciprocity between access to books in the home and an increase in reading interest and ability. Crucial, also, to language development and cognition is the shared activity of reading aloud (Hayes, 1988; Massaro, 2017; Montag, Jones, & Smith, 2015). These advantageous factors do not negate the possibility that there could be many strong readers who become so without having these early or home exposures to literacy.

Still, we know that these early in-home reading experiences, trips to the library, and contact with books in the home during the preschool years are all predictors in the creation of strong readers. Thus, we can offer parents insight into how they can facilitate these connections to reading that put their children on a path toward becoming stronger readers. Certainly, the discovery of the potency of parent bookreading in Duursma's (2014) study and the change in pediatric post-natal recommendations (Hogan, 2014), both shared in Chapter VI, are an excellent start to this process, but literacy educators can also serve as liaisons between this important message and parents of young children. In addition, we should reinforce the behaviors of parents who already do read regularly with their children. Helpful to this goal of establishing early

bridges between parentally motivated reading and school-based literacy expectations and practices is entry into the workings of these parent/child dynamics and practices with home-related literacy, without having to actually physically enter their homes. Reading autobiographies allow us that entrance.

Reading Autobiographies and Parental Influence

If we want a way to measure how reading attitudes begin in the home, reading autobiographies have proven to provide a suitable instrument for assessing how student mindsets are initially formed, information that is essential to positioning them for learning in the classroom. Nancy Morrow (1997) saw literacy memoirs as valuable apparatuses for explaining how early literacy environments lead to evident attitudes and levels of preparation for school expectations, ones that while preparatory in some ways might conflict with each other:

What memoirs of literacy also show, according to Lorri Neilson's work with school teachers, is that early reading experiences are often associated with maternity, nurturing, and sensuality, and yet learning to read in the academic environment requires linear thinking coupled with a knowledge of rituals, rules, and conventions. As Neilson explains, "in order to survive in school, readers must...participate in the larger institutional narrative, or school text" (101), and what was once pleasurable becomes duty. (p. 456)

The effects of parental sponsorship on reading habits and attitudes evolve into the habits and attitudes expected in school environments. Yet, accessing this early evidence about readers only helps us to understand the roots of the issue and not solutions for how to link these multiple forms of literacies and discourses.

Learning to read in the home has proven to be a vastly different experience than learning to read in school. This was identified in Heath's work (1983, 2008) and, as Brandt told us, understanding who the stakeholders are in sponsoring our reading and writing can help students, parents, and educators comprehend why students' out-of-school literacies differ from those they

encounter in school. By “Tracing the sponsors who develop and deliver curricular materials to their schools,” students and parents can be more aware of the powerful interrelationships involved in sponsoring their reading and writing, prior to, during, and after their formative school years (Brandt, 2001, p. 44). This awareness can also assist in more informal, home-based, guided preparation leading into formal schooling. We might consider that schools need to change, not the homes.

Therefore, one way to mitigate the home/school literacy gap is for schools to offer more community and parental outreach prior to kindergarten, and then throughout the school years, as a way to get to know the existent literacies of families and students. I do not mean that we should extend school practices into home practices; I am suggesting that schools and teachers might benefit from knowing the reading attitudes and practices in the homes of students by the time they reach our classrooms. Perhaps parents could be invited to share their own reading histories as part of these outreach efforts. Schools can also offer strategies such as reading aloud, and some of the other successful practices found in the homes of the strong readers in my study. The family reading apprenticeship studied by Knapp (2016) is another option worth considering. Yet another idea is to distribute flyers to parents and caregivers, showing some of the confirmed successful home practices and valuable time spent at the library.

Another way to mitigate the inconsistency between school and home is to make curricular and pedagogical gestures toward better understanding and incorporating the students’ out-of-school literacies, attitudes, and practices. For example, students could be asked to gather samples of their daily home activities (i.e., Pokemon cards, sheet music, Lego instructions) and share them with classmates and teachers.

By acknowledging those representations of the literacies with which many students have comfort and aptitude, we can illustrate how literacy can be acquired in a variety of forms, and that reading and writing are just some of those forms. In this way, we extend our role as sponsors and invite them to see how they have sponsored their own literacy by engaging in those other modes and activities. Parents, too, might learn from this recognition that their children are literate in multiple ways, sometimes more advanced than we conceive them to be.

Early intervention is ideal; however, much work still can be done toward meeting these students' needs in the later years, even into higher education levels. In the next section, I offer thoughts on teacher implications as they relate to the second category of my findings: school and non-school reading attitudes and habits. There, too, I consider some pedagogical approaches to bridging the gap in student attitudes about in-school and out-of-school reading.

Part 2—Implications for Practice

Avoiding Readicide: Fostering Lifelong Readers

Think about that comforting place at home where you curl up with a good book. Mentally place yourself there. Now answer some brief questions. When you curl up with a book, do you do so with the idea of preparing for a state-mandated multiple-choice exam? Do you pause at the end of each chapter so you can spend an hour answering a worksheet filled with mind-numbing answers? Do you go to the library or bookstore to choose your next read so you can earn grades, candy, points, or other trivial external rewards? Do you finish your book quickly so you'll have more time to write a report, make a poster, or build a diorama? Do you begin reading with the hope this will be the book that will enable you to move up to a higher color level or higher point system? (Gallagher, 2009, p. 72)

This excerpt from Kelly Gallagher's *Readicide: How Schools are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It* directly addressed the problematic approaches to teaching and assessing reading that also appeared in the reading autobiographies of the remedial and strong readers in my research. The content of Gallagher's narrative was provocative in its irony and cynicism and mirrored the findings in the studies presented here. Gallagher equated pedagogical

approaches to teaching students reading with a recipe for how to kill readers (p. 73). As I shared in Chapter II, Gallagher defined “readicide” as “the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools” (p. 2).

The most valuable aspect that I hope arises from my research is movement toward a new school-based recipe for how to nurture mindful, lifelong readers. As parents, community members, educators, researchers, administrators, and citizens, we can each play a role in preventing “readicide”! Here are some recommendations that, given the information provided by the strong adult readers and Gallagher’s research, may initiate positive, productive literacy sponsorship:

- Provide access to a variety of books, ones that appeal to students’ interests.
- Allow students room for text self-selection for in-school reading.
- Offer space and time for leisure reading in the classroom/school environment.
- Read aloud to students in class without requiring them to “do” anything other than enjoy listening.
- Employ inquiry-based learning strategies designed to access higher order thinking skills (Fecho, 2003).
- Expand our definition of “literacy” to include multiliteracies that correlate with the diverse, daily literacies of our students.
- Incorporate those various literacies into our curriculum.
- Design reading workshops that foster discussion and boost confidence (Atwell, 1998; Blau, 2003).
- Invite students to be collaborators in the classroom, bridging their home literacies with their school-related ones.
- Reconsider how we determine, label and treat “reluctant readers.”
- Enhance literary experiences by assisting students in connecting fiction to reading the “real world.”
- Create occasions for more creative responses to literature.
- Model the reading process for students by making our own processes visible (Schoenbach, et al., 2012).
- Integrate Reading Apprenticeships, a collaborative means of communal literacy support (For more on Reading Apprenticeships, see Lee, 1995; Schoenbach et al., 2012; also, WestEd’s <http://readingapprenticeship.org/>).

It is important to clarify that simply inviting students to self-select texts is neither a sufficient solution nor a guarantee that they will become avid readers. In addition, it would be imprudent to

suggest that English educators resort to a completely voluntary reading curriculum. The aforementioned suggestions should be balanced to avoid “underteaching.” As Gallagher (2009) suggested, we need to work at “finding the sweet spot” of effective teaching that lies between an overly regimented curriculum and self-directed learning (p. 90). Not all of these strategies will work all of the time or for every student, but the more approaches we incorporate, the more we increase the possibility of meeting students’ needs.

Through the process of analyzing the reading autobiographies of strong readers, we have a valuable starting place for understanding how literacy is most and least effectively sponsored and the results of such forms of sponsorship. We can also ascertain the common predictors for successful, literate lives, which start with those formative mediators of oral language and book access. Nancie Atwell (1998) reminded us that “we, the teachers, are the best readers and writers in our classroom, and as such, each of us should be a ‘mentor,’ a ‘mediator,’ and a ‘model’” (p. 21).

The narratives of English educators at an Ivy League institution revealed a set of readers and teachers who have experienced both aesthetic engagement and reluctant interludes with reading. I want to emphasize that I am prioritizing reading *engagement*, especially with fiction, over the mechanics of reading as a goal for literacy instructors. After all, the strong readers’ narratives show how reading not just *for* pleasure, but *with* pleasure was an early predictor of not only reading ability but of success on many levels. Parents can open early avenues to this mindset, but teachers are responsible for fostering this sort of engagement throughout the formative and higher education school years and amidst the frustrations that text complexity can instigate.

It can be argued that most of the participants in the doctoral and honors students' studies have developed what Blau deems "habits of mind of highly effective literate readers," the sort necessary for "performative literacy" (Blau, 2003). As such readers, those participants have experienced the trials and tribulations of sustaining focus, enduring discomfort, challenging a text, forging through text complexity and ambiguity, employing a methodology of believing and doubting their understanding of a text, and engaging in metacognitive awareness of their reading processes (Blau, 2003). According to the participants' narratives, these skills did not develop in isolation. Their successes were attributable to sponsors who provided opportunities, environments, and materials necessary to introduce, motivate, and foster the personal, academic, and professional traits essential to disciplined literacy and to building lifelong readers. However, these experiences did not necessarily produce engaged readers either; other factors might have been involved, such as certain personalities that can tolerate difficulty and discomfort. Perseverance is a key element. This is why it is important for English educators to consider carefully what it entails to be sponsors of literacy for a diverse set of individuals and learners.

The general dictionary definitions of sponsor are "a person who vouches or is responsible for a person or thing" and "a person who makes a pledge or promise on behalf of another." There are clear implications and accountabilities that accompany sponsorship. As educators, we are intrinsically beholden to our students; as English educators, we are responsible for our students' literacies. Parents, too, should have this obligation toward their own children, and where they cannot afford the resources, they should be shown the routes to free or economically sound alternatives.

This commitment entails providing equal access to books and ensuring spaces for advantageous reading interactions. Brandt (2001) told us that the resources are as important as

the sponsors themselves; while researching “how” her participants learned to read and write, she noticed that “people sometimes turned their attention to the resources on hand for developing as writers or readers—that is, where it was that they found opportunity, assistance, inspiration, or information” (p. 6). Though all of those qualities can be provided without much economic consequence, guaranteeing equity of these resources might involve communities and governments, a much larger discussion for a future paper, and one more in line with the economic focus of Brandt’s work.

Socially Situated Pedagogies

Here, though, I would like to address the socially situated ways that educators can contribute positive and engaged literacy support.

Reading aloud. I am not suggesting that picture books be read to middle, high school, and college students, but I am suggesting that instructors position themselves as “mentors” and “mediators” in the spirit of Vygotsky, rather than “teachers” and “instructors” of reading literature and nonfiction. If we consider our classrooms as “literature laboratories” (Blau, 2003, p. 14), we can redefine that space as one for experimentation wherein we can model our processes for reading linguistically and cognitively complex texts and where our students can explore and monitor their own ways of thinking, reading, and writing.

Here, the traditional stance of teacher as main authority on the text and as the primary producer of knowledge becomes deemphasized in favor of a culture of collaborative learning processes, such as those described in Blau’s (2003) *The Literature Workshop* and in Wilhelm’s *You Gotta Be the Book* (2008) and *Improving Comprehension with Think-Aloud Strategies* (2001). Furthermore, classroom (and home) modeling for students through activities like reading aloud and accounting for various forms of literacy, inclusive of orality and visualization as part

of the interpretive process, can help boost confidence and enhance prospects of building on already existing skills. Other benefits of reading and thinking aloud as a collaborative classroom activity include:

- Enhanced group discussion.
- Promote reading as a social activity.
- Make complex texts more accessible and less intimidating.
- Modeling how to preview title and text.
- Determine significant words and passages.
- Monitor and enhance comprehension.
- Engage attention.
- Practice making predictions.
- Interrogate the text.
- Invite questions as a constructive approach.
- Encourage attentiveness to sensory details.
- Address and embrace confusion.
- Scaffold, review and synthesize previous sections.
- Perform reading fluency.
- Provide opportunity for students to “hear” phrasing and inflection.
- Model rereading as a strategy.
- Ask students to share multiple perspectives.
- Increase vocabulary.
- Stimulate visualization.
- Expand critical thinking skills.
- Explore and directly perceive the transactional relationship of author/text/reader (www.teach.its.uiowa.edu; Blau, 2003; Wilhelm, 1997)

At the college level, reading aloud with our students allows us the opportunity to model our own “reading moves” and to show them that even strong readers face confusion, frustration, and doubt. If we, and they, can recognize that the difference between “strong” readers and more novice ones is largely an issue of grit and perseverance, of a willingness to tolerate failure as part of our reading process (Blau, 2003, p. 30), then reading aloud for and with them gives us occasion to show our own struggles and questions that arise as we read. Reading aloud also allows the professor to illustrate the “messiness” of meaning-making and text construction (Blau,

2003, p. 31) instead of just supplying them with the neat, “finished readings” that too many professors offer as notebook-filling fodder.

Furthermore, the classroom discourses while reading together can include strategies for previewing the text (i.e., posing questions about the title, summoning prior knowledge, making early predictions from the opening sentence), posing questions along the way, rereading, making inferences and connections, and reconsidering early predictions and questions after completing the reading. In this way, students learn how the reading process begins before reading and does not end when the story ends.

For poetry, Wilhelm’s (2001) reading think-aloud strategies, originally designed for elementary and middle school students and then modified by Blau (2003, p. 169) for the college classroom, are effective approaches to enhancing comprehension. In this activity, students are assigned to read a poem in pairs, with one student reading the poem aloud, tracking thought processes and questions along the way, while the other student serves as observer and note-taker. The benefit of this exercise is to observe, model, and practice how to construct meaning from a text. The process also allows students to monitor their own and others’ thinking, improve comprehension, teach them how to read for context clues and re-read sentences for clarity, and overall slow down the experience of reading enough to employ essential cognitive processes.

To make the activity sound more sophisticated to our colleagues and students in academia, we might consider modifying the rhetoric we use for the activity; more preferable terminology could be “collaborative reading protocols,” borrowing from I. A. Richards’ (1929) language, but without using his focus on student misreadings. Another possible term for it is “metaprocessing” (Blau, 2003, p. 169).

In each of these reading-aloud scenarios, the socially situated nature of reading is emphasized, as is the metacognitive process involved in sorting out our own thoughts and confusions during the process of reading. In this way, teaching and reading are reimaged as a “two-sided learning-centered model” (Wilhelm, Baker, & Dube, 2001), in which students and teachers and students and peers work together as a learning community. Moreover, the pedagogical approach is focused on process-oriented rather than product-oriented reading.

The Metacognitive Benefits of Reading Autobiographies

Teaching, like research, involves situated readings of students. We read students’ lives in ways that draw on our own histories as learners. (Hicks, 2002, p. 56)

In Chapter III, where I explain my methodology for my second study, I share my expectation that by assigning a reading autobiography, I “would be better positioned through these reading autobiographies to guide them, and perhaps future students, toward engaging in more mindful approaches to their literacy attitudes and habits.” While it is important to teach content knowledge, a more lasting and transferrable approach is teaching students how to think about the processes involved in their own learning and how they can connect those strategies and apply those procedures to new academic contexts. The construction of writing assignments that provide occasion for this sort of multilayered self-awareness that can lead to “connecting the dots” and, ultimately self-efficacy, is a tried-and-true pedagogical technique. Freshman Honors Student #10 summed up these benefits in a final self-reflection statement: “I didn’t think all of my reading and writing experiences were significant in any such way until I saw them all on paper and traced the pattern.”

I was (and continue to be) interested in what meaning my students derived from their experiences with reading, and with writing their narrative about their histories with reading, and these narratives served as a portal into those realms. The benefits of potential metacognitive

awareness of their own reading histories, attitudes, and behaviors did not escape me. Like my older and better educated Ph.D. classmates who had become strong readers, college students, through thinking about their own thinking, might, via the act of personal narrative writing, become more mindful of how productive their positive experiences and how obstructive their own negative attitudes about reading have been to the process of becoming more resilient readers. They might even discover a pattern of self-fulfilling prophecy that has allowed early labels such as “struggling” and “gifted” to dictate their mentalities and behaviors with reading. I, too, as a literacy educator would be better positioned through these reading autobiographies to guide them, and perhaps future students, toward engaging in more mindful approaches to their literacy attitudes and habits.

Educators Can Learn From Students’ Outside Literate Lives

We need to acknowledge and even channel, through invitation into the classroom, the literate lives of our students that exist and thrive outside of school. Valerie Kinloch (2009), who advocates place-based pedagogy rooted in Street’s ideological view of literacy, suggested that educators and researchers strongly consider the ways in which “community activities and engagements with literacy are oftentimes remarkably different from their school-based interactions and dispositions” (p. 321). The participants in my study used the words “killed,” “ruins,” “hated,” and “unsatisfied” to describe the results of in school practices on their reading attitudes.

A further area for study could be to observe ELA classes in late elementary and middle school to evaluate how reading is “taught” in the classroom at that stage, a stage where many of the participants in my own study stopped reading or began to reflect negative attitudes toward reading. Attention to how amped-up assessment might factor into educational practices and

student involvement in reading at those stages of formal schooling could unearth some causalities for the shift in reading attitudes and behaviors revealed in the reading histories of my participants.

These first-hand accounts of multigenerational reading lives are indicative of some problems with how reading is being approached and taught in the formal educational system. Rather than attempting to accommodate the diverse sociolinguistic and sociocultural needs of students, it is sometimes customary for teachers and the school community to label what they perceive as disengaged readers and thus diminish their responsibility to find innovative and varied means of literacy engagement. The pressure of standardized testing and teacher accountability to those outcomes inhibits teachers from the flexibility to provide much-needed individualized attention required to meet each readers' needs. Still, students deserve in-school literacy practices that move them beyond mere skills acquisition and that empower them with human agency and eventual autonomy over their own literacy practices.

This does not mean that we should throw out all traditional schooling, but it means that we can re-envision it to seek pedagogies that incorporate our students' and communities' daily literacy needs and that merge canonical with contemporary texts. Of course, some factors in the students' home lives might also account for why they stop reading or lose interest in certain types of texts. Yet, through the reading autobiographies and the voices of the students, educators can get a better sense of how, why, and what kind of various literacies are being acquired *outside* of the formal school environment.

As Moll et al.'s (1992) research indicated, and as my research supported, students' funds of knowledge, or "the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133) are valuable

tools for research and for teaching. So, too, are reading autobiographies. I now see the potency of what narratives can express way beyond the quantitative and categorical fact gathering of statistics without representation and explanation. Parent attention, interaction, approval, and personal gratification were all cited as results of early literacy sponsorship. Let English teachers attempt to integrate these discoveries and successes into a culturally responsive way of planning and teaching of reading in the formal school setting.

Bridging Gaps: Literacy Educators as Conduits to Making Connections

In her important work on literacy sponsorship, Deborah Brandt called sponsors “any agents” who sponsor literacy. Yet, much of her work focused on institutions or industries affiliated with religious, corporate, and municipal organizations that serve as sites for sponsorship and benefit in economic ways from their participants’ literate enterprises. Brandt emphasized the economics of literacy. She also focused largely on writing sponsorship, which is of course related to reading. Thus, it is helpful to hear about some of the cognitive “moves” learned through early reading sponsorship and later practiced by strong readers, as the reading histories in my study offered. In addition, by moving sponsorship from macro to micro terms, and honing in on the individuals who promoted or hindered strong and remedial readers’ reading, we can learn much about the power of sponsorship by even one influential person in their lives. This is an invaluable contribution to research in the field and points to the potential for introducing mentors in a more official way, such as school and community reading partnerships.

If teachers of reading and writing recognize themselves as powerful potential sponsors of their students’ literate lives, then they can work at creating a classroom and curriculum that acknowledge the more real-life ways and contexts in which literacy is used. Reading and writing become, then, more than just assignments and obligatory skills to perform for assessment; they

take on a social and cultural significance beyond the container classroom. As sponsors of writing, we can offer writing practices that correlate with or transfer to the students' real-life situations that call for certain discourses and forms of literacy. The freshman composition class can also be a place where students acquire discourses and forms of literacy that are relevant and transferable to other contexts; integrating reading with writing helps students to see the dynamics at work in the writer/audience relationship. But I must address the powerful nature of HOW we approach our important role as literacy sponsors, not as far as the content we provide, but with attention to the environment and relationships we create for and with our students.

Teaching Reading as a Process

I have found that by the time students arrive at my college classroom, assumptions are made, on both the teaching and learning end, that they have already learned how to “read.” Reading is not like learning how to ride a bicycle (Appleman, 2010, p. xii) where one learns a skill once and can master it once and for all, and so, the skills need perpetual development, up to and even past the college level. Above all, the emphasis on teaching reading at the college level might take on a more cultural studies approach rather than simply skills building; we should invite students to engage in the kind of mental and social processes that teach them not only how to read books, but how to read everything in their lives.

But with what seems a growing divide between composition and literature; with composition, rhetoric, and writing across the disciplines curriculum superseding the reading of literature; and with a common core-dictated emphasis on reading nonfiction, the role of reading literature in the college classroom has been relegated to English and English education-focused courses on literature appreciation, or on the teaching of literature, or as a vehicle for something to write about, if and where literature is still even being offered. The place for reading in the

English classroom and ideas of best practices, especially at the college level, have been fraught with inconsistent philosophies, pedagogies, and trends that still beg for more productive cultivation (Applebee's [1974] *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English* provides a comprehensive history up to the mid-1970s). Too often, when reading is "taught," the approach is teaching the process *of* reading, not teaching reading *as* a process. The important distinction between these two lenses is that the former emphasizes a "correct" and vertical way of reading, while the latter leaves flexibility for multiple interpretations and lateral ways of processing.

A few in the field have taken up the importance of reading in the writing classroom, and of prioritizing reading engagement over reading technique, which, some of those voices have argued, often comes along with the enjoyment of reading (Carillo, 2015; Morrow, 1997; Sullivan et al., 2017). These voices advocate for a reconceptualization and re-envisioning of the teaching of reading and literature in the writing classroom. Blau (2017) suggested that the community-based apprenticeship model that works in teaching writing can also work in the teaching of reading (p. 285) and advocates for FYC teachers of writing to incorporate student-centric pedagogies for the teaching of literature.

A process and learner-oriented approach would mean creating a classroom culture "where productive habits and processes in reading are cultivated through the experience of reading as a collaborative activity, entailing frequent work in pairs and in groups, interrogating texts and unpacking their language in a process of acquiring well-grounded experiences of text and warranted interpretations of the experience they provide" (p. 285). This socially situated, community-based model is in line with what Rebecca, the subject of my case study in Chapter VI, on remedial readers, identified as a motivating, encouraging, confidence-building paradigm.

Still, many literacy educators are not aware of these effective practices, and even when they are familiar with the term “reading process,” they do not align it with the “writing process.” What I mean is that composition instructors should know about and teach the parallels between the two; about the reading processes of previewing, meaning making, posing questions, encountering frustrations, forging through difficulties, and interpreting and re-interpreting. Fortunately, there are bridges being built between the teaching of reading and writing. I recently attended the SUNY Developmental English Learning Community Fall Convening, where the focus was on the role of reading in composition courses and on grit and perseverance. As students move into more complex texts, these qualities become additionally essential, perhaps even more so than intelligence (Duckworth, 2016); fortunately, there are ways to build these forms of resilience (see Duckworth, 2006; Dweck, 2006; Sanguras, 2017). Also discussed during this conference was the need to prepare our students for transitioning the process of reading into the ways that they read interdisciplinary and digital literacies.

The reading autobiographies of strong readers exposed how early literacy sponsorship in the home overwhelmingly correlated to later academic success and long-term reading habits. This demands, then, that we work to find new modes of offering that sponsorship, especially in an era where two-parent working families are so prevalent and might be prohibited from offering the proven invaluable advantage of reading in the home. This might mean being open to digital literacies that are accessible in multiple contexts and closer to the kinds of literacies students use in their daily lives.

There are concerns that digital modalities encourage passive literacy practices, and some of these concerns are valid. But these apprehensions also assume a lack of responsibility on the part of the agents who provide these technological forms of literacy. The same concerns exist

with print texts; if the sponsors who introduce these texts do not guide young readers into ways of navigating the world of those texts, then the book remains an object. Of course, the curiosity of young readers might lead them, in both forms of literacy, to a process of self-discovery, but someone must construct the circumstance and space for that opportunity, whether in print or digital form.

Print and Digital Texts

In the midst of our new high-tech global economy, people are learning in new ways for new purposes. One important way is via specially designed spaces (physical and virtual) constructed to resource people tied together, not primarily via shared culture, gender, race, or class, but by a shared interest or endeavor. Schools are way behind in the construction of such spaces. Once again, popular culture is ahead here. (Gee, 2004, p. 4)

Literacy educators are faced with the challenge of motivating students who are too often already turned off to reading, or who have become accustomed to a “one size fits all” style of teaching. Complicating matters are the ever-expanding modes of literacy that are not condoned in the classroom but are prevalent in the students’ lives. How can we leverage the literacies students are already using in their out-of-school lives and try to engage those rather than form a curriculum that is so confining that there is no room for those existing skills?

With the new tools and ideas available in the 21st century, educators can utilize multiple entry points and work more collaboratively with their students on engaging and building upon these extant literacies. But that would require the acceptance of both informal and formal literacies in the classroom, and a shift away from privileging academic print text in schools. Recent research in this field can assist us in making informed, effective decisions about how to balance digital literacies with traditional forms of literacy. It would also be enlightening to hear how a current generation of strong readers feel about and use non-print texts, especially with the recent push for free and affordable OER (Online Educational Resources) at the college level.

Any forward-thinking conversation about sponsoring and teaching reading needs to include at minimum an awareness of, and even further, an incorporation of, 21st century forms of literacy.

Concluding Thoughts on Implications

I now see, from a researcher's standpoint, that it would have been unreasonable to expect that I would discover some groundbreaking finding or offer a pioneering theory that would contribute to my field. Admittedly, many of my findings were predictable and obvious (and, already discovered). But I also recognize that there are specific contributions that we might overlook if we only look at research from a theoretical standpoint. Thus, I am aiming to discuss the gap between theory and practice. Since many other researchers have already discussed sponsorship, my focus is not on using theoretical concepts on pedagogy to question anything related to sponsorship. Rather, my contribution is to re-examine these theoretical discussions on pedagogy from a practitioner's interpretation and to suggest HOW we could provide literacy sponsorship differently. From this standpoint, I can identify several meaningful results from the three studies I conducted.

- On a personal and professional level: the opportunity to get to know my classmates, colleagues in the field, and students of various backgrounds and reading abilities through their stories has been fascinating and rewarding.
- As a mother: through my students' narratives and through dialogue with my own children, I have discovered varied and innovative forms of literacies and modes for accessing texts that I had previously deemed distractions *from* reading rather than forms *of* reading.
- As a practitioner in the classroom and literacy sponsor for my students: the process and findings have opened up new avenues of conversations between me and my

students. These exchanges about their own reading attitudes and habits are interactions that have raised their awareness to the link between their previous literacy experiences and their current mindsets about reading.

- From a curricular and pedagogical approach: I have incorporated more strategies of apprenticeships, reading aloud, and metacognitive exercises into my teaching approaches.
- From an administrative perspective: I am now Coordinator of English at my current college and just recently helped revise the course learning outcomes for our freshman composition literature courses. The new standards identify reading as a process and attention to teaching reading in the writing classroom and are a direct response to what I have learned through my own research work. The integration of reading in the composition classroom was supported too by the SUNY developmental conference I recently attended where this reconceptualization of the first-year composition pedagogy was emphasized.

I recognize now that though it is not innovative to use literacy narratives in research, and even though I am not the first to identify a correlation between early literacy experiences and subsequent reading habits and attitudes, my work is certainly situated in the midst of these important conversations and multiple functions as literacy sponsors. My work also reaffirms the importance of recognizing that students arrive at the college composition classroom laden with these histories that affect their choices and that can mean the difference between their college-readiness or their unpreparedness. As part of our contribution to further sponsoring and developing their literacies, we can think about how that sponsorship operates in their daily communications as well as their academic and professional lives. First, though, it helps to think

about how our own histories and perspectives influence our expectations and approaches to supporting others' literacy.

As I have established, the research I have conducted has provided a more self-reflexive process for me from multiple positionalities:

1. Scholar
2. Researcher
3. Person engaging with reading and writing
4. Doctoral Student
5. Practitioner
6. Administrator
7. Mother

Given all the fluidity of moving from one position to another, this suggests that when practitioners think about positionality, they might begin to fill the gaps and silences between theory and practice. As a practitioner, I am re-examining literacy sponsorship, not from the top down, (theoretical understandings) but from the bottom up (from actual practices as a mother, a teacher, and a researcher). Thus, the pedagogical discussions become more steeped in classroom practices where we can connect insightful theory with how we apply it. Thus, I want to challenge all of us to rethink our roles as literacy sponsors, especially given the multiple modes of literacy that exist and are constantly in flux.

EPILOGUE PART 1—GOODNIGHT MOON

What Goes Around Comes Around, Then Goes Around Again: Two Personal Case Studies

Learning, however, also leaves a residue; it makes a mark on the participant. In that sense, learning draws from and constitutes “histories of participation” (Rogers, 2002) in other spaces, at other times, and with other people. Indeed, what makes learning so complex—and more than just participation—is that people bring their histories of participation to bear on each new act or moment of participating. Thus, learning can be conceived of as always being situated in participation, but not necessarily synonymous with or reduced to participation. Learning goes beyond the moment of participation to constitute a history and to shape a future act of participating. (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 2)

In my introductory chapter, I shared my personal experiences with and heritage of a love of literature that spans three generations. Unlike my mother, though, who read me “high literature” at a young age, I read my daughter all the “forbidden” preschool titles that met with my mother’s disdain. *Goodnight Moon*, *Runaway Bunny*, *The Giving Tree*, *Are You My Mother*, and the entire series of Boynton Books were regulars in my child’s repertoire. It did not take sophisticated literature to build an aesthetic reader in my own home. I will bookend my introduction, which included my own graduate school personal essay, by sharing with you now excerpts from an essay written by my daughter in her sophomore year of high school. My daughter’s ideas and writing have always been wholly independent of my own work and I have had no interference or engagement with the work she produces for school.

She is an International Baccalaureate Honors student who is the sort of disciplined reader whom Sheridan Blau (2003) described as engaging in the processes of performative literacy and who possesses a healthy curiosity strongly linked with habits of mind. The topic for the assignment for the essay she wrote was open-ended and mainly for the purpose of producing an essay that might eventually be used for college applications, which she has recently submitted.

“Taylor Emily Golland!! Get your face out of that book!!”
“Taylor!! You absolutely can NOT be reading *The Hunger Games* in the synagogue; it’s a High Holiday!!”

“Miss Golland, this is the third time I’ve caught you reading during class; I’m taking points out of your participation grade!”

These are frequent exclamations I’ve become quite accustomed to since the fourth grade, and I always had the same response: “But moooooommm, reading is just part of who I am! This book seems to understand me.” My mother, the English professor, would laugh and shake her head at the reading fiend she had created, while my dad would sigh and roll his eyes, incapable of empathizing with our literary fascinations.

*Years later, not much has changed. Though I now appreciate the values of history and science classes without peeking at my novel, I’m still the wide-eyed one in English class; I find myself infatuated with the green light in *Gatsby*, or in tears over Jean Valjean’s redemption as many of my peers tilt their heads lethargically towards the chalkboard, a vacant and glazed look in their eyes. To me, books are like Horcruxes (in *Harry Potter*, containers for hidden fragments of the soul). When authors write, they share pieces of their identity through language. Whether it is through devices like allegory, allusion, or just a reference to an author’s value, simply reading someone’s words will indicate much of their personality, and even give insights on their personal morals.*

*Some intriguing words that have resonated for me came from Harper Lee’s *Atticus Finch* in *To Kill a Mockingbird*; he states “You never really understand a person until you...climb into his skin and walk around in it.” Through her character, Lee teaches the core value of empathy. Humans benefit from the realization that though we may never fully understand someone else, the greatest deed we can do for others is put in every effort to see from their perspectives.*

For me, reading literature invoked my own sense of empathy, and molded me into who I am today, speaking on behalf of marginalized individuals and being a support system to my friends and anyone who needs it... I have developed this mindset through my avid reading tendencies.

When I read, I feel like I am with the characters in the books.... When we read, we practice this incredible skill of living as someone else, and it becomes second nature to us. This is how Katniss Everdeen’s passion has transformed me into an activist, how Hermione’s stubbornness and dedication have motivated me, and how Atticus’s life lessons have enhanced my insights about others. Every time I pick up a book, I learn how to identify with a different person. The people I relate with and learn from are mostly fictional, though their impact on my personality and how I affect others is very real.

My daughter derives from reading the four types of pleasure identified in Wilhelm and Smith’s (2016) study of adolescent readers who found gratification in free reading texts that are often marginalized by schools. She finds friends in the characters (immersive play pleasure), pleasure in working through a textual problem (intellectual pleasure), pleasure in the social

aspect of talking with others about the books and identifying aspects of herself in the characters (social pleasure), and pleasure in using the “text as a tool” (p. 29) to shape her understanding of other people’s perspectives.

Different, though, from many of the reading autobiographies in my study and from the transcribed interviews in Wilhelm and Smith’s study are the value and enjoyment my daughter finds in the canonical texts assigned in school. Thus, we cannot and should not assume that there is no value and pleasure to be found in reading these texts too. Wilhelm (2008) put it best when he shared, “A colleague of mine once told me that ‘we have to teach Shakespeare or the kids will never read him’...My response to him was, ‘Do we want to stuff Shakespeare down their throats like castor oil, or do we want to develop readers who love story and language and will want to read and go to Shakespearean plays in the future?’” (p. 145). I am not sure that he meant we have to choose between including and not including Shakespeare. But I too would argue here that effective teachers can foster engagement and even open pathways to pleasure in reading the canon by incorporating the strategies that I shared in the earlier part of this chapter where I discuss how to avoid Readicide.

We must acknowledge that certain types of teaching kill texts, and that the fault is often not in the text itself. In fact, the only year I recall my daughter actually skipping a reading assignment (*Jane Eyre*) was when she had the “drills and skills” kind of English teacher, the sort identified by so many of the strong readers as having turned them off to reading by drowning them in a sea of discussion questions. Thankfully, as part of the International Baccalaureate program, she has been privileged to have teachers who design their classes much like the “literature laboratory” in Blau’s (2003) literature workshop paradigm, encouraging students to explore interpretations and theories about texts. Of course, we must acknowledge that students

placed in the IB classes already come with the habits of mind established as essential for success in college; thus, the teachers are also advantaged by students who are ready to learn. But...why should teachers who encourage curiosity and exploration with literature be a “privilege” for students and not the standard for all English class levels?

Literature and Theory of Mind

My daughter has intuited about literature what has been explored and proven in the scientific, psychological, and educational communities, that is, the effects that literature has on the brain. She writes about the empathy and compassion that are built and enhanced like “horcruxes” (fragments of the soul) each time she reads a new book. What my daughter is describing is “theory of mind,” a theory rooted in cognitive science and used to monitor the state of mind involved in real-life social interactions (Zunshine, 2015). Lisa Zunshine, professor of English at the University of Kentucky, defined theory of mind as one’s “ability to explain their own and other people’s behavior as caused by mental states, such as thoughts, desires, and feelings” or “mind-reading” (p. 724). Zunshine has merged this psychological approach with literature pedagogy and theory into a cognitive literary theory that emphasizes the value of fiction as a way to “build on the same cognitive adaptations for attributing thoughts and feelings to other people and ourselves that we use in our daily social life” (p. 727).

Zunshine’s body of work in this field (2006, 2012, 2015, 2019; Savarese & Zunshine, 2014) is an important barometer for the current state and positioning of literature in the English curriculum. Despite what the reading autobiographies, my own personal, academic, and professional experiences, and my daughter’s writing show about the benefits of reading literature, recent emphasis in schools and assessment is on nonfiction, specifically

“informational” reading. This curricular demand has permeated classrooms, standardized tests, and homes (Matthiessen, 2018) up to and within colleges. While the rationales are valid— incoming college students cannot read complex nonfiction texts or compose documented essays (Bauerlein, 2010; NAEP, 2011)—the beliefs behind them are based in a misinterpretation of literature as a genre useful only for storytelling and entertainment.

Zunshine’s (2015) work is so imperative because it incorporates an understanding of the cognitive moves and science at work when we read fiction and it highlights the “sociocognitive complexity” of this genre. Important, too, is the metacognitive vocabulary that can be attained while reading and discussing fiction. She acknowledged that nonfiction texts can also offer this sociocognitive complexity and metacognitive vocabulary, but maintained that this genre affords these achievements less consistently. Instead, she advocated for inclusion of literary texts as an exclusive space where “consistently high sociocognitive complexity” occurs as “simultaneous with consistently active reorganization of perceptions and inferences” (p. 730). Positioning literature in the classroom and in life as inferior to nonfiction feeds into dangerous fallacies about not only the genre, but any academic course of study and field of employment associated with it and denies potential readers opportunities to “read the world” with empathy, varying perspectives, and an eye toward nurturing democratically engaged citizens.

Theory of Mind and the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit (ADD) Learner

While I would love to end here on a romanticized, mythological, “literature can save the world and change lives” platform, I cannot ignore my initial concern that arose when I was first introduced to Zunshine’s theory. It is the same problem that I cannot ignore about my study of strong readers. Where do these sociocultural theories and socially situated pedagogies leave students who are on the spectrum?

With the changes to the DSM-V description of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) in 2013, children who were formerly diagnosed with certain social communication/interaction disorders such as Aspergers and PDD (Pervasive Developmental Disorders) became merged under the larger umbrella and diagnostic code for ASD. The implications of these changes, especially the loss of unique identity factors in each disorder, and reconfigured IEPs (individualized education plan) of students with these previously more distinctly identified disorders, directly affect the mainstream English classroom. The assumption that students on the spectrum can only be found in special education English classes, or as part-time “push-in” students who are accompanied by a special education teaching assistant, is dangerous and irresponsible. We must account for more inclusive and broader-ranging pedagogies that consider the neurodiverse student, and that might necessitate revisiting socially situated notions of reading and writing.

Whether diagnosed separately or under the same category, each of these disorders includes social and emotional differences that might inhibit those individuals from detecting social cues, interacting with peers, seeing past the literal meanings of language, and engaging in dialogue. They also often exhibit restrictive interests, activities and behaviors; impairments in verbal and nonverbal communications skills are common too. In a pedagogical environment where reading aloud, think-pair-share, collaborative exercises, peer workshopping, and apprenticeship models are emphasized, the complications facing these students become highlighted, often in uncomfortable ways. Focus, too, particularly the sustained kind required for performative literacy, is a challenge, especially for those with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder).

Theory of mind requires cognitive moves that anticipate the motivations of characters and an ability to navigate real-world social interactions. It also assumes that the reader is capable of

an empathetic viewpoint. Since the time that I first heard about Zunshine's theory, she addressed this issue herself in follow-up work in 2014. She came to recognize that "Scholars in cognitive approaches to literature need the insights of disability studies to think about mind, narrative, and agency in neurodiverse ways."

As the mother of a child on the spectrum, I know first-hand the pitfalls and struggles that these students confront. In 4th grade, my son was asked to take part in a "think-pair-share" assignment with classmates. Students wrote in their journals, then passed those writings to another classmate for a response. My son wrote "This is stupid" in his classmate's marbled composition notebook. It is entirely possible that what the other child wrote was indeed "stupid" or nonsensical, but it is also possible that my son was rejecting the other student's work because he anticipated having his own work ridiculed by his peer partner. Or that he just could not empathize with the personal writing of the other student. No matter the reason, his response was certainly not a socially or emotionally sensitive one and he was chastised in school for it.

In 6th and 7th grade, reading log assignments were a daily requirement. My son looked forward to the 20 minutes of us reading together, largely because he was accustomed to and enjoyed this shared activity with me from a young age. It also meant getting my undivided attention for that period of time. However, when it came time to write the reading log, the battles resulted in broken pencils, ripped loose-leaf pages, and flailing on the floor (sometimes him, sometimes me). On a "good day," we might get three very succinct and factual sentences out of him and keep the physical paper intact. Even then, the teachers' responses would be "write neater," "you can do better than this," "slow down" (he has since been diagnosed with dysgraphia, a motor and information processing disability that affects handwriting ability). We tried to convince him to type his responses on the computer, but because none of the other

students in the mainstream class were typing their work, he did not want to stand out and be “different.”

Then, he begged me for something called “Audible,” a digital audiobook app for the Kindle. As a parent and an English educator, I was appalled. This was not reading. Still, he convinced me to let him try the free 30-day sample, and to promise that if he used it for those days, I would buy him a month’s subscription. After the initial download, he read for hours a day, listening to the audio book while reading along on the screen. Then more—he found an annotation feature. He began to download the reading for school and then annotate directly in the app. After that, he copied and pasted his annotations and turned them into his reading logs. Suddenly, two sentences became a paragraph, and literal, factual ideas became more analytical. I was forced to reconsider my anti-technology stance as a parent and my notions of reading as an English educator.

Despite the difficulties he has with focusing when he reads (a result of his ADHD), his diagnosis of a “pragmatic communication disorder,” and his historically lower grades in English class, my son loves books, visits to the library, trips to the bookstore, and magazine deliveries to the mailbox. His reading stanines, too, have always been superior. Still, he is not someone who would be identified in school or in my study as a “strong reader.” He is also not the sort of student who would feel comfortable or successful with the collaborative classroom approaches that have proven successful in my own classroom and in the practices suggested by the professionals whose work I admire and whom I have identified in my recommendations for classroom strategies. In fact, he would feel alienated, frustrated, and vulnerable.

My research (and schools) validate students like my daughter and other strong readers who also possess the confidence, willingness, and sociocognitive wherewithal to empathize with

the characters they encounter in literature. While I argue that those qualities might be fostered by environments where reading occurs frequently and early, there are many factors to consider that can influence one's literacy learning. Personality, learning differences, birth order, gender, language barriers, and other elements are all variables to consider. Still, my son (now a freshman in high school), with a variety of attention, learning, social, and emotional complications that frequently inhibit reading success and enjoyment, finds the same kinds of pleasures in reading as identified by Wilhelm and Smith (2016) and as shared by my daughter and the strong readers in my study.

EPILOGUE PART 2: GOODNIGHT SON

Recently, my son came home from school visibly upset and near tears. My mind raced through all of the possibilities for why he looked so distraught. He looked ready to burst with anger, frustration, and sadness as he demanded to know “Why didn’t you warn me that Lenny kills George?!” Before I could respond, he theorized, “At one point I thought maybe Curley was going to have to kill him because I knew someone was going to have to, but I never thought it would be his best friend!” I recall now, too, how it took weeks to bring him down from his depression over *Flowers for Algernon* and his terror at the evil nature of humankind invoked by reading Elie Wiesel’s Holocaust experiences recorded in *Night*.

My son grew up in the same home book culture as my daughter, with books spilling out of every corner, frequent visits to libraries and bookstores, learning to read through the Bob’s book series, and dialogue about literary characters at the dinner table. Yet, if I asked him to write a reading autobiography, it would be as succinct as the ones submitted by many of my remedial students. To test my theory, I decided to ask him to tell me what he remembered about reading when he was little. His first response was curt and disinterested, so much so that he walked out of the room after his first two words.

I followed him and asked him to think a little harder. Within seconds, he fondly recalled the Bob’s books my husband used to teach him how to read and he talked with excitement about the Percy Jackson book he spent an hour and a half reading that very day, thanks to the new app he has found called Bookly. He proceeded to enthusiastically navigate me through the app, showing me the features (highlighting and copying favorite quotes, taking notes, marking passages to return to) and the virtual rewards/badges readers can earn for a variety of reading achievements.

Watching my son's enthusiasm about these digital forms of literacy sponsorship reminded me of the power of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) and critical media literacies (Kellner & Share, 2007; Kress, 2003) as ways to establish agency, encourage autonomy, and bridge classical notions of literature and reading with diverse 21st century forms of media. Jenkins' (2006) white paper sparked the conversation about "how we need to change our practices to reflect the new ways that young people are engaging with the world around them." My conversations with my son about Audible, Bookly, and his own reading memories stimulated new ways to meet a broader, more diverse audience of learners and readers. I discovered, too, that I need to be open to alternative techniques for learning about my students' reading histories; interviews, questionnaires, and artistic renderings offer alternate ways to engage students in recalling and reporting these memories with reading. Inviting our students to be co-producers, rather than mere consumers in their in- and out-of-school engagements with literacy, can encourage collaborative educational partnerships, build confidence, increase willingness to learn, and generate prepared students and engaged citizens.

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