



**DEFINING LITERACIES:
THE COMPLEX LITERACIES USE AND UNDERSTANDINGS
OF THREE CHILDREN**

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Dedicated to:

Emily, Tristan and Simon - Thank you for your patience, wisdom and love.

Christine - Without you this journey would never have been possible.
Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

DEFINING LITERACIES: THE COMPLEX LITERACIES USE AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF THREE CHILDREN

This nine-year ethnographic study describes how three children, Emily, Tristan, and Simon learned, used and understood literacies over time, across sites and within specific discourses. In documenting the literacies of these children, I have gained insight into the processes by which they became literate as well as how each of these children scaffold their own learning by using multiple literacies and sign systems. Emily, Tristan and Simon helped me to see literacies as complex in their conception and use and that all sign systems (e.g. art, dance, reading, writing, maths, sports, videogaming, etc.) operate using common semiotic principles. Sign systems as literacies are multimodal, meaning-focused and motivated; they involve specific social and cultural practices which differ depending on site and community. During every literate act the children in this study made extensive use of the semantic, sensory, syntactic and pragmatic cuing systems to make meaning, regardless of the literacies used. Emily, Tristan and Simon taught me that we need to see children as literate, as symbol users, and meaning-makers from birth. In order to support literacies learning we need to begin by recognizing and supporting the literacies learning process that is already in place.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“A complex process may be clarified, but never simplified.”
–Carolyn Burke (2005)

What follows is a culmination of nine years of research with my own children:
Emily, Tristan, and Simon

Emily is a Post Modern Writer¹

We

Sit
Interviewer
Interviewee
We analyze
Discuss

I

Question
Probing
for answers
to my own
questions

Emily

Sits
Writes
Patiently
Explains
that

which I cannot understand

¹ To help me understand my own thinking and make sense of the world I often write poetry. Throughout this study I have written poetry, some of it to make sense of what I am learning from my children, some of it reflecting on events, others exploring my own thinking and reasoning. As such they constitute data and I have decided to include some of this poetry throughout this paper. All of it is personal and, for me, it represents my thinking, understandings, and beliefs more clearly than any amount of writing.

My personal journey into researching literacies began when I read Glenda Bissex's book Gnys at work (1980) in 1995. This book changed my life; the way I viewed children's writing and the way I viewed Emily (age two and a half), my only child at the time. I began to see her as literate and I started to see the marks she was creating as writing; not as pre-writing or something less than adult writing. About this time, she came running up to me with a piece of paper and read it to me "Papa is a shipper." (see figure 1) I was amazed: "my daughter is writing!"² This was the beginning of a new journey for me. I saw Emily's writing as writing and I wanted to learn how all children learn to write, and how they become literate. It was not until much later that I understood this question as flawed, because I now realize that children are literate; it is just that I did not recognize or understand their literacies. Children are in many ways born as literate beings; it is the way we, as human beings, learn, interact with, and understand the world. We are symbol makers and users, motivated to make and understand meaning. Literacies are the ways we interact with the world and make sense of it.



Figure 1: "Papa is a Shipper"

My children have taught me much about life, research, and literacies. It would be impossible to discuss all that I have learned; I am sure that I am not even conscious of it all. However, this is my attempt to share some of the most significant aspects of my learning from my children.

² It was several years later that I reflected that she was most likely writing long before this and that this was just the first time I noticed her work as writing.

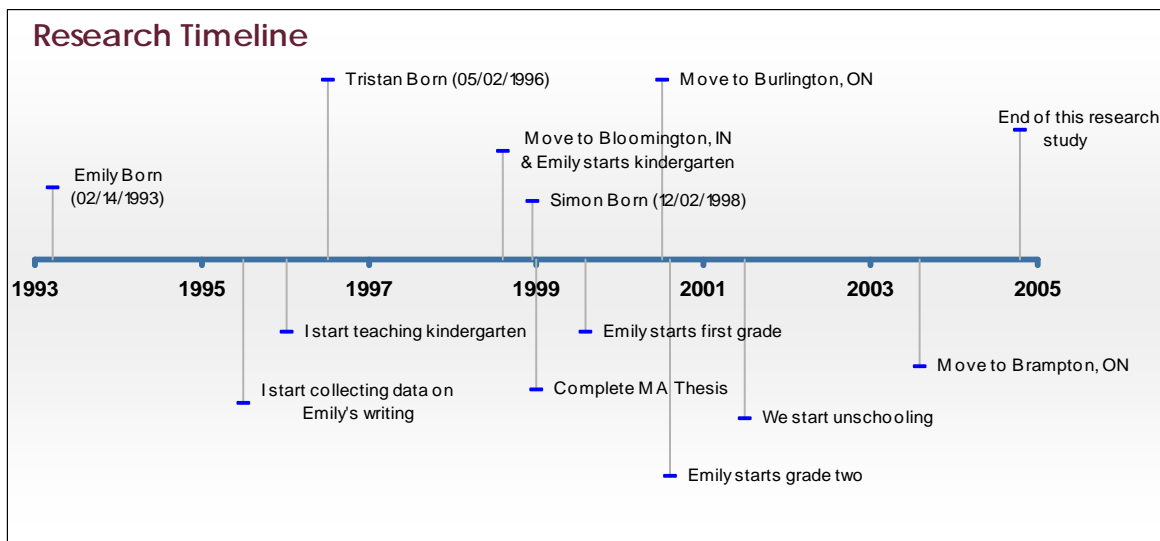


Figure 2: Rough timeline of the major events included in this study

Learning has come hard for me during this inquiry. I always thought I had the answers, I thought I knew what I was looking for. Through this study, my children taught me I did not have the right questions let alone the answers. As adults we rarely take the time to truly listen to each other and less so the children around us: the children we teach, the children we develop curriculum and theory for. The work we do as teachers and researchers we presuppose is for the betterment of the children we work with, yet how often do we really look at what they are doing or stop to really listen to what they are saying? We think we have the answers and we know how to help the children we are working with, but more often than not we do not.

I do not mean to say that everyone is like me; I have had the privilege of working with several educators who really listen to children and try to learn from them, but they are in the minority. These educators and my own children patiently taught me the importance of seeing and listening, and then they taught me how to learn from what I saw, heard and experienced. We need to take the

time to learn from children because they are far wiser and more intelligent than we can ever imagine. Children will show us what we need to know to help them; if we are willing to listen. Children have the answers to our questions; we only need to enter their world as learners.

Background

I started my research with the question “How do children learn to read and write?” My children taught me that not only is this an impossible question to answer, but it is the wrong question to be asking. When I did my master’s thesis on Emily’s writing (Wood, 1998) I categorized her work according to current theories of Emergent Literacy (Teal & Sulzby, 1994). While I was writing, Emily started to show me that what I thought I knew about literacy could not explain what she was doing with her literacies use. However, like most grown-ups I continued to believe my understanding of literacies and treated what she was teaching me as an anomaly, and not central. I must admit that the anomaly she showed me: that my understanding of literacy developing through a fixed set of stages was problematic or incorrect was very exciting to me, but I assumed it to be a small nuance that I had not come across in my review of the literature. This of course was just the tip of the iceberg and no anomaly. It took several more years of learning from Emily, and then Tristan before I realized that what I believed I knew and even how I approached my questions was simply wrong.

It wasn’t until I started to do my Ph.D. course work that I was equipped or ready to begin to listen to my children and learn from them. I saw for the first time

what they were showing me. I am certain that what I am learning now is still being influenced by my tacit assumptions but I have had the opportunity to interrogate many of these assumptions and drag them into the light of what my children have been teaching me (see table 1).

Past Assumptions	Current Assumptions
Learning literacy is largely a factor of maturation	Learning literacies is a matter of experience
Literacy is reading and writing	Literacies are multiple and are any meaning making sign system
Sign systems are a support for literacy learning	Sign systems are literacies
Learners go through specific stages of literacy development	Literacies users entertain multiple hypotheses about literacies at any given time
Conventional literacy is the measure of success	The richness of the ideas being expressed with a literacy is what is most important
Literacy is something that takes place primarily in the head	Literacies are primarily social and cultural practices

Table 1: Some of my key past and current assumption about literacies

About our Family

We are the Wood family: Simon (born in 1998), Tristan (born in 1996), and Emily (born in 1993), Christine (mother), and Jeffrey (father) the author of this study. We are a white middle class family and both Christine and I are university educated; on a whole, we are affected by the privilege of being white and middle class. I was a kindergarten teacher for much of this study and I have been a student for every year covered by this study. So, my children have always known me as a teacher and learner, both at school and at home. I guess that in many ways this makes the upbringing of my children unique, while in other ways it is

like the experience of many other families. As human beings we are all learners, as parents we are all learning from our children, the difference in our case is that my learning is slightly more formal and systematic than most; and I am trying to share that learning by writing about it.

Research Problem

In her keynote address to the Researching and Teaching in These Critical Times Conference Debbie Rowe stated:

Future research needs to record literacy activities in infant, toddler, and younger preschoolers' homes and childcare settings – whether or not they are intended as opportunities for children to read or write. Ideally, early literacy research would begin to describe cross-contextual patterns and variation in these youngest children's access to observing and participating in literacy events, as well as caregiver beliefs and values about early literacy experiences. (2005, p.5)

Rowe went on to describe the need for an expanded research agenda into early literacy and that we needed to use an expanded theoretical lens for understanding children's early literacy participation. I have done just this in my research. For the nine years included in this study I collected data on my three children's literacies uses and understandings across various settings, including our home and various other sites. I have been observing and collecting data from my children in an informal way as an involved parent since 1995. I have

done this in an attempt to better understand literacy, and my children, as a parent, a researcher and a teacher. With Debbie Rowe's call for a renewed emphasis on early literacy and a need to understand children's complex understandings and participation with literacies I felt it was important for me to go back and reanalyze what my children have taught me and share it with a wider audience.

While my children come from a very specific family culture that values and intentionally supports their use of literacies, I think literacies use and learning are the same for my children as they are for many children. What I have learned up-close from my children I have also seen in my classroom, teaching urban youth. It is my hope, through this work, to add a positive voice to the discussion on literacies, a voice that shows that children are capable, powerful, and successful literacies users.

As I think about what I have learned through these years from my children, I am awed. They have taught me new ways to think about and understand literacies, how literacies are used and learned and how children approach them. What my children have taught me has fundamentally shifted my beliefs about literacy and, I think, suggested a new path for me to take in my learning. A path away from the prescriptive adult imposed world of conventional literacies toward a path that sees children as capable literacies users and as literacies producers not just consumers. This is not to say that this path has not been suggested by others, but that this data brings together many of the research and theoretical perspectives which mark the path more clearly; while at the same time

suggesting that many of the paths we have traditionally taken and many of our notions of literacies can not adequately explain the way my children used and understood literacies in today's rapidly changing and digital world.

Research Questions

I used data I collected with my children from 1995 to 2004 to address the issues raised by Debbie Rowe; looking at the literacies activities my children engaged in across a variety of sites and over time; exploring the cross-contextual patterns and variation in my children's literacies uses and understandings. The specific questions I wanted to answer looking at this data were:

- How have Emily, Tristan, and Simon used literacies?
- What have Emily, Tristan, and Simon understood about literacies?
- What practices in our home have influenced Emily, Tristan, and Simon's literacies uses and understandings?
 - How have these changed over time and across various sites?
- How have the D/discourses (Gee, 1996; 1999) available to Emily, Tristan, and Simon, dominant and otherwise, influenced their literacies uses and understandings, as well as our practices as a family?

These are complex questions that in many ways overlap, creating greater complexity. But to truly try to understand what Emily, Tristan, and Simon understood about literacies and how they used them I needed to deal with the data in complex ways. Literacies are complex and while simplifying them makes them more manageable it also degrades the level of understanding that can be

achieved. Literacies are complex and need to be treated as such in our research and the analysis of data.

Organization of the Study

I have been studying the literacies uses and understandings of my three children formally and informally; my master's thesis was an examination of Emily's writing (Wood, 1998) and I have completed numerous course papers through conducting research on the children's literacies uses and understandings. I have also observed them informally as a parent – always watching, interacting, and learning with and from my children. The researcher part of me kept records of these experiences through journals, writing samples, video and audio tape, photographs, and the collected stories about the children's literacies use from our friends. As such, I had a rich data pool to draw upon to write this dissertation. I wanted to go back and examine this data pool to gain further insights about how my children have used and understood literacies to understand better my own journey to my own understanding of literacies. To do this I closely examined the data I collected with Emily, Tristan, and Simon for the purpose of telling our story. The story I am sharing with you now.

This is a deeply complex journey; my beliefs and the beliefs of my children changed over time; their theories and uses of literacies too were not static but dynamic. This creates a rich and complex fabric out of which we all can come to a better understanding of how my children view and use literacy and ultimately

draw inference into how children use literacy and what types of understanding they might have about literacy.

Procedure

In this study, I took a qualitative approach to the data collection and analysis. As I was primarily interested in the children's uses and understandings of literacy this seemed the logical approach to take. It afforded me the opportunity to analyze across use, learning, development, purpose, and function in ways that a quantitative study would not allow. Added to this, I wanted this study to be as non-intrusive as possible. I am the children's parent and I realize I have direct influence and responsibility over them. As such, I conducted this study from a naturalistic, ethnographic perspective, taking the stance of an involved participant in my children's literacies uses and understandings. As their parent my opinion is naturally skewed toward a positive interpretation of their work and abilities. I realized this, and tried to control for it by relying on the data generated (see chapter three), not just remembrances. I also realized that my intense interest in the children's literacies might have actually hindered their literacies uses and understandings, and as such I decided to err on the side of caution, choosing not to give them formalized assessments or interviews but instead recording our informal conversations about literacies. I collected their instances of literacies or literacies events (Heath, 1983, p. 93), whenever possible, and analyzed them for changes in use or indications that their understanding about literacies changed on an ongoing basis. These are both

above and beyond the regular formal and informal observations recorded about book handling, book choice, mathematics use, dramatic play, and other literacies events that occurred on a daily basis.

For each of my children the corpus of data was different in quantity, quality and time. For Emily, who was born in February 1993, I have the greatest amount of raw data. This is because she has been the most interested in traditional literacy (i.e. reading and writing) of all my children, and also because I studied her work the longest. However, since my earlier interest in her work was focused on writing development, the data I have before 1998 is focused primarily on writing and coloured by the lens of development, something Emily taught me does not do a good job of describing her learning and literacies uses. Thus, although Emily's data was the greatest in quantity, the quality of the earliest data is limited. With Tristan, who was born in May 1996, the data quantity was less, primarily because he showed less interest in traditional literacies than Emily. I also did not recognize Tristan's literacies use and learning until 1998, because his use was different from that of Emily and was not focused on writing but more focused on maths and games. I also did not believe that children engaged in literacies use until they were older, at least two years old. When I did take notice of Tristan's literacies use I collected a broader spectrum and had the knowledge of what Emily had taught me to help me see more and be more accepting in what I considered data and literacies. Simon, who was born in December 1998, has the least amount of data, primarily because of the timeline of this study, but his data was rich. What I considered literacies use and learning data was

considerably broader with Simon than with Tristan and Emily. Simon is a natural storyteller, and he regularly verbalized what he was thinking, giving insight into literacies learning which was far richer than was possible with either Emily or Tristan.

My analysis of the data was comprised of basic category generation (Creswell, 1994) and a form of initial meaning reconstruction (Carspecken, 1996). All the data was analyzed through the lens of initial meaning analysis to construct basic categories and to find anomalies. These initial categories were then developed into matrices (Creswell, 1994) to further analyze the relationships among categories; the information was coded across categories by child, site, time (both chronological and age), purpose, social setting, context, and other delineators that arose during analysis. From this analysis I then selected what I felt were representative stories that exemplified what I was learning from the children and represented how they understood and used literacies.

Summary

This research is an attempt to look at Emily, Tristan, and Simon historically. I tried to reveal and explain their literacies uses and understandings of literacies over time and across contexts while treating literacies as a complex process. I approach literacies as 1) multimodal, semiotic and motivated; 2) involving specific social and cultural practices, while also recognizing that these practices are different depending on site, community, and time; and 3) as social.

Literacies are a complex process and to better understand literacies requires dealing with them in complex ways.

An Overview of the Chapters

In chapter one I have discussed the historical contexts that led me to embark on this study; I have reviewed my reasoning and the central questions of this study. Chapter two addresses the theoretical framework I used to understand the literacies uses and understandings of Emily, Tristan, and Simon over time and across contexts. It also discusses some of my assumptions and the approach I used in this study. Chapter three deals with the methodological decisions I made in analyzing the data used to construct this study. It also discusses the framework I used to interpret and understand the data I have amassed from my children. Chapter four looks at Emily's literacies uses and understandings over time and across contexts. This chapter focuses specifically on Emily's use of writing as a meaning making system. Chapter five looks at Tristan's literacies uses and understandings and how he used writing, reading and videogaming to make sense of the world and create meaning. Chapter six focuses on Simon and his literacies uses and understandings. Simon has been drawn to Lego, writing and drawing as literacies for understanding and creating meaning in our family. Chapter seven shares a significant story from each one of the children illustrating how they have used literacies as multiple, multimodal, meaning-focused and motivated; as involving specific social and cultural practices; and as social. And finally the chapter presents an expand model of

literacies that helps to explain Emily, Tristan, and Simon's literacies learning, use and understanding. The children

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“Theory and methodology not only provide a structure for research ... but are themselves structuring.” (Harste, et al., 1984, p.49)

Writing

Trying to

understand

others

myself

I move beyond

My own way

of thinking

to understand

what I have

learned

to share

with others

The most significant thing that my children have taught me is that literacy is not just reading and writing; it is every form of symbolic communication.

Literacies are understood in specific ways through what Gee refers to as Discourses (1996; 2000). Literacies are the way we understand and try to be understood by others; they are any type of symbolic communication we use.

Literacies are complex, but in an effort to tease out some of the finer details, I am going to break my discussion into four sub-categories. This is not to say that these elements exist on their own but that these are different facets of literacies and each gives us a different perspective of the same theoretical understanding of literacies. The four sub-categories in which I would like to frame my discussion of literacies are: 1) literacies as multimodal, semiotic and motivated; 2) literacies as involving specific social and cultural practices, which are different depending on site, community, and time; 3) literacies as social; 4) the literacies process as a complex system. Others have discussed each of these facets of literacies at length. What I am presenting here is what I have come to understand from my children, and what their literacies use seems to suggest - a convergence of these theories; literacies which are complex in their conception and use.

Literacies as Multimodal

One of the interesting directions my children have led me is to see that literacies are multiple and multimodal. They have taught me that my understanding of literacy as confined to reading and writing was oversimplified and inaccurate. In my effort to simplify theories of literacy for ease of use and understanding, I ignored elements which are vital to understanding how literacies are learned, used and understood. Literacies can be, and should be, thought of as any meaning making system: maths, science, dance, art, computer gaming, reading, writing, etc. and they are multimodal (Jewitt et al., 2001; Kress, 2003). That is, literacies are rarely found in isolation and in fact are often used together

to support the meaning making process as well as often having many modes for carrying their message. By mode I am referring to any “organised, regular, socially specific means of representation” (Jewitt, Kress, Ogborn & Tsatsarelis, 2001 p. 5); for example, language has four modes: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Rarely is communication done using only one mode.

Literacies as a concept that has been around for a long time but has been referred to as ‘multiple ways of knowing’ (Berghoff, Egawa, Harste, & Hoonan, 2000), sign systems (Nöth, 1990; Danesi, 2004) and even Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983). What my children have helped me to see is that all sign systems are literacies in their own right, and that literacies work together in a multimodal fashion, actively supporting the learning and understanding of other literacies (See figure 3). This is because all literacies are semiotic in nature and have parallel underlying

processes and structures (as will be discussed in detail in chapter 7). In the same way that when we learn more than one language both languages benefit from our learning (Cummins, 1994), there is an

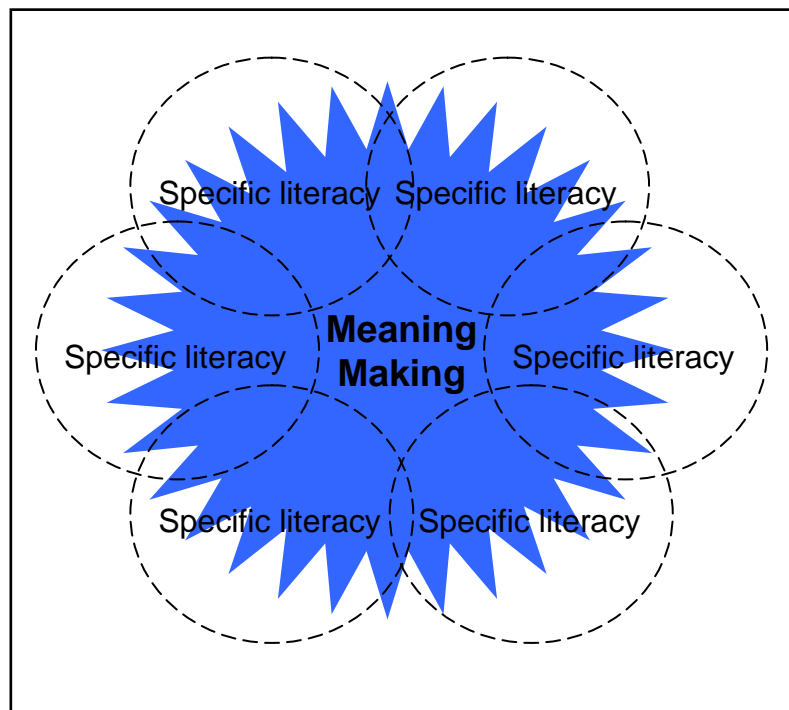


Figure 3: Literacies as multiple and multimodal

overlap. All spoken language shares syntax, grammars, similar sounds, and semantics; and so as we are learning one language our understanding of other languages improves.

This connection between literacies has long been noted and documented between reading and writing (see Berghoff et al., 2000; Harste et al., 1984; Short et al., 1996; Smith, 1988, for examples). As we write we become better readers; as we read we become better writers. These literacies support each other. Reading and writing are different aspects of language but share similar meaning making processes. It is this underlying process that creates this connection between reading and writing and allows for influential growth and learning. Likewise, all literacies share elements of the meaning making process and therefore support each other in the same way as reading and writing.

We use literacies in multimodal ways. It is rare that we ever use any literacy independently. The new literacies studies (see Barton and Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2003; Kress, 2003; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Street, 1995; Willinsky, 1990) have shown us how digital literacies are almost always multimodal; hypertext documents are dense with images, sound, and text. It is easy to see videogames and web pages as multimodal, and that these reflect the world we live in and the new state of literacies in our society (see figure 3), but these studies also make evident the nature of 'old' literacies, such as writing this dissertation, which are also multimodal. It is rare that we ever engage in a single literacy, outside of school. When I write I always have a book at hand as I look up references, or distract myself; I use pictures to ground my thinking (though, oddly

enough, rarely do any end up in the papers I write) and I listen to music to help me focus as I write. It is only in school that we divide up literacies into separate parts (see Figure 4); maths, then reading, then writing, then social studies, then science, then phys. ed., then (if we have been good) art or music on Fridays (Berghoff et al., 2000). This pattern has been so ingrained into some of us it is

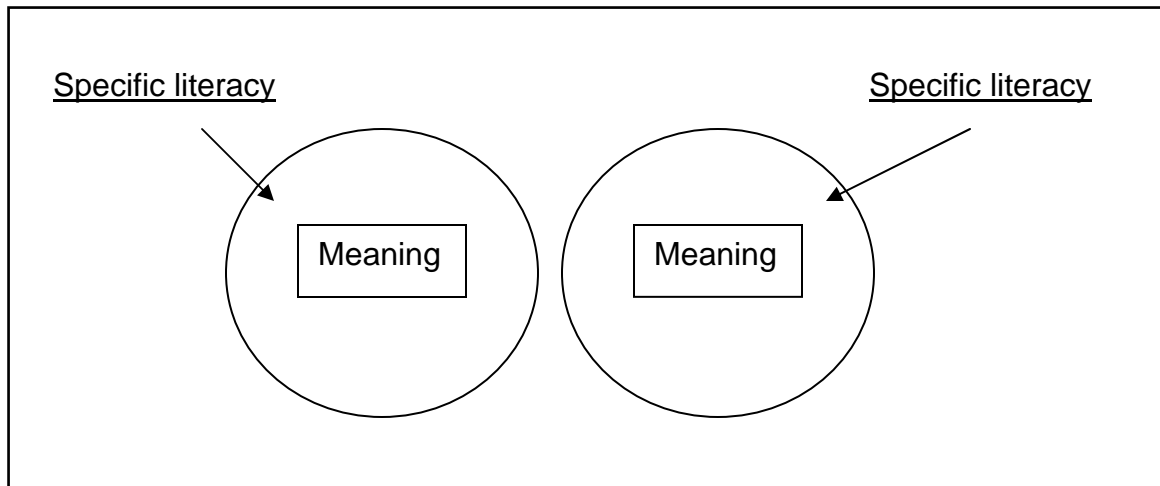


Figure 4: Traditional approach to literacies understanding

now the way we think we need to engage in literacies; we need absolute silence as we focus on reading a book (though even then this experience is typically multimodal as we create a 'movie in our heads' as we read). One only needs to watch young children to see how they use literacies as multimodal. The pictures that young children produce, sometimes accompanied by text, are stories to be told to anyone willing to listen; building in the blocks becomes a dance/drama with written invitation for friends. Children do not pay attention to the distinctions between different literacies which have been arbitrarily created by adults; they use them as needed, blending literacies for their own meaning making purpose.

When I discuss literacies as multiple I am referring to the fact that they are multimodal but also that literacies are multiple. In using the term multiple

literacies I am referring to the fact that there are more than one literacy and that literacies are locally and social determinant. Any literacy has different uses and meanings depending on the site and D/discourse group where it is being used (this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter). Typically, when we use the term literacy we are referring to text-based literacies (i.e. reading and writing), but there are as many literacies as there are forms of symbolic communication: maths, science, dance, art, media, computer gaming, reading, writing, etc.

Literacies as a Semiotic Process

We as human beings strive to make meaning and be understood. As was mentioned earlier, all literacies are sign systems. The term sign systems is derived from the field of Semiotics. Semiotics is an umbrella term used to represent a broad field of study (Nöth 1990, p.14) that includes the study of how people use, create and understand signs, that is the way we make meaning (Eco, 1976). As human beings, we are hardwired to make sense of and create meaning of the world in which we live. I am not saying that language or literacies are specifically premaped in the brain at or before birth, but that one of the primary functions we are born with is to make sense of the world around us. As such our understanding and creation of signs is always motivated to make meaning. Our motivated use of signs is considered by many to be one of the defining elements of our species (Chandler, 2001). Marcel Danesi (1999) has further refined this notion to state that our ability to preplan signs and then act on them is the defining element that makes us unique as a species.

Semiotics is a broad field with many definitions. It is considered by many to be an “architectonic discipline” (Berghoff & Harste, 2002) or a discipline “that covers the study of lots of things that “communicate” in some way” (Harste, personal communication 2007). My use and definition of semiotics is much more focused. I am using the term to specifically discuss the use of signs as communication systems; by signs I meaning anything we use to create meaning in the world, words, actions, objects, etc. but these things do not have meaning in and of themselves but only when we assign meaning to them (Chandler, 2001). The theorists I am relying on for my understanding of semiotics are Pierce (Chandler, 2001), Eco (1976), Derrida (1973), Berghoff (Berghoff & Harste, 2002; Berghoff et al., 2000; Berghoff, 1999; Berghoff & Cousin, 1998), and Danesi (2004; 1999; 1998). As such I am using the field of semiotics to help me understand the creation and understanding of signs in human culture and more specifically for my three children.

The signs we use are never quite exact and are created and understood using the referent, sign vehicle, and meaning making to make sense of signs. Semiotics refers to the cognitive processes we use to make sense of any sign as semiosis (Berghoff & Harste, 2002; Chandler, 2001). This is a complex, social and individually subjective process that for simplicity’s sake I am reducing to the term *meaning making*.

It is suggested by Derrida (1973) that as the interpretation of a sign is a cognitive act we never can have access to the original signifier, but only our understanding of the signifier. Even as the meaning creator, I never have access

to my own *true* meaning but only my understanding of that meaning. As I experience an object, the desk I am writing on for instance, I am experiencing my mental interpretation of the desk, not the desk itself, and even then I am only experiencing a specific perspective of the desk. Our reality then is not as concrete and fixed as we imagine it to be.

We create patterns and suppositions to fill in what we suppose ought to be, such as the underside and far edge of the desk I am working on right now. Signs are imprecise modes of communication, but through them we are able to make ourselves understood and understand others most of the time. Thus every interaction that we have with a sign requires an interpretation and that interpretation is never precise. We always understand a sign slightly differently than how it exists as a pure/exact signifier (Derrida, 1973) and also than how the originator of a sign

intended the sign to be understood, because all signs are mediated through our own experiences (see figure 5). The dotted line along the bottom of the diagram (see figure

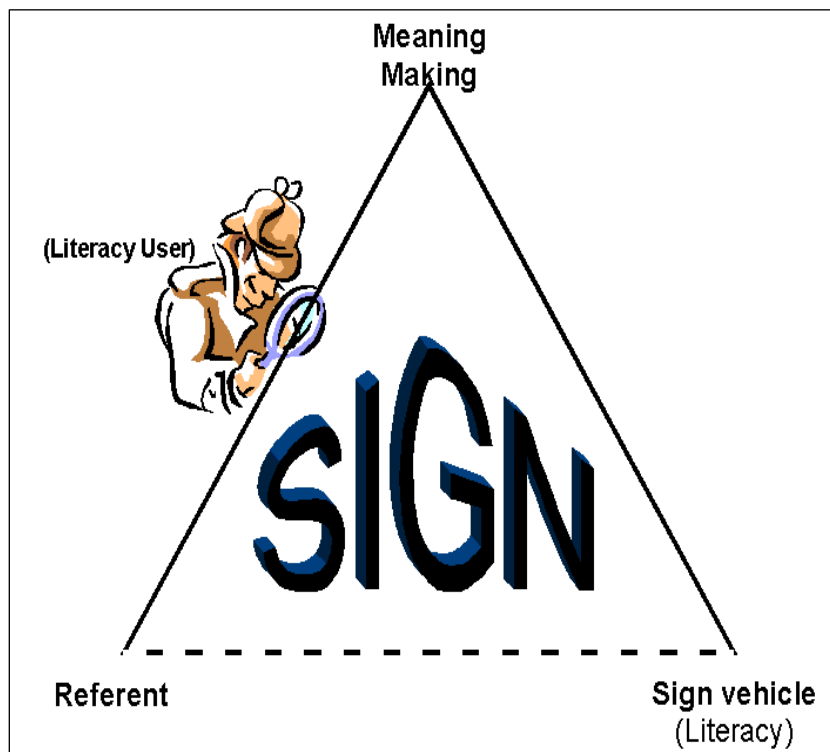


Figure 5: Semiotic Model -Adapted from Pierce as referred to in Eco, 1976

5) reflects the imprecise nature between the referent and the sign vehicle used to convey meaning. The literacies user here is seen looking at the sign, but should be understood to be actively engaging with the referent, sign, and sign vehicle to make meaning.

Semiotics refers to all literacies (i.e. language, music, art, dance, maths, etc.) as sign systems, or ways of knowing (Berghoff, 1999; Berghoff et al., 2000; Berghoff & Harste, 2002). Each one of these systems is a way of knowing; each connected as meaning making processes, yet different from each other. It is for this reason I use literacies as plural instead of just expanding my definition of literacy to include reading, writing, maths, art, dance, etc.; each sign system is a distinct way of knowing (Berghoff et al., 2000; Burke, 2000); if they were not, there would be no need to distinguish them from each other. The way we know something or create meaning through music is different from the way we know the same thing through maths or writing. The concept of semiotics suggests that a sign, or symbol, does not transmit meaning, but prompts the individual to construct their own meaning (Berghoff, 1999; Berghoff & Cousin, 1998).

Each sign system is in fact a different way of knowing and creating. Sign systems have three attributes: they are a defined system, are comprised of interrelated subsystems, and generate unique types of meaning [in relation to other sign systems] (Burke, 2000). Each sign system is a defined system that is focused on process rather than product (Danesi, 2004; 1999). Sign systems give access to meaning but not necessarily the intended meaning itself. They have interrelated subsystems, or cueing systems (K. Goodman, 1967), which are

dependent upon each other for the creation of meaning; for example, reading has the subsystems of semantics, syntax, graphophonics, and pragmatics (Y. Goodman, Watson & Burke, 1987). Each subsystem is dependent on the others for the production of meaning, and the system fails to function with the loss of any one of the subsystems.

According to semiotic theory we are experiencing the world, or modelling what is around us, on three different levels (Danesi, 1998): a primary modeling system in which we use our bodies to learn and understand (Sumara, 1999), a secondary modeling system in which we use our minds, to understand, and a tertiary modeling system in which we use symbols to make meaning. It is this tertiary level that we often relate to reading and writing, while forgetting that we also relate to the world through the first two levels. It is true of all three modeling systems that we make meaning, and each sign system engages with these three modelling systems differently. We use these modelling systems to make meaning out of literacies. Our motivation in using literacies is to make meaning; this meaning is created with our bodies, language and symbols. Often this meaning making is done on all three levels, though we are usually only aware of the level being used primarily by the literacies we are using. In dance we are aware of the bodily movement of dance and the language of the music but rarely do we consider the symbolic nature of our dance, unless it challenges cultural norms. Videogames use all three levels in a very explicit manner (though admittedly the bodily interface usually requires little physical exertion).

In approaching literacies as a semiotic process the focus is on meaning;

not only specific meanings, but also the creation of meaning, and knowing; literacy that is tied to the creation of knowledge, and understanding as a process and not a product (Danesi, 1998). As each sign system creates knowledge in its own unique way, each sign system will position us differently in relation to our knowledge, allowing us to form new perspectives and causing us to reposition it differently. It is through this process, called transmediation (Harste, Woodward and Burke, 1984; Siegel, 1995), that we can make new connections, and see our own positions differently. Literacies as a semiotic process moves the concept of literacies beyond just reading and writing.

Literacies as Social and Cultural Practice

Literacies are social and cultural activities. They are always social, in that they are socially motivated but also created within the bounds of specific cultural and social norms. The way we use literacies and what literacies we use differs and is dependent on the specific local context we are in. Different cultures and social groups use a specific set of literacies. These limitations and choices are then defined by the discourse group(s) one belongs to (Gee, 1996; 2000).

Gee's D/discourse Theory

For Gee, Discourse with a capital <D>, is the sayings, doings, thinkings, feelings, and valuings within a specific group. Discourses can almost be thought of as specific 'clubs', in which there are certain rules which govern all aspects of a person's identity while they are members of that club. Discourses have five

defining points according to Gee: they are inherently ideological; are resistant to internal criticism and self-scrutiny; are incidentally related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical gestures and society; they own objects, concepts, viewpoints and values at the expense of others; and are defined positions from which to speak and behave. We each have a primary Discourse, the Discourse we are born into (through our families)¹, and a secondary discourse, which we learn in order to interact with groups outside of our immediate community. This secondary discourse is typically an institutional discourse, or one that we learn at school or church. There are also dominant D/discourses and subjugated D/discourses.

Dominant discourses are those that are used by the group which has access to power or, as Gee terms it, 'social goods' (like status, worth and material goods). Subjugated discourses are those which are othered by the dominant discourse. For many people their secondary discourse often conflicts seriously with their primary Discourse; this is especially so when a person's primary Discourse is a subjugated discourse. Thinking about these discourses much like clubs, they have tacit rules about who is a member and who is not. These rules are constantly tested to decide who is an insider, who is an outsider, and who is colonized. A person who is colonized is a language user who has just enough access to a discourse to signal that he/she is not a full member of the discourse, and as such that person acts to reaffirm those in the dominant discourse, resulting in what we commonly term as hegemony.

The way I use D/discourse theory builds on primary and secondary, and

¹ Primary Discourses are signified by the use of the <D> and all other discourses use <d>.

dominant and subjugated discourses. I see that there are many more layers to discourse; there are discourses which are embedded within discourses. Within any discourse there are multiple layers and gaining access to one layer of a discourse does not guarantee access to the other layers. An example of this would be access to the discourse of engineering; one gains access to engineering through the apprenticeship of the University but this does not mean that you have access to the discourse of electrical, mechanical, systems, or civil engineers. Each of these specific discourses have their own ways of saying, doing, feeling, thinking, and valuing, which are similar to the other discourses of this profession, but are at the same time quite different. A civil engineer would not last long in a technical discussion about electrical engineering; in the same way these two groups also behave differently when in a group, even in social settings, as can readily be observed on any university campus. As such, I would argue that there are at least tertiary discourses, if not more.

Becoming literate for Gee, then, is the critical acquisition of a secondary discourse to such a degree that one can critique both one's own primary Discourse and the secondary discourse; for, remember, inherent to any D/discourse is its own resistance to critique of itself. As such the language used in discourses does not just communicate information but also feelings, values, and thinking, and ultimately defines a person's identity. For a person to be fully fluent in a discourse it has to become subconscious so they no longer think about it. This leads to another problem, for if by definition a person who is an expert in a language, or discourse, no longer is meta-cognizant of how they use that

language, how can a language be explicitly taught? Additionally, anytime a language is learned, whether it is oral or written, a specific discourse is also being taught and valued. So the learning of a language or literacies now becomes incredibly complex, for it can no longer be thought of as just learning a language but it is the learning of a specific discourse.

This naturally leads to the question of how can one teach without colonizing or alienating our students if once we have mastered a discourse we are no longer meta-cognizant of its nuances, making the discourse impossible to teach explicitly? Gee suggests that language, or a particular discourse, can only be "taught" effectively through apprenticeship. The only way to enter into an apprenticeship relationship is when both parties truly accept and celebrate each other's primary Discourse. It is through apprenticeship that the primary Discourse is learned in the home. It is impossible to explicitly teach any D/discourse effectively since it is an impossibility to explicitly teach all the nuances of a discourse.

Gee argues that literacies can be used as a tool to empower subjugated discourses so that they can influence the dominant discourses and ultimately alter them. Like Freire (1970/1995), Gee believes that literacies only empower when people become active questioners of the social reality around them. The way this happens is through the teaching and learning of secondary discourses through a critical lens. This teaching is done through apprenticeship, but apprenticeships that are tacit and critical of both the primary and secondary D/discourses.

In Gee's vision of literacy we must reconsider all that we believe about what it is, and how it is learned. We must view literacies as multiple and social. We can no longer talk about literacy as just reading and writing, for any time we are talking about literacy we are also talking about a particular way of saying, doing, thinking, feeling, and valuing of a specific group. As such anytime anyone learns a language or literacy, s/he is also learning a discourse.

Therefore, for Gee the literacies uses and understandings of my children is also heavily influenced and embedded with specific discourses and to understand these I also needed to examine our primary Discourses used at home, secondary and tertiary discourses used in the many social settings the children engage in, and also the dominant discourses within our societies.

This was an extremely complicated task as we lived in many cities and two countries during the time period of this study. My understanding of the children's literacies use and understanding became incredibly complex. Our family Discourses are relatively stable but can only be examined in a superficial manner, as most practices are tacit and therefore difficult to examine; secondary discourses were in flux as they changed when we moved, the discourses found at church, school, the YMCA, and various other community based centres changed from place to place; the dominant discourse changed as we moved from Canada to the United States of America and back to Canada.

Some of the social practices Christine and I used in our home that facilitate literacies were examined because they were explicit choices which we were constantly negotiating and working on to put into practice, but the tacit

practices and beliefs at work in our home needed close analysis to be seen and understood; even then it is likely that many of these practices went unnoticed and unanalyzed.

One of the more obvious practices that supported literacies in our home was the intentional valuing of all literacies attempts by our children; Christine and I valued attempts at symbolic meaning making as a literacy and not as a precursor to something else. We emphasized and focused on the meaning being made either by Tristan, Emily, or Simon, not accuracy or convention. Meaning making was then seen by the children as something that we valued and as such something our children came to understand as important.

We also saturated our home with literacies. We used our dining room as an art/writing/reading centre, and made a point of keeping and displaying much of the children's work. All of the children took dance lessons, swimming lessons, engaged in at least one sport, and there were various musical instruments found throughout the house, though Emily is the only one who chose to take formal music lessons during this study. There was a large space, usually the basement or living room, dedicated for the children's play. We had many costumes, props and toys specifically to encourage the children's dramatic play.

Our house was also saturated with books. Christine and I intentionally placed the children's large library, comprised of a large variety of fiction and non-fiction texts in various formats, throughout the house and books could be found in almost every room. Christine took the children to the library multiple times a week and each child had their own library card. Christine is an avid reader and read

whenever she had free time, often reading where the children could see her and she read to/with the children multiple times in a day. She also edited several newsletters so the children often saw her writing on paper and on the computer. I, as a consequence of my jobs as a kindergarten teacher, graduate student, and university instructor, was constantly reading and writing and made a conscious choice to do this often within sight of the children. I also read bedtime stories to each of the children most nights. These are some of the more obvious practices employed in our home but these will be explored in greater detail in other chapters to unpack some of the tacit sayings, doings, thinkings, feelings, and valuings within our family Discourse.

Literacies as Critical

The children have used literacies in a way that is best described through a critical literacies framework. The approach that Christine and I had when discussing literacies with Emily, Tristan, and Simon can also be understood through this framework. In critical literacies the social world of children is the context for literacies use, learning, and understanding (Vasquez, 2004). As such, it deals with key issues in the children's lives and allows them to see literacies as empowering. Literacies are inherently social, cultural and political.

At the core of literacies are their use, learning, and teaching which are always political acts (Freire, 1970/1995; Shannon, 1998; Taylor, 1998); as such they are critical in their nature. Any literate act either works to support the dominant discourse or acts to broaden, or undermine, that discourse (Gee, 1996,

2000). It works either to reinforce or resist hegemonic structures present within the culture in which it is produced (Cherryholmes, 1988); this is the case for subjugated discourses as well as the dominant discourse within a culture. Critical literacies (Comber & Kalmer, 1997; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Vasquez, 2004) treats the language of any discourse group or institutional discourse as arbitrary, and values the language, discourses and literacies children use, not only using the child's lived experiences, but validating them. Using critical literacies as a lens, we interrogate the discourses we use across lines of culture, gender, race, class, and power. As such, my analysis of the data also looked closely at issues of power as did the definition of literacies that emerged out of that examination. Critical literacy theorists also treat literacies as specific sets of locally situated social practice (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanil, 2000; Comber & Kalmer, 1997; Street, 1995). It was the way that we used literacies and the practices we had as a family that were the focus as I considered literacies through this lens.

We as a family often use books and literacies activities as a springboard for dialogue (Shannon, 2002; Vasquez, 2004), helping the children to become conscious, not only of how they act upon texts (Rosenblatt, 1989), but of how texts act upon them (Simpson, 1996). Not only did we read books and engage in literate activities with our children, but these often dealt with issues that were affecting the lives of the children in critical ways (Leland et al, 1999) and led to deep conversations. These discussions engaged the lived experiences of the children and were as such inherently meaningful, and at the same time usually examined critically the world around us. These discussions often led to acts of

social justice, effecting change in the life of our family and community. Through these experiences the children's interest in literacies have been furthered and they have developed a desire to use literacies in meaningful ways.

Literacies as Multiple

Within Gee's D/discourse theory literacies are created within a particular discourse and are influenced by normative factors set out in that discourse, the dominant discourse, and the intended audience which may be trying to access the meaning of the sign from yet another discourse. Thus there are multiple discourse layers embedded within any generated sign and that sign is interpreted differently by members of different discourses. For example graffiti may be considered destruction of property by one discourse, art by another, statement by another, territory marker by another, or a provocation by yet another discourse group.

This is not to say that it could not be more than one of these things to any one discourse group or interpreter of the sign, but that different discourses will understand and create the same sign differently. This is the basic underlying principal to how literacies as multiple is currently used and understood. There are different literacies in different discourse groups, these literacies are valued differently within different groups, and each discourse group has different literacies practices (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1997).

When I use the term multiple literacies though, I am expanding this definition of multiple literacies to include the concept of specific literacies as

being multiple, not just the practices and meanings. All sign systems have similar underlying processes and should be considered literacies. All these systems use symbolic representation to create meaning. Each carries its own set of patterns and practices, and is used differently by different discourses. Thus literacies are multiple in that they are comprised of more literacies than linguistic literacy and literacies are multiple in their use and understanding across discourse use and specific settings.

Literacies as Social

The implication suggested by both discourse theory and semiotics is that literacies are always socially constructed and understood. In fact some semioticians prefer to use the term socio-semiotics (Berghoff & Harste, 2002) to better define semiotics as a social structural phenomenon. Signs are created and interpreted within a social context and social purposes. They are either the expression of meaning or the interpretation of meaning; engaging the concept that our ideas, emotions and experiences can be transmitted beyond ourselves, and beyond the moment. Literacies would not have developed as a human construct had there only been one human (Gee, 1996; K. Goodman, 1996). They are always used as an act of communication, either with others or with ourselves, through language as a medium. The way in which meaning is constructed is not only defined by the medium (McLuhan, 1964/1994), but also by the groups one affiliates with. None of us lives or learns in a vacuum, but within a certain set of D/discourses. As such the children are learning and responding from each other

and to Christine and me, not to mention friends, family members, media, and members of the various groups we interact with.

It is this social nature of literacies that makes it impossible to define without also talking about its use. For example writing is a semiotic process whereby meaning is constructed through the transaction between author, audience, reader, and text (Rosenblatt, 1989). It is through this transaction that meaning is created, and only once this transaction occurs. Without some level of interpretation there can be no meaning. All meaning is socially constructed: it is created from the history a person brings with them when they use a particular literacy, and socially constructed through its use. To understand the meaning someone else is trying to convey, or to be understood ourselves, requires that our meanings are to some degree agreed upon by the discourse group we are part of or trying to communicate with; for it is only the meanings which are agreed upon which are useful (Fleck, 1979). These meanings will shift and be different depending upon the community in practice from which they are used (Wenger, 1998), and are closely associated with particular discourses (Gee, 1996).

In our family we read every night. This reading values reading out-loud over silent reading, specific types of texts and content; it is a time where the children and Christine and I expect to interrupt the reading and discuss it, commenting on text or making connections to our lives. As another example, it surprises many to learn that we generally did not read nursery rhymes and fairytales in our family; this is largely because of the portrayal of women and the violence in these tales. We are valuing a family norm, of non-violence and

valuing women/girls as strong and valuable, over the dominant discourse norm that states that children need the shared knowledge of fairytales to be fully literate (Bennet, 1995).

The way in which literacies are used, or not used, signifies the user as a member of a particular group (Gee, 1996). This goes beyond accent, gestures, language, and word usage, but also defines how meaning is constructed. Epistemology and etymology are not universal, but D/discourse dependant, and thus it is the community of practice which defines what meaning can be derived from a particular literate act. It is for this reason that I can talk about literacies as including music, drama, dance, maths, art, reading, writing, speech, listening or anything else we can use to symbolically convey meaning, and other groups define literacies as reading and writing (and maybe art for young children), while still others would reject my use of the word literacies instead of literacy. How literacy is defined greatly influences how one sees literacies, for the theorist as well as for the literacy user. Regardless of how literacies are defined and viewed they are the way in which we communicate with each other. Literacies are social, and as such they are complex.

Literacies as Complex Systems

I understand literacies as a complex system and as such I am also using knowledge from the field of complex systems (see Camazine, 2003; Heylighen, Bollen, & Riegler, 1999; Wolfram, 1988) to get a better understanding. Literacies are irreducibly complex and to understand them the interactions among the

subunits, or cueing systems and other factors which influence literacies, must be taken into account as a whole. The field of complex systems argues that many complex, seemingly random, patterns found in nature can be easily understood and are often defined by a subset of simple rules, when considered as a whole and complete system, that leads to self-organization. As literacies are a complex system, the analysis of any one of the subset systems will give little information about or allow reproduction of the system because the patterns, or in this case meanings, are only created in the interaction between subsystems.

Those processes are characterized by simple "rules" that depend solely on local interactions among the subunits of the system.

Yet despite their simplicity and the local range of their immediate effects, the rules and their actions on the subunits give rise to the spontaneous emergence of pattern, order, and structure on a global, system-wide scale... The patterns that arise are emergent properties, properties that cannot be predicted simply by examining the subunits in isolation. To understand them, the dynamic and often remarkably complex interactions among the subunits must be taken into account (Camazine, 2003, p.39).

I have come to a better understanding of literacies through the use of complex systems to help me understand how my children are learning, using and understanding literacies. Complex systems have several features which I believe describe literacies. All complex systems have certain features that apply to and help explain literacies, in their use, understanding and learning. In attempting to

analyze the whole of literacies for my children I hope to be able to see the complex interactions among its subunits and better understand literacies as a process. We need to think of literacies as complex while simultaneously treating literacies as multimodal, semiotic, social, discourse dependant, and imbedded in specific practices.

People are complex. Literacies are complex. Theories need to simplify this complexity so that we can understand them and use them, but simple theories obscure this complexity. Theories are necessary so that we can understand the subject in question, but I believe we often see only the theory and forget the complexity the theory is trying to describe. We should always try to adopt the theory which is the most complex yet is still practical. We need to take a close look at the interactions between the subunits that make up a literacies event, looking beyond the subunits themselves and grappling with the complexity inherent in literacies and the meaning making process.

Summary

Literacies are multimodal, semiotic and motivated; they involve specific social and cultural practices, and these practices are different depending on site, community, and time; they are social; and they are complex. The definition of literacy needs to be expanded to include all literacies: art, dance, reading, writing, maths, science, videogaming, etc. We need to start to deal with literacies as a complex system.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

“What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning.”

- Werner Heisenberg (1962)

The Journey

we wander
transfixed upon
the crowded wasteland
alone
yet surrounded
deafened by noise
voices and sound
everything and nothing
drowning
deeper and faster
into the pool
of information
our desire
our curse
we pursue
everything
we gain
nothing
we
are lost
in a sea
of information
abandoned
left
discovering
truth?

we discover
nothing

what is reality?
what is truth?

everything
perception

I have been listening to the explanations of my children, and those children that have the patience for my lack of understanding, since 1995 and I am just now starting to understand what they are telling me. I am starting to leave the world of adults, and our important business, and enter the world of children; and to understand fully what children have been telling me. The children who have been my greatest informants are my own children: Emily, Tristan and Simon, for they are the only ones willing to put up with my blunderings and misunderstandings for so long. It is as if young children are aware that grown ups just do not understand, but are willing to explain what they are thinking and doing, when we, as adults, are willing to listen. We must learn the language of children and become fluent; a fluency I am developing. We must forget about what we think is important and how we think things work, and begin to listen and learn from the children who are our informants. Then and only then will we understand how they view literacies and how they use it in meaningful ways.

Study Design

I did not originally intend to conduct research but was just trying to understand what my children were teaching me. As I started to pursue my questions further I applied some frameworks to make better sense of my questions and to help me find the answers. Even though all of this research was conducted informally I started to use a critical ethnographic (Carspecken, 1996) stance in the way I approached my learning from my children, becoming more systematic as time went on. I was always an involved parent with an intense

interest in what my children were doing and learning. As such, I was always questioning, collecting everything the children created, and collecting our stories. I compared this material, or data, to current theory I was learning in graduate school and was using in my classroom, to better understand what my children were doing and learning. I inadvertently was using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as I was collecting this material and starting to learn from my children. The best way to describe how I organized the research presented here is as a case study of how Emily, Tristan and Simon used and understood literacies between 1995-2004.

Case Study

Case study is the approach that made the most sense for me as I tried to figure out what my children were doing with literacies. By case study I am referring specifically to the naturalistic observation of the children in the context of their everyday lives. As the three children share similar contexts, and I am looking at the literacies use and understanding of all the children, I am treating this whole study as a single case study and the data of each of the children as individual cases within the larger study. This is what case study is, the focused study of one or a few children, “directed toward understanding” (Bissex, 1987, p.14) and describing what they do.

“It doesn’t take much to disprove a theory – just a single exception...In language research all phenomena are significant: for the theories we develop – if they are to have power – cannot

wallow in frequency or convenience but universality. It is for this reason that the case study is a powerful theoretical tool. Because all phenomena demand explanation, theories developed from this source have more generalizability rather than less...A good model, now don't you agree, ought to at least be able to explain the behaviour of one child before it gets implemented." (Harste, et al, 1981, p. 368).

Research methods are not neutral tools (Bissex, 1984). They always relate to issues of power and the researchers' relationship with his/her subjects/informants, assumptions, how knowledge is developed and understood, and even the nature of human beings. More and more it is becoming clear that research is also political, with some groups calling their literacy research scientific and other research unscientific (National Reading Panel, 2000), and some research discounted out of hand (Graveline, 2000). Nevertheless, the goal of science and research is to try to understand the external, and internal, world through observation and experimentation. This can be done just as well, if not better, through case study.

There is no reason to assume that the item which recurs most frequently is the most important or the most significant, for a text is, clearly, a *structured* whole, and the place occupied by the different elements is more important than the number of times they recur.

(Burgelin 1968, p.319 cited in Wolcott 1982, p.93)

Critical Ethnography

In trying to understand and analyze the research I have done with my children from 1995 to 2004 I have organized it as a critical ethnographic study (Carspecken 1996). I am a concerned parent who wants to understand the learning of my children from their perspective. As a mostly white, middle class family there is little of the critical analysis of class struggle found in most Marxist/critical analysis, though this is a lens I used in meaning reconstruction. The more I think about it the more I realize that all children are subjugated within our society; the fact that I feel I need to justify why it is important to at least try to understand literacies from the perspective of my children should have been an indicator that what I am doing here is some sort of radical departure aimed at transforming our society. In writing down this research and sharing it publicly, I have moved from the world of parental activism to the realm of 'positive social change' that defines critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996).

I am not merely trying to describe our social life but to redefine how we think about literacies and hopefully what type of research we consider important, and as a result more regularly include the voice and perspective of children. The sheer scope, social embeddedness, and length of this study define it as ethnography. As one who has lived in this context with my children during the nine years encompassed by this study I am privileged to have access to vast amounts of data which has enabled me to write thick descriptions of the contexts and social milieu surrounding each literacies event; for "...it is in the write-up, rather than in the fieldwork, that materials become ethnographic" (Wolcott, 1997).

Parent as Researcher

"No other person will ever know the child, the context of the child's life, and the particular research situation so completely as the parent." (Baghban 1979, p. 17)

As a parent researcher I have tremendous access to the site, contexts, cultures, and systems of the participants in the study. As well, as the parent I have a tremendous amount of access to the participants themselves and not just in one setting but in the complex multiple settings that we all live our lives. This allows me as a researcher more of a full picture; to see the complexities of literacies that an objective observer will never see, will never gain access to. Therefore, as a parent researcher I have intimate understandings and details about the child as a language user.

This intimacy brings with it difficulty as well. It subjects the researcher, unnecessarily, to questions of objectivity and bias. My response to this is quite simple: of course a parent will always be an advocate for their child - if they were not, we would question whether they were a good parent. I would argue, as do Denzin (1997), Carspecken (1996), and Lather (1992) that the objective observer too is biased, and is generally a person who embraces their subjects just as passionately as the parent does their own child. The difference being that for the parent this relationship is transparent, obvious and revealed; where for the clinical observer this passion is veiled by procedure, objectivity, and verisimilitude.

As a parent researcher I am hopelessly entangled with the subject matter

and my participants, we cannot be separated, and the search for understanding and truth is slippery (Britzman, 1997). Yet this is not a weakness but a strength of this research and when laid bare, as I have done, it leaves the reader to decide whether a statement is the result of a parent's love, a researcher's objective observation, or if it really matters in the end.

Research into the literacies use/development of children by their own parents has a long tradition, the most notable researcher being Jean Piaget (1971). Many of these parent researchers have had significant influence in the field of literacies research: Marcia Baghban (1984, 2002), Glenda Bissex (1980), David Doake (1988), James Gee (2003), Jerry Harste (1984), Prisca Martens (1996), Judith Schickedanz (1990), and Patrick Shannon (1995), have all studied their own children. Each of these studies has given us a great deal of insight into how children learn to read and write, how they represent their literacies practices, and how children use reading and writing in conventional and non-conventional ways. Each of these studies has challenged the way that we view literacies.

As a parent researcher, I needed to be wary of oversimplified theories of literacies. The power of parent-as-researcher studies is that they allow for greater complexity leading to theories of literacies which are more robust. I do not suggest that we need theories which explain every possible variant within human literacies use and understanding; such a thing would have very little practical application or use. All that I suggest is that we develop theories which allow for complexity, are multidimensional, embrace differences and celebrate them, and treat literacies as the complex system they are.

Finally, we need to embrace research which is messy, complicated, and entangling. We need to move beyond the old concepts of objectivity and admit that we are always making subjective judgments. We need to admit that research is messy and get over it. We need to rethink our concept of research and researchers and redefine who we are.

Learning from Children

“Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is exhausting for children to have to provide explanations over and over again.” (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943, p.4).

I have been transformed by what my children have been patient enough to teach me; it has affected my teaching and the way I approach literacies and learning. I believe that we need to reconsider our research model when we go into a classroom or interview children about our preconceived notions of literacies and presuppose that it is our job to teach them to be literate through some better method. Children are the reason we do the work we do; we want to help them better integrate into our societal discourse, of which a large part is reading, writing and using other literacies in very specific ways. It seems obvious to me then that we would want to understand what literacies are to children and to take time to observe and understand how they use them, and I am not alone in this belief (e.g. Gallas, 1998; Paley, 1997; Paley, 2000; Taylor, 1993; Vasquez, 2004).

We need to think about learning as a continuum and not an end point to

be achieved. We are immersed in literacies, like fish in water, it is just that it is so much part of our lives we rarely take time to notice and when we do, it is difficult to see and understand. We are all, including children, immersed in literacies that we have to use daily to make sense of the world around us. If we take the time to learn from children we can understand their literacies and we can better understand how to support all literacies. Learning from children is essential to bettering our understanding of literacies and how children learn in general. We need to view children as our informants and not as our subjects.

Data Collection

My data collection for this research was informal. That said, I have paper-based writing and art samples, several journals, books of photographs, video and audio tape recordings, emails, and countless other sources of data and information that has been informally analyzed on a continual basis. At times this analysis was more formal as I looked at the data to better understand something that was happening in my classroom, or I was using the data for a course I was taking, or for a paper I was writing on my own or with friends. I did not carefully categorize each piece of data on a weekly basis, but most pieces of data were dated with a description and then coded informally and I believe this is adequate considering the volume of material collected. This ad hoc approach to data collection and storage made analysis of this data more difficult to say the least, but it also emphasizes the need for this process to have happened. I have learned much from my children over the nine years included in this study and I

needed to analyze this data and write about it in a systematic way so that I could start to share what I have learned with others.

The Data

The data I collected includes five boxes full of paper data and what follows is an approximate estimate of what is included in this physical data: over a thousand writing samples, hundreds of drawings and paintings (which are also often writing samples), craft projects, maths writing, and countless other smaller collections of written stuff. Each of these pieces of paper has been collected by Christine, who had her own collection of the children's work, or myself as would be expected. Christine has been assisting me with the collection of the children's work ever since I started to take an interest in Emily's writing during my Master's work. More importantly than actually collecting the piece of data for me, Christine gives me the story that accompanies each piece of paper. Not all the pieces of paper have been dated and labelled, with their story written out on a Post-It or on the back, and some of the Post-Its have been lost. In this instance we both tried to remember the story associated with the piece of paper and if we were unable to remember or our remembrances were different, then that piece of data was not included in the study.

The same is true of the approximately sixteen hours of video tape we have. Though much of what was recorded gives a fairly clear picture of what is going on, and it was my practice to often state date and place as a part of the recording process, if the story is incomplete the data is worthless as literacies are

an embedded cultural practice. Without the story of the context it is impossible to understand a literacy event apart from any other part of our lives. A literacies event is defined by the engagement with a sign system and without some form of engagement it is not a literacies event.

I used approximately ten hours of audio tape, which includes interviews about literacy events, either conducted during an event or afterward; in one instance I have a recorded reflective interview where Emily discusses her understanding of her learning to write which was done in preparation for a journal article that we planned to write together (a project we never completed). With this one exception, all of the interviews were conducted on an informal basis. In every instance the children were aware that they were being video or audio taped.

Christine and I also kept journals in which we recorded instances of the children learning or interesting instances of literacy use. Both of us are poor journal keepers, and this record keeping was inconsistent at best. We were very deliberate in our collection of physical data, but less consistent about writing about events. The greatest storehouse of the stories of the children's literacies use and understanding are the physical pieces of paper and the many photographs we have taken of the children engaging in these practices and during these events. Christine has been diligently organising and cataloguing these pictures for the past several years and next to the physical paper samples photographs comprise the largest data source.

Christine and I have also collected stories from friends and family members. Even though "Do you remember when Emily..." or "Tristan said the

funniest thing as we drove home...” is not the strongest source of data, I have used this data in combination with other more concrete data to make sense of the children’s literacies use. The remembered stories about our children created a thread that helped tie the various pieces of data together. It also, in some instances, helped me to see a piece of data as significant that I otherwise might have dismissed.

Literacies Events

Shirley Heath identified a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (Heath, 1983, p. 93). I am relying on her definition as a basis for my understanding of a literacies event but, as I am going beyond print-based literacies, I am defining a literate event or literacies act as the creation of or understanding of the meaningful use of a sign. A sign in this context is semiotic in nature and therefore motivated and meaning based. Literacies are understood as contextual, multimodal, and multiple. The difference between a literate act and daily living lies in the creation/use of literacies as meaningful signs.

For example, I would be inclined not to include sport as data for analysis, but Tristan has taught me that ball play is a literacy for him. This leaves much in our lives open for interpretation and analysis because so much of our lives are mediated by signs and literacies. My initial thought was I could discard our regular walks to the park from analysis - surely these are not literate events? But

sure enough they are rife with instances of literacies: the signs we pass, the litter (which contains images and text), the signs at the park, not to mention the rituals we experience as a part of going to the park, the activities we engage in at the park and the stories and pictures that come directly from these experiences. So much of our lives is mediated by signs and literacies in our society that very little of our lives is not affected by literate activity.

Therefore, for the sake of analysis I looked at everything, but only coded events that led to the creation of or engagement with a sign. This is what I consider a literacies event. I also make a distinction between literacies events and literacies practice; I rely on Mary Hamilton for my distinction: "Events are local activities, whereas practices are more global patterns" (Hamilton, 2000, p.18). The practices relate to the engagement with literacies in general and the literacies event refers to the specific local instance of the creation of engagement with a sign or literacy.

Participants

At the time of final data collection, 12/2004, Emily was eleven years old, Tristan eight years old, and Simon newly six years old. During the time of the study the children were involved in various activities in the community. Some of the events had more of a traditional literacy focus (these events emphasize reading and writing). During these events a story was usually read from a book and reading was seen as a valued experience. Trips to the public library were a weekly event and the children generally borrowed 10-15 books each. The

children also had a collection of well over 1000 books, ranging from board books to novels, all of which they read individually, with an adult, or with peers. Books in the house were always accessible for reading.

The children were also engaged in a variety of non-traditional literacy activities¹ such as sport, music, drama, etc. Besides these community events, Christine regularly engaged in oral story telling with the children, creating stories out of the *stuff* of our daily lives. The children rode their bikes, danced, sang, and played games throughout the house and outside. Christine and I took the children swimming and skating, played ball sports and we often engaged in art activities as a family. Though each of these seem like fun activities, each involves its own complex literacies systems and each uses multiple literacies in its learning and use.

Tristan, Simon and Emily also had their own table and arts supplies, and it was from this location that most of their writing, art (painting, drawing, collage, etc.), and maths were done. This table had a large storage shelf beside it that was always well stocked with assorted coloured fine paper, newsprint, and construction paper as well as a variety of writing/art utensils: markers, crayons, pencil crayons, paints, pens, scissors, pencils, and manipulative materials. The children wrote and made pictures often throughout the day. The majority of this writing and art was self-initiated, though occasionally Christine and I suggested creating something for a specific purpose. Writing, art, and maths were often modeled by us.

¹ Throughout this paper the discussion of activities is somewhat problematic because the activities have changed over time, as we have moved and the children's interests have changed. This section is written in the present tense but the children are not still involved in all these activities nor is this list exhaustive.

All of the children were home schooled for various reasons. The most dominant reason was that the children enjoy being home schooled and we have been successful at implementing a constructivist approach to our family curriculum. Christine was the parent most responsible for their education and she followed the teaching of John Holt, using *Unschooling* (Holt, 1989) as the guiding principle of their education. This type of schooling is generative and follows no prescribed curriculum; the children are supported in their own interests, and everything is considered a learning experience. Emily is the only one of the three children who has had any formal schooling.

Emily.

Emily was born in Toronto, Canada in 1993 and I started to collect data on her writing when she was two and half years old. I started to collect data formally² because I was taking a writing course as a part of my M.Ed. with Esther Fine and Emily was starting to do some interesting work. Dr. Fine suggested I look a bit closer at what Emily was doing and suggested I read the work of Glenda Bissex. This simple suggestion changed the course of my degree, and my life. I had started to take my Master's as a way to better understand curriculum but I changed directions and started out on the long journey to understand how children are literate. This question has changed over time but it was because of this suggestion and through reading the work of Glenda Bissex that I became passionate about early literacies, which soon became a driving force of my life and choices over the past fourteen years.

² Though this is the point at which I started to see Emily's work as literate, the data I have extends to an earlier date.

Emily introduced me to the world of children; their rich thinking and deep questions. She taught me that children are brilliant and that they are born to learn and that it is we, as adults, who need to learn how to learn from children, not the other way around. This is a path I am still discovering and one which I did not understand when I started to collect data on Emily's writing for my Master's Research Project. I focused on her writing to keep the work manageable, as I was not ready to understand what Emily was beginning to teach me. Inherently this focus on just her writing allowed me to learn about her writing more deeply than if I had focused on more, but it also limited the type of data I collected and analyzed and so I missed a great deal about what Emily was doing and teaching me in other areas about literacies. Part of this was due to my own lack of ability to understand what she was teaching and part of it was a conscious choice to focus that learning to make it manageable.

As such the data I have from Emily is extremely limited until about halfway through kindergarten. The reasons why the quality of Emily's data improves are threefold: first I finished writing my M.Ed. and started to broaden the scope of my learning from Emily; second Emily stopped writing for 6 months³; and finally I received a small grant to do research at the school Emily was attending and Emily was included in the participant pool. I was also learning how better to listen to children and learn from them. I was reading more and learning from people such as Jerry Harste, Carolyn Burke, and Prisca Martens. My theory of learning, and what counts as literacy, was expanding and hence so was what I considered

³This piqued my attention and I started to collect all the data I could, out of sheer desperation, to try and figure out what was happening and to help her see herself as a writer again.

valuable data.

Oddly enough, it wasn't until I returned from Bloomington, Indiana, and doing my Ph.D. course work, that I really learned how to learn from children; friends and a few fellow teachers showed me how to open my eyes and my ears to children. It was also through a close study of the Reggio Emilia schools that I was able to truly revisit what my children were teaching me and how to learn from them. Hence the richest data I have is from the last 3 years of my research. I was tempted to just include this high quality material and forget about the rest, but the journey itself holds valuable lessons. Not to mention that even though my ears, eyes and understanding might have been clouded there is such a volume of data from these times that there is much that I learned in spite of myself. I can compare it to the work of a photographer – an expert might take one or two pictures and come out with a masterpiece whereas the amateur may still achieve this but it could take hundreds of pictures.

I have learned through practice, trial and error, and patient teaching to be more masterful in my selection and collection of data, how to look and listen, what to look and listen to and how to ask questions to learn more. But there are still nuggets of understanding in my earlier piles of data and I learned much from my children about literacies and about research throughout this time.

Tristan.

Tristan is the second child born into our family. He was born in Toronto, Canada in 1996. I have incidentally collected data from Tristan since he was born, but I again didn't start to pay attention to his literacies use until he was

about two and half years old. The data I have from Tristan is better in some senses and poorer in others, than the data I have from Emily. The type of data I have collected from Tristan is broader than from Emily at ages below five years old, but I was not looking intently at Tristan's work until 1998 because I had not seriously considered the idea of collecting data to learn from all my children until that time.

For Tristan writing is a more serious business than it is for either Simon or Emily. Tristan has been a very hard nut for me to crack because the way he works and thinks is often different than the way I do. Simon, Emily and I are all risk -takers and more interested in the big picture than the details. Tristan, on the other hand, is focused on the details and interested in accuracy. He looks at his written work and sees that it is not the way he wanted it to look; he wants what he writes "to be right". I experience the same thing to a lesser degree in my art and when I play the piano, and I too look for a different form of expression. Yet with most things I just try it and work it out until I achieve a satisfactory level of success. Tristan and I frustrate each other when I tell him to do his best and he refuses to even try. This causes a further tension around writing which is not an easy form of expression for Tristan. He has seen Emily, Christine, and me writing for pleasure, for school and for others, and has seen himself as an unaccomplished outsider. And there was nothing I could do to help him feel like he was a member of the "literacy club" (Smith, 1988). But Tristan is accomplished in many ways and in many literacies: he has a natural rhythm about him that makes playing musical instruments and dance natural; he loves all

types of sports and games and has an easy time understanding the rules and patterns associated with any type, be it active (like hockey, basketball, baseball or soccer) or sedentary (like board or card games). He seems to interpret and understand the world about him using the literacy of mathematics. He sees patterns in everything; he is fascinated with numbers and order; he is drawn to design. I on the other hand know little of this way of thinking. Thankfully, Christine understands mathematics and thinks this way as well and she has taught me to see that this is just Tristan's way of understanding how things work.

Tristan is not the patient teacher that Emily and Simon are, carefully reteaching the lesson they want me learn or repeating what they want me to understand, but he is a talker. He expresses almost everything he is feeling and thinking. I only needed to listen and engage with Tristan to learn from him. What he has taught me the most is that literacies are broader, more complex, and more encompassing than I ever imagined.

Tristan has taught me that in our world we are immersed in more than a world of text but that there are many forms of literacies and that literacies are multimodal. He has shown me that multimodal forms of literacies, though they are complex in their interactions, give literacies users greater access and understanding to the author's intended meaning. He is responsible for expanding my understanding of literacies beyond reading and writing to include ball play, sports and all sorts of gaming, including videogaming.

Simon.

Simon is the youngest of the three children and he was born in

Bloomington, Indiana, USA, 1998. The material included from him in this study ranges from birth until he was six years old. By the time Simon was born I was intent on learning from my children and a few friends joked that Christine and I were expanding our subject pool instead of our family.

Simon is immediately loveable; he has a ready smile and an easygoing attitude that just sucks you into his world. He is a patient teacher and is willing to explain his ideas more than once to make sure that he is understood. This is largely because although Simon was linguistically advanced his articulation has often lagged behind language and semantic growth, making the oral expression of meaning understood by others more challenging for him. But he is patient and has developed many strategies to make himself better understood by others.

Simon loves writing and drawing and has been engaging with print and pictures since before he was one year old. I am certain that Emily and Tristan were also engaged with paper-based expression earlier than when I started to recognize their work, but by the time Simon was born I had expanded my understanding of literacies beyond reading and writing and was ready to learn from him. Simon also got my attention at this early point because his first instances of writing/drawing were in books. I had begun to see literacies as multiple and multimodal, so the range of data I have from him is greater. What I counted as literacies had begun to expand because of what Tristan and Emily were teaching me.

Simon's early literacies use was not confined to writing/drawing. He could read the Wendy's sign at nine months, making his vocalization for food as we

passed it on our regular trips through town, and he has been creating and designing with Lego since he was two years old. Simon was immersed in literacies like neither Tristan nor Emily largely because he did not just have Christine and me as examples of literacies users; he had the overwhelming influence of his siblings as well.

Principal researcher.

I have been interested in learning and literacies since I attended teacher's college. As a devoted father I have had the privilege of combining my academic interest with learning from my own children. This has been an amazing experience bringing the different loves of my life together to better understand both. I have completed a Master's thesis looking at the subject of early children's early writing; looking at Emily's writing from the age of 2 ½ until she was 5 years old. I was a kindergarten teacher, and I applied this learning to my classroom. That said I am the author of this study but it is my children and Christine who have contributed the most to it.

Settings

Christine and I have, and continue to, engage the children with activities across multiple settings and we have moved frequently as a family as various opportunities have arisen. As literacies are a social and cultural practice it was important to examine literacies across different sites and cultures. In many ways our frequent moves and Christine's and my emphasis on the children being active in a variety of activities outside the home has allowed me to examine more

easily the nature of literacies across the various Discourses of these sites.

We moved five times during this study. Sometimes the moves were within the city we were living in but more often the moves were between cities as opportunities presented themselves. Christine, Emily and I moved the first time from our basement apartment in Toronto to Ottawa where I was accepted into a consecutive, one year, Bachelor of Education program (this was the standard teacher certification offered at the time in Ontario).

We lived in a low-rise apartment close to the University of Ottawa, the Canadian Parliament buildings and historic sites, the library, and the Rideau Canal (where we would go skating in the winter). I attended school and Christine cared for Emily who was only one and half years old when we arrived and two years and four months old when we left Ottawa to return to Toronto. This time period is not a part of the study but is a frame of reference often referred to by Emily and is the critical starting point for the story of our family that followed.

We chose to return to Toronto because there were very few teaching positions available and I was able to work for my father who ran a manufacturing plant in this city. We also chose to return to Toronto because I was accepted into York University's Master of Education program and we wanted to be close to the university.

While we lived in this location, the activities we were involved in and the common sites for literacies events for Emily would include a weekly bible study children's program, trips to the library, Sunday school, and a playgroup. Christine's sister lived with us at that time as she attended university. It was in

this house that I started to see Emily's work as literacy.

We next moved to a larger home, still in Toronto, where Emily shared a room with her new baby brother, Tristan, and I had room for an office to work on my Master's degree and teaching work⁴. We continued to have extended family living with us, but Christine's sister now lived in a basement apartment. This house had a large back yard with fruit trees where the children often played.

Our weekly bible studies continued, as did our trips to the library, which we could now walk to. Along with Sunday school and playgroups, Emily was also enrolled in creative movement classes and swimming lessons at the local community centre. Christine babysat a friend's daughter who was the same age as Emily, giving Emily a playmate and a co-conspirator in her new understandings of literacies. Christine provided a loosely structured preschool environment for both girls. During this time I worked towards completing my Master's degree in education, with my final research paper focusing on Emily's writing. It was through my interaction with Tristan in this house that I later started to understand ball play as a literacy.

When Emily was five years old and Tristan was two years old, we moved to Bloomington, Indiana U.S.A. where I would spend two years completing the coursework for my Ph.D. The old house that we lived in was an easy walk to the faculty of education, so we as a family regularly visited the university grounds, playing there as well as visiting various buildings and places of study on campus. Emily attended the local public school for kindergarten and first grade while we lived here. Simon was born in this home.

⁴ I started teaching kindergarten in January of that year, 1996.

The literacies activities the children engaged in while we lived in Bloomington increased in number and scope. Emily was involved with Brownies, ballet and tap dance lessons and she regularly danced with a friend who was studying dance at the university, and she performed in two musical dramas at the church we attended. Emily and Tristan both took swimming lessons and learned to skate; they also regularly visited a friend's home who had children the same ages as them where they did all sorts of crafts and activities outside of their normal play. Tristan played soccer in the local soccer league and attended a bible study for young children. Simon and Tristan accompanied Christine to a weekly bible study where they were babysat, attended library readings for young children, and a playgroup. We went to the local library multiple times a week to exchange books and Christine and I regularly attended concerts and dance performances with one or more of the children. The house was on the edge of Bloomington's downtown so we walked a lot and regularly went downtown where the children saw and read the many store signs and various other text based literacies. We also frequently went to Indianapolis, as one of my research sites was located there, and the children regularly went to the Children's Museum where we had a membership.

From Bloomington we moved to Burlington, Ontario, Canada. We rented a large old home with very large backyard which was in easy walking distance of Burlington's downtown, the waterfront, local library, and YMCA. We became members of the YMCA where the children participated in swimming lessons, gymnastics, soccer, and theatre sports on a weekly basis; Tristan also took

basketball lessons. Emily attended the local public school for grade two but after this year she was home schooled. So though Emily did not participate in the weekly trips to the library for story time, or the children's bible study in the first year, she joined Tristan and Simon the second year, becoming a helper in Simon's bible study class. We were all active in our local church and the children went to a boys' and girls' club, called Treehouse, and Sunday school once a week. Our family were members of a local home schooling group and the children went on hikes in nearby conservation areas. As a family we had memberships to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), and the McMichael Gallery and visited the Art Gallery of Ontario and conservation areas; we visited these institutions frequently and all of them had special programs and spaces designed for young children. All of the children continued to skate, ride bikes and skateboard while in this home. Emily took weekly ballet lessons and our walks to the library were so frequent that she became a favourite among the librarians who invited her vote on the Silver Birch awards and took her to view books in the library's archive.

We moved to Brampton when I had the opportunity to open a new school, as a kindergarten teacher. We intentionally found a home close enough to the school for me to walk to and that was close to the homes of Christine's brother and sister. All of the children continued to be home schooled in this location and Christine took on a role of leadership within the local home schooling group. The children continued their memberships at the YMCA where they took swimming lessons, and played basketball and floor hockey often on a weekly basis. All of

the children took dance lessons, with Tristan and Emily taking two classes a week. We regularly went to the city's central park where there was free skating. Christine organized monthly sport days and helped run the home schooling group's bi-weekly co-operative (where parents shared their expertise or interest in an area and the children signed up for activities or lessons they were interested in). They joined the home school group on field trips to various historical and cultural sites throughout southern Ontario, which fuelled, in particular, Tristan and Simon's growing interest in History. The home schooling group was also involved in an activity called 'Battle of the Books' where children are asked general knowledge questions about a specific corpus of books; this was an opportunity that valued Emily's voracious reading habit and helped further pique Tristan's interest in reading. We continued to be involved in a local church with children attending Sunday school weekly. Emily also joined the church youth group and a bible study where she was expected to study the bible on her own. The boys were involved in several organized sports: T-ball, baseball, and basketball. Emily started to take piano lessons and joined Christine on a one month trip to Holland. We continued to maintain our membership at the ROM, started a membership at the Metropolitan Toronto Zoo, and made several visits to Black Creek Pioneer Village. Christine also took care of our nephew, from the time he was one year old, on a daily basis, which added a completely new dynamic to our family.

Beyond the sites where we lived, we frequently visited the homes of friends for extended visits (up to one week) and they would visit us throughout

the year. We also lived a far distance from Christine's and my parents – Christine's parents live in Northern Ontario, a seven hour drive from southern Ontario, and my parents lived in the Detroit, Michigan area, more than a four hour drive from any of our homes in southern Ontario. We would regularly visit their homes for long weekends and during school holidays for extended periods. We as a family have always planned a one to two week camping trip in the summer. These sites all provided rich locations for literacies events before, during, and after visiting them.

Data Analysis

The simplest way to divide up the daunting task of discussing the data analysis from the lives of 3 children over a multi-year, multi-site project was to first deal with each child as an individual, then discuss convergence in their experiences and data and then to discuss divergent data. All the data used was analyzed using basic category generation (Creswell, 1994) and my own form of meaning reconstruction which was heavily influenced by Carspecken's Initial Meaning Reconstruction (1996). All artefacts, stories, research notes and interview notes were analyzed through the lens of initial meaning analysis to construct basic categories and to find anomalies. These initial categories were then developed into matrices (Creswell, 1994) to show the relationships among categories; the information was coded across categories by child, site, time (both chronological and age), purpose, social setting, context, literacies being used, sibling or adult influences and intended meaning.

All data was first reviewed to gain a general impression of the material collected and general themes presented by the children's work. This stage also revealed gaps in the data pool and whether or not I needed to find further data currently housed with family and friends. Ideally, this stage would have been conducted as I was gathering data, to constantly compare the data I had and conduct interviews with the children to fill in gaps in my understanding. But due to the informal nature of this study I did not do this; although there are a few exceptions - on several occasions either for course papers or conference presentations I visited the children's work for examples and understanding. But this informal analysis left too many of my tacit assumptions unexamined, leading to the need for me to treat this data as unanalyzed and conduct the initial meaning analysis as a complete and separate stage. I used this stage to reveal the validity of certain tacit understandings I have developed over the years as I have been learning from my children.

After the general review was complete, I examined the data through the lens of meaning reconstruction. During this phase, I maintained low levels of inference and tried to reconstruct the meaning fields that were intended by the children in any literacies instance. As the children's parent I am in the privileged position of being very familiar with the cultures in which the literate acts occurred, giving me an advantage in generating meaning fields which were closer to the intention of the children (Carspecken, 1996). I have also been striving to enter into the world of the children and understand their culture; this task would not have been possible at the beginning of the study because my understanding of

the children's culture/discourse was as an adult looking in, separate. Though as a parent I was a part of the construction of the culture/discourse experienced in our home, I was distant from the children's perception of it.

Christine and I have been striving to create a culture in our home, throughout the last five years of this study, in which the children are full participants in its generation. This is not to say that we have abdicated our responsibility as parents, but that the children are included in all family decisions and their needs and desires are forefronted in the way family is lived. The cultural divide between the adult world and the world of my children has decreased, giving me greater access to their cultures and allowing me to generate meaning fields which are closer to their intended perspective, both explicit and tacit.

From this analysis I selected stories from the dominant categories from each child's data set that exemplified what I was learning from the children and represented how they understood and used literacies. I tried to avoid overlap between the children and used stories which demonstrated each of the ways the children used literacies to create unique identities within our family. What is represented here are only a small sample from the complex and rich data that was our lives from 1995-2004 but I hope they are enough for the reader

Summary

This study is a nine year critical ethnographic study that looks at the literacies use and understanding of my three children: Emily, Tristan, and Simon. As a parent researcher, I have had incredible access to the worlds of my children

and to their literacies use across multiple sites and contexts; this complicates the analysis process and has resulted in my collecting vast amounts of data that required processing. To help manage this task I used basic category generation and then an informal form of initial meaning reconstruction to make sense of the data in its various contexts.

CHAPTER 4

EMILY

"The ocean of truth lays open before us...largely undiscovered."

-Albert Einstein

Toronto in the early morning

Dashing
dashing
quickly going

somewhere

nowhere

everywhere

Everybody joined
in
one dance –

dashing!¹

I have learned much from Emily and, more importantly, I have much yet to learn. Emily is very capable and she continually amazes me by what she can do and how she sees the world. We often think of children as needing our protection and guidance; there is no denying that they do, but in the process we forget how capable they are, they are just inexperienced. Emily showed me time and time again that my parochial view of children as needing to develop through certain stages before they are capable of doing certain things was just wrong; she showed me that using just one literacy at a time is a linear adult approach to literacies use; and that we are communicative beings constantly making meaning

¹ Poem by Emily age 10.

of the world around us. Emily has shown me literacies and much of what I have come to understand and believe; I then went to the theorists to understand and explain what I was being shown and taught. My understanding and literacies theory has grown largely out of her practice and this is the story of how Emily slowly taught me what she knows and understands about literacies and how they work.

Emily is a writer, dancer and reader, but the primary literacy she uses to create meaning and make sense of the world is writing (see figure 6). Emily has always been a writer; I recognized her as a writer when she was 2 ½ years old and I was capable of understanding her constant work as writing. This is not to say that she wasn't writing earlier, only that I failed to recognize her earlier work as writing.

It is often the misconception of adults that the work children do is less than the work of adults or that it is preparation for adult work, or even just the imitation of adult work. This is especially so when it comes to children's writing and I was not innocent of this representative mindset; that is until Emily pointed

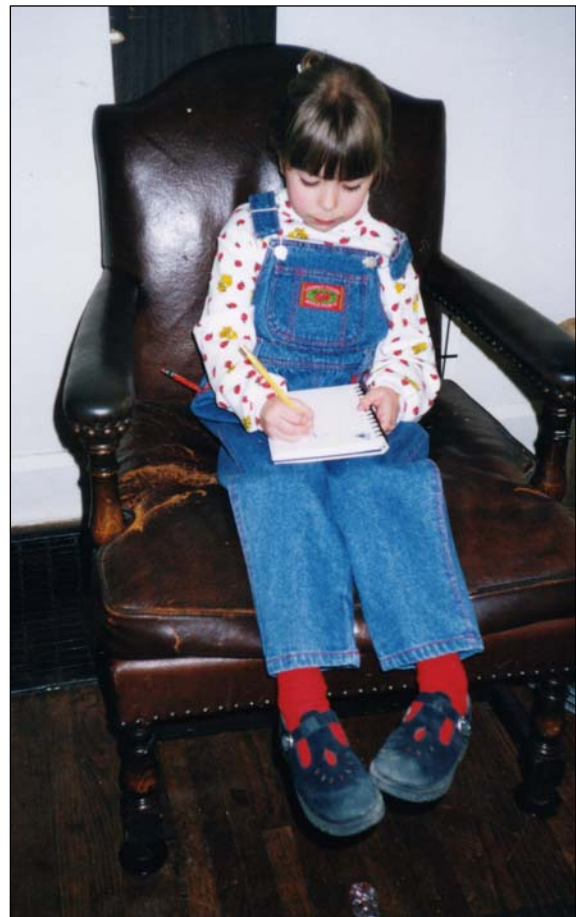


Figure 6: Emily Writing (age 6)

out to me that I was wrong and that her work is writing and is just as important and valid as my grown-up writing.

Emily as a Writer

Emily showed me that she was a writer and she used writing in powerful and transformative ways. She showed me that her writing was in fact more complex than adult writing. She often combined her writing with drawing, drama, dance, and oral story telling; blending the lines that define these literacies in their adult/conventional forms. She challenged my taken for granted notions of literacies as discrete sign forms.

I was so amazed by Emily's writing that I chose to study her writing for my Master's Research Paper. This study and the research finding changed the way I view and understand children's literacies but rather than reiterate the finding of that study I have gone back through the data to specifically answer the questions of this research study. I have chosen to continue to focus on Emily's writing because it is the primary literacy she uses to make and express meaning. For brevity I am looking closely at her use of writing as an example of how she uses literacies more generally. What follows is the story of Emily's writing. I have selected samples of her writing that both support her story as a writer and are representative of the major themes in her data.

Emily's Writing before School

The research for my Master's thesis was looking solely at Emily's writing

before she started school, and at that time I was not aware of the connections she was making to other literacies.



Figure 7: <T> Tristan, <E> Emily, <C> Christine, <J> Jeffrey

Some of the connections were so blatant I couldn't miss them, like the connections between Emily's writing and her art, drama, or reading; but, with the exception of reading, I saw these as supports and not literacies. What should have been the most obvious blending of literacies, art and writing, I saw as interesting but not as complex (see figure 7). Emily used art and writing to convey complex



Figure 8: "Playing at the beach." (scribble mid-page)

concepts, integrating the two literacies into a single meaning making product (see figure 8). These two creations (see figures 7 & 8) have the text integrated within the picture. These samples are both representative of Emily's early work; in the first (figure 7) she is using the text, in this case the first initial of each person's name, to reinforce, or act as a reiteration, of the picture through labelling. In figure 8 she has embedded the text so that it is a part of the picture, presenting both as an integrated whole and offering no distinction between these two literacies (she added her name to the picture after she was finished); using both together to convey her ideas/story.

It is important to note that both these pictures/texts were accompanied by an oral retelling as well and were self produced by Emily (without request) and come out of her lived experience. In these two examples Emily is using drawing, writing, and oral story telling to express meaning in an integrated whole. She regularly used literacies as multiple and only started to distinguish between literacies as she started to share her work with wider audiences. She started to realize that adults she was sharing her work with were making a distinction between the drawing and writing, and were expecting the oral story to be representative not necessarily supportive. She also started to understand that these adults expected a separation between the drawing and writing (see figure 9). This was clearly Emily's understanding, but I think it is interesting that advertising, and other adult literacies, use multiple literacies to convey meaning effectively. It seems that this type of literacies use is considered sophisticated for adults but beyond the capabilities of children and not valued or encouraged. This

is not to say that Emily stopped using literacies as multiple but that she started to explore literacies as separate, while continuing to dialogue among different literacies.

Emily's writing during this time (before she started school at age 5) was a very social process. She constantly wrote and created art, dramas, dances, and music for others and to be shared with others. She was constantly interacting with her audience. Her understanding of writing moved toward a more conventional application in a short period of time (see figure 10) but this was not a linear progression or through preset stages of development.

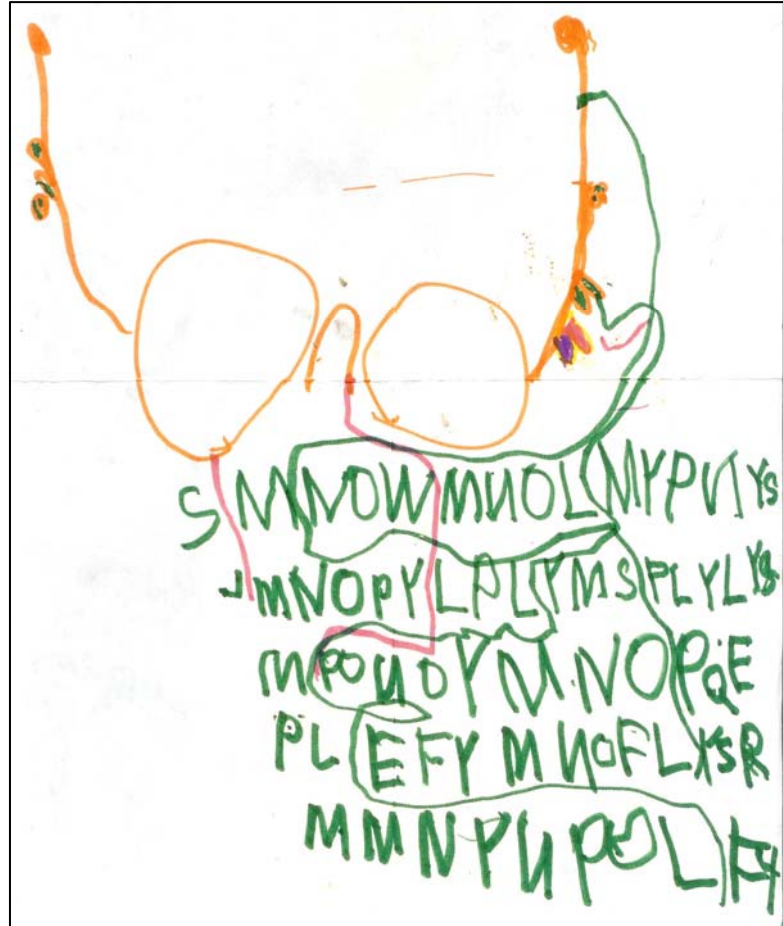


Figure 9: Design for glasses to resolve my colour-blindness. The parts listed in order (top to bottom): Glasses / eye part / nose part / decoration / end part (with lines pointing to each part)

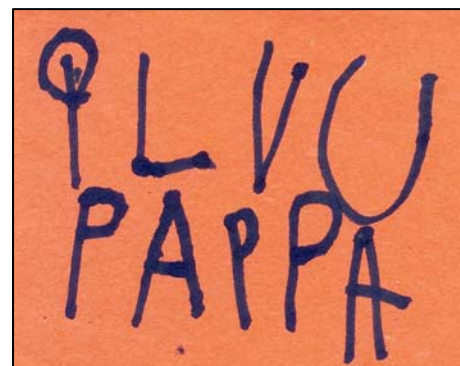


Figure 10: I love you Papa

Emily observed the adults and literacy users around her and developed her own schema of how literacies work (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984). She often modified and developed her understanding of literacies, assimilating new information and discarding those features of her schema which no longer worked for her. She engaged in many practices which were very richly literate but which could have easily gone unnoticed or been misinterpreted. Emily integrated all the social messages she was receiving about writing and how literacies work. Emily's schema was at times deeply personal and at other times very conventional, or public; it would seem to depend on the function of Emily's literacies use. For Emily the literacies process was very social; and even her story writing, which was deeply personal, was often intended to be read aloud. For Emily literacies were about making meaning both personally and through social interaction.

Our Family Practices that Supported Emily's Literacies Use

As was mentioned in chapter 3, between the time Emily was three and half until we moved to Indiana when she was five, Christine watched a friend's daughter, Miranda², who was Emily's age. Because Christine was caring for Miranda at this time, and partly because she is a conscientious mother, Christine started to do some semi-formal preschool instruction with Emily and Miranda. Christine made a pocket chart with nine possible activities for the girls to choose and they had to choose to do three every day. These choices included a great

² Miranda is a pseudonym, as are all the names in this thesis that do not belong to immediate family.

deal of play indoors and outdoors but also included a conscious effort to teach the girls the alphabet (see figure 11), numbers, to read with them daily, provide them with art supplies, and to take the girls on regular trips throughout our Toronto neighbourhood. The culture of the city readily supported this with “mom & tots” reading programs at the local library, many children’s learning activities at public community centres and cultural sites readily accessible on foot or by public transit.

This type of teaching was encouraged by myself, as a kindergarten teacher, and by

many of the parents Christine interacted with. This was what was seen as necessary for Emily and Miranda to succeed in school, which of course, they would both attend. Christine and I praised and encouraged Emily’s literacies uses. We delighted in her plays, art, and writing. We encouraged her and made sure she was well supplied with all the materials she needed. In some ways this was an incredibly supportive environment for Emily’s developing literacies understanding and use. But the reason for this support was the preparation for

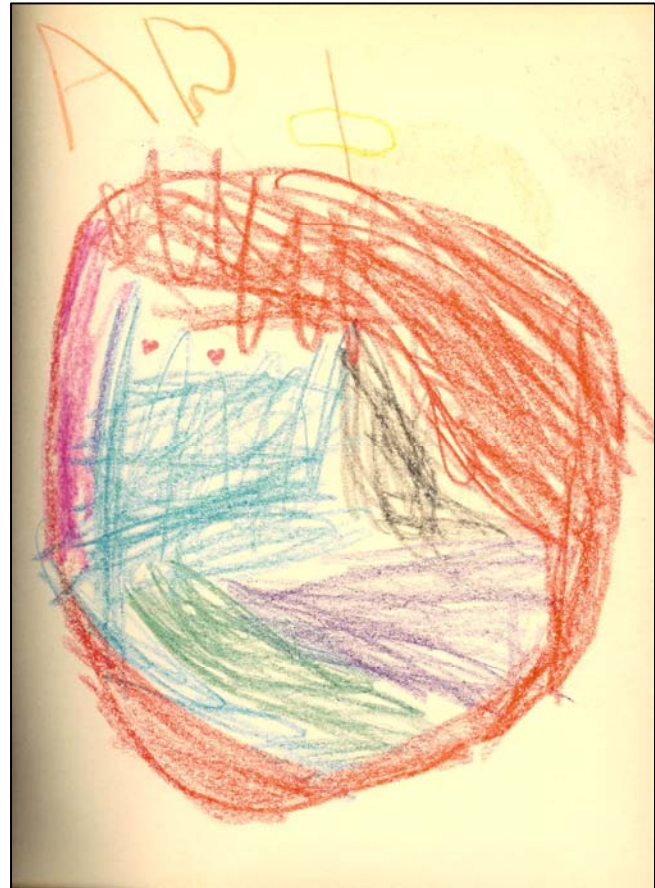


Figure 11: Page from Alphabet book (age 5)
“A is for apple”

something else, school curricula and what we perceived as the social norms expected by a child of Emily's age; we worked towards making sure that she met those standards.

Emily's School Writing

Before Emily started kindergarten we moved to Indiana as a family so that I could pursue my Ph.D. She and I started school less than a month after we arrived. I was very focused, starting my course work, teaching at Indiana University, and finishing my Master's thesis. We were all adjusting to a new home and Christine was pregnant with Simon. So between finishing school, starting school and taking care of everyone I was consciously not collecting data from Emily. But she quickly got my attention. When Emily started kindergarten, her writing stopped. Christine and I thought Emily might have stopped writing because of the move and that she was just adjusting to her new surroundings and focusing her energy and attention on other things. We were wrong. At Christmas I had successfully completed my thesis and our family was getting established. Christine had given birth to Simon and our home was settling down and entering a happy rhythm. And I turned my attention to why my daughter, who had been a prolific writer since she was 2 ½ years old, had now stopped writing for the past five months. My first discovery was horrifying; Emily had lost all confidence in her own ability to write. She believed that she couldn't write and didn't know how to write.

Writing in Kindergarten

I had started to volunteer in Emily's class once a week at the beginning of the school year, so I knew it was not the type of play-based kindergarten program I used in my classroom, but assumed that because it was a loving environment no harm was being done. Upon analysis of the data collected from Ms. K's class, it was not what Ms. K explicitly did or said in her classroom that stopped Emily from writing but the tacit underlying messages and the values which were embedded in the curricular and pedagogical choices mandated by the School District and made by Ms. K for her classroom.

Ms. K ran a half day kindergarten with Emily attending in the afternoon. This classroom was set up with the focus on the teacher. The children sat at desks that were set up in a U-shape facing the front blackboard and the teacher. The day was divided up into short blocks of time, with each chunk of time addressing a specific subject area. Mrs. K used the state recommended curriculum and interjected her own interpretations and examples to enhance student learning. She regularly used worksheets (see figure 13) to give the students practice with the topic being discussed and to assess their learning. The classroom was well organized and the students were well behaved, with the obligatory few 'trouble students'. Mrs. K worked hard to create a safe and loving environment for the students. On the surface it looked as if Ms. K was an excellent teacher and, in all honesty according to state guidelines, she would probably be deemed exemplary. In fact Emily performed quite well in this environment, according to state and federal guidelines for kindergarten, meeting

K Kindergarten Report Card
School Corporation

Student Emily Wood
School A school Year 1998-99
Date Entered Aug. 1998 Date Left _____
Teacher MS. K

Explanation of Marks
+ All of the time/Excellent
✓+ Most of the time/Good
✓ Some of the time/Satisfactory
✓- Needs Improvement
(If not marked, the teacher did not evaluate at this time)

Social, Emotional Development	1	2	3	4
I observe school rules.	+	+		
I play well with others.	+	+		
I am developing self-confidence.	✓+	+		
I am polite and courteous.	+	+		
I keep my hands and feet to myself.	+	+		
I follow directions.	+	+		
I do my work carefully and neatly.	✓+	✓+		
I work without disturbing others.	+	+		
I work independently.	+	+		
I am not easily distracted.	✓+	✓+		
I make good use of my time.	✓	✓		
I listen attentively.	+	+		
I express myself well in group discussions.	✓	✓		
I am responsible for my belongings.	+	+		

Physical Development

I use my small muscles adequately when I cut, paste, print, color, manipulate.	✓+	✓+		
I can print my name. <u>EM and last</u>	✓+	✓+		
I can print upper case letters.	✓+	✓+		
I can print lower case letters.				

Special Areas (These marks reflect participation & effort in these classes)

Music/Teacher:	+	+		
Phys. Ed /Teacher:	+	+		

Academic Development

I recognize the following colors:
red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown, black white

I recognize these letters:
A a B b C c D d E e F f G g H h I i J j K k L l M m N n O o P p Q q R r S s T t U u V v W w X x Y y Z z

I recognize these beginning sounds:
Bb Cc Dd Ff Gg Hh Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

I can say my ABC's + +
Oct Jan March May

I can count to 39 39
Oct Jan March May

I can identify these circled geometric shapes:
○ □ △ ▭

Oct - checked to 10
I can recognize these numbers:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

I can print these numbers:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

Jan. - child she's

Jan. - teens sometimes reversed.

I understand the following:	1	2	3	4
associating numbers with their sets		+		
likenesses/differences		✓+		
classifying	+	+		
more/less		+		
sequencing		+		
right/left		✓+		
rhyming		+		
<u>patterns</u>	+	+		

Figure 12: Emily's January kindergarten report card (age 5)

or exceeding all expectations (see figure 12). My concern is not that Emily did not meet State expectations in this class; my concern is that in this class her self confidence was destroyed and she no longer saw herself as a capable writer.

The data samples I collected from the work that Emily brought home are about control, accuracy, form, and convention. There is no creative spirit or attempt to build on

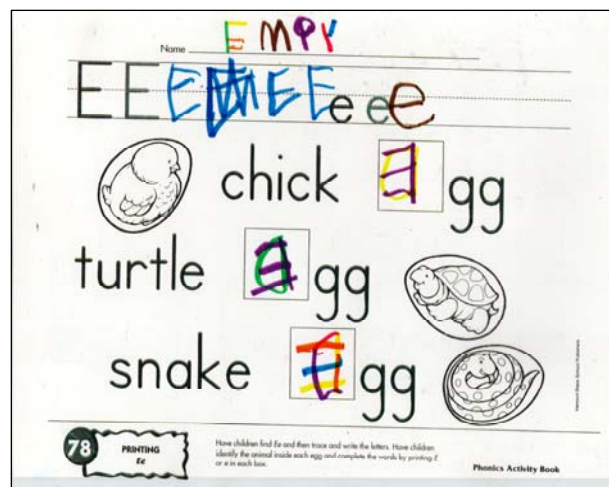


Figure 13: Phonics Worksheet – The letter <E> (age 5)

Emily's prior knowledge. There is not the message of capability that we wanted

Emily to learn and feel. The worksheet sample above (see figure 13) is indicative of the work that Emily did in Ms. K's class. Going beyond the fact that this is a phonics worksheet, notice that Emily has misspelled her name and reversed all of the <E>s in the boxes; these are two things Emily had mastered by the time she was three years old (see figure 14). The message from home was directly in conflict with the message at school and the message from school was that what she had learned at home was wrong and to succeed at school she needed to forget what she had learned.

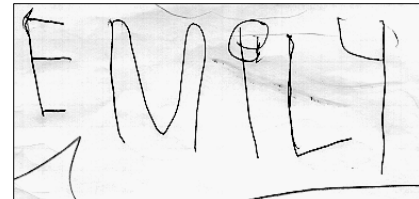


Figure 14: Emily name writing (age 3)

So why did Emily no longer see herself as a competent writer? I think it comes down to the underlying theme of Ms. K's teaching which is best described as pedagogy of control (Lesley, 2003). Emily quickly understood that it was her job to listen, follow instructions and routines, do her work, and above all else **not** to think for herself. The literacies instruction carried the message that there is only one interpretation of literacy which is valid, and that her inventions and constructions of literacies were wrong and not valid. Emily accepted that conventional literacy was the only acceptable literacy, so she stopped using her inventions and waited to learn the 'proper' way. It is important to add that this was not what Ms. K was trying to accomplish, but it was the tacit message she sent through her teaching practice of the letter of the week, phonics and writing worksheets, and the way she read aloud to the class. The message was "There is only one correct literacy and you must learn it at school."

Emily starts to write again.

After much encouragement from Christine and me Emily slowly started to write for herself. I took out my Master's thesis on her writing and showed her the value I placed on her work and showed the praise her writing had received from friends and colleagues. After several long talks Emily slowly began to see herself as a writer and to write close to the volume she used to write before starting kindergarten. However, it wasn't until March that she felt confident enough in herself as a writer to share her writing with her class.

Ms. K had a reading program, which she started in the New Year, where she sent a teddy bear, Godfrey the Bear, home to a different family every evening with a couple of books; the family was supposed to read the books with Godfrey and write in his journal about what he did while with the family. Most of the entries were written by adults. Emily chose to write

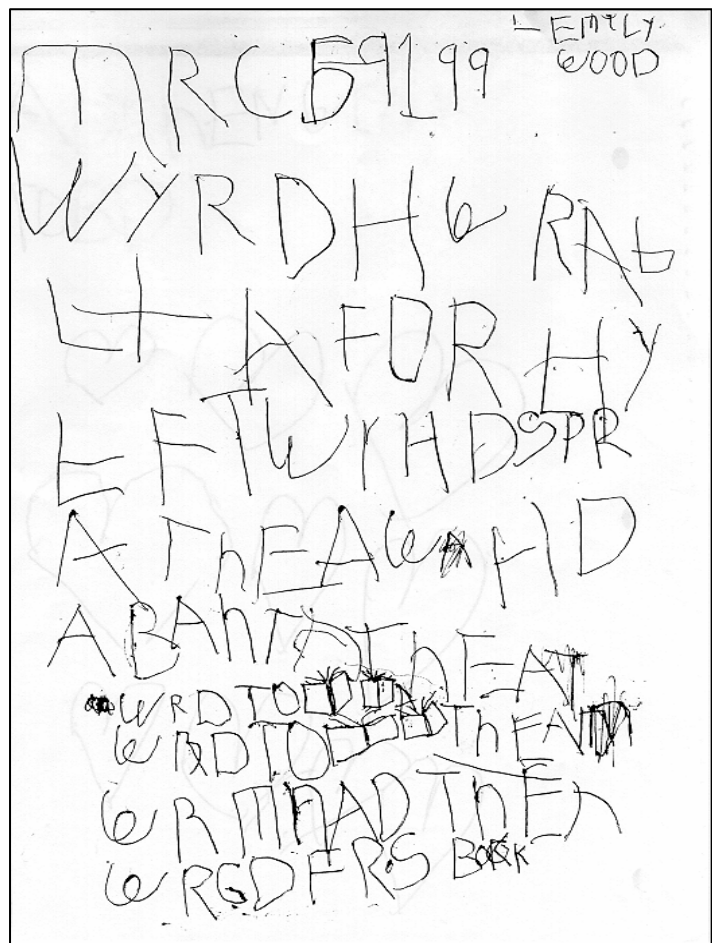


Figure 15: Godfrey's Journal entry (age 6)

We rode home with rob/ert after he / left we had supper / and then we had / a bath and then / we read two books / we read two books that / were mine and then / we read Godfrey's book

her own entry (see Figure15). When Emily return the log to the class Ms. K praised Emily's writing and asked her to read her writing to the class. Ms. K's reaction to Emily's writing demonstrates to me that she was not conscious of the tacit message Emily understood from the state inspired pedagogy used in the class. After this Emily occasionally chose to do writing at school during "free-time" but she still continued to passively look to Ms. K for direction and her learning at school.

This is not to say all of Emily's experiences in Ms. K's classroom were negative; she has fond memories of her time in Ms. K's class, and it is possible that this experience is what helped Emily move from experimental to more conventional writing. She certainly learned how to do what was required of her in a school setting. Her writing increased as her confidence increased and she was prepared for the new experience that greeted her in the first grade.

First Grade Writing

Emily's first grade classroom was very different pedagogically from her kindergarten class. This classroom was a multi-age class of first and second grade students and two teachers. The structure was very free and student focused. Mr. V and Ms. E divided their roles along lines of their personal curricular interests and not by grade level. Their pedagogical approach was about sharing power with students, and the students taking ownership of their own learning. The class was very active and hands on; Emily's fondest memories are of the experiments they did and the many class pets and plants the students

cared for. The students regularly left the classroom for investigations, reading buddies, to do research in the library, to do drama, or just to change venue. The year was loosely focused around a year-long inquiry into Lewis and Clark but was focused on, and was flexible to, the needs, interests, and

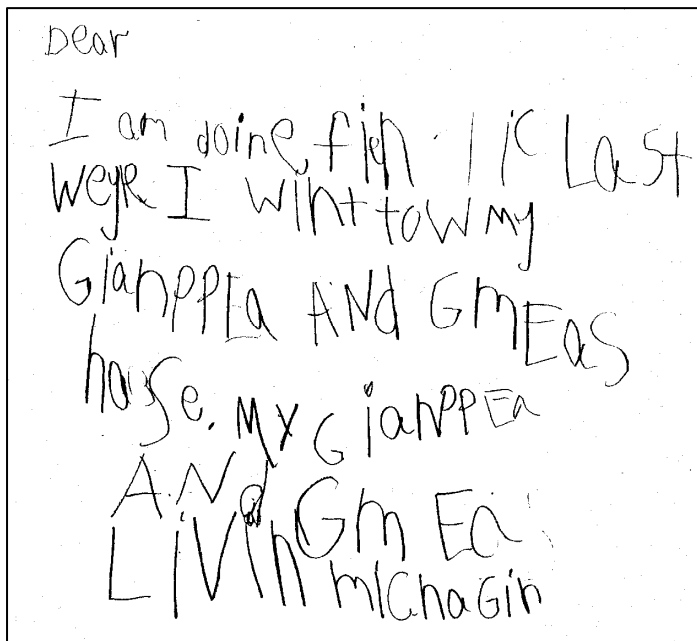


Figure 16: One of Emily pen pal letter (age 6)

Dear XXXX / I am doing fine. Last / week I went to my / grandpa and grandma's / house. My grandpa and grandma live in Michigan.

questions of the students. Writing was seen as a vital part of all of these activities. Emily also regularly wrote for authentic purposes in this class; she had pen pals at the nearby university (see figure 16) and at a school in a different country, she wrote book reports and plays, and she and her classmates wrote letters to members of government to affect changes in her community. Writing was used and viewed by her teachers as a form of communication and a tool for social change. This tacit message of literacies, and specifically writing, as a source of personal and societal change is something that began to permeate Emily's writing and is a perspective she maintains today. The tacit messages being conveyed in this classroom worked in concert with Emily's own beliefs about literacies, extending and expanding them. The change was not only theoretical in nature but also in a measurable and conventional sense as well;

her writing continued to expand in volume and quality. Emily took this experience and used writing as a tool to try to influence

Frst of all I want a Rate
 be kose they are
 Route + Soft. Sakind of all
 I want a Rate be kose
 I have had I sperce with
 them I am willing
 to take care of it, and I
 will make sure that
 the rat unless somebody
 is holding it, I will feed
 the rate when it needs
 to be ~~fed~~ fed

Figure 17: Emily’s letter for a pet rat (age 7)

First of all I want a rat / because they are / cute and soft. Second of all / I want a rat because / I have had experience with / them. I am willing / to take care of it. And I / will make sure that / the rat [is in its cage] unless somebody / is holding it. I will feed / the rat when it needs / to be fed.

decisions made at home as well (see figure 17); this letter was written at the end of the year to successfully convince Christine and me to allow Emily to have a pet rat, after her class’s pet rats had babies.

In many ways this pedagogy in Emily’s class was very consistent with what I believe in as an educator: student directed learning,

INDIAN PROJECT EVALUATION

Name Emily

Type of dwelling Prairie / tipi

Brought project in on time	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Brought in completed rubric	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Presented to the class	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
Answered questions about the project	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

What we really love about the project We can tell you put a lot of work into this project! The background really adds a lot!

Areas for improvement Be sure you know what is written on your rubric sheet.

Figure 18: Sample of a first grade rubric. (age 7)

centres, and an inquiry approach. But there were also things I had a difficult time understanding as an educator: the obsession with grading was overwhelming; every piece of data Emily brought home from this class has a grade or comment on it (see figure 18), there was also a rigidity in the way things were evaluated and graded; for example when we decided Emily would be better off without spelling tests her teachers refused to give her a grade on spelling instead of evaluating the spelling she used in her writing.³ Both of these pedagogical features seem to be strongly influenced by the larger 'American educational discourse' and were strongly encouraged by the school administration and other parents. Much like the emphasis on testing, this is a discourse, as a Canadian educator, that I was unfamiliar with. These pedagogical characteristics would seem to be in conflict with the overall pedagogy of the class but were essentially transparent to Emily and did not conflict with the tacit pedagogy of student ownership in the class.

In the same way that Emily's kindergarten class set up a conflict between what Emily understood about writing and what was valued as writing, her first grade class confirmed and reinforced these beliefs and practices. These two classrooms reflect the value laden nature of curriculum and literacies instruction. The tacit and expressed beliefs of our pedagogy have the ability to support or undermine the literacies beliefs of our students.

³ Her teachers need to be commended for honoring our desires to have Emily stop her spelling tests without question or challenge.

Grade Two Writing

Emily's grade two experience was interesting. We had moved back to Ontario, Canada to a city just outside of Toronto. Emily loved being close to family again but missed her friends in Bloomington. And we as a family suffered from the culture shock of returning to place we thought we knew but saw through new eyes. Emily attended the neighbourhood school.

This year was very conflicted pedagogically. Emily's teacher was a new teacher in her first year. Ms. U was progressive in her approach to teaching but the school was very traditional pedagogically and Ms. U was under constant pressure to follow the practice of the much older, and experienced, staff

members. This was further conflicted because this was a split grade one/two class; the new Ontario Curriculum had very specific expectations for each grade but no supporting materials for how to address these within a split grade.

This resulted in what could only be called an eclectic pedagogy. Reading and writing were valued in this class, but they were tightly

<u>WRITING A MATHEMATICAL STORYBOOK</u> <u>PLANNING PAGE</u>	
TITLE:	<u>Nancy two-three</u> (A MATHEMATICAL STORYBOOK)
WRITTEN BY -	<u>Emily Wood</u>
GRADE	<u>2</u> © 2001
PAGE 1 - Introduction (Who? Where? What?)	
<u>Hi I'm Nancy I</u> <u>live in a mansion with</u> <u>my family.</u>	
PAGE 2 - Event	
<u>Our family lost our</u> <u>money but guess what?</u> <u>I found five cents in my</u> <u>dad's old wallet.</u>	
PAGE 3 - Event	
<u>I have great news! I found</u> <u>ten dollars in an ^{old} rat hole.</u>	

Figure 19: Typical planning worksheet (age 8)

controlled by the teacher; literacies were treated as multiple with the integration of many subject areas and literacies but the vast majority of the work done in the class related to a worksheet in one form or another (see figure 19). The class had regular spelling tests but Emily was allowed to be exempt when we requested that she not be given them. I started the year volunteering in Emily's class one afternoon a week, but in the spring I was told my help was no longer needed in the class.⁴

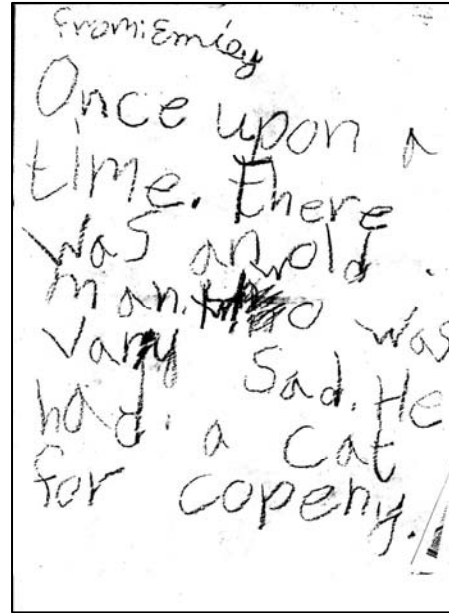


Figure 20: Page from a story written at home. (age 7)

From: Emily / Once upon a / time, there / was an old / man who was / very sad. He had a cat /for company.

Emily was given spelling tests with the rest of the class immediately after this occurred; Christine and I were not consulted. Emily responded by totally acquiescing to the teacher's instructions but unlike kindergarten she continued to write while at home (see figure 20).

I found this year very fascinating as an educational researcher. Ms. U did so many things that were consistent with what I did in my class and what I wanted to see Emily doing. Assessment in the class was done through using portfolios, literacies and subjects were integrated, there wasn't a compulsive need to assign a grade to everything, reading was valued and personal choice of books was encouraged.⁵ But, there were still the worksheets that seemed ubiquitous throughout Emily's time in school, there were tests, and there was a

⁴ I have suspicions as to why this was, but was not given a reason.

⁵ It is interesting to note that the class was located adjacent to the library, with an adjoining door.

return to the sense of teacher-control that was prevalent in Emily's kindergarten class. I find it remarkable that Emily remembers little from this class, it being her last year to attend school, and that some of the memories she ascribes to this class were actually from her first grade class.

Many of the assignments in this class integrated reading, writing, math, science, and/or art. Writing was constantly encouraged and

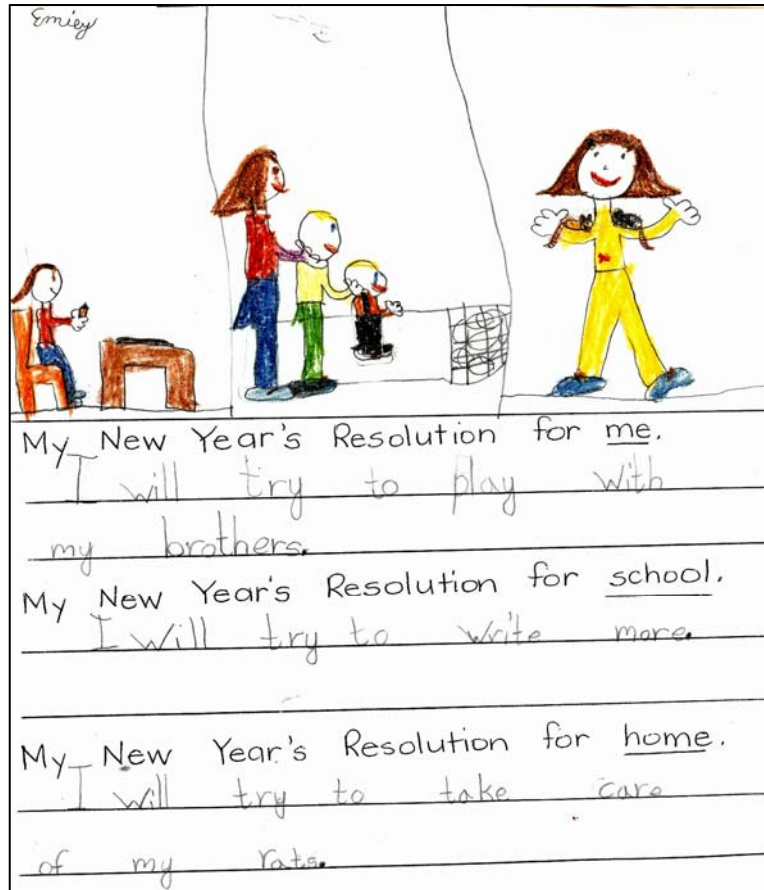


Figure 21 A New Year resolution worksheet. (age 7)

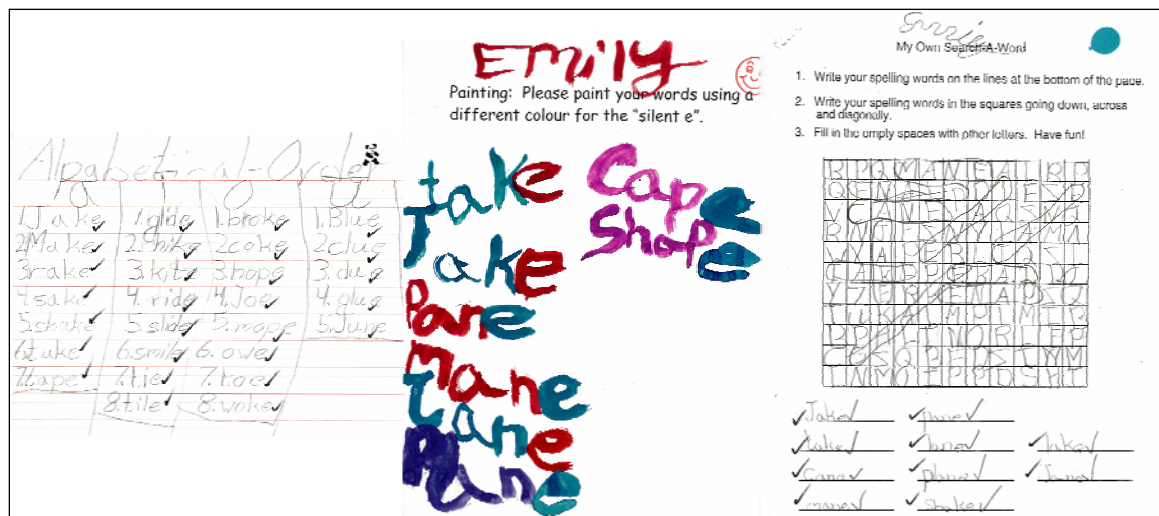


Figure 22: A series of spelling activities (age 8)

expected. It was the main mode of communication about learning (see figures 19 & 21). There were many times when Emily was to write for the sake of writing but the content was tightly controlled (see figure 21) or included one of a whole series of spelling activities (figure 22). This series was typical, though there are some samples that include an even more expanded practice of spelling words. Before Emily was required to do the spelling activities and tests she would typically read or finish other work at these times. Though Emily remembers little from this year of schooling she still excelled at the game of school, continuing to meet or exceed the provincial expectations for her grade. It is interesting that during each year Emily was in school she performed well against the standards imposed by the state, yet it is only her time in first grade that she remembers positively and it was during this year that she experienced explosive growth in her literacies use and understanding.

Emily's Writing at Home While She Attended School

During the time Emily attended school we supported her as a capable and successful literacies user at home. We gave Emily supplies, praise and an environment that respected and valued the work she was doing as a writer. While she was in first grade this was a message that reinforced what she understood from school, but the rest of time she spent in school this acted as a counter-narrative.

With the exception of the brief, six month, time during which she stopped writing, she wrote on an almost daily basis while at home, for her own pleasure

and to share with others. Emily is a writer and the literacies she preferred to use during this time period were reading and writing. Christine and I did our best to support this with continued trips to the library and other activities and community programs in a similar manner to what we did before she started school. The significant difference being that, after Simon had been born and Emily had stopped writing, we were much more conscious of doing things with Emily to support her current interests and needs, not for some future goal or intention. When Emily stopped writing Christine and I took serious stock of what we were doing with Emily at home and examined our practices and rationales for them, looking for inconsistencies and eradicating them when discovered. We focused on who Emily, and the boys, were and did our best to live and support them in the moment and helping them where they were at and not necessarily where we thought they should be going. This doesn't mean that our home life was suddenly transformed in to a pedagogically consistent paradise; it was not, but we changed our focus from encouraging the children in their learning that was expected by societal norms and to simply enjoying who they were as people.

Emily has always loved to write. She has never been hung up on spelling and has always placed a great emphasis on meaning in her work. During Emily's time in first grade she continued to blossom as a writer. She continued to use scribble writing in her journal and for notes she wrote for herself, though this type of writing started to wane from regular use. Emily started to emphasize printing and personal writing in the messages she posted and gave out to friends and family (see figure 23). She started to experiment with her writing, adding

punctuation and experimenting with different font types and genres. Her confidence had returned fully. Emily saw herself as a writer and as capable. She started to help Christine with different writing tasks around the house, often writing out the shopping list for Christine and making signs for the dramas she and Tristan were playing. She started to see literacies not only as something she was doing for herself but as capable of influencing her life, and she started to try to influence family members through writing (see figure 17).

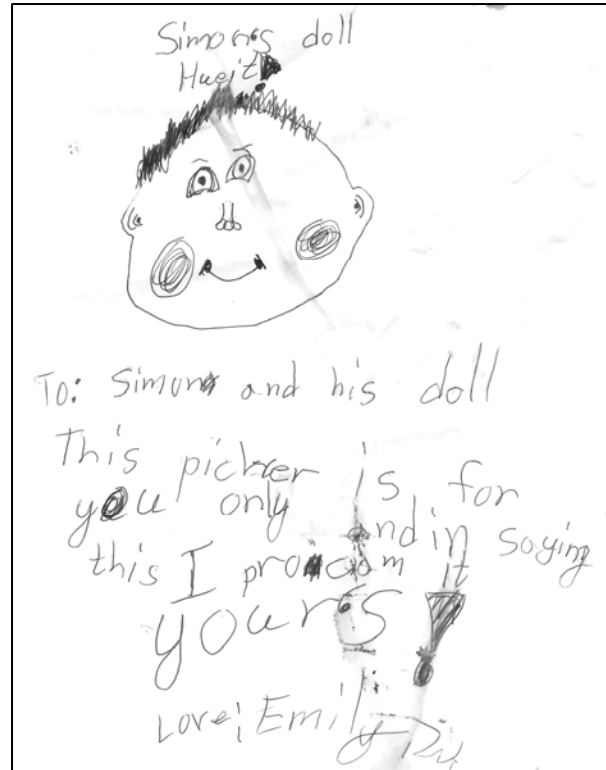


Figure 23: Picture for Simon and Hoyt (age 7)
Simon's doll / Hoyt!
To: Simon and his doll / This picture is for / you only and saying / this I proclaim it / yours! / Love: Emily W.

Emily continued to write and develop her understanding of writing while at home during grade two. She regularly wrote to her friends in Indiana, specifically

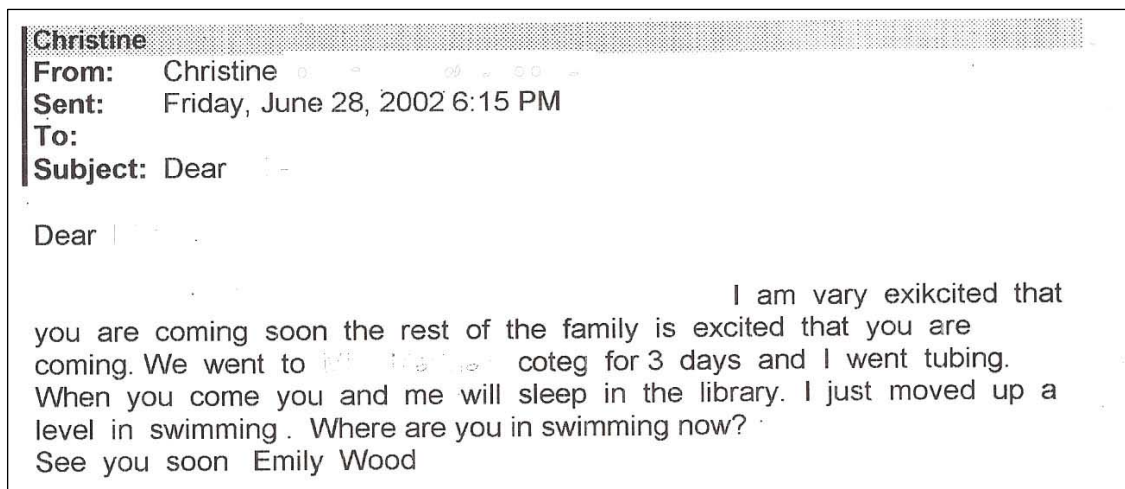


Figure 24: Emily's email to a friend in Indiana (age 9)

one girl she developed a strong friendship with in kindergarten. They regularly wrote to each other, either in letters or by email (see figure 24) and through the experience of this correspondence Emily started to write letters to other friends and family. It is also interesting that as Emily started to explore this new genre, other forms of writing that she was beginning to master in her letter writing, such as spelling, grammar and other conventions, seemed to be forgotten while she focused on the form of writing. I suspect that this was further complicated by her learning how to use the keyboard in addition to the nuances of email as a form/genre of writing. It appears that she chose to focus on the orthographic features of email writing and in so doing needed to ignore other aspects of writing. Because these were public texts Emily took advantage of our drafting process and all that remains are my research notes and the final copies, as Emily did not save drafts.

Emily continued to explore writing outside of school, sometimes incorporating what was expected of her at school while at other times developing as a writer in spite of what she was being taught in school. Writing was a way that Emily constructed meaning and explored her understanding of the world. With her discovery of the internet and email her ability to communicate with friends and learn about the world beyond our immediate family and friends expanded. Home was a place where Emily could safely explore writing and her role as a writer.

Emily and Unschooling

After grade two Christine and I decided to try unschooling (Holt, 1989) with the children. This is a pedagogy that enacts a pure form of constructivist pedagogy; the children have a choice in what, when and where they want to learn. Christine and I act as facilitators of this learning, occasionally imposing limits (e.g. encouraging Emily to stop reading and play with her brothers and choose other activities, or limiting the children's videogame play to one hour each a day). This choice was not one that we made against the school system, but because we felt we could offer a better education for our children; one that is specifically designed to meet their needs, interests, and learning styles, and pace. This type of child-focused constructivist pedagogy is something that was extremely difficult to enact within the Ontario Curriculum that existed in schools in Ontario at the time. This is also not saying that there were not excellent teachers who were trying to enact innovative pedagogy within this curriculum; we just felt that the needs of our children could be best met through unschooling. This decision to unschool the children was one that was made in concert with the children and is one that we revisit each summer.

Emily continued to explore writing regularly during this time. Her use of varied genres continued to increase, the lessons she learned in her first grade class were consolidated and she regularly used writing to change, affect and communicate with the world around her. Emily regularly wrote notes, cards, invitations (see figure 25), and poetry (see poem on page 69). The house became filled with signs that she made for herself and for the boys. She made

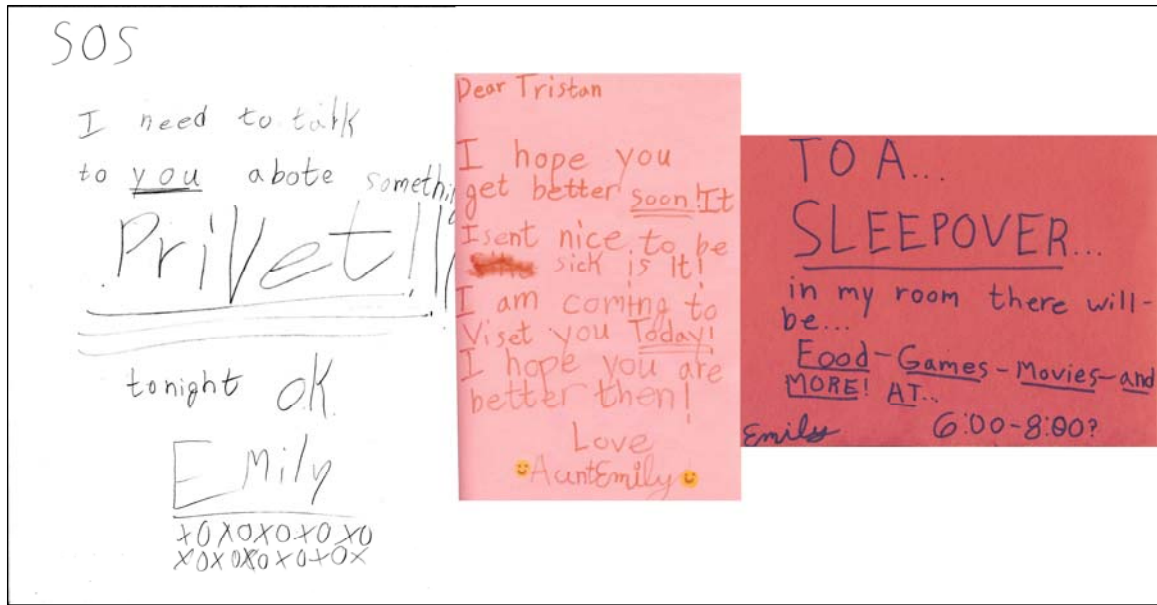


Figure 25: Emily's writing to family members, in dramatic role and out. (age 9) signs to control access to different locations of the house, like her room or the playroom, to advertise for events she was planning, or as a part of elaborate dramatic plays she created with Tristan and Simon. Emily started to use writing as a way of expressing herself and sharing what she knows with others. She started to write book reports, and project reports for home schooling group get

together (see figure 26). On this project report you will notice Christine's spelling suggestions; conventional spelling was never emphasized in our home and anytime the children wanted to write conventionally we first required at least one draft (not necessarily the whole

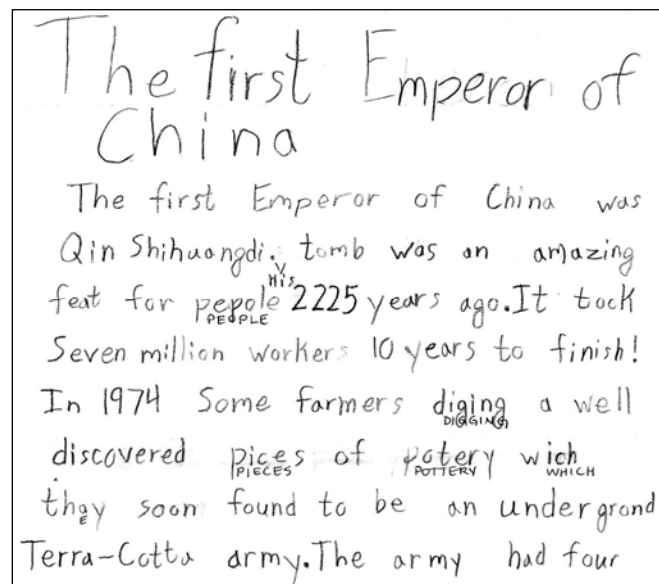


Figure 26: Final Draft of the Emperor China project (top 1/2) (age 10)

composition but the words they wanted checked)⁶.

Emily started to keep a journal and started to write stories that went beyond those she had always written for herself but were written for specific audiences (see Figure 27). She also started to create her own lists for when we

Two Friends

p.1 – To: Tristan, Simon, Jeffrey, and Christine

p.2 –The little boy was walking down the street and he saw a little girl.

p.6⁷ – The little boy said, “my name is Simon, what is your name?”
“My name is Mary.” said the girl.

p.3 –The girl said, “Do you want to come over and play?” The little boy said, “Yes I will come over at 3:10.”

p.4 – The little boy gave the little girl his phone number and she gave him hers, then the little boy went home.

p.5 – The little boy went to the little girl’s house and they played and watched Ice Age on the little girl’s T.V.

Figure 27: Transcript from Emily’s story. (age 10)

went on trips or did anything special. These are all things she chose to do on her own; Emily’s was not a choice of a certain number of things that she could do throughout the day, she had choice to do whatever she wanted to do. If she wanted to read all day she could (later we sometimes imposed the aforementioned limits on all activities to specifically encourage interaction between the children) and she chose to write in some form or another almost every day. The thing that has amazed me about Emily’s writing is that her spelling and use of grammar steadily became more conventional over time, even though she has received very little direct spelling instruction (all of the samples

⁶ Emily only took advantage of this process when she wanted to publish something beyond family and close friends. Tristan regularly asked for this editing process regardless of what he wrote.

⁷ This page was added at the end as an editorial addition and was intended to be in this order.

used in this chapter are, with the exception of the email, drafts). It seems as she developed greater experience with a literacy she was able to pay more and more attention to conventional understanding without limiting her use of that literacy.

Throughout this time Christine and I made a more conscious effort to support the children in learning what they want to learn, instead of teaching them what we thought they need to learn. At times this was difficult, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5, but we have enormous faith in our children and that they, as human beings, are capable and able to learn all they need and want to learn. We believed, and still believe, that given the right environment and setting they would constantly want to learn, and they have. This was furthered by our practice of not directly answering the children's questions but answering with a question, or more commonly, "what do you think?" or "why don't we try to find out?" We always supported the children in these investigations but did our best not to assume that what we knew was the best answer. We also believed that the process of finding the answers to their questions was more valuable than the answers to those questions.

Christine and the children started the process of writing a bi-monthly newsletter, the Jubilee Journal, which grew out of the yearly update we send to friends and family at New Years and the newspapers we received at home. Christine and the children had the idea that they wanted to start their own newspaper. The children contributed article on topics they were researching, things they were doing, stories they had written, or an interview they conducted, and Christine would do the editing and layout. This gave the children a specific

audience for their writing and meant that at least once every two months they took a piece of writing through the authoring cycle (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996). Emily was a regular contributor to this journal and very excited about sharing her work. An important thing to add is that this journal and its content are decided by the children and is derived from work they are currently investigating; all that the journal did was provide an audience for this work⁸.

As an example of how this works; the children were very interested in geography and specifically different countries since we started unschooling. In our dining room there is a large map for the children to reference anytime and it was something often discussed during meals. The children and Christine labelled the map with names of friends and family and the places they lived. As the children asked questions about different places we encourage them to contact the people we might have known that lived there, we borrowed books, movies and audio material from the library, investigated through the internet and on several occasions visited the location, when it was relatively local. The children would then write about the chosen location as an article in the Jubilee Journal, taking the article through the authoring cycle.

Overview of Emily's Literacies Uses and Understandings

Emily used writing as an extension of who she is as a person, and in powerful life changing ways. Though, for simplicity's sake, I teased Emily's

⁸ The Jubilee Journal was not actually published until after the data collection for this project stopped. But for over two years the children made contributions and were very interested in publishing it; it just took Christine and me a while to figure out the logistics. The journal has been published regularly for the past two years

writing out of her literacies use, she was always using literacies as multiple. For her, literacies were social and used for communication and to influence the world around her. Literacies were not only transformative, they defined who she saw herself as; they define and are defining. Emily is and has always been a capable literacies user, though I have not always recognized this in her.

Written text is all around us in our society and it was the primary way in which Emily communicated with the world. She was constantly writing. The more she wrote the better a writer she became, in terms of content of her ideas and in her use of convention. Spelling was not something we focused on as being important in our family and yet as Emily wrote her spelling consistently improved. As Emily used writing to communicate with others and as she took her writing through the editing process her understanding of convention and genre were expanded. It seems as though as Emily increased her experience with writing through writing (and reading) she improved as a writer.

As I saw this steady improvement in Emily's understanding of writing, and other literacies, I began to trust in Emily as a literacies learner. Through Emily my understanding of literacies was transformed; preparing me to better understand and see Tristan's and Simon's literacies uses and understandings.

CHAPTER 5

TRISTAN

“...traditional definitions of literacy are no longer adequate in a world where texts communicate to us in new ways.” – Sharon Goodman (1996)

*The Trees
are
Dancing
with
the Wind¹*

Tristan never ceases to amaze and teach me new things. He sees the world in amazing complexity and uses this complex perception and understanding to his advantage. He sees, uses and explores literacies constantly, prompting me to expand what I previously considered literacies. It was Tristan's use of the world around him to understand and create that forced me to start exploring the concept that all sign systems are more than supports for reading and writing but are in and of themselves literacies. His amazing ability to deal with complexity convinced me that we need to develop more complex theories of literacies, not just rely on the simplest.

Even when he sits down and read a book in the solitude of his room, which he often does, but when he does he is always making connections between the book and his lived experiences, other books, and other literacies. He uses multiple literacies simultaneously to make, understand and construct meaning. He uses the literacies of dramatic play, writing and building together in complex literate ways. This is part of Tristan's attraction to videogames; they use

¹ Poem by Tristan Age 9

multiple literacies in multimodal ways to engage the gamer in a literate experience and they reflect the way he prefers to engage with literacies.

Tristan's Literacies Uses

Tristan's story cannot really be teased apart from Emily's, though in an effort to make this story understandable to others I have created this arbitrary division. Emily and Tristan are certainly their own people; as mentioned earlier, Tristan learns and understands the world very differently from either Emily or myself. But Tristan's uses and understandings of literacies have been strongly influenced by Emily. She has been Tristan's primary playmate for his whole life. Tristan has an easy time making new friends and is immediately part of any new group he meets but he has always looked to Emily and values her company above all others even, I think, more than Christine and mine.

Tristan has often joined Emily in dramatic play since he was about one and half years old. Emily would include him as a part of her play, initially in a domineering manner but later with a more considerate and cooperative nature. They would often play together with cars, Barbies, building with blocks or Lego®, but, most interesting to me, they would also engage in complex dramatic plays (see figure 28). Emily would design the play, as discussed in the previous chapter, and Tristan would enact the role he was given. They would do this for hours at a time, though occasionally Tristan would adlib too much, upsetting Emily, or other times he would decide he wanted to do something else. On

these occasions rather than abandon the dramatic play Emily would incorporate the activity Tristan wanted to do, usually including play with cars or blocks, into the drama until he was interested in the drama again.



Figure 28: Tristan and Emily playing “Library” (age 7 & 4)

These were times that were rich with literacies woven throughout the play; blending and intertwining. During these times the stories they knew would be interwoven, creating new stories (see figure 29). Tristan and Emily would become the heroes of the stories and the stories would shift to reflect their local and lived experiences. As time went on this became a more negotiated process, occasionally needing support from either Christine or me, but initially Tristan was happy to go along with Emily’s ideas, thrilled to be playing with her.



Figure 29: “CinderEmily” & “Prince Tristan” (age 6 & 3)

After just over six months of playing like this we were given a TV (we had

previously made the choice not to have one). Just less than one month later, at 2 years of age, Tristan's interest in dramatic play completely disappeared and he stopped joining Emily in these elaborate dramas. It was Tristan's complete lack of interest in dramatic play that alarmed Christine and me the most, more than the change in Emily's dramatic play, which prompted us to return the TV.

Tristan resumed his interest in dramatic play after we moved to Indiana, when he was two and a half years old. Two things seemed to trigger this

happening: the removal of the TV and

the birth of his brother Simon. For

Tristan the birth of Simon was a

traumatic experience; he was excited

about the idea of having a brother to

play with but was very disappointed

when Simon wasn't capable of doing

much more than lying on his back and

demanding Christine's and my time.

Life was not fair. He recovered quickly

and shifted his attention to Emily, who

was away at school for half the day

during the week. He was not used to

playing alone and was intently interested in interaction from family members.

Emily was not very interested in building and playing cars, though she was willing



Figure 30: Tristan & Emily playing at dance (age 3 & 6)

to do these activities; her favourite activities were drama and dance (see figure 30). So, Tristan was drawn back into the world of dramatic play.

Until Tristan started to see himself as a reader at the age of eight the different forms of dramatic play were Tristan's favourite form of literacy to construct meaning. He would create rich and complex imaginary worlds with Emily (and Simon, when he was older). These complex dramas would carry on for days and sometimes even weeks. They would take on three main forms: live action dramas, Playmobil® setups, and puppet shows. These dramas were times for experimenting and through them Tristan worked hard to figure out his place in the world. By their nature these dramas were rich multiliteracies events. The children would spend the majority of their time setting up the drama; this setup could take days, creating the world either they or the Playmobil people would interact with. This setup involved detailed negotiations as the children constructed the shape the drama would take and shared resources. There was always a jockeying for favourite roles and materials.

Writing was a vital part of these dramas and it was through these dramatic plays that Tristan did most of his experimenting with writing. Since the writing done during these plays was part of his imaginary world, Tristan did not seem to feel the same need to comply to conventions that he did when writing outside of the context of a dramatic play. Some of the writing he did was part of the setup and was used to put limits on who had access to the



Figure 31: No trespassing sign (age 6)

play (see figure 31). Much of this writing took the form of signs and was used to convey meaning during the dramatic play like this one used during Hot Wheels play (see figure 32). At other times this writing would be an integral part of the drama like this supply list Tristan created and used during a long complex dramatic play (see figure 33). The fascinating thing about these two samples is that they were made late 2002 - early 2003; a time when Tristan had stopped writing anything other than perceived conventions and insisted on asking for help with everything he wrote. But during his dramatic play he felt the freedom to use invented/personal writing forms.



Figure 32: No green trucks. Red and purple ok (age 6)

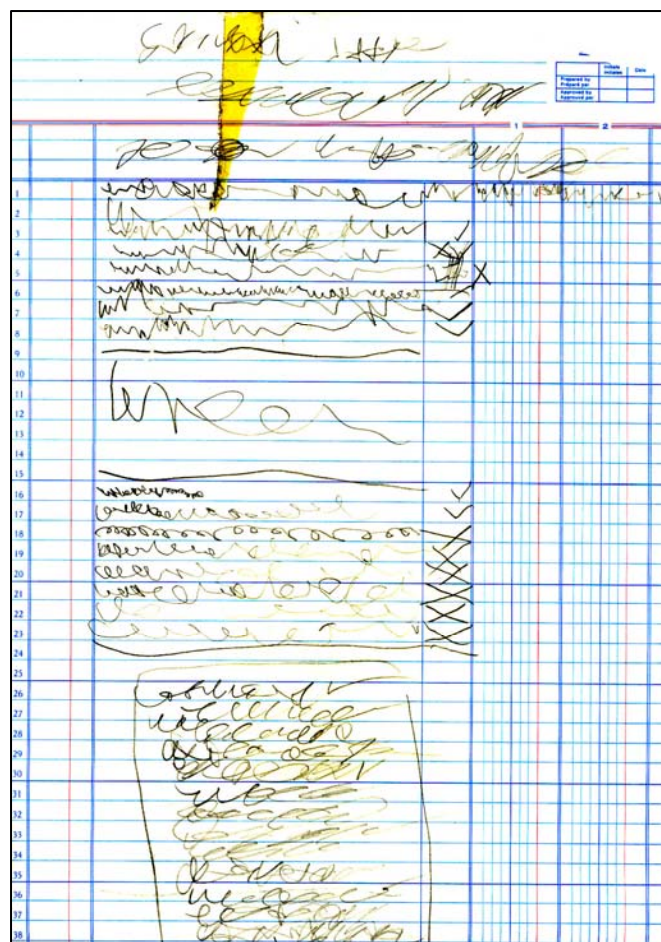


Figure 33: List of supplies needed for a dramatic play that was taped outside his room. (age 7)

Tristan as a Writer

It was when Tristan was two years old and we had the television, that I first recognized him as writer and started saving his work for analysis. This writing, like Emily's, was in the form of scribbles (see figure 34). As with Emily's writing, I am certain that Tristan was writing before this time, but this is when Tristan started to describe his work as writing and made the distinction between it and

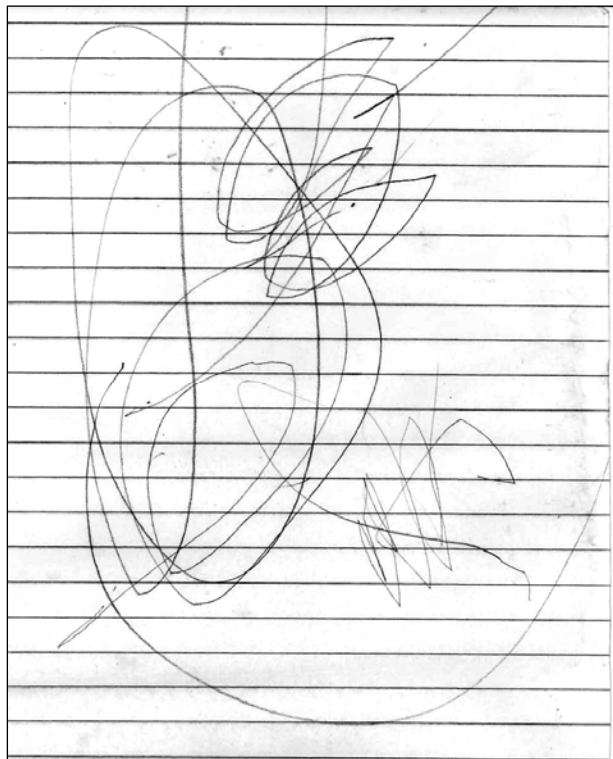


Figure 34: Tristan's scribble writing/drawing. (age 3)

his art (see figure 35). It is difficult to say whether Tristan's writing was modeled on Emily's scribble writing or if, like Emily, he was trying to express a common feature they both saw in writing, possibly the swirling flow of the cursive writing Christine and I frequently used when we wrote.

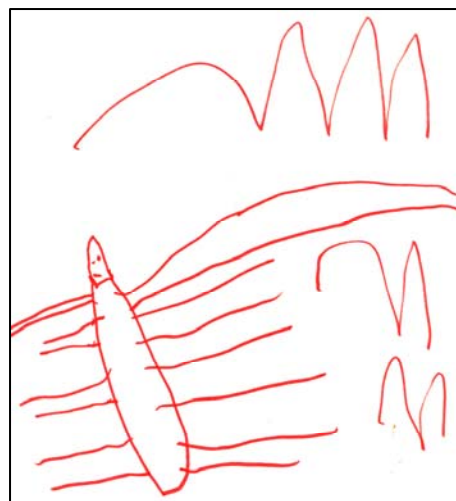


Figure 35: A later example of Tristan distinguishing between writing & drawing. (age 4)

Tristan, like Emily, continued to use scribble writing after he was capable of using

letters and was experimenting with personal spelling. But with Tristan, during this

period, the letters consistently appear at the top of the page and then the rest is finished in scribble writing (see figure 36).

For Tristan there has been a very deliberate and steady progression toward conventional writing. You will notice that the orientation of the scribbles in figure 36 was unimportant; in this sample they are vertical as opposed to the horizontal one



Figure 36: Tristan's later scribble writing (age 4)

would expect. At this point in Tristan's understanding of writing (age 4) he continued to use scribbles but they were clearly a placeholder for his thoughts but he did not consider them "real writing" and described them as "just scribbles". Shortly after this time Tristan stopped using scribbles and only wrote with letters in what he believed to be "real writing" (see figure 37).

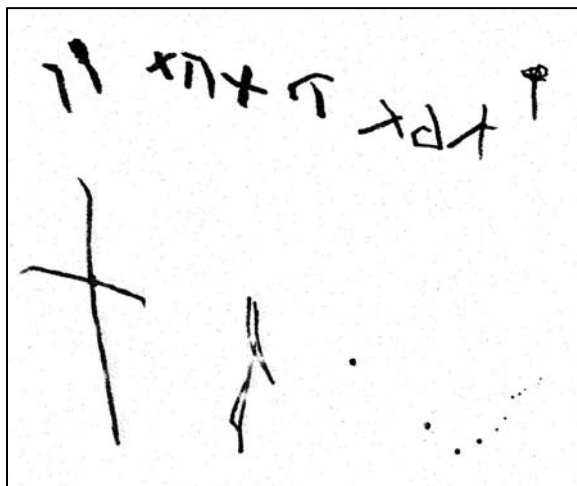


Figure 37: Letter to Tristan's Bible study teachers (age 4)

To my Teachers from / Tristan

This was a very frustrating time for Tristan and me. Tristan became

increasingly focused on accuracy and was very aware of what he called “the right way to write.” I, believing in the importance of process writing, insisted that Tristan first write a draft before I would help with conventional spelling. This approach was very problematic; because unlike my school setting, where often my students were more likely to have received the message that conventions were important from home and, tacitly, that personal meaning was unimportant, Tristan had always been given the message that meaning above all else is what is important in writing. He knew this message and was rejecting it, in favour of what he saw in books, Emily’s writing, and adult writing: conventions.

At this time I had also inadvertently started reading Emily’s work without my usual, “wow, great writing, tell me about it.”, which I still used when Tristan presented me with his work. Tristan, being astute, realized that I was saying this because I could not read his writing with any accuracy. I realized this too late, and even though I returned to my “tell me about it” stance anytime Emily presented me with her work, Tristan had decided convention and audience readability were the key elements in writing (see figure 38).

Christine’s approach during this phase of Tristan’s writing, which lasted for the duration of this study period, was to support his requests for conventional

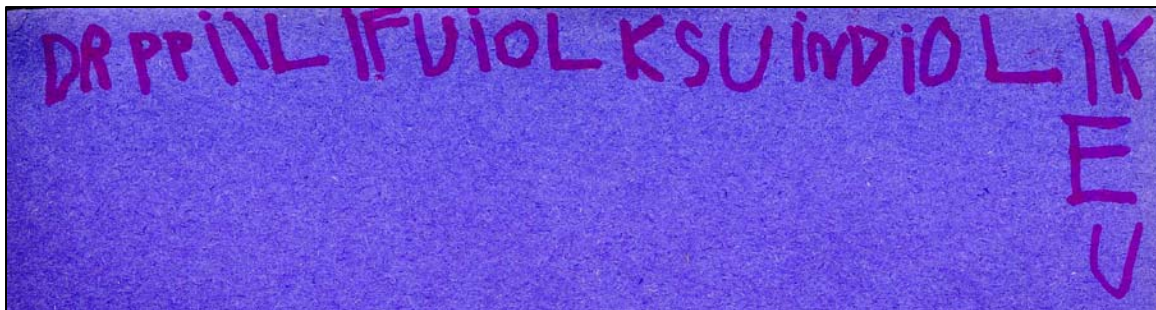


Figure 38: A note to me from Tristan (age 6)

Dear papa I love you I will kiss you and I will hug / you

spelling. If Tristan asked for the spelling of a word she gave it to him. Her reasoning was that “it is better for him to write than not write”, which was his choice anytime I demanded a draft; he chose to not write at all. The writing process was not worth the frustration it caused; on several occasions Tristan’s writing sessions with me would end in tears and with Tristan feeling a failure at writing, because he was not able to “write anything right.” Tristan came to me less and less for assistance with his writing, and I now believe that, since my process writing approach was causing frustration for Tristan, it was not beneficial. With Christine’s assistance Tristan continued to write, and she was able to successfully reintroduce the concept of drafting and other elements of process writing. However, Tristan didn’t see himself as a writer, a pattern which was repeated in his reading.

Tristan as a Reader

Tristan’s approach to reading followed a similar pattern to his writing. Initially he was willing to experiment and attempt to read the texts that surround us in our lives, creating meanings for himself. He was confident in these meanings and didn’t seem to care that when I read a story to him the exact words were not the same. It is possible that Tristan believed, like he did with his early writing, that personal meaning was what was important and that the details were unimportant or certainly less important. He read his own writing with ease and confidence but he also read street signs and other environmental print. He was particularly interested in signs with numbers and would call out the speed

limit as we drove past, often looking at the speedometer in the car and commenting on how accurately I was driving the car, especially if I was going too fast; he seemed to assume that if I was driving faster than the speed limit it was because I was not aware of the discrepancy between the posted limit and the actual speed displayed on the speedometer.

His memory too was remarkable. He would use the signs and other visual cues he read as we were driving to remember the route to various regular activities like the library, but he also remembered the route to less frequently traveled destinations, like how to get to my parent's house in Michigan from where we lived in Indiana. It was this uncanny ability and the way that Tristan and Emily both seemed to be able to accurately read books that had been read to them that led me to the conclusion that they were reading. They both seemed to access the print in a manner that was different than the way we as adults access meaning, in the same way they were writing in a personally meaningful way, to access meaning and create meaning. Clearly, Tristan was reading the text and accessing meaning from signs and picture books in a way that was meaningful but different from the way an adult would. He was also clearly combining literacies to make meaning. When he was reading books he used the pictures and the markings (words) to remember and tell the story in the book; when we were driving he would use the signs, travel time, items of interest to him and landmarks to make meaning.

Though Tristan was able to read familiar books that we read repeatedly to him, he preferred new books. Tristan seemed to be drawn to the new and

resisted the idea of rereading stories. I suspect that this might have been a contributing factor in Tristan reading later than Emily. Tristan seemed to be attracted to the information contained in books, and was drawn to non-fiction, funny stories, and stories with action. It is possible that he didn't want to hear a story more than once because he felt he already knew the information it contained. Even with books he labeled as really good, like *Does a kangaroo have a mother, too?* (Carle, 2000), the *Bill and Pete* books by Tomie dePaola (1998; 1987; 1978) and the *Zoom* books by Tim Wynne-Jones (1992; 1985; 1983) he did not want to have them read over and over again as Emily had. He wanted to hear these stories again only after many months had passed. Additionally, Tristan preferred other literacies for creating and expressing meaning, giving him less practice with reading and writing. This concerned me, as a literacy researcher, because I understood that children need to hear stories frequently and repeatedly to be able to scaffold their learning to learn to read the words on the page. What I didn't realize until much later was that Tristan was using other literacies to making meaning and 'scaffold' his learning when he was reading.

Much like his writing Tristan went into a silent phase in his reading. At the age of six he suddenly decided his approximations and meaning focused reading were not enough. He started to focus on accuracy. This greatly reduced the amount of time that Tristan spent reading independently. He continued to enjoy being read to, and would not go to bed at night until after he was read to, whether it was after his bedtime or not. Tristan continued to have some independent reading time most days as he had the option of staying up for an extra half hour if

he used it to read in bed. He continued to be attracted to books that were new to him. During this time he flatly stated on numerous occasions that he could not read; other times he would say “I have read that book but I don’t know what it says.”

Regardless of how much Christine and I pointed out to Tristan that he was a reader, capable of reading signs and simple pattern books, exposing these capabilities to him regularly, he rejected this idea. He saw Emily, Christine and me reading and writing for pleasure, for school, and for others, and saw himself as an unaccomplished outsider. And there was nothing we could do to help him feel like he was a member of the literacy club (Smith, 1988). It was not until he used his interest in videogaming to access reading that Tristan was able to see himself as a reader (this story is discussed in chapter 7).

Videogaming as a Literate Experience

Seeing how Tristan used his interest in videogaming to join the literacy club inspired me to start to analyze some of his videogaming to really understand how he used it. I had long thought that the imbedded text in videogames would support my children’s interest in reading and writing. Because of this I saw videogames as a valuable support, but not a literacy. Through analysing Tristan’s videogame use I have come to understand that videogames are quite possibly one of the most multimodal literacies there is. The gamer uses reading, math, art, music, and movement to make sense of a world which bombards him/her with visual, auditory, and interactive experiences. Videogaming is potentially a rich

literate experience and it is Tristan's use of videogaming as literacy that changed my mind; convincing me that it is indeed a literacy.

Using Tristan's favourite game², *Ape Escape* (SCEA, 1999), I began to consider and explore the possibility of videogaming as a literacy. It was through Tristan's playing of this game that he demonstrated to me that videogaming is a literate activity. The basic premise of the game is that an evil intelligent monkey has empowered other monkeys in an attempt to take over the world; the gamer assumes the role of Spike who is tasked to capture all the bad monkeys and return them to the zoo. Like most videogames *Ape Escape* advances through progressively complex tasks as the game unfolds. As each new element of the game is introduced there is an oral introduction of it, highlighting the salient points the gamer needs to pay attention to.

In this screen shot (see figure 39) we can see the use of text, numeric notation (for the lap time); times to beat; the times of other players; and a map that indicates where the

player is in relation to the course and to other players.

Tristan took into account of all this information and used it to his advantage to become proficient in the game. Tristan discovered



Figure 39: A screen shot of a mini-game within *Ape Escape*

² That is during 2003.

quite early in his gaming experiences that he did better at the game when he used all of the information presented to him in the game, as opposed to skipping past this information to just advance through the game play. This practice also increased Tristan's enjoyment of the overall game experience, as he gets a great deal of pleasure out of being successful. Other screen shots show the use of written information for the gamer to use. As a part of Ape Escape the gamer has to try to capture escaped monkeys (see figure 40). Each of these monkeys has different attributes: speed, attack and alertness. Also on the screen is the monkey's name, e.g. "Ton Ton," and its level, e.g. "monkey level 2," (on a scale between one and five). Tristan would take in and use all this information very quickly and deduce that this monkey would be easy to capture and devise a plan to capture it using this information. Additionally, the game uses sounds to give an indication of where the monkey is, whether the monkey has detected the gamer's presence, and give an indication of the monkey's response before it is seen. The game also uses a musical sound track that reflects the appropriate emotional state the main character would be in during different parts of the game.

I started to think about videogaming as literacy and tried to understand the cueing systems that Tristan used to make meaning from



Figure 40: A screen shot from Ape Escape

the game as he played. Looking at semantics, or meaning; the semantic purpose of any game is the principle reason why anyone finds a game interesting or boring; to save the world through skill, cunning, and valour is far more attractive to children, and adults, than the rote learning of skills. The meaningful purpose of any game defines its success or failure. Regardless, meaningful engagement on one level or another is what seems to drive videogames and game play. Syntax is the rules that govern the game and game play. Tristan's ability to determine what these rules are and exploit them is one thing that makes him an exceptional gamer. The sensory cueing system in videogaming is one of the most complex and rich of any literacy; it is multimodal and multisensory. The gamer is bombarded with visual, auditory, and interactive experiences to navigate through and understand any game. And finally, each game progresses through a series of levels as the gamer moves from one level to another, gaining skill and pragmatic knowledge of the game which often builds on the gamer's experiences with other games. Videogames are a rich semiotic experience full of multiple signs to help the gamer understand the meaning of the game and the intent of the game's author. Videogame developers are communicating with the gamer in the same way that an author communicates with a reader; through a transactive process. Videogaming is a less valued literacy than reading or writing, but it is a literacy nonetheless. The success of videogames is in their ability to use multiple literacies in a multimodal way to create meaning. The gamer uses reading, maths, art, music, symbols, and movement to make sense of and succeed at the game. Each of the multiple literacies that are used work

together to help the gamer play the game and understand the intended meaning of the author of the videogame. This is the power of videogames. They intentionally use multiple literacies to scaffold understanding and learning for the gamer; creating a rich world in which the intent of the game's author can be clearly understood, often on multiple levels.

Tristan's literate videogaming practice.

The key to Tristan's use of videogames as a literate experience are the practices he engaged in. Videogaming is clearly a language that the game's authors use to communicate with the gamer but it is the way that Tristan used videogaming that made it a literacy for him. Tristan used the full range of literacies together to make meaning of a game and to be successful at his game play. Unlike some gamers who play to just get through the game he tried to maximize his gaming experience, and not only to get past different levels or quests but to be the best and maximize his game score at the same time. To do this Tristan engaged in a number of literate practices while gaming, and beyond playing the game.

When Tristan was gaming he took in all of the information he was bombarded with during game play. He paid attention to details easily missed by the casual user such as the direction of noises and exploring an entire level, discovering many 'secrets' and 'bonuses' as opposed to just linearly working through a level. He often moved backward in a game and re-explored levels when he developed greater skill at the game or his character had acquired new abilities so as to explore the game further in that level. While playing he was

constantly multitasking, paying attention to all the prompts available to him at that time during his game play.

Tristan's use of these multimodal inputs was so complex it was difficult for me to track, even when I was intentionally documenting his game play. It is easy for us, as adults, to discount this complex use of videogaming as literacy because there is so much going on at any moment during the game play that we are not capable of following all that is happening . We simply say that it is impossible for the gamer to be processing all of the information and literacies presented to them in the fast paced instance of game play. But Tristan clearly did take advantage of all the multimodal messages presented throughout game play to take full advantage of and master the game. This became evidently clear to me while I was engaged in learning to play this game myself; Tristan was constantly pointing out various multimodal cues and multiliteracies I needed to take into account to improve my game play. It is the act of videogaming that makes videogames a literacy, not videogames themselves; videogames are a tool or a language. It is the activity and the way the gamer engages with a videogame that makes it a literacy.

Practices in our home that supported Tristan's use of videogaming as a literate experience.

We valued Tristan as a reader, even though he did not see himself as one. We pointed out to him the times he was reading, whether it was making predictions while reading a picture book (or reading a picture book) or reading a street sign. We constantly referred to Tristan as a reader, because Christine and

I saw him as a reader, and we encouraged him. Even though he was eight before he saw himself as a member of the literacy club he received no remediation and at no time did we pressure him to read. We trusted he would see himself as a reader when he was ready.

We also had specific family practices around the use and playing of videogames. First of all, Christine and I valued Tristan's interest in videogaming. I played, and continue to play, videogames with all of our children regularly. Christine and I purchased cooperative and multi-player games for the children but they purchased single player games with their own money. Anytime videogames were purchased, by the children or Christine and me, we researched the game on the internet for both content and playability and made the decision to buy the game as a family. This research was done collaboratively with the children and was usually web based. It is also important to mention that we generally limit videogaming to 1 hr a day and we have a video monitor for this purpose (and watching the occasional movie), but we do not have a television.

Conclusions

Much like Emily, and as has been demonstrated through the way Tristan approached reading, Tristan uses and understands literacies as multiple, both in the way he uses literacies together and what he considers a literacy. Tristan has seriously stretched my thinking in what I even consider a possible literacy. Tristan used literacies to create meaning and understand the world. His use of literacies was always multiple and complex. He saw math, art, games, reading,

writing, drama, and science everywhere and in everything. It was the way he approached everything; it was the way he saw and still sees the world. Tristan's use, learning and understandings of literacies seemed to be in constant flux, as were the preferred literacies he chose to use at any given time, much like the way dramatic play lost favour and then returned to become central.

This complexity had further complications as well; I suspect that it was the multiple nature of Tristan's understanding of literacies that resulted in the apparent delay of some of Tristan's traditional literacy learning, like his reading or writing. It seems possible that in the same way that learning more than one language often causes a delay in acquisition of L1 and L2 but can result in advanced language learning in the end (Cummins, 2000) Tristan's apparent delay was the result of learning more than one literacy at a time, and this will ultimately leave him with a deeper understanding of these literacies.

Tristan taught me that this complexity of understanding and uses of literacies needs an equally complex approach to the way in which we support children's literacies learning. My insistence on process writing was a hindrance instead of a help to Tristan. What I considered literacies was also limited, and constrained the ways I could support him. He showed me that we need to support and value all semiotic systems children are using to making meaning. For children, and specifically Tristan, these sign systems are literacies. These literacies are not used in isolation but support each other in much the same way that Tristan used reading, music and videogames; or reading, writing and dramatic play to make meaning. The use of multiple literacies in this way

enhanced Tristan's experience and the meaning making capabilities of all the literacies he used.



Figure 41: Tristan's flowers, revealing amazing colour sense, movement, and perspective. (age 6)

CHAPTER 6

SIMON

"One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes."
-Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1943)

play

becoming
ourselves

learning

meaningfully
powerfully

play

By the time Simon was born I had learned from the mistakes I had made with Emily and Tristan. This is not to say I didn't make new ones or occasionally repeat errors, but with Simon I was ready to learn - and I was fascinated by all he did. However, I continued to be hampered by my understanding of development as an issue of maturation and did not see him as a capable literacies user until just after he turned one year old. This is not to say that maturation does not occur; children clearly develop physically and this has some effect on what they are capable of doing as literacies producers; but they are using and understanding literacies almost from the time they are born. I first recognized Simon as a literacies user when he took a pencil and started to 'write'¹ in one of Emily's books while we were writing New Years letters and thank you cards together as a family. He clearly wanted to join the family and be part of our writing activity. We quickly stopped him from writing in the book and gave him a

¹ Here I am assuming he is writing and not drawing because we were writing as a family

sheet of blank white paper to use instead (see figure 42). This has been the Simon's preferred way of making meaning and understanding the world

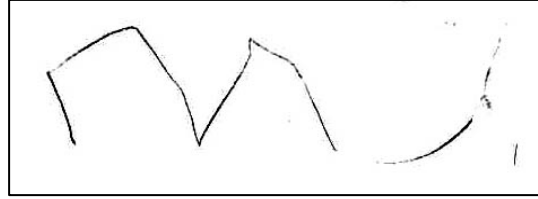


Figure 42: Simon's first scribble

ever since: through writing and drawing. He has used these literacies longer and more frequently than any other and they came to represent more than meaning but to reflect Simon's identity as well.

Simon as a Writer

Simon loves to write and draw. On numerous occasions he has declared "I want to be a cartoonist." And on many of my research notes about his writing is the notation "he just can't get enough of this." He was exactly one year and one month old when I first observed him writing in the instance mentioned above. My research note reads:

Simon Jan. 02/00
 At the beach house
 Simon was up and 'walking' [he was creeping] around.
 He found a pencil and started to 'write' in a book.
 We took the book away and gave him a pad to write on instead.
 He was moving the pencil back and forth holding it close to the eraser.
 He was saying "da, da, da" repeatedly as he wrote.

From that time on Simon loved to write/draw. He would write on every scrap of paper that he could find and his writing and drawing were constant. We made a point of keeping a ready supply of paper available so he never wrote/drew in a book again. It is difficult to say if Simon was drawing or writing at this point in his life, or if he would have made a

distinction between these two literacies, because he was not yet speaking in such defined terms. All of his writing/drawing was composed of scribbles. He would regularly talk at these times leading me to believe that he was using writing and drawing as a meaning making process (see figure 43).



Figure 43: Simon writing (age 1 ½)

When Simon was writing he did not seem to care if the page was blank or already had text printed on it (see figure 44). Christine and I would often give the children drafts of my work to write/draw on. Emily and Tristan only used the blank side of the paper but Simon wrote on both sides of the page, ignoring the existing printed text. Interestingly though, Simon respected the hand written work of others and never wrote over something that Emily or Tristan had made, which would often get

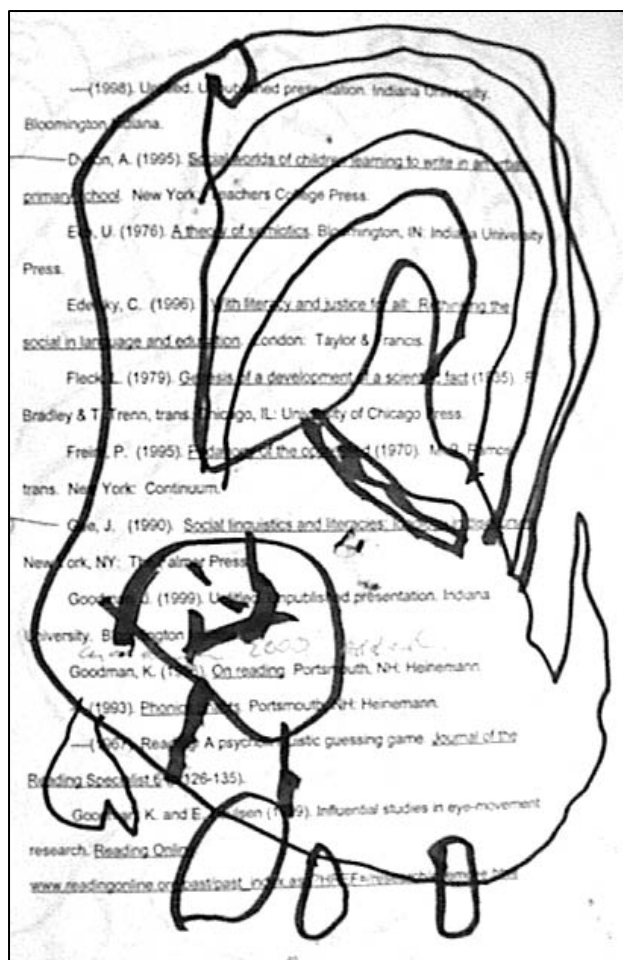


Figure 44: Simon writing/drawing on the front of my drafts (age 4)

mixed in with this paper. This behaviour suggests a possibility that Simon was already making a distinction between printed text, for reading, and writing, or not treating print as text.



Figure 45: Simon's blob writing/drawing (age 2)

Later that same year, while he was two years old, Simon started to experiment specifically with drawing. After doing his regular drawing/writing he would go back and add faces to his work (see figure 45). This later developed into blob figures (see figure 46). It was at this point, just after he turned two, that Simon started to make a clear distinction

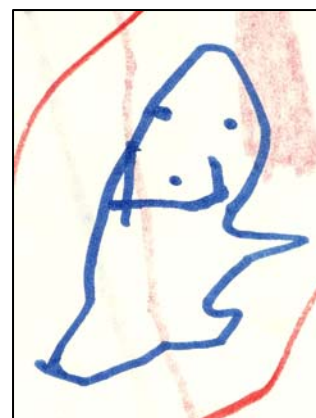


Figure 46: Blob figure (age 3)

between writing and drawing. This is an assumption on my part, the data speaks to a clear distinction between writing and drawing, but Simon was still not able to discuss such nuances. There is a clear difference between his writing -scribbles, and drawing -blobs (with and without faces). At this point Simon also started to produce work that was pure writing or

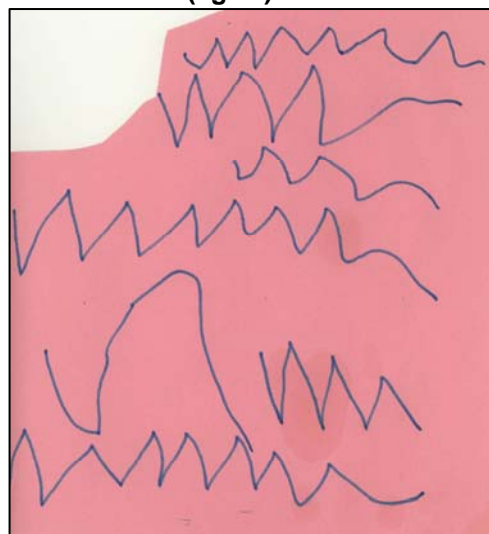


Figure 47: Simon's writing on its own (The drawing is on the back) Meteor Meltdown (age 4)

drawing, though it was rare that he wrote without adding a drawing or drew without adding some writing. He clearly saw them both as meaning making systems that supported each other but as mutually exclusive (see figure 47 & 48). Simon wrote several books using scribble writing and others containing only illustrations.

From the time Simon was four years old he entertained two distinct hypotheses about writing: 1) that writing is a meaning making process and its form is less important than meaning; 2) that writing you share with others must have letters, resulting in him using random letter strings for his writing. These hypotheses translated into Simon's continuation of scribbles as a form of personal writing long after he started using letters in his writing (see figure 48), in much the same way that Emily did. Later, Simon added to this hypothesis that the letters were associated loosely with spoken sounds; resulting in Simon applying a



Figure 48: Scribble book (age 5)

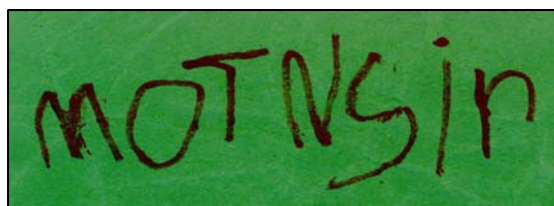


Figure 49: Sign for Doghouse (age 5)
Doghouse

phonetic hypothesis to his writing without having a conventional phonology to his oral language (Simon's articulation was delayed. He had difficulty saying many common sounds including 's', 'er', 'l' and most blends). Thankfully, Simon was ready and willing to orally share his writing (see figure 49). This type of writing started to become prevalent in all of Simon's writing as he started to produce it with family members and friends as the intended audience. He had many older friends who were very gracious and encouraged him in his writing and cartoon production. I find it remarkable that not one of the children Simon shared his work with commented on his peculiar spelling system². I wonder if this has to do with the "*Kindness of Children*" noticed by Vivian Paley (1999). Virtually all the contact Simon had with other children regarding his writing was positive and affirming. I suspect this is more than kindness but a focus on, and a valuing of, meaning making by children that goes beyond my three children. The children Simon interacted with were focused on the meaning of his work, so they did not lord their ability to work accurately over him because accuracy was not even a consideration. It almost seems as if the older children he shared his writing with understood that accuracy is important to adults but in kid culture meaning making was what mattered.

Writing of Numbers

Simon often wrote numbers as a part of his writing. These numbers were always associated with concrete meaning, not dealing with problems or abstract

² I did need to remind Emily and Tristan on a few occasions that Simon was working on meaning. They were only being overly helpful when Simon was writing and they were trying to support him as best they could.

patterns. The types of numbers he often used were our phone number or street address. These numbers rarely related to quantity or volume but to specific meanings (see figure 50). They were frequent in his writing and the fact that they

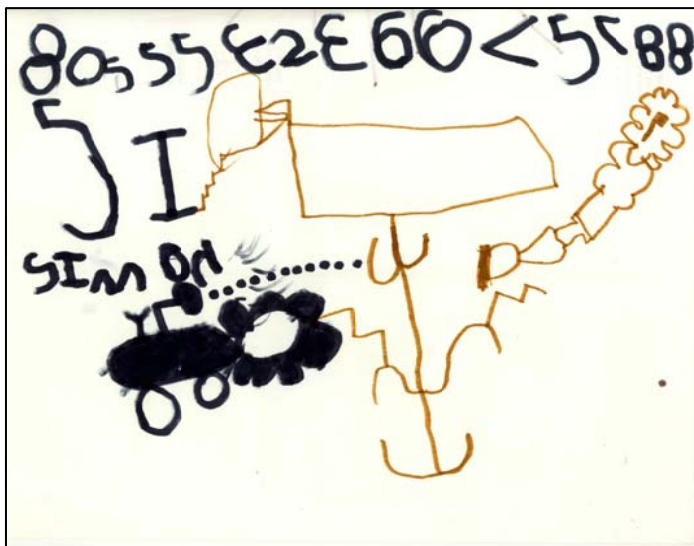


Figure 50: Drawing with a phone number on top (age 5)

were used separately from letters, scribbles and drawing seems to indicate that Simon understood that they were a separate meaning making system. The one area that was the exception to this pattern of number use was Simon's creation of money as a part



Figure 51: Money for dramatic play (age 5)

of his dramatic play (see figure 51) or the inclusion of monetary value for art he had decided to sell (see figure 52). Neither Emily nor Tristan did this type of writing. Both of these monetary explorations occurred simultaneously, while Simon was trying to make sense of the whole concept of money. I suspect that he thought of assigning value to his art to ascribe value to the work he did, to add to his savings and so that he would have more money to give away; Simon is very generous with his money. Equally, the pretend money he made was in part for use in the children's dramatic play, and to give away.

It was these two acts that helped me to see Simon's literacies uses as more than a way of understanding and creating meaning in the world but as an extension of himself. Simon is generous and he used these literacies as a way of extending that generosity beyond his current means. Many of the books and drawings he made were intended from their inceptions to be given away as gifts.



Figure 52: A cut-away car with a family inside. Purchased from Simon for \$1.00 (age 5)

Simon and Drawing

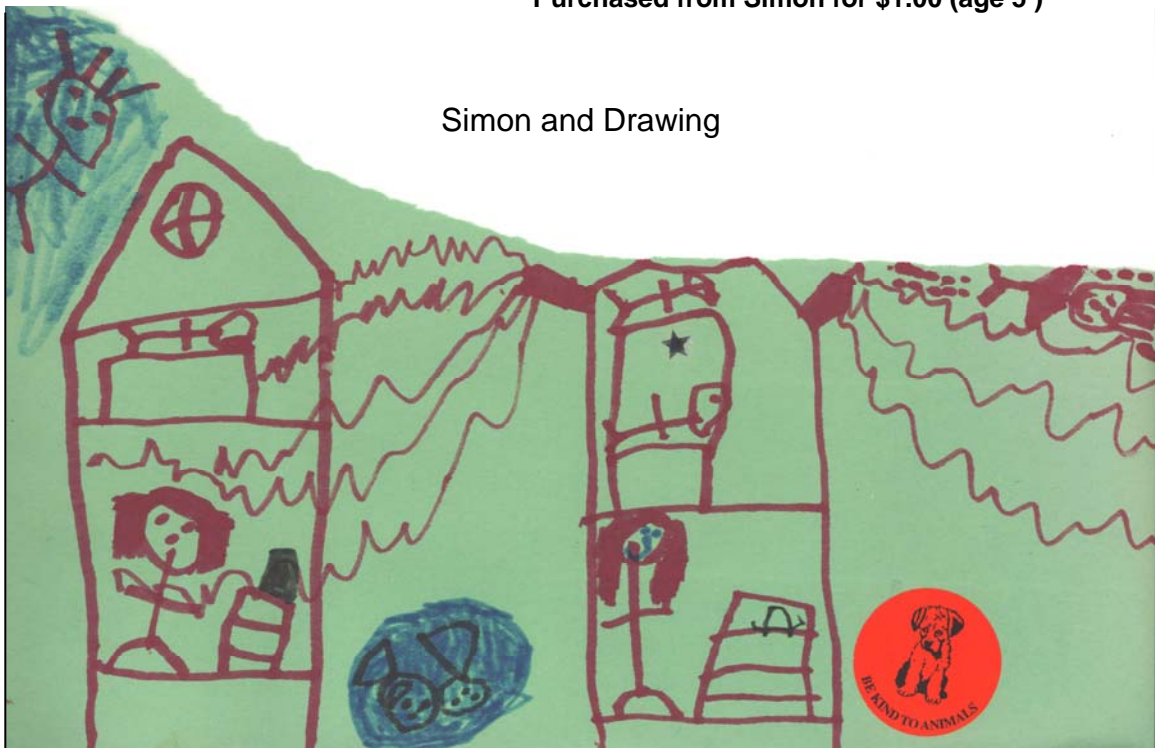


Figure 53: Picture of a cut-away house with people (age 4)

This distinction between writing and drawing is a completely arbitrary division because so much of Simon's drawing is accompanied by writing and his writing by drawing. For Simon the artistry of his drawings convey as much meaning, if not more, than written text. Rarely did Simon label his drawings; the odd example is in a few family portraits where the different family members are denoted with initials. Simon writes with his pictures or adds pictures to his writing to extend the meaning, not to repeat it. He treats these literacies as separate, but complementary, semiotic processes. Even when Simon draws a schematic of a car or a house, he does not label his illustration (see figures 52-54), as Emily and Tristan both did. He lets the drawing stand on its own merits, to convey meaning, and the text he adds is of a separate meaning; for example, "for Mama", or something else to add to the drawing, not repeating the drawing itself (see figure 54).

Many of Simon's drawings include an element of transparency, or a sense of being able to see through various layers. Many of these are schematics or cutaway pictures explore how things work or how people live (see figures 52 - 54). It appears he used these drawings as a way of trying to figure out how things work or are arranged in the world, or to better



Figure 54: A cut-away house "for mama" (age 5)

represent how he saw the world around him. His cars and houses were always transparent, with the people clearly visible on the inside; emphasizing the world as social. For Simon the world is about people and how people, and in some cases animals, interact in the world. It is interesting to note that even when Simon drew animals they were always personified (see figure 55).

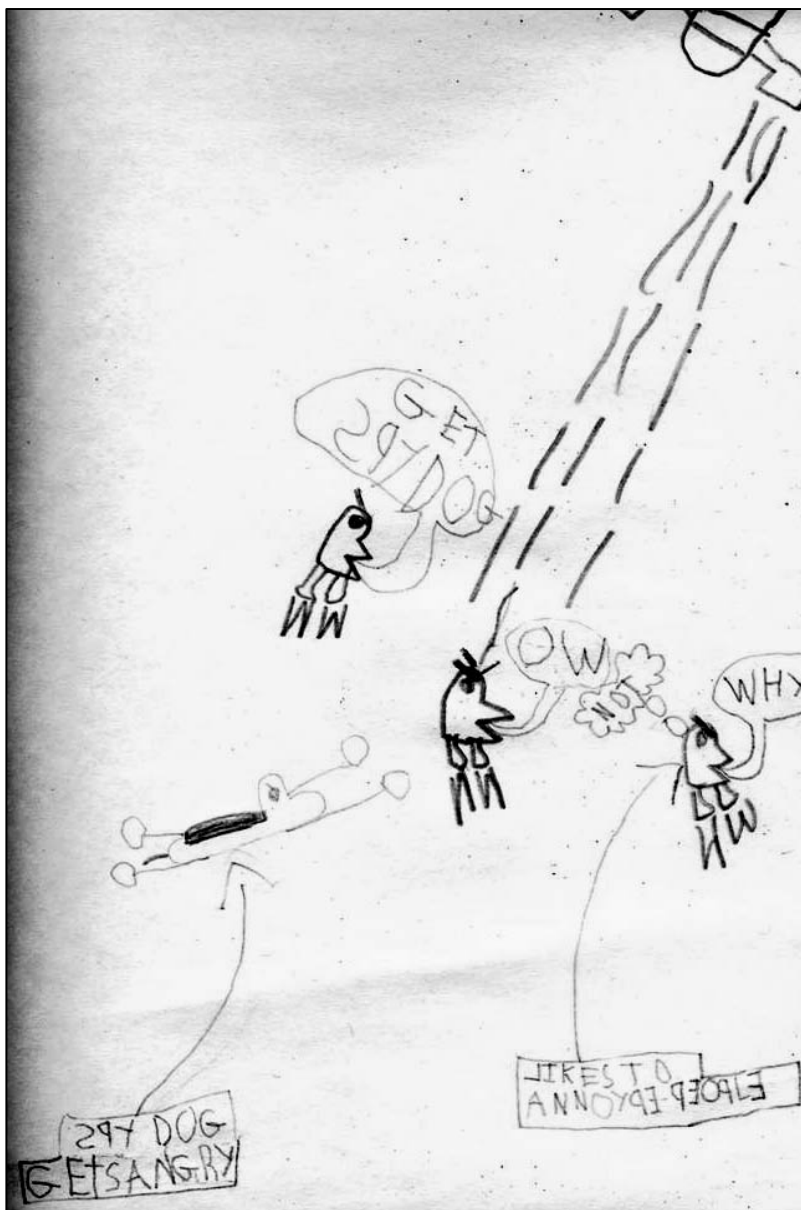


Figure 55: Spy Dog Gets Angry (p. 4 of *Spy Dog 1*) (age 6)

His drawings were always about the social world in which he lived; as the youngest of three children he had never known what it was like to be alone, and though he often chose to play alone it was always with the conscious knowledge that others were near. He often commented on where family members or friends

were in the house in relation to himself; even when they were not playing with him it was important for him to know where they were. Simon's drawings were a deeply social expression of how he saw the world. It was the interactions people have within their environment and with various objects that made these things important and worthy of representation.

Simon's use of Literacies in Three Dimensions

Simon's explorations in writing and drawing were not confined to pen, ink, pencil, paint, crayon and marker. Simon explored the canvas or media he used as well as what he was creating. He experimented with play dough, clay, Popsicle sticks, tubes, Lego®, and Lincoln Logs®. The intensity and attention he paid to these things warrant my consideration. Some of them, like the exploration of various types of canvases for his drawings or writing, are clearly just another part of the drawing/writing process that Simon included as a part of exploration of meaning production. While others, like Lego, were used as a literate experience in and of themselves.

Simon's use of Different Media for Meaning Production

Simon did some extraordinary work with the paper that he chose to write and draw on. In many instances Simon seemed to care less about what he was writing/drawing on, often writing on the front of the text dense drafts I offered to him for his work. But other times he was very deliberate and intentional about the

medium he chose to work with. He regularly chose to rip or cut the paper he was using before he wrote/drew on it (see figures 53 & 56). This interest in the third

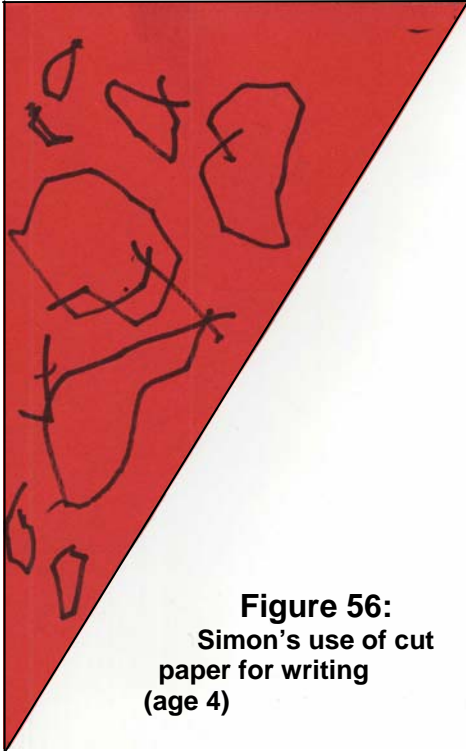


Figure 56:
Simon's use of cut
paper for writing
(age 4)

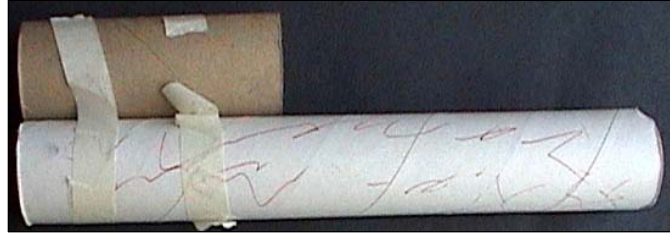


Figure 57: "Telescope for looking at things" (age 5)



Figure 58: "No
touching." (written
on a block) (age 4)

dimensional space has been documented by Kress (2003), but it was not until Simon started to use tubes to write on (see figure 57) that I noticed that he was as focused on the media on which he was writing as he was on the content. Simon's exploration of the media only worked to underscore the complexity of his understanding and use of writing. In many ways Simon's hypothesis of writing worked to challenge my underlying assumptions about writing and point to more complexity than even Emily and Tristan had taught me. Simon's use of tubes, torn/cut paper, and wooden blocks demonstrated an intentionality to use different media to express meaning (see figures 56-58). Simon's perspective, or understanding, of literacies as multimodal in every way worked to further push

my understanding of literacies and how children use them to create meaning, not to mention that it added new layers of complexity to my notion of literacies. He showed me that what he was using in the creation of meaning went far beyond the message and the mode to also include the medium. This suggests that the learning of a literacy, such as writing, contains further layers of complexity that extend to the medium and that the simple notion that writing is done on paper is simple only in that for adults it is tacitly assumed. For a child learning to write the medium itself is arbitrary and is paid attention to. Simon has never felt confined by paper for conveying meaning in writing or in other literacies. One medium Simon explored beyond the mostly two dimensional world of writing and drawing was Lego.

Simon's use of Lego

For Simon the primary attraction of Lego is his ability to use it to express his ideas in three dimensions and interact with the creation. Many of the same themes that Simon was exploring in his drawing found their way into his Lego creations; most frequently boats and Star Wars (see figure 59). Simon bought Lego sets not to build the set, though he did occasionally do this, but for the shapes and parts that would help him make new

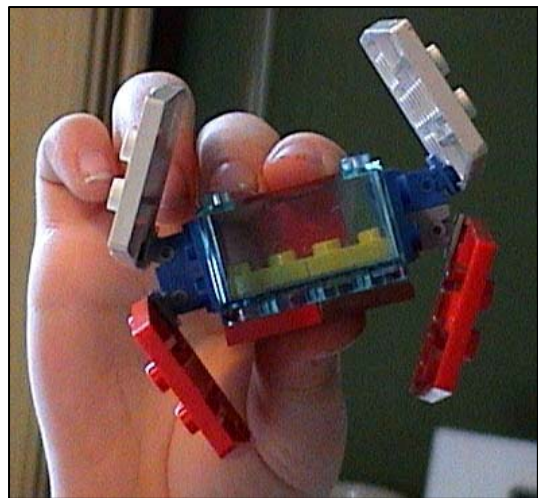


Figure 59: A Mini-Star Wars ship (age 5)

creations which he based on his imagination, known objects and research he did through Lego Magazine and the Lego website.

Simon would gather all the Lego together to create fanciful ships and buildings. He would use the Lego people in much the same way the children would use Playmobil®, constructing dramatic plays; the primary difference being that he would create whole worlds for his Lego 'guys'- vehicles, houses, communities. Similar to his exploration of his social world in his drawings, Simon created whole societies out of Lego. He built new Lego creations to support these worlds, and these were not just supports but sculptures that were art in their own right. Simon often chose to do this work alone, especially after Tristan started to spend his time reading as much as Emily did. He was not playing with Lego just for the social interaction with his siblings, though he welcomed their company, he worked on Lego to create his own meanings. He was using the Lego to figure out and represent the world as it was and as it might be. He would often create and work through lived experiences, encouraged by Emily, where they would create a store, school, library, or other common place that we would visit and enact scenes that were a reflection of the type of activities that happen in those places. Other times his play would include possible happenings in these places, usually including 'bad guys', where they would rob the bank and be chased by police. Regardless of the actual story, the Lego would be the vehicle for the story telling in a manner similar to drama, drawing, or written stories, except that Lego involved the element of creating a three dimensional world for interaction. As with most of the arts the meaning making process took

precedence over the permanency of the final product. Simon enjoyed the level of interaction that he could get through engaging with the Lego and other three dimensional literacies that went beyond the flat world of print. For Simon Lego was a complex semiotic meaning-making system. And Lego play became a literacy in its own right.

Conclusions

For Simon literacies are social, reflect how he sees and interacts with the world, and are an extension of who he is as a person. He is a literacies user in a very rich sense, constantly exploring and finding new ways to create and understand meaning. For Simon literacies were always about meaning making. Meaning was and still is the principle purpose of using a literacy.

Simon has invented what literacies mean to him and has used them accordingly. He has created the forms for the meanings he wanted to express, out of all the materials, ideas and experiences that were available to him; creating new uses and understandings from the common everyday literacies he found used and created by others. Simon has shown me that it is crazy to think that we can confine literacies to a singular meaning and form. I know that without convention there would be no way to communicate with others outside of immediate family and friends; but, just perhaps, we should allow young children to shape what literacies mean for themselves until they are ready to share with others. As Simon has demonstrated here it is not just meaning he is creating and using; it is himself. The literacies he chose to identify with also shaped who he

was and how he perceived himself. The choice of which literacies one uses and how is deeply personal. To restrict the literacies uses and understandings of young children is to restrict who they are and, more importantly, who they may become.

With Simon I had the advantage of having learned from Emily and Tristan; with him I was ready and I learned much. Simon taught me that my expanding understanding of literacies was still far too simple. I had considered the inclusion of sign systems as literacies but ignored the mediums used to convey these literacies as significant and often arbitrary. He also taught me that my concept of literacies as social constructions was limited to adult modes of understanding.

Through Simon I was able to understand literacies as even more complex in their composition and use. Literacies learning is an incredibly complex process. There is so much that we take for granted and is tacit, as full members of the literacy club, that we cannot possibly directly teach what we know. Simon uses his understanding of literacies as multiple and complex to create meaning which is rich, amazing and beautiful (see figure 60). His use of literacies goes beyond what I imagined possible.



Figure 60: Sketch (age 5)

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS

“...I believe that the sun has risen not only because I have seen it, but because by it I see everything else.” -C.S. Lewis (1945)

Finding Meaning

the past

interpreted

through

the present

interpreted

through

the past

In documenting how Emily, Tristan and Simon have used literacies on their own, and more importantly how they have used multiple literacies, I have gained insight not only into how the literacies process works, but also into how the children have each used different literacies to support their own learning, through taking what they knew in one literacy and applying it to another; scaffolding their own learning. Through my observations of the children's literacies use and understanding, I have come to redefine literacies and even what I consider a literacy. Emily, Tristan and Simon have helped me to see that

literacies are complex in their conception and use and that all sign systems have the same underlying process and should be considered literacies. They have helped me see literacies as: multimodal, semiotic and motivated; social, and embedded within multiple layers of discourses; and involving specific social and cultural practices which are different depending on site and community.

Emily, Tristan and Simon also taught me that we need to see children as literate, and value their literacies learning. All children are symbol users and make meaning from and in our society. They are strong, rich, powerful, and capable literacies users. It is up to us to recognize this and support their learning. To summarize what I have learned from Emily, Tristan and Simon and to discuss my new understanding of literacies I have chosen to relate one story from each of the children.

Emily's Use of Dance to Become a Precocious Reader

To illustrate Emily's story, I would like to share how during first grade she went from being an average first grade reader to becoming a precocious reader. There were two significant influences that pushed her reading from being at grade level expectations, reading supported text in picture books, and turned her into a proficient reader and as someone who saw herself as a reader. The first significant factor was Emily's interest in dance, specifically the *Nutcracker* ballet.

Emily was enamoured by *The Nutcracker* and decided to coordinate a performance of this ballet with her friends. At first Emily listened to the music and watched videos of *The Nutcracker*. We talked to a friend of ours, who

happened to be a senior in dance performance at university, about Emily's interest in *The Nutcracker*. Julia volunteered to help Emily learn some of the dance steps and came by our house once a week to work with her. Emily was also enrolled in movement classes at a local dance studio. Julia later invited Emily to see her performance of *The Nutcracker* and invited her backstage (see figure 61). Afterwards Julia gave Emily the ballet slippers she wore in the performance. Emily was ecstatic.

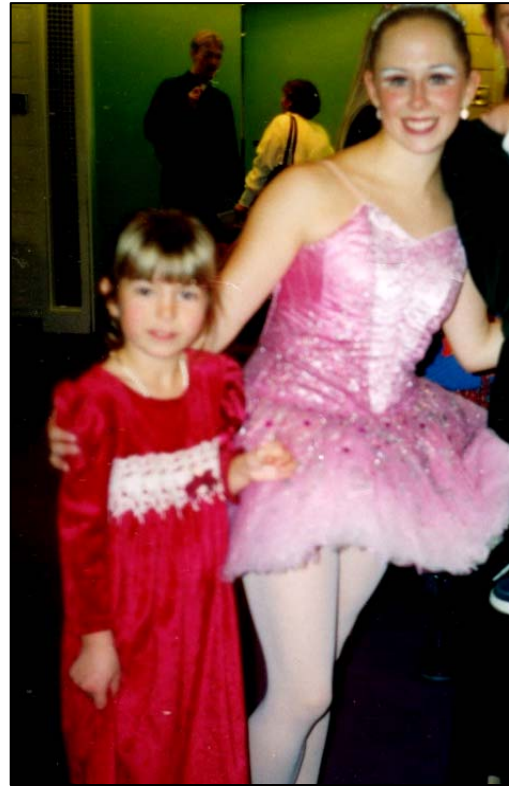


Figure 61: Emily and Julia after *The Nutcracker* (age 6)

This event motivated Emily's interest in dance and *The Nutcracker* to a fever pitch. She quickly exhausted the library of age appropriate ballet books and videos and started to borrow coffee table books from the adult section of the library. She started to take an interest in the lives of ballet dancers when Liz (another friend of ours involved in ballet) gave her a copy of *On Stage Please* by Veronica Tennant (1979) for her birthday in February. I still remember my astonishment when I saw Emily return from the library with a huge book on the life of Baryshnikov. All the while Emily continued to practice dancing the dance of the snow fairies from *The Nutcracker*. In April, because it had not worked out for any of Emily's friends to take part in her project, Julia arranged for her friends

in the dance program to fill in. Emily hand wrote invitations for family members and friends to attend the performance. And at the beginning of May Emily danced the dance of the snow fairies at the university practice studio (see figure 62).

Emily's reading ability grew in leaps and bounds during this time largely because of her intense interest in ballet, specifically *The Nutcracker*. Her reading excelled so that there was nothing she could not



Figure 62: Emily dancing the part of Clara in *The Nutcracker* (age 6)

read and by the spring Emily was reading *Little Women* (Alcott, 1995/1868). She used music, video, dance, talk, reading and writing to navigate through this experience. At every turn she used her prior knowledge and supports from multiple literacies to support her reading. All of these literacies worked together to complement and support each other in Emily's literacies learning. Emily's reading improved because of her motivated reading of dance related material and her reading worked to support and improve her dance.

Upon closer analysis another significant thread has emerged. That year

at school her teachers, Mr. V and Ms. E, were exploring the use of a critical literacies framework (Vasquez, 2004; Luke & Freebody, 1997) to guide language arts instruction and practice in the class. The students had been introduced to critical literacy circles when they met with their fifth grade reading buddies; I helped lead one as a parent volunteer on a weekly basis. During these times we read books dealing with critical issues like those found in *Sister Anne's Hands* (Lorbiecki & Popp, 1998), *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991), *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 1998), *White Socks Only* (Colman, 1996), *Whitewash* (Shange, 1997), *Just One Flick of a Finger* (Lorbiecki, 1996), etc. We used these books as touchstones for discussions with the students and made explicit connections between the books and the lived experiences of the students. The students regularly engaged in written response to the text we read and we would often use strategies like sketch to stretch (Short, Harste, and Burke, 1996). On several occasions the students dramatized a critical or significant scene from one of the books we were reading.

Through her experiences in this class Emily saw literacies as something that was related to her life and could be used to explore issues and feelings she was having. Books were real and meaningful in this class; they dealt with issues like racism, poverty, and other issues that affected the children's lives (for further examples of how this class used critical literacy texts see Wood, 2002). The students in this class became familiar with using books to discuss serious issues and using literacy in significant ways that affected their lives. Literacies were used as meaningful and powerful shapers of the children's lives. It was this

powerful teaching which melded with Emily's own passion for dance that motivated her to excel in her reading.

Tristan's Use of Videogaming to Become a Reader

To illustrate Tristan's story I want to share how he used videogaming as a literate experience and as a catalyst to becoming a reader and to seeing himself as a reader. For a long time Tristan saw the reading Emily, Christine and I were doing as "real reading" (the reading of novels, newspapers and magazines, etc.), and he saw his reading of street signs and pictures books as less than reading.

Tristan's journey to becoming a reader and a full member of the 'literacy club' started after he received a Nintendo Game Boy Color as a Christmas gift when he was seven (see figure 63). He quickly became bored with Tetris, the game his Gameboy came with, and wanted to buy a new game. Tristan and I researched together where to buy games, how much they cost, and which games were recommended by others for the Gameboy.

Tristan decided to buy a used version of *Super*

Mario Bros. Deluxe (Nintendo, 1999), a game developed specifically to sell his type of Gameboy, and one which seemed universally recommended, with his



Figure 63: Tristan playing his Game Boy Color (age 8)

birthday money. He was now eight years old and still did not see himself as a reader. Tristan began playing *Mario Brothers* immediately after getting the game home, but he quickly became frustrated, as the used game did not come with an instruction manual and he could only figure so much out on his own. To help him



Figure 64: The cover page of the FAQ Tristan used to play *Super Mario Bros.*

I went online with Tristan and we found several FAQ sheets and walkthroughs for the game (see figure 64). I printed the ones I thought were most useful but it was past his bedtime so I put them aside, intending to go through them with him when I came home from work the next day. Tristan found the FAQ sheets and walkthroughs the next morning and immediately began reading them; even though they were dense with text and were single spaced pages printed in 10 point courier (see figure 64). He used what he learned in the FAQ sheet and immediately started playing the game.

When I arrived home that evening Tristan showed me how far he had advanced in *Mario Brothers*, he showed me the FAQ and told me what he had learned. Christine and I praised his work and his reading. Tristan glowed. That night when he went to bed he decided to read a chapter book. After he went to bed Christine told me how he sat down and read through the FAQ on his own, intently focused for half an hour. This one small thing was the final piece in bringing Tristan to where he could see himself as a reader and join the literacy club. This is by no means how he learned to read, but was the key to helping him get over the hurdle of text size and knowing for himself that he could read text which was unsupported by pictures immediately on the page. Tristan's experience with videogaming as a literate activity, combined with his past experiences with reading and his desire to figure



Figure 65: Tristan Reading the *Hobbit*

out how to play *Super Mario Brothers Deluxe* on his own allowed him to successfully access the text and read the FAQ. He was highly motivated and had the ability to verify the meaning he read from the FAQ with his game play. These elements worked together to help Tristan see himself as a reader and to create meaning from the FAQ in a useful manner. Within a month Tristan was reading *The Hobbit* by Tolkien (1937/1999) (see figure 65). But this was not a one way transaction; Tristan used his ability as a reader to improve his videogaming and, specifically, to learn how to play *Super Mario Brothers Deluxe*. These literacies worked together to support Tristan's learning, use and understanding in each.

Simon's Use of Comics as a Path to Writing

To illustrate Simon's story I want to share how he used his interest in and passion for drawing as a way of accessing the more traditional literacies of reading and writing through making comic books. Simon loves writing, drawing and building with Lego and sees all of these as literacies. For Simon literacies have always been about meaning making. But it was the world of art and drawing that he used to create meaning and understand the world. His art has always been social in its conception and use and his production of comic books was no different.

Simon was very familiar with and enjoyed the genre of comics. Tristan and Emily would read to him from DC Junior Comics, and other comics and cartoons. He had also seen Emily and Tristan collaborate on several comics and had

started to experiment with making his own comic books.

Spy Dog evolved when Tristan and Simon were writing together; Tristan was writing a book called *Spys* and Simon copied him, to which Tristan complained, so Simon changed the title of his story to *Spy Dog*, combining his interest in dogs and superheroes. *Spy Dog* (see figure 66) would consume Simon's writing through to the end of this study and

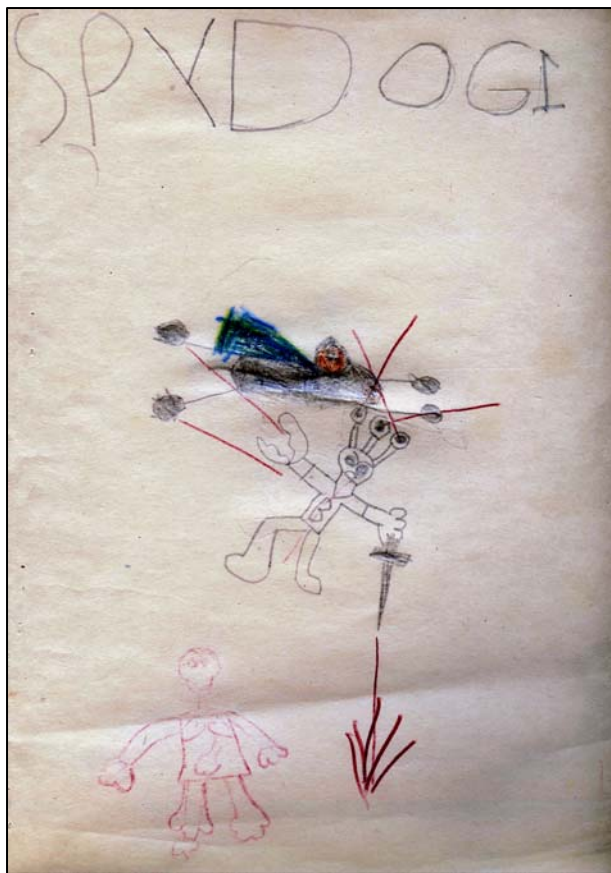


Figure 66: Cover of *Spy Dog 1* (age 5)

would include no less than six volumes; one of these comic books, *Spy Dog 4*, is over one hundred pages long. Outside of the sheer volume and time involved in the production of the *Spy Dog* comics, it was a place where Simon started to explore conventional spellings (see figure 55 & 67). Simon asked Tristan to help with the generation of the text in *Spy Dog 1* and in subsequent comic books would occasionally ask how to spell a word, but more often he would just apply what he thought was correct. Simon has an incredible memory and highly honed sense of prediction that he uses with excellent results in his writing.

Simon incorporated his experience with multiple literacies to create meaning in his comics. He used his experiences with videogaming, Lego, and

the Lego website to construct the design of his images and the structure of his comic books (see figure 67). He incorporated elements he found in the comic books that he read and were read to him (.e.g. the dialogue bubbles, thought bubbles, etc.). He used all of these literacies together to powerfully create meaning in his comic books but also to

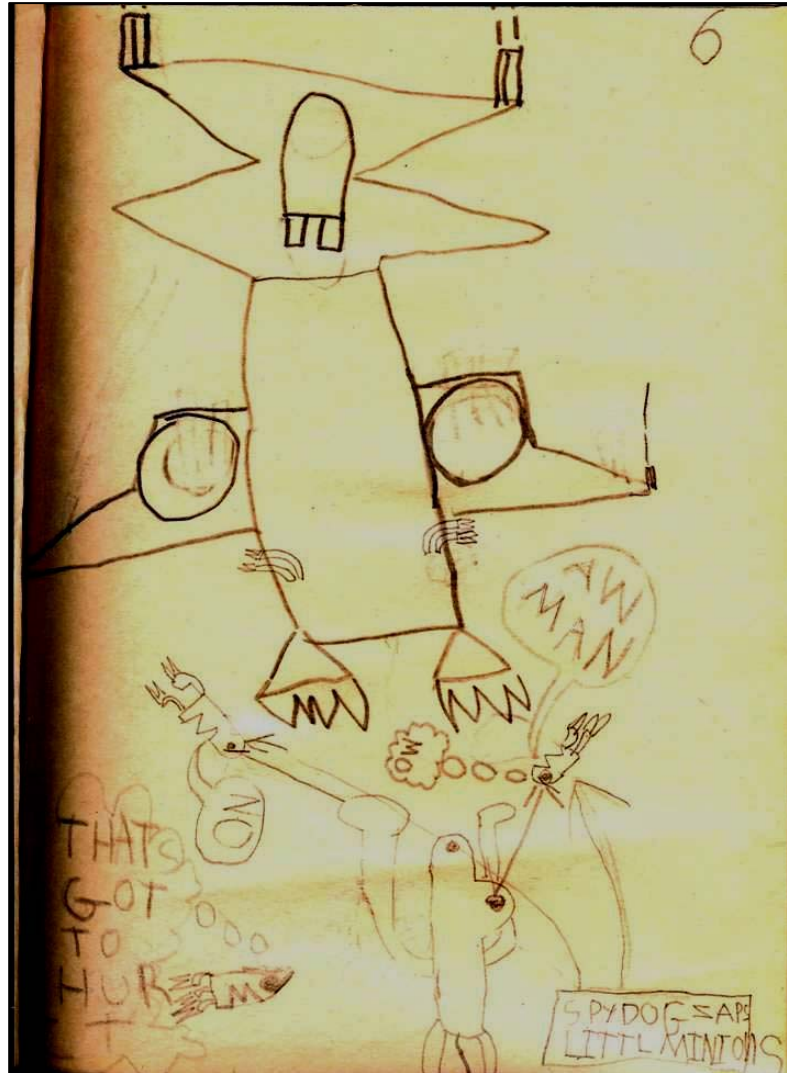


Figure 67: *Spy Dog* -page 6 (age 5)

support his meaning making, drawing on what he knew from these literacies to expand what he was capable of with writing on its own. He was intimately aware of this literacies use, stating, as he worked on a *Spy Dog* comic: “I love that I can learn to read and write at the same time.”

Spy Dog was a breakthrough for Simon; it was here that he was able to establish himself as an individual within our family. Comic book creation was one thing that he was better at than anyone in the whole family. He was able to

combine his love of drawing and writing to convey meaning in a powerful and entertaining way. Simon poured his unbridled attention into *Spy Dog* well past the end of the scope of this study.

Literacies Model

To help me make sense of how the children were using literacies I worked on developing a model that would explain what they were doing and help to clarify my own thinking. I started by building on Ken Goodman's reading model (1967) because I think it does a good job of describing what the children were

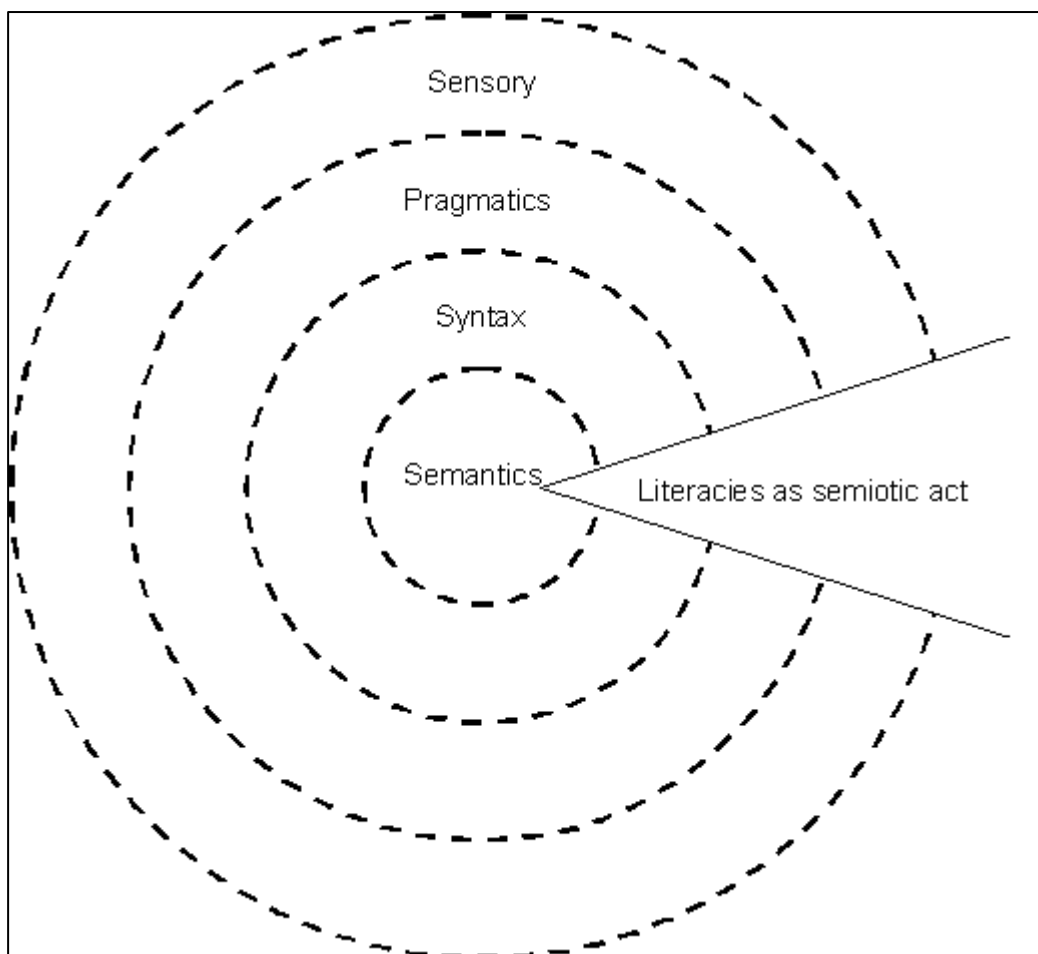


Figure 68: Basic literacies model (modified from Harste, et al., 1984)

doing with reading and how reading works as literacy. But I used the expanded model suggested by Harste, Woodward & Burke (1984) because of their inclusion of pragmatics (see figure 68).

I have come to understand literacies as a complex system and see literacies as multiple, created, and used through a critical sociopsychosemiotic process (Wood, 2002). Literacies are critical. The way in which they are used, and this use itself, are as important as the literate act (Comber & Kalmer, 1997; Muspratt, Luke, & Freebody, 1997). Whether the literacies user is aware of it or not, every literate act is either reinforcing or dismantling the hegemony present within the society in which it is produced (Cherryholmes, 1988); while at the same time literacies are positioning the user within a Discourse (Gee, 1996). Literacies are always social. Literacies are used to communicate or understand meaning between people, thus making them social constructions (Harste, 1999; Harste et al., 1984). Yet, a literate act always originates in an individual, whether through reacting, creating, or interpreting [psychological] (Y. Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1996). Thus literacies which are either being created or understood are done so through the filter of the individual user's immediate environment, his/her history, various experiences (Sumara, 1996), and Discourses. Literacies are ultimately semiotic in that they use signs to convey meaning or are symbolic in nature (Danesi, 1998; 2004). They are multimodal. Finally, any literate act is a process whereby each of these systems acts in concert to make meaning (Burke, 2000). It is impossible for meaning to be made independent of any of these process systems - critical- socio- psycho- or

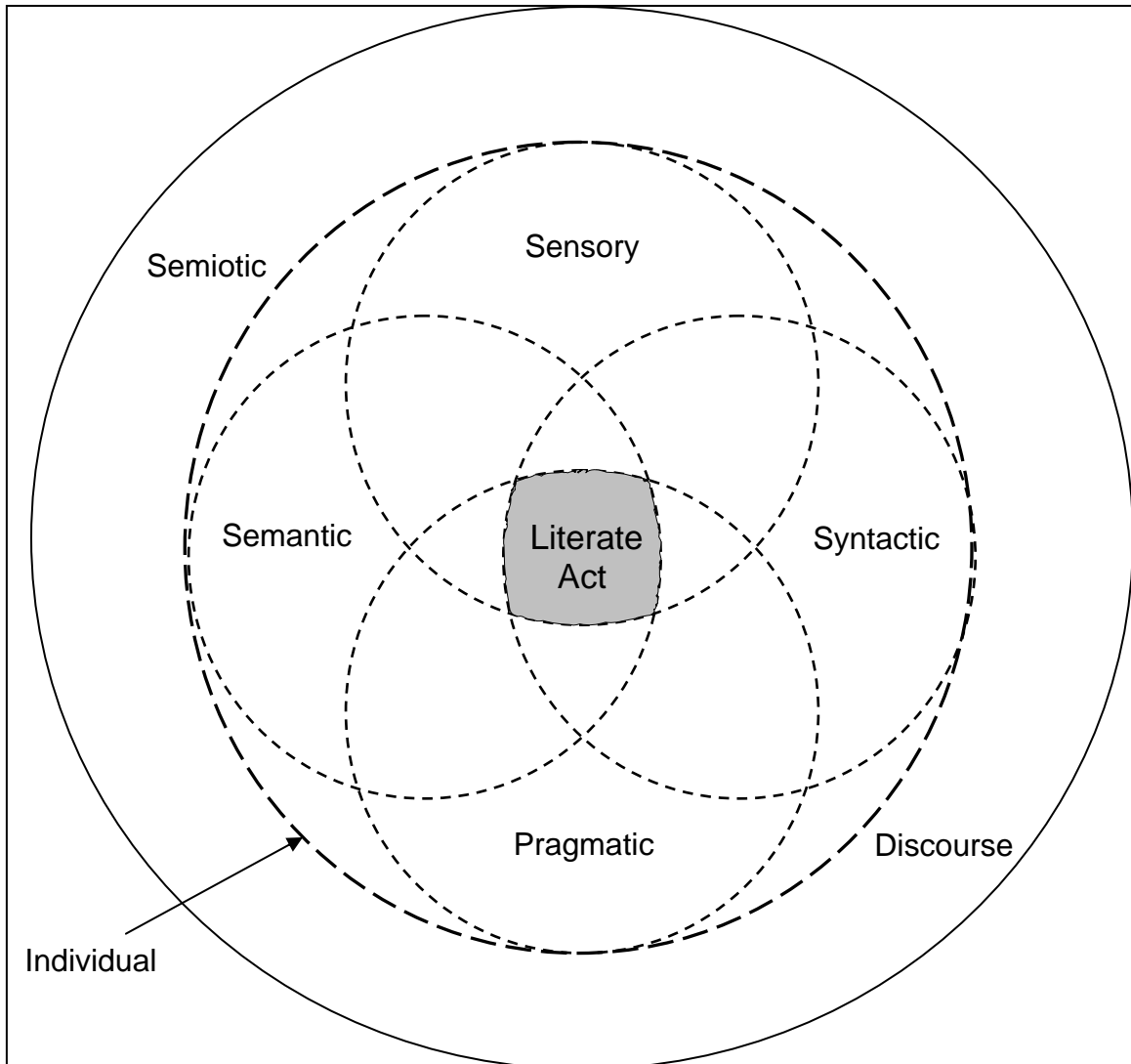


Figure 69: Literacies as a Critical Socio-Psycho-Semiotic Process

semiotic; the failure of one of these systems inhibits meaning making and the process breaks down. All literacies: art, dance, language, etc. use similar underlying systems in their meaning making. It is this similarity between these underlying processes that makes literacies use, understanding, and learning multimodal. During every literate act the literacies user uses four cueing systems to make meaning: semantic, sensory, syntactic and pragmatic (see figure 69), and it is in the interactions between these subsystems that meaning is actively created.

At the heart of the literacies process is semantics, or meaning, though all the cueing systems also work together to make meaning from literacies. At its simplest, semantics is meaning; the meaning derived from literacies and the meaning a literacies user brings to the text. Whenever we engage in any literate act we are trying to make sense of it. Meaning is a semiotic process, and the interpretation, or translation, of literacies into meaning is just as dependent on what a person brings to the construction of a literate act as the product itself. Meaning, then, is something that is mediated by each person and interpreted differently based on his or her experiences, discourse, and location, in what Louise Rosenblatt termed transaction theory (1989). Meaning is inherently related to the lived experience of the literacies user (Sumara, 1999; 1996) or the context from which the literacies use is being conducted.

Another piece of the literacies process is the sensory cueing system. The sensory cuing system is the way in which we interact with and perceive a literacy; this is typically the one area in which literacies are divergent. The way Emily makes meaning while she is dancing is different from the way she makes meaning while she is writing, which is different from the way she makes meaning while she is reading. This confuses some people into believing that this is the only cueing system because it often defines the 'uniqueness' of a literacy. In dance Tristan interacts with the literacy through movement and rhythm, while in reading he uses graphophonics, while in videogaming he uses visual, interactional, and auditory cues. The literacies user interacts with different literacies using different combinations of senses, and it is this, combined with

purpose, that makes literacies different and creates the need for there to be multiple literacies.

When understanding a literacy we also apply syntax, or rules, to the literacy. It is these rules that help us understand a literate act; it is this cueing system which gives literacies order and predictability. Admittedly the rules are more or less rigid depending on the literacies being used; for example the rules in modern dance are more flexible than in classical ballet and the syntax for written language is more rigid than for spoken language.

Finally, we are always using pragmatics to make meaning from a literate act. Pragmatics is the context within and around a literate act. Pragmatics on one level can be thought of as the context a literacy event occurs in; it is everything that has happened up to that particular moment and everything that is going to come after. Therefore, when reading a book you are using the pragmatic cueing system to apply your knowledge of what has happened in the book and what you believe is going to happen, to make meaning out of what you are reading at any moment. Pragmatics engages the literacies user's past experiences with the particular literacy to help make meaning out of the current literacy event. So not only are you relying on the particular book you are reading, but also your knowledge and experiences with reading in general; added to this is your experience with reading a particular genre or author. Pragmatics is also the experiences a literacies user brings to the literacies event to make meaning. Your understanding and knowledge of the particular content being discussed in the book influences your understanding of the text. Emily used her knowledge of

dance and *The Nutcracker* to make sense of the increasingly difficult texts she was borrowing from the library, and in the case of the coffee table books was able to use the pictures as a support to help further her understanding.

We use these four cuing systems within a semiotic discourse to make sense of any literate event. Even more, when literacies are working together and we allow the overlap of learning, it is easier for us to understand and make sense of a literate event. The cueing systems in each of the literacies being used scaffold each other to support learning and understanding (see figure 70). As we add more literacies our chances of having our message understood by others or

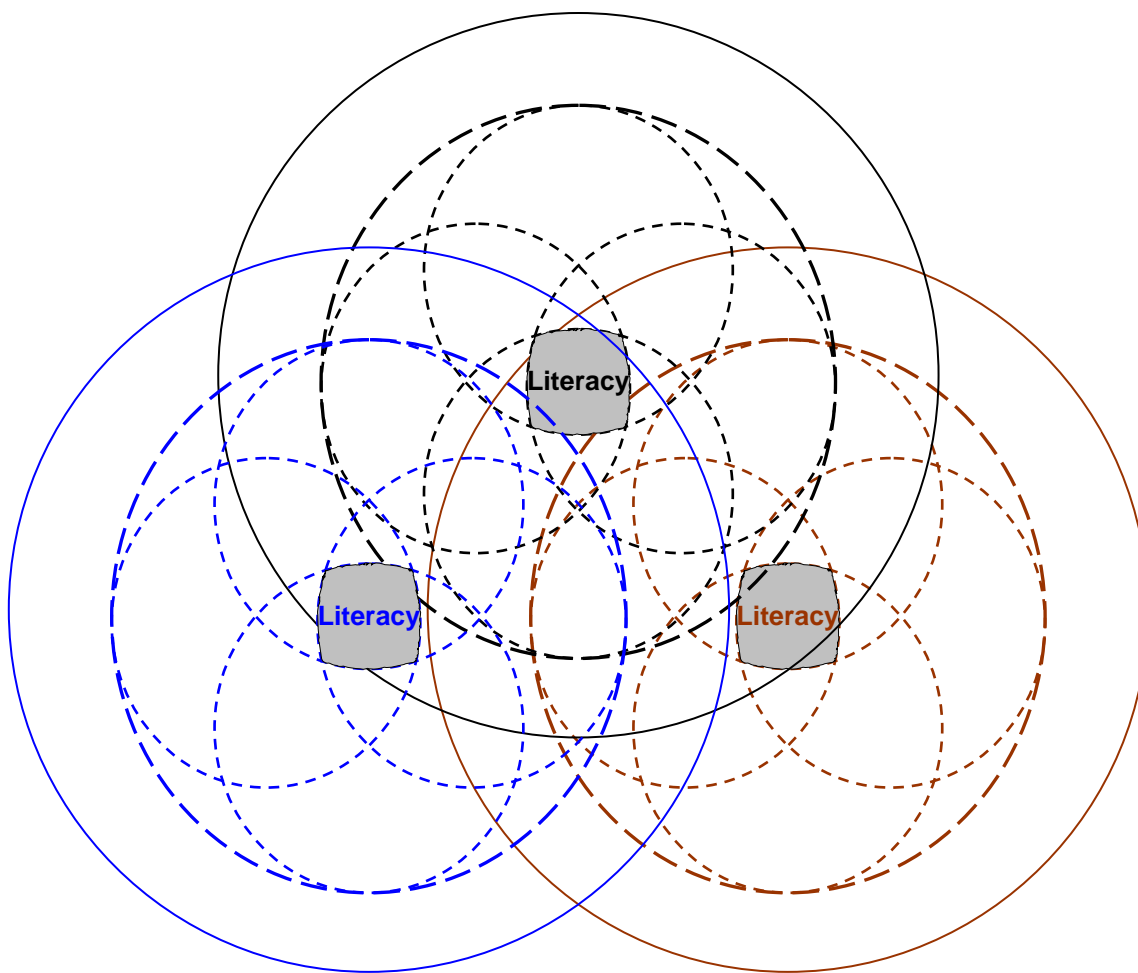


Figure 70: Multiple literacies as scaffolds for learning and understanding

understanding a message ourselves increases significantly. Each of the literacies scaffolds our understandings, and working together they assist the meaning making process, as has been demonstrated by each of the children's stories. A powerful example of how this is used today is television advertising; the average advertising spot has been reduced from one minute down to fifteen seconds. The advertisers are using multiple literacies: art, music, spoken language, text, etc. to make their meaning more easily understood by viewers, thereby greatly reducing the time needed for the advertisers to get their message across.

Conclusions

Emily, Tristan and Simon used different literacies to define who they were and to construct a literate identity. They each engaged with literacies in powerful and life transforming ways. They did not emulate their siblings, but instead seemed compelled to find a way to distinguish themselves as individuals. Literacies allowed the children to do this through what Michelle Knobel and Colin Lankshear refer to as the *Ethos* of a literacy (2007). Knobel and Lankshear are referring to the new ethos, or way of being, that new literacies make available for literacies users and I think this does a good job of describing how Tristan takes on the ethos of a gamer when he engages with videogames as a literate practice. But this idea of ethos I think goes beyond the new literacies. Each of the children used different literacies to explore ways of understanding and being in the world; Emily became a dancer and a reader, Simon became an artist and a writer.

These literacies allowed the children new ways to be in the world and with which to construct their identity.

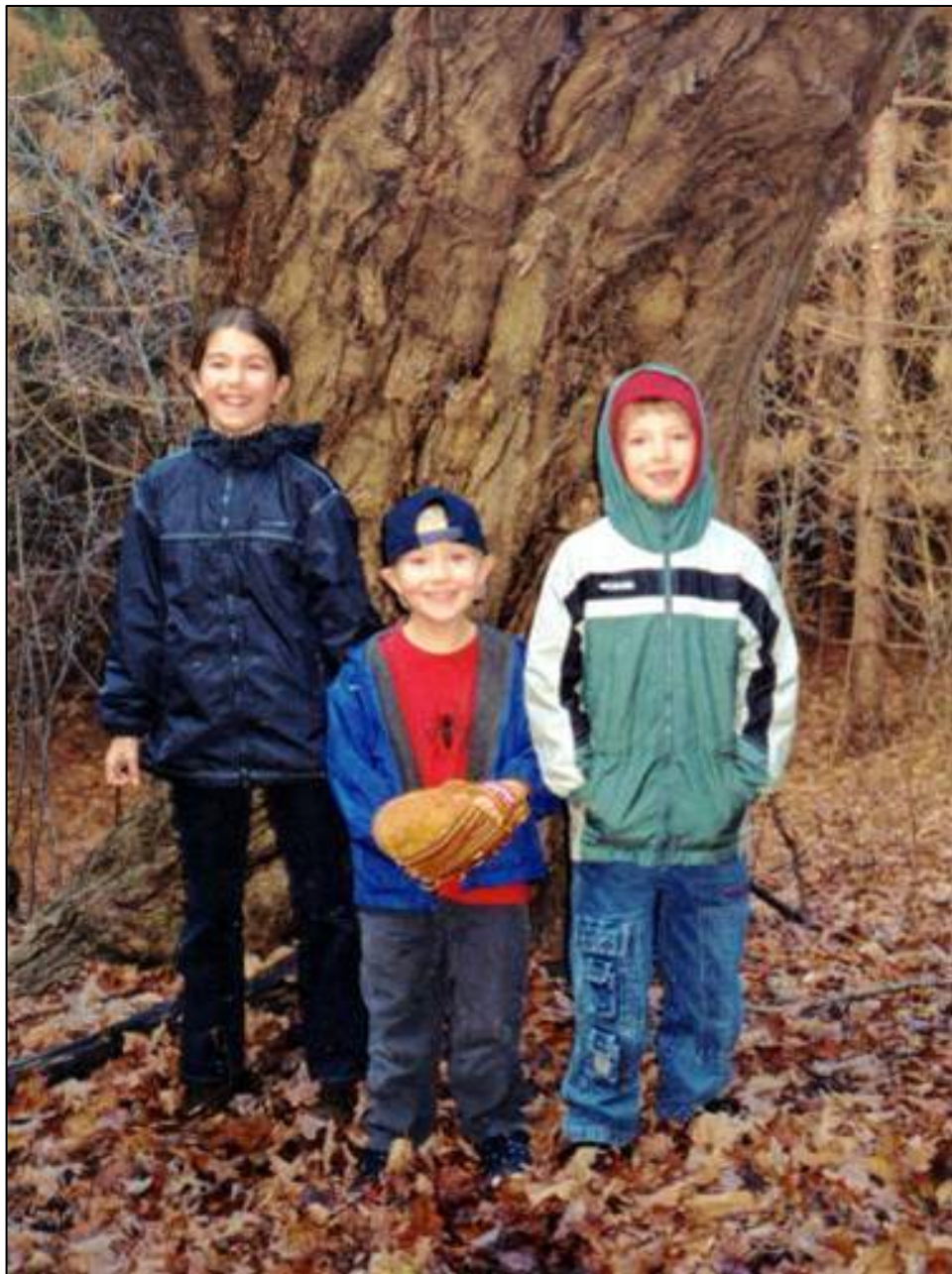
The children also used multiple literacies together to help them learn, understand and create meaning more fully. Each used their motivated interest in a preferred literacy to access other literacies. Emily used dance to more fully become a reader; Tristan used his interest and experience with videogaming to see himself as a member of the literacy club and to access reading as a literacy; Simon used drawing as a way of exploring reading and writing. Using literacies they were precocious at, they scaffolded their learning of another literacy; in each of their cases a traditional literacy.

Reading and writing, more than any other literacy, are emphasized and used throughout our society. They are the primary ways we communicate, making experiences with reading and writing more frequent than any other. The children were literally bombarded with meaningful purposes for using and having to understand reading and writing. In fact, it seems the use and understanding of these conventional literacies by Emily, Tristan, and Simon was unavoidable because of their pervasive nature within our society. The fears of those who think that schools are not emphasizing these literacies enough and that children will not be able to function within society without a great deal of direct instruction in reading and writing are misplaced. With the exception of Emily, my children explored the use and understanding of these conventional literacies without formal instruction. The children were best able to use and understand the conventional literacies of writing and reading when they used other literacies as

supports, had authentic reasons for using these literacies, were supported by each other, were supported by Christine and me, and were immersed in a society where the use of these literacies was ubiquitous.

My children taught me that we need to broaden our definition of literacies and value multiple and new literacies, not just reading and writing, and accept and value home and out of school literacies. Literacy is so much more than decoding the words on a page. They helped me see that we need to treat literacies as complex and create situations where multiple literacies are encouraged. We need to help children make connections between new, multiple, and traditional literacies within these contexts. We need to value children as capable, powerful, and successful literacies users. But most of all my children have taught me that I need to relax and trust them, valuing the literacies they are using right now.

The evidence from my children suggests that we still have much to learn. This study needs to be broadened to take into account the voices of children from different discourses. We need to see if, as I believe, the direction suggested by my children is unique to our situation or if it is something that is common to more D/discourses. Regardless, we need to reconsider what we thought we knew and believed about literacies, and embrace complexity, thereby gaining deeper insight in order to better support our children in their literate lives.



**Figure 71: Emily, Simon, and Tristan (at the end of the study)
(ages 11, 5, & 8)**

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Wynne-Jones, T. (1985). Zoom away. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books.

Wynne-Jones, T. (1992). Zoom upstream. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books.

JEFFREY W. WOOD
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EDUCATION

2002-2007	Doctoral Candidate Language Education	Indiana University, Bloomington
	Dissertation Topic:	Defining literacies: Early literacies from the perspective of three children
1998-2001	Doctoral Student Language Education	Indiana University, Bloomington
1995-1999	Master of Education (focus on Early Literacy)	York University, Toronto
	Thesis Topic:	Emergent Literacy: A Child's Understanding of Writing
1994-1995	Bachelor of Education (Magna cum laude)	University of Ottawa, Ottawa
	Ontario Teaching Certificate	
1989-1993	Honours Bachelor of Arts	York University, Toronto

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Critical literacies
Multiple multimodal literacies
Writing as process
Early literacies
Teacher as researcher

UNIVERSITY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2005-present **Assistant Professor**
Laurentian University

Undergraduate Courses Taught:

EDUC 4025 Curriculum Studies 1: Language Arts (Primary/Junior)
EDUC 3004 Elementary Methods Course
EDUC 2006 Education and Schooling
EDUC 0150/0250/0350 PrePracticum Placement Faculty Advisor
Initial Placement Supervision
Final Placement Supervision

Undergraduate Courses Developed:

EDUC 3004 ->Elementary Methods Course
EDUC 4025 ->Literacies Course Development P/J – 72 hour 6 credit course
EDUC 4125 ->Literacies Course Development J/I – 72 hour 6 credit course
EDUC 4096 ->36 hour 3 credit course (Intermediate English Option)
Aboriginal content development for EDUC 3004, 4096, 4025 and 4125

1998- 2004 **Associate Instructor Indiana University**
Indiana University

Undergraduate Courses Taught

- E340 Methods of Teaching reading I
- E341 Methods of Teaching reading II
- E339 Methods of Teaching Language Arts

Graduate Courses Taught

- L545: Advanced Study in the Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School
www.indiana.edu/~lang545/spring
- W505 Using Thematic Units K – 12
www.indiana.edu/~w505b/
- L530 Methods of Teaching Language Minority Students
www.indiana.edu/~biling/

OTHER TEACHING EXPERIENCE

09/03-06/05 Edenbrook Hill Public School Peel District School Board	Kindergarten Teacher	-Grade Level Chair, Lead Teacher for Kindergarten Years implementation, Chair Diversity Committee, Member Literacy Committee, Host Teacher for York University preservice teachers (03/04)
09/00-06/03 Hawthorn Public School Peel District School Board	Kindergarten Teacher	-Workplace Steward, Facilitator for book talks on literacy, Chair of the Program Team, Lead Teacher for Kindergarten Years implementation, Language Arts & Drama Contact, Member Staffing & Computer Committees, Host Teacher for D'Youville College preservice teachers
09/97-06/98 Nahani Way Public School Peel District School Board	Kindergarten Teacher	- Chair of Literacy Focus Group, Grade Level Chair, Drama Contact, Facilitator for book talks on literacy, Member of the Computer Club & P.D. Committee
03/97-06/97 Parkway Public School Peel District School Board	Gr. 3 Teacher	- Implemented the new Provincial Testing with a newly reorganized class, Member Computer Committee
09/96-03/97 Esker Lake Public School Peel District School Board	Gr. 1 Teacher	-Computer Club Coordinator, Director of the Christmas musical, Remembrance Day Committee.
01/96-06/96 Havenwood Public School Peel District School Board	Kindergarten Teacher	-Grade level Chair, Drama Club Coordinator, Member of the Budget Committee, Computer Club, & Environmental Club

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2000-2005 Peel District School Board	Teacher Researcher	Conducted action research on sustaining critical conversations and negotiated curriculum in my kindergarten classroom
1999-2000 Indiana University	Research Assistant	Conducted field and bibliographic research into the construction relationship between theories of literacy, perceptions of self, and literacy learning with Dr. Prisca Martens
1999-2000 Indiana University	Research Assistant	Conducted bibliographic research and engaged in Grand Theorizing to develop a historical and practical position for education based on diversity with Dr. Jesse Goodman
Summer 1999 Indiana University	Principal Investigator	-Grant recipient , Supervised 4 research assistants conducting field research on early literacy in an Elementary Public School
1998-1999 Indiana University	Graduate Assistant	- Conducted bibliographic research to support the work of Dr. Prisca Martens
1997-1998 Peel District School Board	Teacher Researcher	- Conducted action research on emergent writing in my kindergarten classroom
1996 Peel District School Board	Teacher Researcher	- Conducted action research on emergent writing in my kindergarten classroom
1995-present	Independent Researcher	- Investigating how my 3 children use literacies, what they believe and understand about literacies over time, and how those beliefs are translated into actions.

SERVICE TO LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY

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Committee Membership

Resource centre planning Committee

Teacher Education Liaison Committee

Teacher Education Advisory Committee

Equity Committee

Research Committee

Program Committee

Literacy/Drama faculty hiring committee (2005)

Music faculty hiring committee (2005)

Science faculty hiring committee (2005)

ACADEMIC SERVICE

2006-present	Chair	LLRC Pre Conference
2005-present	Reviewer	- Voices of Practitioners NAEYC Teacher Research Journal
2004-present	Member	-Teacher Research Steering Committee National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
2004-present	Awards Chair	-Teacher as Researcher SIG American Educational Research Association
2003-present	Reviewer	-Networks Online Teacher Research journal
1999-present	Reviewer	- Program Proposals American Educational Research Association
2005	Reviewer	-Draft Science Curriculum Ontario Ministry of Education
2005	Reviewer	-Draft Kindergarten Curriculum Ontario Ministry of Education
2005	Reviewer	-Draft Language Curriculum Ontario Ministry of Education
2002-2005	Mentor	-to new teachers in Peel and other school districts
2000- 2004	Chair	-Teacher as Researcher SIG American Educational Research Association
1999-2000	Program Chair	-Teacher as Researcher SIG American Educational Research Association
1999-2000	Member	-Research Dissemination Committee National Reading Conference
1999-2000	Mentor	-To 3 new Ph.D. students at Indiana University
1998-1999	Chair	-International Graduate Student Association Language Education, Indiana University
1999	Student Reviewer	-Research in the Teaching of English National Council of Teachers of English
1998-1999	Member	-Standing committee on 'literacy' standards for elementary pre-service teachers in Indiana

HONORS AND AWARDS

2006	Dean's Doctoral Fellowship	Laurentian University \$1500
2006	President's Travel Grant	Laurentian University \$1000
2005	New Faculty Start-up Grant	Laurentian University \$4000
2000-2004	Elected Chair	-Teacher as Researcher SIG, AERA

2000	Teacher as Researcher Grant	-International Reading Association \$5000
1999/2000	Leo and Jean Fay Fellowship	-Language Education Dept. Indiana University \$2000
1999	President's Summer Research Initiative Grant	-Indiana University \$2000
1999/2000	Elected Program Chair	-Teacher as Researcher SIG, AERA

PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Wood, J. (accepted). The teacher as researcher. In Provenzo, E. (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education*. New York: Sage.

Wood, J. (2005). Voices of Practitioners. Moses's story: Critical literacy and social justice in an urban kindergarten. *Young Children Beyond the Journal*. Online:
www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/vp/VoicesWood.pdf

PUBLICATIONS

Wood, J. (2005) Videogaming as literacy. *Learn With TVO*. PodCast
<http://www.tvo.org/learnwithtvo/podcast/pod.html>

Wood, J. (2000). *Defining literacies*. Eric Document. (ED465980).

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

12/06 Culture and Thought Colloquium Sudbury, ON	Research Presentation	Exploring critical conversations about gender with young children
07/06 Whole Language Umbrella Charlotte, NC	Research Presentation	Videogaming as literacy Presenter
05/06 The Canadian Society for the Study of Education Toronto Ontario	Research Presentation	Literacies as multiple: An exploration of literacies and their multiple uses and understandings Presenter
03/06 American Educational Research Association San Francisco, CA	Research Presentation	Gender Issues in Kindergarten Presenter
03/06 American Educational Research Association San Francisco, CA	Research Presentation	Teacher Research in Early Childhood Education Discussant
11/05 Council of Ministers of Education Conference Toronto Ontario	Research Presentation	Videogaming as literacy Presenter
05/05 Researching and Teaching in these Critical Times Bloomington, IN	Research Presentation	Videogaming as literacy: Tristan's journey to becoming a reader Presenter

04/04 AERA Annual Conference San Diego, CA	Research Presentation	Moses's story: Critical literacy in a primary classroom Presenter
04/03 AERA Annual Conference Chicago, IL	Research Presentation	Defining literacy: A pooled case comparison of 3 early literacies users Presenter
04/03 AERA Annual Conference Chicago, IL	Research Presentation	Critical conversations with young children Presenter
11/02 NCTE Annual Conference Atlanta, GA	Research Presentation	Critical literacies in the classroom: An elementary school teacher's perspective Presenter
04/02 AERA Annual Conference New Orleans, LA	Research Presentation	Defining literacies Presenter
04/01 AERA Annual Conference Seattle, WA	Research Presentation	Critical literacy Presenter
11/00 NCTE Annual Conference Milwaukee, MI	Research Presentation	Delivering a dream: Literacy rooted in the lives of inner city children Presenter
05/00 IRA Annual Conference Indianapolis, IN	Research Presentation	Early literacy—Beginning the process: Literacy rooted in the lives of inner city children Presenter
04/00 AERA Annual Conference New Orleans, LA	Research Presentation	Case study: The writing development of two ESL kindergarten students
11/99 NCTE Annual Conference Denver, CO	Research Presentation	Learning from children to support their learning: Reimagining the possibilities
08/99 Whole Language Umbrella Rochester, NY	Research Presentation	Literacy at home and at school: Lessons from Dane, Emily, and Sarah.
05/99 Language Education Research Forum Bloomington, IN	Research Presentation	Emergent literacy: A child's understanding of writing
05/98 Peel Teachers Research Forum Mississauga, ON	Research Presentation	Children learning to write: Looking at the literacy development of two ESL students.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

05/06 Ministry of Education/Faculties of Education Forum Toronto Ontario	Workshop Presentation	Practical Aspects Related to School Law Presenter
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01/06 Ontario Teacher's Federation Annual Conference Toronto, ON	Workshop Presentation	Partnering in Education Presenter
06/05 Peel District School Board Mississauga, ON	Workshop Presentation	Playing with written language Presenter
02/04 & 03/04 Peel District School Board Mississauga, ON	Workshop Presentation	Science in the kindergarten classroom Presenter
02/03 & 03/03 Peel District School Board Mississauga, ON	Workshop Presentation	Kidwatching: Observational assessment in the kindergarten classroom Presenter
01/02 Peel District School Board Mississauga, ON	Workshop Presentation	Miscue analysis: An introduction Presenter
11/00 Peel District School Board Mississauga, ON	Workshop Presentation	What is writing? Ways to Support Student Writing in the Primary Classroom Presenter

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

01/06 Frontier College Sudbury, ON	Workshop Presentation	Literacies Keynote
11/04 Brampton Christian Educators Network Brampton, ON	Invited Presentation	The making of a writer Presenter
10/99 American University Washington, DC	Guest Speaker	Critical literacy, critical texts, the role of parent and teacher. An online presentation.
06/99 Summer Reading Conference Bloomington, IN	Workshop Presentation	Multiple sign systems: An interactive workshop