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Understanding Students' Chosen Literacy Practices During Non-Academic Times: An Ethnographic Teacher-Research Inquiry

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UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' CHOSEN LITERACY PRACTICES DURING NON-

ACADEMIC TIMES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC TEACHER-RESEARCH INQUIRY

Submitted by

Justin R. Moyer

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Lesley University

Graduate School of Education

Fall 2016

UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' CHOSEN LITERACY PRACTICES DURING NON-

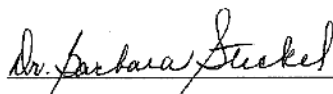ACADEMIC TIMES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC TEACHER-RESEARCH INQUIRY

Justin R. Moyer

Graduate School of Education
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Ph.D. Educational Studies
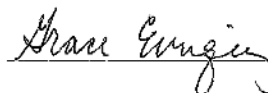Interdisciplinary Studies Specialization

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In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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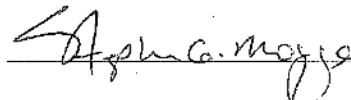Doctoral Committee Member

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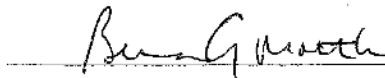
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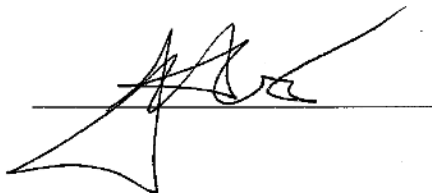Individually Designed Specialization

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I never would have gone anywhere if I had not realized how to think and write my way.

—Me

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to illuminate the literacy practices that a group of "struggling" students undertake during unstructured times of the school day. The study aims to extend prior theoretical work on literacy (Street, 1984; Weil, 1993; Luttrell & Parker, 2001; Kinloch, 2010; among others) to identify the ways these students engage in literacy practices for deeply personal reasons. Further, this dissertation intends to dispel some of the many myths that surround students in special education settings and, in the case of the focal students in this study, alternative schools.

Students reveal: (1) the literacy practices in which they participate, (2) explain their choices, and (3) contemplate the benefits. I ask about how they view, read, and interpret their larger worlds by way of their literacy practice(s). The study generally defines literacy practices as "what people do with literacy" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). I expand the literature with an investigation into the personal literacy practices of high school students in special education as a means to inform their personhoods and enhance classroom instruction.

The study followed five students who participated in an English elective, *My Literate Self: How I View, How I Read, and How I Represent My Larger World*. Students responded to a literacy prompt, discussed the daily prompt together, and created personal responses on digital slide programs. This ethnographic teacher-research inquiry utilized many ethnographic techniques, such as semi-structured interviews (Berg, 2007), unstructured interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), field notes (Delamont, 2002; Berg, 2007), audio recordings, and research artifacts (Glesne, 2006), for data collection. Data was analyzed for emergent themes and compared through triangulation (Delamont, 2002).

This study found that students employed personal literacy practices to construct identity, cope with emotions and experiences, and to critique the world around them. Further, the study found that while students used their literacy practices in part to isolate themselves from others, the products of their literacy practices symbolized personal thoughts and emotions. This study found that students were more concerned with the process than the product of their literacy practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

year of my studies. Dr. Heller has become a most influential role model in all my educational

pursuits by encouraging me to always do more and to revise, revise, revise. She provided so

much "grist for the [mental] mill" throughout all the seasons of my doctoral studies.

DEDICATION

—To Logan. My inspirational nephew.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 My Path to Literature, Writing, and Teaching

My educational journey was initially filled with some bumps and bruises by teachers who

assumed I did not try and curriculum that I estimated was well beyond my capacities. Yet, like

many students, I found teachers who assisted me along the way and helped me to the point where

I felt successful. Because of these moments of success and happiness, I discovered in college an

academic concentration I loved and a career that would allow me to provide students with

similar, small supports and helping hands to enable them to discover their learning strengths and

surpass their hurdles. My story, is of course, not the focus of this dissertation, but it is surely part

of the fuel that influenced me to dedicate my career and academic pursuits to help students who

struggle in mainstream schooling.

I was the average student throughout high school and again during initial undergraduate

courses. During these formative years, I experienced both literature and writing courses that

engaged my mind and led to many successful moments. In retrospect, I unwittingly realized that

I would never test well; however, with time, effort, and critical thinking, I came to understand

that I could represent quality effort and learning through essays. I began to hone my critical

thinking and writing skills in early college English classes. While I was still a frequent visitor to

professors' office hours, I saw improvements in my grades and felt my confidence slowly build.

I came to love literature in a course entitled *American Literature, 1915-1945* at the

University of New Hampshire. Professor Mishler allowed no distractions into the classroom.

Students who arrived tardy received only a locked door and blank stares from the on-timely

students on the other side of the window in the classroom door. His class was unlike any I had experienced because food, drink, and other distractions were not welcomed. Yet, what Mishler did allow into the room was any interpretation, thought, or as yet undeveloped idea that connected to the text under study. He was most concerned with the thinking and meaning-making process, not so much with establishing truths or definitive answers. Mishler reaffirmed my literary interests because he taught by example that numerous textual interpretations could be applied to reading text if the interpreter constructs a coherent argument. His method excited me because I would no longer be "wrong" for asserting an idea that may oppose a more typical interpretation.

I did well in Mishler's course because I could meet his classroom expectations. He recognized my involvement during class discussions and the effort I put into my submitted essays. My skill at constructing written arguments came earlier from Professor Romadanov, who skillfully taught *Critical Theory of Literature* with the most confident Eastern European accent. He carved out a little space for me during his office hours each week to discuss the relevant texts and my written responses to them because he noticed that my developed thoughts from discussions were occasionally lost in my haphazard writing. He focused little on my interpretations and rather chose to focus on my writing in the early stages.

Both Mishler and Romadanov built my confidence as a reader, writer, and student by taking the extra time to build on my strengths. They did not acknowledge deficit thinking (Harry & Klinger, 2007; Valencia, 2012, p. 2) in their teaching, but rather began with what a student could do and then modeled and encouraged the practices and necessary skills to accomplish an assignment or master content. Adhering to what I came to think of as "the abundance model,"

these two professors taught by *doing* and utilizing what I was doing well to teach me the skills I still lacked. I now attempt to implement such methods into my own practice.

I also experienced some teachers who were not so helpful regarding my academic potential and progress. Mr. O'Connell, the varsity band director and head music teacher at my high school, taught me how *not* to treat and interact with students. Though his actions and words had little effect on me while I was enrolled in his *Survey to Music* course, I now frequently reflect on them to maintain perspective on the struggles of my own students.

My high school was large, about 3,500 students for grades 10-12. Everyone was a face or number to the teachers. Each day I could encounter another student that I believed I had never seen before. I had registered for O'Connell's class to complete a Fine Arts requirement to graduate and I thought listening to music might be a decent way to fulfill the credits. If memory serves, his class was during 5th or 6th period just before the end of day. I entered the first class with excitement because I thought the course might be something different from all others. However, after a few days, I came to dread the daily walk into the isolated corridor of D-wing. The music wing was at the far end of the school: beyond the gym, beyond the auditorium, and beyond the art rooms. As an athlete, this was a foreign land to me. It was a place where the band and chorus students staked their claim.

I was always late because O'Connell's room was far from the content classrooms. He instantly assumed my tardiness was a personal slight. While I do not remember the comments he made to me across the classroom, I remember his sarcastic and presumptuous nature. My teenage self felt his comments emanated from pent up resentment about what and where he

taught, and I concluded he released his frustrations on students. I became an easy target because I always managed to arrive late, among other things…

My father had recently come home ill from work. He never did that. He was always up early and home late. He did whatever needed to be done for the family. Yet, when he came home from work one day near the end of my 9th grade year, he never went back. After his initial visit to the doctor my father was left permanently disabled, both mentally and physically. The cause was a failed medical procedure and miscommunications among his doctors. As a 10th grader, the same year I experienced O'Connell's wrath, my life at home was in turmoil. My sister had just left for college in Vermont and I was at home trying to get through school and understand all the changes that had occurred during recent months. My father was consistently in-and-out of the hospital. For months at a time he was an in-patient, while at other times I skipped my after school activities to pick him up from a day treatment program. I was tired and run-down dealing with this new person who looked so much like *my father* of old. Eventually, my attempts to do it all—school, family, friends, and sports—like I always had, exhausted me physically and emotionally.

Back in O'Connell's class, I began not only arriving late, but falling asleep. I would do everything I could to stay awake, but by this time of the school day I had no energy left. O'Connell could now chastise me for both offenses and became increasingly creative. He began to insist that I stand in the back of the room for entire class periods to ensure I would remain awake. His method worked, but it also remains the most vivid memory I have of learning in high school. He taught me what not to do with apparently reluctant students—assume you know the cause of struggle, highlight the deficit, and embarrass publicly.

I learned, both positively and negatively, from Mishler, Romadanov, and O'Connell. They regularly enter my conscience as I plan lessons in my classroom. These formative teachers cause me to question how each student will, or will not, engage with each lesson or activity. I consider who the lesson will help, who it may alienate, and who can meet the expectations if I set aside a little extra time to get them over hurdles. I ponder these questions continuously before, during, and after my classes. If O'Connell had asked similar questions, I could have provided a simple explanation for my behavior and he may have offered alternative solutions. However, he did not care enough to ask, so I cared even less to offer. Funny thing though—I actually liked his class when I could keep my eyes open.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

I begin this dissertation with reflections of my educational past because it is from here that I was motivated to teach. Also, with such reflection I continually evaluate my own pedagogy regarding: (1) how it affects students; (2) how it engages students; and (3) how well it welcomes students' interests and personalities into the classroom. Kutz and Roskelly (1991), literacy and education professors/scholars who pioneered new approaches to teacher preparation, assert that when teachers do not value what students bring to the classroom, the same students will disregard what the teachers bring (p. 57). Throughout my educational journey and teaching career, I have experienced numerous moments when this idea has either helped or hindered in any given situation. Seemingly, both Mishler and Romadanov also recognized the importance of working with what students brought to their classrooms as assets and starting points of development that could ultimately lead to growth and favorable learning outcomes; O'Connell

taught me that a lack of interest in students' lives beyond the classroom can lead to dereliction and failure.

My job allows me to observe, interact, and teach high schoolers the literacy skills that society deems will better their futures productively, personally, and financially. However, I notice that many of my students demonstrate a reluctance to adopt academic literacies and prefer to continually practice and revise their home and out-of-school literacies for a variety of reasons. Countless classroom hours have led me to believe that their reasons for resistance appear to stem from school officials' negative treatment of their learning difficulties, from their difficulty to manage emotions, and from the varied attempts to segregate them from mainstream classes. Much of the literature discussed in *Chapter 2: Review of the Literature* documents other instances where students or young adults in some way resist in-school literacy practices and opt to develop and focus on their out-of-school literacies.

I am a teacher of English Language Arts in an urban alternative high school for students diagnosed with emotional and behavioral difficulties. I have served in this role for the last twelve years and observed that my students' strongest engagements with literacy, such as texting, gaming, social networking, do not align with traditional notions of academic literacy or standardized assessments of literacy. The students I work with have met numerous educational, social, cultural, and familial roadblocks on their road to late adolescence, and many test well below grade level on standardized tests of literacy achievement and consistently fail to progress to higher grade levels, as revealed by these tests. However, these students continue to come to school, some more consistently than others, and many express a desire to change their current realities and acknowledge that education is a major factor to make such a change.

My observations of the students in-school, out-of-school, occasionally with their parents, and on the basketball court where I coach them, have provided moments where I observed them employ higher level literacy skills than emerge through testing, for numerous practical and entertainment purposes of communication about their needs, desires, and wishes. For instance, one student continually refused my insistence to begin her college application essay using the graphic organizers I provided and my suggestion that she just start typing on the classroom computer. Eventually, I noticed her constantly text messaging on her cell phone. I jokingly suggested she type her essay on the phone and email me her progress. I received, much to my surprise, a completed essay the following day in my inbox. While her essay had problems with conventions, her ideas and thoughts were dramatic and interesting. She later revealed that her struggles with writing long-hand and her lack of a home computer caused her anxiety about using them. We later used the classroom computer to work her essay through to completion.

In my early years of teaching at Park High School (the alternative school), I came to understand that some administrators and teachers at Madison High School (the mainstream school) held a negative bias and a contemptuous outlook towards Park students. Their attitudes permeated the community. In turn, Park students also professed a degree of resentment towards Madison High School administrators and teachers because they were the ones who removed them from the mainstream school and placed them on the other side of the city in the alternative school that is housed in a repurposed elementary school.

I was new and not even from the same state. I also didn't completely understand what *alternative* meant, nor whom the school was meant to serve. What I did understand was that our school was sent students who were on Individual Education Plans (IEP). Some students were

diagnosed with specific learning disabilities, some with social and emotional issues, and some came from incarceration or other placements.

I learned from the students that while they might demonstrate some challenging behaviors they were looking for an education. I began to observe students outside the classroom and noticed that a number of them participated in literacy practices of their own choice, and their practices made me curious. I looked more closely at what the students were doing and asked questions. Yet, I was left wanting to know more about what they were doing, what it provided them, and how I might be able to utilize their interests in my classroom.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

In my dissertation, I explore the literacy practices of high school students outside the structure of the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom in this alternative high school. The students have been diagnosed with emotional/behavioral difficulties that have significantly impacted their learning in mainstream settings. The students are surrounded by negative biases and assumptions from the outside community; some consistently participate in literacy practices (writing, drawing, reading, etc.) during unstructured points (i.e. breakfast, break, lunch) of the school day. These students' involvement in literacy practices runs contrary to outsiders' perceptions about their literacy lives and their literacy interests are also unlike those of many of their mainstream peers. I began to believe that the literacy practices students employ beyond the classroom can become points of contact in the classroom if teachers recognize and utilize students' literacies. I have also observed some students become completely engrossed in these outside literacy practices and withdraw from the more social aspects of school. One aim of my research is to bring attention to these literacy practices so that both the students and those in the

community recognize and value the students' efforts (as seen through their literacy engagements) to learn and grow within Park High School (PHS, Park).

I have met numerous moments, both in and out of the classroom, where I observed and interacted with students who communicate with literacy practices that are unlike those traditionally valued in the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. I often observe students: who glue themselves to smartphones with text-messaging; who interact with others through social media websites; who read and discuss video game magazines; who act as translators for parents at progress meetings; who converse in the hallways with context specific vocabularies and dialects; who express themselves through lyrics and art; who seamlessly communicate with teammates throughout an entire basketball game, often nonverbally. I am interested in the many ways that students use alternative literacies both in-school and out-of-school because I believe that personal literacy practices are useful to teach traditional academic literacies in the classroom, which the students will also need to develop.

When I observe students with a command of literacy via these practices, I wonder why these same students continually struggle to connect with the ELA curriculum and to make "academic literacy" progress. I stand witness to students who successfully read the larger world through the words and images of the contextualized situations they experience. However, I find that students' literacy abilities outside-the-classroom do not always translate to success in the classroom. Ruppar (2013) validates this perception when she states "many students with significant disabilities [difficulties] are not accessing literacy learning within meaningful and purposeful contexts" (p. 44). Ruppar calls for the integration of authentic literacy practices for students with learning differences; Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, and Tower (2006) describe

authentic literacies as those that "serve a true communicative purpose" and a "text (written or read) must be like texts that are used by readers and writers outside of a learning-to-read-or-to-write context" (p. 346). It stands to reason that students such as those I've observed and the participants in my study may experience more academic success if the classroom literacy content is geared towards the more authentic literacy practices they value. For instance, rather than students writing a literary analysis paper in response to a classroom novel, they might write a letter to an organization that supports a theme represented in the novel to open a dialogue and obtain more information on the context of the issues the novel raises.

Last year, one student constantly wrote and drew personal manga stories during the spare moments of classes, during morning and lunch breaks, and during many moments of the school day. Brenner (2013) defines manga stories as Japanese comics where "stories are told in sequence across the page using panels, text, and word balloons" in a manner similar to U.S. comic books or graphic novels (p. 42). He began to dress like some of his created characters and went so far as to style his hair in a manner similar to a character of his own creation. On numerous occasions, I spoke with him about his work. He communicated details about the conception, history, and development of his plots and characters. His creation of these comics became deeply integrated into his daily life.

Students labeled in similar ways as those enrolled in my high school are more known for absenteeism, negative behavior, and poor grades. These same issues have come to inaccurately define alternative school populations in the theoretical literature about students with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004; Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaesar, 2006; Caldarella, Young, Richardson, Young, & Young, 2008, among others). I believed

the negative connotations associated with these students was not the full story of those students I observed engaged in personal literacy practices. I identified a section of the school population engaged in these literacy practices whose stories might help educators see other aspects of these students' lives to more fully understand them as individuals ripe with potential.

This dissertation is a teacher-research inquiry that employs ethnographic techniques to better understand the literacy practices and the students who participate in those practices during unstructured times of the school day. Unfortunately, administrators who approved and oversaw my research required that the project be conducted within the confines of my classroom to limit the exposure of the project on non-participating students. While my true intent was to investigate students working on their own literacy practices outside the classroom, I was forced to concede and investigate their literacy practices in the classroom. However, I incorporated as much freedom and potential for individual creativity into the project design to ensure I afforded students a space where they could create, interact, and employ literacy practices similar to those that they engage in outside the classroom. As such, I designed an elective entitled, *My Literate Self: How I View, How I Read, and How I Represent My Larger World*, that met twice weekly during the Spring 2014 semester. I invited ten students to participate and ultimately five agreed and completed the necessary permissions to take part.

Once parental and school permissions were collected, I conducted semi-structured interviews discussing a host of literacy-based questions (Appendix B). We then began meeting on two scheduled days a week for approximately fifty-minutes. During each meeting, I introduced a literacy prompt (Appendix D & Appendix E) and then allowed students to discuss and analyze the prompt for approximately fifteen-minutes. Students then went to individual

computers where they created a new electronic slide that represented their interpretation of the daily prompt.

I designed the structure of the research project to yield three forms of data collection: (1) semi-structured interviews (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995; Berg, 2007; Wolcott, 2008, p. 55) and unstructured interviews (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995; Berg, 2007; Wolcott, 2008, p. 55); (2) field notes of each class and the associated directed discussion; and (3) research artifacts or measures or accretion—"things people have created" (Glesne, 2006, p. 67) in the form of digital slide presentation portfolios create by each individual student.

1.4 Research Questions

The following questions guided my study throughout design, implementation, and formalization:

1. How do these students view, read, and interpret the world?

2. For what purpose(s) do these students consistently engage in literacy practices outside the classroom?

3. To what degree do the literacy practices enable them to better understand the world in which they live?

4. What intrinsic or extrinsic benefits do the students receive as a result of their literacy practices?

5. In what ways might these seemingly very different students connect interpersonally due to their literacy or artistic interests?

1.5 Significance of the Study

My career path brought me from English teaching in a mainstream setting to teaching English as a special educator in an alternative high school. I continually try to make connections between English Language Arts and special education because literature, teacher preparation programs, and schools tend to address them in isolation and separate from one another (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengill, 2005; Taylor, 1991). There exists a vast body of literature about literacy and ELA instruction, as well as multitudes of literature on various topics pertaining to special education. However, I found only limited literature that addresses the literacy practices of adolescent students in special education settings. Further, many studies that do address students in special education choose to frame the students as disconnected from any literacy practices (Garot & Katz, 2003). For instance, Cohen (1999) explores the reflective capacities or "the personal and interpersonal components that enable a person to learn from social-emotional experience" (p. 70), and the ways that teachers can help students grow by teaching them to be more reflective about their social-emotional experiences. He identifies three significant factors in student behavior as a "deviation" (p. 70)—(1) biological, (2) psychological, and (3) social/interpersonal. While I agree educators must be aware and work with students when negative behavior persists, I question the way Cohen (1999) and others frame students as deviant and in need of remediation by adults. Such deficit thinking (Valencia, 2012) creates a negative perception of students, whereas reframing and rethinking how we work with such students can be done positively by utilizing what they *do well* and with methods like positive behavioral interventions and supports [PBIS] (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

I hope my research will provide positive stories about a group of students in special education who utilize literacy practices to meet a variety of personal and emotional needs. Luttrell and Parker (2001) note "We found many students are engaged in everyday literacy practices far beyond the school day in ways that their teachers are unaware of" (p. 235). I posit that many of those students who participate in literacy practices outside-of-school also do so during unstructured times of the school day. While many teachers do not inquire about students' lives outside-of-school, it seems that their knowledge of students' literacy practices conducted during unstructured periods in school may allow them to help students connect both personally and academically to literacy practices in the classroom. Luttrell and Parker (2001) focus on a particular student in their study, Alice, who "feels her English classes are disconnected from her interests in reading and writing or her hopes for a college education" (p. 243). Alice writes journals and poetry daily, yet she struggles in her ELA courses because she has little connection with the content. It seems that if teachers had been aware of Alice's personal writing beyond the classroom, they may have been able to use her interests to help her meet curriculum expectations in the classroom. I hope my research will alert teachers to the literacy practices students participate in so that they may use this new knowledge to more fully engage them in the classroom.

In addition to Luttrell & Parker(2001), Weil (1993), Moje (2002), Kinloch (2010) and others document literacy practices by students outside-of school, while researchers such as Chall (1983), Delpit (2006), Luke (2012), and many others document literacy practices in the classroom. However, I have found scarce literature that discusses students' use of literacy practices around the school while not in structured classes. Much of the research available

provides suggestions to implement students' interests to enhance identity formation into ELA

curriculum, but my contribution is to understand students' participation in literacy practices that

go largely unnoticed by their busy teachers and therefor underutilized in the classroom.

1.6 Definitions of Terms

When I discuss the participants of this study, I also name them as those who attend an

alternative high school for students in special education with emotional, behavioral, and specific

learning disabilities. For the purposes of this study and out of respect for the students, I avoid the

term disability and substitute it with "difficulty." I use the term *alternative high school* to refer to

the specific setting where I teach and conducted my research. It is a substantially-separate school

that enrolls 24-40 students in a traditional course of study with the addition of numerous supports

such as counseling, small class size, and differentiated instruction. The students who attend are

required to have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) as defined by the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This plan is developed by a team that consists of the student,

parents, administrators, special education teachers, content teachers, and school psychologists.

Prior to the development of an IEP, all students participate in a battery of educational and

psychological testing that determines their areas of need, necessary supports, and general

eligibility for specific services. Students believed to have an emotional difficulty (anxiety,

depression, bipolar disorder, for instance) or behavioral difficulty (conduct disorder, ADHD,

substance abuse, for instance) are formally diagnosed by a physician or psychologist.

My use of the term *literacy* is based on Street's (1984) ideological model of literacy that

insists literacy cannot be easily defined, but must be seen as contextualized for specific purposes

in specific places. Street (2003) further defines the ideological model of literacy as "a social

practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially

constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address

reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and

being" (2003, pp. 77-78). More recently, Keefe and Copeland (2011) ask the simple question,

"What Is Literacy?," and acknowledge that such a question opens "a world of complexity" (p.

92). Reviewing relevant literature, they focus on pivotal moments in the development of literacy

and conclude that since literacy is under constant development it is more appropriate to name

core definitional principles. Further, their principles take into account the literacy needs and

experiences of those with extensive needs for learning support. Keefe and Copeland (2011)

provide five *Core Definitional Principles*:

1. All people are capable of acquiring literacy.

2. Literacy is a human right and is a fundamental part of the human experience.

3. Literacy is not a trait that resides solely in the individual person. It requires and
   creates a connection (relationship) with others.

4. Literacy includes communication, contact, and the expectation that interaction is
   possible for all individuals; literacy has the potential to lead to empowerment.

5. Literacy is the collective responsibility of every individual in the community; that is,
   to develop meaning making with all human modes of communication to transmit and
   receive information. (p. 97)

Their tenets of literacy are useful to name and place the literacy practices of students such as those who contributed to this research. While the participants' practices are unconventional in the scope of an ELA classroom, these practices fit with components Keefe and Copeland (2011) name as essential to literacy. For instance, the participants engage in their literacy practices to make *connections*, to *communicate*, and to *empower* themselves in their local community and larger world.

The students I work with might not initially think of their activities as literacy practices, but their practices most certainly classify as *literacy* practices because they contribute to their "knowledge, identity, and being" that Street notes. Seglem and Witte (2009) assert, "No longer are the abilities to read and write in a linear, left-to-right fashion the sole indicators of successful communication. Rather, the world is made up of visual symbols that require more complex thinking skills than traditional literacy requires" (p. 216). While such statements suggest tenets of a more traditional, autonomous model of literacy, their forward thinking about literacy resides in their insistence that reading and communication extends far beyond the word and the text. Seglem and Witte (2009) suggest that students, especially struggling readers (p. 217), retain more textual knowledge when they associate the information with images, particularly those images which they create. The creation of symbols within literacy practices is what I observe many students intuitively do without a name placed on it.

Kinloch (2010) further advances definitions of literacy while acknowledging more traditional definitions of literacy as "the ability to read and write."

Literacies encompass not only the ability to read and write, but also to make sense of our lives and to critique multiple positions and perspectives. Literacies involve questioning our roles in the world, assuming multiple identities to consider various perspectives and experience empathy, and interpreting complex meanings of texts that may or may not include our voices, stories, lived experiences, and truths. (p. 145)

Within my research, I aim to gain a better understanding of students by acknowledging and bringing forth their "voices, stories, lived experiences, and truths" (Kinloch, p.145) as portrayed in their personal literacy practices.

I use the term *unstructured times* of the school day to refer to students' breakfast, break, and lunch periods. It was during these moments that I observed and became interested in the students who engaged in literacy practices by personal choice.

Other important terms:

Literacy Practice—"the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape…Literacy practices are what people do with literacy" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7). This term is useful in describing the practices of the research participants, for these practices are embedded and represent the social worlds in which they live. Their practices are impacted by the social and emotional contexts in which they live and they *are doing* work with literacy to understand their place in society and the larger world. Further, the participants produce products from their practices that represent who they are and how they relate to the world.

Alternative Literacies—[sometimes called multiple literacies, 21st-Century Literacies] these are the spoken, written, and performed communication acts initiated by individuals to express their contextualized lives. Alternative literacy practices extend beyond literacy practices found in school classrooms and represent the various forms of communication between individuals of shared spaces. While scholars and educators use numerous synonyms to describe these literacy practices, I found alternative literacies useful in my work because it is both specific and vague. It is specific in that it denotes some literacy practices as alternative to those of the traditional classroom, yet it is vague in that it does not attempt to classify specific literacy practices as alternative. I use this term only to note that one participates in a literacy practice that would not typically be found in a traditional English Language Arts classroom.

New Literacy Studies [NLS]—the attention and recognition of the ways in which literacy is tied to "people's lives, identities, and social affiliations" (Compton-Lily, 2009, p.88). Compton-Lily (2009) suggests that NLS is one method to better acknowledge students' literacy practices outside-the-classroom with technological texts (p. 89), as well as the ways NLS is useful to help struggling readers because it enables educators "to move beyond skills-based approaches to literacy learning, enabling them to recognize that a vast range of experiences contribute to literacy learning" (p. 88). Richardson (2009) similarly defines NLS as "the idea that literacy must be conceived of more broadly, as ideological, not restricted to the print bound, socially constructed (p. 753). An NLS stance is an important term in order to recognize and view the participants' literacy practices because NLS widens how one defines and understands literacy. In this broader literacy conception the participants' work is more clearly explained and understood as true literacy practices.

Shared Spaces—the areas, geographical or philosophical, that bring people or groups of people, together for particular purposes. I use this term because shared spaces in a school such as the cafeteria, break room, and the research course classroom united participants who may have otherwise shared no common connection. While the participants did establish relationships with each other in the course of the research, prior to the study the shared spaces where they engaged in literacy practices might have been their only connection. As well, the shared space of the research classroom became a space understood only by the participants and they were the only individuals knowledgable of what occurred within the room.

Culture—"a phenomenon associated with how groups of people interact with each other. It is not to be confused for people themselves but with what people do and say as they go about their everyday affairs" (Goodenough, 1981, p. 103; as cited in Wolcott, 1997, p. 330). I found this definition of culture appropriate for this study because it describes the interactions of peoples brought together with shared spaces of shared interests. Also, this definition helps one to understand how the participants grew as a group over the duration of the research meetings. While they held few connections at the outset of the study, their interactions and emotional connections developed as they spent more time together in shared experiences. In this period, they became closer by further understanding each other's literacy practices and through the discussion, each other's interpretation of classroom prompts.

Teacher-Research—systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 7). I use teacher-research both as a stance towards the research and as a means to better understand the phenomenon I investigated in this research. I uncovered a point of interest

in my teaching position and formally went about researching students' literacy practices in a systematic way to inform my pedagogical practices.

Work—synonym for the participants' personal literacy practices in this study. In later chapters, I use *work* to replace literacy practices at times to note the physical and emotion effort that participants expend when engaged in their literacy practices.

Emotional and Behavioral Disability (EBD) or Emotional Disturbance [Difficulty]— "…a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance: (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems" (IDEA, 2004). I use the federal definition to describe the difficulties that each participant was formally diagnosed as having. While I do not believe their diagnoses are disabilities, but rather see them as difficulties, I feel it is important to recognize the way in which educational practitioners formally describe students like the participants of this study.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This chapter, *Chapter One* is an introduction and discussion of the literacy practices I observed among some students in my school, the site of my research. I also outline the significance of this study and compare and contrast it with other studies found in the literature.

Chapter Two is a Review of the Literature that expounds on the ever-changing definitions of literacy and numerous studies that demonstrate expanded notions of literacy, including the ideological model of literacy as enacted in and beyond the classroom. *Chapter Three* outlines the methodology and processes that I engaged in from the inception of the idea to the completion of the study. *Chapter Four* presents the data through a discussion of each participant individually and concludes with a discussion of the themes that emerged from the research. *Chapter Five* is a discussion of (1) general findings; (2) significance of the study to my daily work and the larger educational research community; (3) limitations of the study; (4) recommendations for implementation and ideas for future study, and (5) conclusion and reflection on the research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The goal of this literature review is to examine how literacy researchers' work has transformed and expanded notions about how literacy is defined and what it means to be literate in school, home, and/or one's immediate community, and what literacy means in the larger world. Further, I focus on studies that demonstrate potential connections between individuals' literacy practices and those endorsed in academic settings.

I continually search for interesting and interactive ways to engage students with an English curriculum that appears to have texts of little relevance to them. I believe if teachers could better connect the current curriculum to students' interests and help them see relevant, real world outcomes the students would respond with greater dedication and study. I analyze in this literature review the work of numerous academics that investigate the ways teachers can better recognize and represent students' literacy practices from their communities in the classroom. The goal of my research is to expand on the current body of knowledge through an exploration of the power and promise of including authentic literacy practices of adolescents in an alternative high school program.

I believe, and the research suggests, that students bring to the classroom alternative literacies from their home and community (Luttrell and Parker, 2001; Weinstein, 2007; De La Piedra, 2010; Kinloch, 2010;); I hope to uncover ways for teachers to incorporate such alternative literacies into their pedagogical methods to better convey traditional literacy content

to students diagnosed with emotional and behavioral difficulties (Wilhelm, 1997; Gaughan, 2001; Fecho, 2004; Vetter, 2010).

Over the last few decades, the results of numerous studies have reshaped how academics think about and define literacy. I assert that such a paradigm shift presents an opportunity for teachers and academics alike to seek ways to make students' literacy practices essential and common components of classroom pedagogy going forward. The results of such studies can be summarized as a shift in thinking from the people as dependent on literacy, to the meanings of literacy as dependent on the people. The evolution of how scholars view literacy represents what Street (2005) calls a move from an autonomous model of literacy to an ideological model (pp. 417-418), that recognizes the influence of culture, personal history, community, and context on the meanings and values of literacy transactions between people and within cultures. Aghaei, Lie, and Nor (2012) rename Street's (2005) models of literacy as "the cognitive view" that prevailed in the past and "the sociocultural view" that has taken root in our discussions since the early 1980s; yet, Aghaei et al. (2012) maintain Street's (2005) description of the two views despite an alteration to the name.

Regardless of the shift in the ways academics discuss literacy, the teachers, policy makers, and school personnel continue to follow the mandates of the older cognitive model. In this literature review, I contend that citizens need to reconsider definitions of literacy as a result of the philosophical shift and the new trends described in contemporary literacy research, as well as the ways educators may apply these new understandings directly to how we teach and engage with students in our schools. Ahmed (2011) describes "functional literacy" of the 1960s as those literacy skills directed towards "productivity and improvement of quality of life" (p. 183), which

is no longer an adequate goal of literacy because ideas of productivity and quality of life have

also become more complex over the past few decades. Today, people use literacy skills to be

productive personally and professionally and to improve their quality of life not simply by the

jobs they maintain, but also by using literacy to critically view the world, to creatively express

themselves with multiple modes of communication, and to construct one's identity within their

cultural milieu.

Individuals also use literacy to critique and challenge dominant ideologies and

mechanisms of control such as government and big business. Freire (1978) notes, "Any situation

in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in in the process of inquiry is one of

violence" (p. 85). He frames this as the oppressor-oppressed dilemma in which each needs the

other in order to exist (Freire, 1978, p. 58). Bob Fecho (2004), literacy theorist and teacher of

reluctant students, describes and uses critical literacy in the classroom to enable students to call

"the oppressive status quo into question and helps learners and teachers to use their literacy as a

means for negotiating social change" (p. 47). With such actions, students engage in authentic

experiences that help them not only understand dominant ideologies and structures, but also the

ways in which they can use literacy in meaningful ways to challenge and change structures

towards their "liberation" (Freire, 1978). The students I interact with have resisted, in varied

degrees, the mainstream educational model, yet demonstrate with continual attendance and effort

a desire to become educated. So while they *resist* the classroom, they also embrace literacy

practices for authentic and personal purposes. Further, Cridland-Hughes (2015) states that

caring critical literacy is a means to not only engage social justice issues with students, but also

it develops close relationships that make a difficult task bearable (p.131). It is overwhelmingly

evident that if teachers of similar populations can access such students out-of-school literacy interests in-the-classroom a degree of investment, care, and change might ensue.

I have observed numerous moments where students make clear their literacy abilities that may, or may not, mesh with how teachers and policy-makers continue to define literacy based on old models and theories. I believe the students are doing something that warrants teachers attention and integration into classroom activities and curriculum. I investigate the following research in my effort to inform and diversify instruction and learning for these students and to help colleagues, policy-makers, and myself see and honor a wider range of literacy practices.

Luke and Woods (2009) note that traditional definitions of literacy consider the "skills, processes, and understandings" necessary for individuals to make meaning from text (p. 9). They continue that literacy was traditionally thought of as static, or "a fixed body of skills or an individual, internal capability—culturally neutral, universal in its features, and developmentally accessible" (p. 9). While Luke and Woods (2009) recognize the traditional ideas of literacy, they also describe the ways in which literacy has evolved and continues to evolve. Yet, Herber (1970/1978), Chall (1984), and Enright (2011) all contribute to how academics typically describe the historical autonomous model of literacy. These theorists, to varied degrees, assume a skills-based approach that aims to teach reading and writing in isolation without recognition of the context.

Herber (1970/1978) and Chall (1983) describe in their research how reading and writing instruction can be taught with explicit strategies. Chall (1983) proposes a five-stage scheme to assist teachers and learners with the process of learning to read (pp. 15-24). Her stage theory is an attempt to systematically advance students' reading abilities from the initial reading, or

decoding, stage (p.15) to an advanced college-level where knowledge is to be constructed and reconstructed in the formation of a unique world view for the reader (p. 24). Herber (1970/1978) explains instructional methods for teachers to teach reading through content material. He uses the content of various subjects as the "vehicle" (p. 3) for teachers in secondary grades to both convey their content information, while also continually teaching students advanced reading skills.

Enright (2011) contributes an important distinction that deconstructs the definition of traditional literacies. She distinguishes between notions of academic literacy and academic language and summarizes key components of each term. Enright (2011) states, "Academic literacy focused on particular skills involved in decoding and composing text-based curricular materials, whereas academic language involved measurable aspects of language proficiency (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) along a developmental trajectory" (p. 84). This description details two main points about traditional literacies: (1) literacy is composed of a specific set of skills, and (2) literacy can be tested and measured along a continuum. Enright notes that traditional literacies rarely acknowledge the person and the context in relation to literacy, which suggests that one does not inform or influence the other. In her work, Enright explains traditional literacies to create a case for the inclusion of students' literacies for engagement; however, I believe her dissection of academic literacy and academic language serves to further define my conception of traditional literacies.

Luke and Woods (2009) assert how and why such definitions of literacy have been challenged and rewritten over the last two decades (p. 9). An accurate definition of literacy

today would counter traditional definitions, Luke and Woods (2009) suggest that literacy is organic, an ever-changing body of skills, which one constantly refines and repurposes in a number of contexts to place one as a member, or outsider, of a particular discourse community to develop knowledge and effect political, social, cultural, and personal structures. I believe a definition of literacy such as the one Luke and Woods (2009) issue is a definition that will recognize and legitimize the skills that students already use and can be built upon in the classroom to further their knowledge. For instance, I often overhear students in heated critiques about clothing and music. They not only outline their feelings, but also provide evidence and rationale for their thoughts. If teachers could welcome such debates in the classroom, they might be able to help students transfer their skills of evaluation to the texts under study.

The structure of this literature review is progressive in the sense that I review traditional, autonomous notions of literacy and gradually move forward to contemporary thoughts on literacy analysis with a focus on studies that represent the ideological model of literacy in action (Street,1984). My review follows snapshots from the historical evolution of literacy thought and theory where I describe literacy in-the-classroom, beyond-the-classroom, and the ways in which both areas can be bridged together to make literacy more complete and representative of the individual. Specifically, section 2.2 focuses on how the term literacy and many of its adaptations can be analyzed and how definitions of literacy can be dissected historically by purpose and intent. Section 2.3 concentrates on identifying major influences to literacy theory since the landmark study of Scribner and Cole in 1981. Section 2.4 emphasizes the existence of power in literacy through a description of New Literacy Studies (NLS) and a connection of NLS to alternative literacies. Section 2.5 examines numerous studies, largely based on the ideological

model of literacy, set within classrooms by scholars and teacher-researchers alike. Section 2.6 highlights those studies that aim to make students active participants in literacy discussions and activities in the classroom. Section 2.7 reviews the literature that aims to "re-contact" students in the ELA classroom that have felt neglected by teachers in an attempt to welcome them in again. Section 2.8 illuminates studies that aim to empower students within the ELA classroom to find their voice through all forms of expression. Section 2.9 looks beyond the classroom to provide the landscape for other areas where students are involved in literacy practices. Finally, section 2.10 sketches the ways in which literacy may serve as a bridge between education, the larger world, and the development of the individual

I describe this literature review as progressive because I attempt to take the reader from the theoretical underpinnings of literacy to the practical application of literacy in both the classroom and the community, and ultimately I suggest a potential bridge that literacy may create between both worlds.

2.2 Analyzing How Literacy is Defined

Various scholars have come to name specific types of literacy under the larger umbrella term. While their efforts serve to answer many questions, the scholars' works also raise many new questions in regards to: What constitutes literacy?; Where does literacy occur?; When is one literate?; and Whose literacy counts? In this section, I address through the literature the ways in which scholars define literacy, deconstruct definitions of literacy(ies), whose literacy counts, and the consequences of literacy.

Roberts (2005) provides a process to analyze definitions of literacy, which he adapted from a model by Scheffler (1960), that would negate the need to settle on one precise definition of literacy. Scheffler's (1960) definitional framework was generic, in that it was to be used as a way to define the myriad of definitions and associated terms within the educational landscape. Roberts (2005) applies the framework for the specific purpose of classifying various definitions of literacy, which is useful to consider when reviewing the literature of literacy theorists who lay claim to new and repurposed terms and definitions regarding literacy. For instance, Enright (2010) speaks of "hybrid experiences [literacies] as participating in and across multiple communities and domains" (p. 113), which is similar to what I regard as multiple literacies or alternative literacies. Essentially, in the literature, various theorists use different terms to refer to similar definitions and/or concepts.

Roberts (2005) names the three types of definitions that he borrows from Scheffler (1960) as stipulative, descriptive, and prescriptive (Roberts, 2005, p. 29). Stipulative refers to words that are being defined for the first time, or old words defined in a new way, for the sole purpose of definition in a specific paper (Roberts, 2005, p. 30). Descriptive definitions of terms refer to "prior use" of terms, or those often found in a dictionary or prior academic writing (p. 30). Prescriptive definitions often describe, overtly or suggestively, how a term should be used (p. 31). Roberts (2005) notes the usefulness of these types of definitions when considering how to define literacy because the concept of literacy itself has become so large and means so much to so many people that placing literacy within the three types helps to deconstruct all that literacy is and is not. As I explore the meanings of literacy, I will be continually rewriting the stipulative definition of literacy as it is an old term that I am using to mean new things within my work.

Utilizing Scheffler's (1960) framework of definitions, Roberts (2005) notes that a "search for a satisfactory single descriptive definition of literacy is a journey without end; one can best hope to specify 'the' definition of literacy for particular purposes..." (p. 32). This in hand, he moves to suggest that academics think of definitions of literacy through various lenses in particular situations (p. 34). For example, Heath (1983) sought to describe literacy experiences in two rural communities, which is much different from Kinloch's (2010) observations of the literacy experiences of adolescents in a gentrified Harlem. However, both Heath (1983) and Kinloch (2010) claim that literacy was employed by the participants in their research settings, albeit in different ways, which only furthers the argument for expanded definitions of literacy and associated terms.

Daphne Ntiri (2009) asserts that "literacy must be understood as historically constructed and subject to continuous change as it interacts with social, cultural and political contexts" (p. 103), and that the way scholars think about literacy should also be viewed through "the framework of both the individual's and society's well-being" (p. 103). Ntiri reviews a breadth of literature that demonstrates the chronological evolution of literacy through major paradigm shifts. She asserts that literacy is one's ability to read and write, but also "an instrument for reading the world" (p. 98) in conjunction with empowerment and betterment for the self and of society. While Ntiri claims a definition of literacy is "limiting," she notes that scholars' paradigms of literacy have moved from the "traditional, non-engaging" view to "an open, dialogic approach that is politically energized" (p.103), capable of changing with the evolving world, yet literacy policy has not sufficiently followed this paradigm shift.

Ntiri's (2009) work echoes much of what Paulo Freire (1970/2004) spoke to concerning literacy as a tool of empowerment that can lead to political change. In relation to education and breaking down the teacher-student divide, Freire (1970/2004) claims, "Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (p. 93). Freire's claim applies to the teacher-student divide concerning what literacies matter in the classroom, in the home, and in the world. Many educators remain dedicated to traditional views of literacy and literacy methodologies, which can lead to a disconnect from students' lives. Further, many teachers' traditional thinking and narrow definitions of literacy disregard the literacy practices that students employ on their own outside of formal schooling that results in a dichotomy of *mine is right and your's is wrong*, between teachers and students who are both reluctant to sacrifice what they believe are *true* literacy transactions. To right the disagreement of what literacies matter, Walter (1999) suggests a model of definitions for literacy to separate four major views of what literacy is. In doing so, he provides evidence that both teachers who focus on teaching academic literacies and students who value the literacy practices that are most essential to daily survival are both right about what literacy means because it means so many things. For instance, teachers should work to improve the grammar and conventions in students' writing because later in their lives they will be judged by it. Yet, students should also have the opportunity to discuss, write, and read about topics of immediate importance to their lives and interests outside of the school.

Pierre Walter (1999) focuses on adult literacy and the consequences of literacy in developing countries. He extends Lytle and Wolfe's (1989) framework of four metaphors of

literacy consequences: literacy as skills; literacy as tasks; literacy defined as practices; and

literacy as critical reflection (as cited in Walter, 1999, pp. 33-36). He uses these metaphors of

literacy as the stepping-point to define what literacy might mean in relation to each metaphor and

then uses the definitions to discuss the consequences of literacy for adults in developing worlds

(p. 36). In relation to the metaphors as a whole unit, Walter (1999) presents a working definition

of literacy:

> ...[literacy] can be variously defined as a set of instrumental reading, writing, and math
>
> skills, as the ability to perform various life tasks using these skills, as a set of cultural
>
> practices encompassing reading, writing, and calculations or as a process of obtaining
>
> critical knowledge of and reflecting on the world and one's place within it. (p. 36)

Walter's definition of literacy recognizes that specific skills, cultural practices, and identity

formation are all hallmarks of the literate person. He reapplies Lytle and Wolfe's (1989)

framework to discuss the consequences adults in developing countries face if they are generally

unable to attain his conception of literacy (pp. 36-39). With the backing of numerous qualitative

studies that investigated literacy in contextualized ways, Walter (1999) concludes that being

literate and the consequences of such literacy, with regard to current assumptions and definitions,

is more a result of one's schooling and socialization than actual literacy (p. 45).

Kirkland (2009) extends Walter's (1999) notions of what literacy is and can be with a

detailed study that focuses on how tattoos might tell the "unexamined human story of

literacy" (p. 375). Kirkland's (2009) research examines one way that adolescents use literacy to

establish identity. Through exploration of the tattoos of his main subject, Derrick Todd, Kirkland

found that symbols tell a story of an individual that extends beyond words (p. 376). He notes

that the tattooed body comes to represent "sites of struggle and storytelling" (p. 378) that may be critically read in ways that are similar to practices of literary scholars and their more formal written texts (pp. 378-379). His contribution is important as it serves to document an alternative literacy practice in action. Further, his work increases how scholars frequently extend and deepen our understanding of what literacy means through the examination of literacy practices and literacy artifacts in contextualized settings.

Kirkland (2009) repositions his view of literacy and proposes a further definition of literacy that accounts for literacy practices such as tattoo art. He comes to describe literacy as "both a material product and social practice fettered to a particular time and place. It encompasses the worldview of the individual juxtaposed against world views in society" (p. 391). His greatest contribution to understanding literacy lies not only in representing a new literacy artifact in practice, but also in connecting literacy practices with the individual. Literacy is often thought, practiced, and defined in relation to the environment and larger world; however, Kirkland (2009) reminds scholars that literacy is also a highly personal act that the individual can use "to negotiate and articulate the human aspects of self" (p. 391).

Similarly, Garot and Katz's (2003) ethnographic study of gang appearance and dress codes in an urban, alternative high school compliments Kirkland's (2009) work; in that, they note how students' dress, gait, and appearance become symbolic of their self and group affiliation (Garot & Katz, 2003, p. 448), which can be read by both insiders and outsiders of the group. Garot and Katz (2003) note that "students make their clothing proclaim values" that are representative "of personal liberty, self-expression and identity" (p. 429). For both Garot and Katz (2003) and Kirkland (2009) literacy artifacts become symbols to be read by others, which

tell the personal story of the individual who carries the message. Garot and Katz's (2003) research provides further evidence that literacy is not only one's ability to read and write, but also one's ability to symbolize and interpret.

2.3 Shifting Paradigms of Literacy

In this section, I focus on scholars that raised our understanding of literacy beyond traditional thoughts of literacy as the ability to read and write. I focus on those scholars that studied and contributed about literacy beyond the academic context. I devote much of this area to the work of Scribner and Cole (1981/1999) who introduce us to literacy for "specific purposes in specific contexts of use" (p. 236). Further, they note that literacy is not always for the purposes of social, educational, or class movement and that literacy is not always for social change or community growth. Scribner and Cole demonstrate that literacy is often times pragmatic and a means of survival. I also note the work of James Gee (1989) who describes the ways in which literacy is embedded with assumptions, biases, and complexities when it goes beyond academic settings (p.22). As well, Gee explicitly describes how literacy is attained either by acquisition or learning (p. 20). With this understanding, he adds that one can be literate in any number of discourse communities (Gee, 1989, p. 22) and the skill to navigate these various social languages (Gee, 2000, p. 413) demonstrates one's literacy ability. When I consider the contributions of Scribner and Cole (1981/1999) alongside Gee (1989, 2000), I notice how Scribner and Cole provided the idea that literacy is context and person dependent and Gee expands on this conclusion by describing how literacy functions so differently for each person.

The early 1980s serves as a major point on the literacy timeline where academics began to question traditional notions of literacy. In a landmark literacy study, Scribner and Cole

(1981/1999) investigated the literate lives of the Vai people in Liberia and parts of Sierra Leone

to determine if schooling could be separated from literacy (p. 15). They speculated the Vai to be

an interesting group of people for study because they taught their native language in the home,

rather than in the school, which is a distinction that would best serve their research question.

Scribner and Cole's (1981/1999) work was further influenced by their belief that much of the

literacy research before their study was based on large assumptions. Researchers that based their

work on traditional notions of literacy claimed it caused psychological changes to the ways

individuals processed information and viewed the world with literacy being the agent of such

change (p. 7). Scribner and Cole's work demonstrates that even those people considered literate

by traditional definitions does not mean that their literacy will be an agent for personal change

and/or development.

Scribner and Cole (1981/1999) recognized that literacy meant something more among the

Vai people, who were often literate, in some combination, of Vai, Arabic, and/or English. As

well, their work faced complications because they found that people who spoke and understood a

particular language did not always ensure that they would also be able to write the language. For

these reasons, they sought a functional definition of literacy that could be used to assess literacy

levels among the Vai people at the outset of their study. Scribner and Cole (1981/1999)

constructed literacy as:

> …a set of activities or operations that an individual performs, rather than some static
>
> capacity that he has. How much practice a given individual has in these activities would
>
> clearly be relevant to whether or not literacy has generalized intellectual consequences.
>
> (p. 18)

From this working definition of literacy, they were able to develop questions to better describe the Vai people, their uses of literacy practices in three languages, and the ways in which they used these languages and literacy skills in daily life (p. 18).

Scribner and Cole (1981/1999) identify the prominent languages [Vai, Arabic, and English] of Vai life and the common activities associated with each language--daily farm life, religious studies, and government/urban occupations, respectively (p. 31). They note that individuals study and use each language to varying degrees dependent on their situation and purpose. Scribner and Cole found learning Vai was two-fold: (1) it was a sign of respect for Vai history, language, and leaders (p. 89); and (2) it was "used primarily for secular or pragmatic tasks..." (p. 241) that consist mainly of daily farm life. However, Scribner and Cole note that learning Vai is not necessary to preserve or enhance Vai life (p. 238). They found learning Vai was for purely practical purposes and deemed it "literacy without education because it [Vai] does not open doors to vicarious experience, new bodies of knowledge, or new ways of thinking about major life problems" (p. 238).

Scribner and Cole (1981/1999) found that the Vai people may be considered literate, yet not use their language for any purpose other than daily farming activities. In this case, the Vai people only learned the language to maintain their place in the work of the community. The Vai people that sought literacy for education attended more formal schooling to learn either Arabic for religious studies or English for the pursuit of occupations in government (pp. 70-74).

Scribner and Cole's (1981/1999) research helps to expand how scholars think about and problematize literacy and what being literate might entail because their work regarding literacy does not assume social, educational, or class movement after attaining literate status. As well,

their work challenges more traditional assumptions where literacy is thought to be a byproduct of schooling (p. 234). They explain how literacy in the Vai community does not necessarily entail "social change" and growth for the community (p. 239). Scribner and Cole (1981/1999) revise their view of literacy and assert, based on the results of their research among the Vai people, that:

> ...we approach literacy as a set of socially organized practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it. Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use. (p. 236)

Scribner and Coles (1981/1999) application of literacy "for specific purposes in specific contexts of use" (p. 236) affirms that literacy also resides in contextualized spaces that exist beyond traditional classrooms and thus provide a rationale for researchers to investigate literacy practices in particular spaces outside classrooms. The contextualization of literacy has led to numerous studies of alternative literacies (Scribener & Cole, 1980; Health, 1983; Kinloch, 2010; among others).

When I talk about and define alternative literacies, I refer to the definition of multiple literacies in general as explained by various researchers (Ahmed, 2011; De La Piedra, 2010; Fisher, 2003; Forell, 2006; Gee, 2000; Luttrell & Parker, 2001), with the exception that the people I speak about are not fully fluent with academic literacy practices.

James Gee (1989), renowned linguist and literacy scholar, dissects what he claims literacy entails to evaluate the individual components that provide the chemistry for the formation of literacy. His analysis of the components of literacy allows people to understand the individual parts and how these parts effect and contribute to an expanded notion of literacy.

Gee's (1989) aptly titled journal, "What is Literacy?", details his thoughts on literacy, which he uses to arrive at a proposed definition of what literacy might mean. Throughout the text, he places attention on terms that are foundational in nature and useful to understand in the pursuit of a better comprehension of literacy itself. Gee's (1989) focus is to define four key terms within the scope of literacy: (1) *discourse* (p. 18), (2) *identity kit* (p. 18), (3) *acquisition* (p. 20), and (4) *learning* (p. 20). While each term holds specific meaning that is dependent on the context that they refer to, Gee explains the meaning of these terms within the context of literacy.

To place these terms in one context, Gee (1989) acknowledges that literacy in the domain of a reading class would deal explicitly with the ability to read and write, but when literacy practices are discussed outside the classroom a "notion of literacy is nowhere near as coherent as it at first sounds" (p. 22). Essentially, when theorists discuss and investigate literacy practices out-of-school the term becomes embedded with assumptions, biases, and complexities. Gee (1989) considers how literacy becomes problematized when removed from the classroom vacuum and extended to the larger world.

Gee (1989) asserts that discourse can be thought of as an "identity kit" (p. 18) that represents an individual's contextualized "ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting" (p. 18) to identify one's participation in a larger social group or network. While people often connect across one or more discourse communities, at times simultaneously, they may also use multiple discourses that vary, contrast, and contest with the other discourses that they participate. For instance, a student who excels in theatre can participate within that discourse community accurately and purposefully. Yet, his/her understanding of theatre discourse might be nullified when participating in other discourses such as that of religious activities. For this individual, the

discourse of theatre and the discourse of religion may contrast with each other in regards to the ways of being and speaking in each situation (pp. 19-20). However, Gee (1989) states that part of literacy is being able to maintain numerous discourse spaces by altering one's actions, speech, and ways of being to suit the particular situation (pp. 22-23). Based on this assertion, one might consider that the ability to move across discourses plays a role in an expanded definition of literacy.

Gee's (1989) work also raises a question; If manipulating and navigating multiple discourse communities is necessary to be literate, then how does one gain the knowledge and information to participate in various discourse communities? He problematizes this question by stating that discourses are learned through one, or a combination of two, methods: (1) acquisition--learning something subconsciously through exposure, models, and practice without direct instruction (p. 20); and/or (2) learning—conscious information that is gained from direct teaching (p. 20). While such discourse knowledge is gained through various models of acquisition and learning, Gee (1989) maintains that the extent of each method is often culturally dictated (p. 21). However, he is clear with his own distinction of how acquisition and learning aid discourse knowledge. Gee (1989) states, "acquirers usually beat learners at performance, learners usually beat acquirers at talking about it, that is, at explication, explanation, analysis and criticism" (p. 21).

Gee (1989) builds from his definitions and explanations of the previous terms to arrive at his conclusion of what literacy might entail. He first claims, "dominant literacy is control of a secondary use of language used" in the dominant discourse (p. 23). Gee (1989) continues:

...powerful literacy is control of a secondary use of language used in a secondary discourse that can serve as a meta-discourse to critique the primary discourse or other secondary discourse, including dominant discourses. (p.23)

Gee (1989) provides here a definition of literacy that excludes particular points of knowledge and language like the more prescriptive definitions of literacy. Rather, he opts to highlight that literacy is more about the control over various discourses to the point that one can move across them flawlessly, while also being able to critique discourse communities that they consider themselves a member. Briefly returning to the example of the religious, theatre student, under Gee's definition of literacy, he/she will be able to move fluidly across the discourses of theatre and religion, while simultaneously being able to evaluate each discourse from an outsider perspective.

Gee's (1989) definition of literacy is important to consider when thinking about students today because teachers generally consider students that struggle with school literacy practices as simply illiterate and in need of remediation. However, outside of the school, these same students often successfully navigate various discourse communities within the home, community, and larger world. Many researchers have focused on students' literacy abilities outside the classroom (Bloome et al., 2000; De La Piedra, 2010; Fisher, 2003; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011, among others).

A decade later, Gee (2000) continues to theorize what literacy might mean specifically to the teenage population. Gee (1989) emphasized that a key component of literacy is one's ability to seamlessly move between various discourse communities (p. 23). He now terms this practice "social languages" (Gee, 2000, p.413), which are "used to enact, recognize, and negotiate different socially situated identities and to carry out different socially situated activities" (p. 413).

One only needs to walk a shopping mall or high school hallway and attentively observe to see his concept in action. Gee's idea of social languages enable the literate actor to form his/her identity through the speech, beliefs, actions, and technologies of the specific group in which he/she chooses to participate (p. 413). For teenagers in a new age, Gee (2000) believes that students' recognition of their various social languages (literacies) will allow them to better form their identity and express themselves (p. 419). This later take on literacy demonstrates that it is not only about communication within a specific context, but it is also about how individuals develop through their participation in specific contexts.

2.4 New Literacy Studies and Alternative Literacies Defined

In this section, I discuss and review various academics ideas on expanding notions of literacy. I focus on New Literacy Studies (NLS) as detailed by Street (2003, 2005). He describes the ways in which literacy is a social practice that is connected to the tenets of the community for which one is a part as well as literacy as "always contested" that can either empower or oppress (p. 77-78). I also look to the work of Lanksheer and Lawler (1987/1989) who, like Street, compare and contrast the ideological model of literacy and the autonomous model of literacy. Their works serve to further the discussion that the person precludes literacy and affirm the situatedness of literacy as described by Scribner and Cole (1980). Further, I look to the work of Bartlett (2007), who describes how literacy is a component in the construction of identity and demonstrates the ways people interact with literacy in a specific community for specific purposes. Lastly, I explain the connection of alternative literacies to NLS with both personal definitions and the work of Kinloch (2010) that demonstrates alternative literacies in action.

Street (2003) reviews the field of New Literacy Studies (NLS), for which he is a pioneer, through the context and background of NLS development, theoretical concerns of NLS, and applications of NLS to education. He provides a detailed definition of what he concludes composes NLS. Street (2003) states that NLS is an ideological model of literacy that proposes literacy is a social practice that is attached to the social understandings of the community (p. 77). He continues by stating:

> It [New Literacy Studies] is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being. It is also always embedded in social practices, such as those of a particular job market or a particular educational context and the effects of learning that particular literacy will be dependent on those particular contexts. Literacy, in this sense, is always contested. (Street, 2003, pp. 77-78)

Street's (2003) definition of New Literacy Studies (NLS) contains similar characteristics to what other researchers simply define as literacy in society today (Scribner & Cole, 1981/1999; Heath, 1983; Gee, 1989). Although, Street (2003) also notes that NLS recognizes the reality that literacy can at times empower, while at other times oppress. A major difference between contemporary definitions of literacy and components of NLS is the notion of power through literacy. While power always plays some role within what it means to be literate, NLS focuses on how power effects the transmission and learning of literacy acts between those involved (p. 78).

Street (2005) revisits NLS to describe how he sees literacy present in educational spaces and how it might be further implemented with a philosophical shift from literacy as "autonomous" to literacy as "ideological" (pp. 417-418). He calls for a shift from the autonomous model because it presents literacy as "neutral and universal", which then imposes Western practices and notions of literacy on other cultures (p. 417). His hope of the ideological model of literacy is to better recognize the vast majority of cultures that use literacy for multitudes of purposes both in-schools and out-of-schools. Street (2005) notes, "Many people labelled 'illiterate' within the autonomous model of literacy may, from a more culturally sensitive viewpoint, be seen to make significant use of literacy practices for specific purposes and in specific contexts" (p. 419). As well, he proposes that an ideological model of literacy recognizes not only the influence of culture on literate practices, but also the "power dimension" involved in literacy practices and literacy instruction within schools (p. 418). Street's implementation of an ideological model of literacy may reduce the tension students and teachers express between in-school and out-of-school literacies because it creates space for both entities' beliefs and practices.

Lankshear and Lawler (1987/1989), in *Literacy, Schooling and Revolution*, review and comment on both the "autonomous" (pp. 38-43) model of literacy and the "ideological"(pp. 43-58) model of literacy with reference to Street's (1984) prior analysis of these models. In sum, Lankshear and Lawler (1987/1989) affirm Street's (1984) beliefs on the situatedness of literacy when they state, "what literacy *is* is entirely a matter of how reading and writing are conceived and practiced within particular social settings" (Lankshear & Lawler, 1987/1989, p. 43). Again, their view of literacy suggests a person-first model of literacy where the individual, or entire

groups of people, exists prior to literacy and they then employ literacy skills towards an objective. Lankshear and Lawler's (1987/1989) view of literacy, like Street (1984) and Scribner & Cole (1980), resists the autonomous model of literacy that claims literacy precludes the person or group and is a compilation of learned skills that may be employed for personal and community betterment.

Lankshear and Lawler's (1987/1989) discussion of the ideological model of literacy reveals a definition that promotes literacy as a social practice. Lanshear and Lawler (1987/1989) state:

At any rate, literacy should be seen as an integral aspect--a dimension--of social practice as a whole, simultaneously reflecting and promoting certain beliefs, values and processes. And so it is directly linked to the actual consequences for the lives of individuals and groups of social activity and arrangements grounded in these same beliefs, values and processes. (p. 44)

Their definition of literacy, through an ideological perspective, represents literacy as one piece of social practice that individuals use to represent their identity as insiders and outsiders of particular groups.

Further, Lankshear and Lawler's (1987/1989) definition clarifies that the literacies people choose to employ are representative of their "beliefs, values, and processes" (p. 44) and carry consequences in daily life. De La Piedra's (2010) work with biliterate adolescents is a clear example of people who value certain literacies over others due to the consequences that such literacies play in their lives. In brief, De La Piedra's participants display greater value for the practical use of literacy in the home environment because it enables them to navigate daily life

tasks. Her participants view school literacies secondarily because such practices do not work as a means to survival and results from school practices do not hold daily consequence for them.

In contrast, Bartlett's (2007) research reveals people who struggle with, but value and wish to appear school literate. Barlett (2007), who conducted ethnographic field work on literacy in Brazil, using a New Literacy Studies perspective found "that one cannot define literacy or its uses *a priori*, but must always examine it in a social and cultural context" (p. 52). Spending two years in Brazil, both the Southern more urbanized areas and the Northern more rural areas, she notes a generalization that the southern, wealthier, lighter-skinned Brazilians were more literate, while the northern, poorer, darker-skinned Brazilians were thought illiterate (p. 58). The importance of these statements are not in their "truths," but rather in the effect that such a perception had among the Northern people. Bartlett's (2007) participants from northern parts of Brazil wished to either be considered literate by others or appear literate to others.

Bartlett's (2007) work stresses the connection that she identifies between perception, identity formation, and action in regards to being literate. She states "that literacy is something one actively *does* in concert with other humans (who may or may not be physically present) and the material, social, and symbolic world" (p. 53). Yet, she notes that literacy is not something to be achieved and then preserved, but rather something that constantly grows and develops (p. 53). Her work embodies a larger, ideological perspective of literacy that speaks to the ways people use literacy within their own contextualized worlds. Interestingly, her research also displays how some people see advancement in the larger world by learning the literacy practices of other groups to gain either membership or acceptance. Bartlett (2007) found literacy was a means to construct identity and to personal betterment.

Scholars who accept an ideological model of literacy use numerous terms to name and then further define the literacies that they speak. In a similar way, my use of the term alternative literacies can be situated in a NLS stance and can also help to describe the practices that students use on a regular basis in daily life both in-school and out-of-school. I provide numerous examples in the introduction of this review regarding the literacy practices that I associate with alternative literacies; the examples, though not all inclusive, are texting, social media, gaming, family translation, group vocabulary/dress/action, artistic, and nonverbal communication acts such as body language. Here, I expand on the way in which I define the term alternative literacies.

Alternative literacies are the spoken, written, and performed communication acts initiated by individuals to express their contextualized lives. Alternative literacy practices extend beyond traditional literacy practices found in schools and represent various forms of communication between individuals of shared spaces. Shared spaces are the areas, geographical or philosophical, that bring people, or groups of people, together for particular purposes. For instance, the children of a particular neighborhood may adopt a discourse that those outside the neighborhood may not be privy. Or, members of an activist group may share alternative literacy practices in communication towards their goal. Kinloch's (2010) work provides more meaning to the definition of alternative literacy practices when she speaks of twenty-first century literacies as "the multimodal, multisensory, print, visual, linguistic, and cultural practices that youth and adults employ and are confronted with on a daily basis" (p. 118). In the twenty-first century context, she advances the definition of alternative literacies while acknowledging literacy's more traditional definition as the ability to read and write. Kinloch (2010) states:

Literacies encompass not only the ability to read and write, but also to make sense of our lives and to critique multiple positions and perspectives. Literacies involve questioning our roles in the world, assuming multiple identities to consider various perspectives and experience empathy, and interpreting complex meanings of texts that may or may not include our voices, stories, lived experiences, and truths. (p. 145)

Kinloch's (2010) definition of twenty-first century literacies is synonymous with, and further explains, what I understand alternative literacies to be. Khaleeq, a student-participant in Kinloch's yearlong ethnographic study of literacies used by Harlem adolescents, aptly states his redefinition of literacy, which is also what I deem alternative literacies. Khaleeq asserts in an interview:

[Literacy is] expressions about myself, my beliefs through words, images, opinions and they can be written or spoken or like digital or what you see [visual], but they give a feeling of power, like feelings of knowing or something….Maybe I feel like that [suffocation] in here [classroom] 'cause I don't think I got power. You think I do?

(Kinloch, 2010, p. 44)

Kinloch's (2010) research and the statements of Khaleeq display the evolution of literacy definitions from the ability to write and speak towards a conceptualization and definition that encompasses one's unique character and experiences. I assert that alternative literacy practices are as legitimate and valuable as the more traditional literacy practices when they serve an intended goal (Moje, 2000). When teachers recognize and legitimize through their inclusion in traditional curriculum the alternative literacy practices of students they become more willing to

engage the traditional literacy practices taught in the classroom (Gaughan, 2001; Wilhelm, 1997). Teachers who begin instruction with literacy practices that students understand and care about become better able to capture the student audience. As a result, students learn in a more personalized situation where they can use their experiences and skills to aid in the acquisition of new information and skills.

2.5 Literacy in the Classroom

I review and discuss various studies in this section that demonstrate the ideological model of literacy implemented in the classroom in an attempt to make content meaningful to students. Many of the scholars included (Forell, 2006; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011; among others) acknowledge literacy as a sociocultural practice. As well, many of the works I review here engage students that may be deemed "at-risk", like those I teach, and demonstrate how bridging their realities to literacy can both empower them as individuals and create a positive classroom environment.

Street's (2003) distinction between the autonomous model of literacy and the ideological model of literacy has changed the methods, purposes, and questions that many researchers and teachers seek explanations for in the classroom. Some teachers, administrators, and researchers still hold traditional notions of literacy—the ability to read and write (Chall,1983, pp. 2-3); however, for many teachers and researchers, the ideological model of literacy has become the dominant stance from where they begin their research or their teaching. From an ideological stance, I investigate the literacy practices of students with specific learning difficulties in a substantially-separate, high school learning environment. In this space, students often resist traditional literacies and opt to value their out-of-school literacies. I posit in my research that a

blend of in-school and out-of-school literacy practices is essential in the ELA classroom of an alternative high school in order to provide students what they need and also to use what they already know as a foundation to build on, rather than to discard.

Bob Fecho (2004) is a teacher-researcher who explicitly verbalizes the paradigm shift from the autonomous model to the ideological model of literacy. Fecho (2004), a former high school teacher and currently a professor of adolescent literacy, asserts that reading is the primary way that humans make sense of experience; or "through literacy, we come to understand ourselves in relation to the world around us" (p. 96). People read "not only to decode and comprehend, but also to make meaning" (Fecho, 2004, p. 49). Fecho writes about literature as a transaction between text, reader, and the reader's larger world. He taught his students with methods that would enable them to connect the literature read in classes to the realities of their everyday worlds (p. 96).

However, not all teachers are completely ready for such a shift in literacy methods and pedagogy. For some, being literate entails both the traditional ways of literacy instruction with the addition of newer methods that allow students to both acquire traditional skills and to make meaningful connections with their present realities. In connection to Lisa Delpit's work (2006), Michie (2009) asserts:

> They [African American and Latino children] must be taught to construct sentences, to compute numbers, to read and comprehend. Anything short of this is cheating them. But I cringe at news reports and studies that suggest that all urban kids really need is to get back to basics. Because what often seems to accompany this idea is a belief that the basics are all poor Black and Spanish-speaking children are capable of learning. That we

have to endlessly drill them with exercises and worksheets and tests that keep them busy

but leave no time for doing or making things, no space for real thought. (p. 113)

Within his Media Studies course, Michie (2009) taught students through a balance of the

traditional methods and more progressive educational methods. Michie does not view the shift

of methods in the educational landscape as all or nothing, rather he adds that success and

learning lives in a more balanced approach. Yet, Delpit (2008) demonstrates that holding onto

past methods and thinking might cause a progressive shift to be stunted.

Delpit (2008) recounts a statement from Edynce, a young man she spoke to in a language

arts class. He stated, "'If you don't speak proper English then they don't want you in their little

world'" (p. XII, Preface). This statement provides a perspective too often ignored in all areas of

education—the lens of the students. Edynce (Delpit, 2008) indirectly shows how aware students

are in regards to how they are treated and viewed within the school. He identifies "their little

world," (p. XII, Preface) which shows he understands there are more worlds than one and each

requires a form of membership. In this passage, he notes that his language and use of it is both

unacceptable and not welcomed by his teachers. As a result, teachers hold authority over Edynce

and other students in similar situations. Students, such as Edynce, are taught that their language

is somehow inferior to the academic language of the school and to gain acceptance to the school

community they will have speak and be differently. Yet, the consequences do not end in the

classroom. Edynce is then caused to question, or possibly be placed in opposition to, his home

language. In some way, Edynce needs to be taught about the variations in language and literacy

where he will learn to value both his home and school literacy practices. K. Lee Hamm Forell's

(2006) work serves to make connections across the home-school divide that is a place where many students flounder and in turn struggle to identify with either.

Forell (2006) views language and literacy through a "sociocultural lens" (p.28) for the purpose of making literacy meaningful for "disenfranchised youth" (p. 33). Her article, "Ideas in Practice: Bringin' Hip-Hop to the Basics," explores the positive findings from her research when Hip-Hop is legitimized within and paired with the typical English curriculum (p. 29). Forell (2006) claims that Hip-Hop in the classroom enables youth to go beyond communication and meaning-making to "an arena where young men and women can explore their identity; challenge encroaching systems of power; and think critically about everyday issues that impact their families, communities, peers, and selves" (p. 33).

Forell's (2006) conclusion of the effectiveness of this particular methodology also affects how she comes to view and redefine her larger view of literacy. She views literacy as a sociocultural practice that "can be used to transform thoughts and experiences, as well as challenge structures of power and privilege at work within the university and society at large" (p. 28). For example, Forell suggests that a hegemonic shift will ensue within universities that accept the introduction of rap narratives of young adults into "prevailing educational discourses" (p. 31). She concisely defines rap as a "narrative that tells a story of a person or people" (p. 30). She further asserts that the acceptance of personal narratives through Hip-Hop or rap in the university can have a powerful effect on the way in which students connect with and make-meaning with other facets of the curriculum. Forell (2006) believes that such methods will cause a connection "between students' lives in and out of the academy, thereby enhancing English instruction" (p. 29).

Skerrett and Bomer (2011) assume a similar sociocultural stance towards literacy as Forell (2006); however, their work explicitly details how the integration of out-of-school literacies mesh with in-school literacy practices in one particular classroom. Skerrett and Bomer also confirm how such an integration of literacy practices enhances literacy within the "formal curriculum" (p. 1256). They term the space where out-of-school and in-school literacies meet as "borderzones" (p. 1257), which Skerrett and Bomer's article describes through their observations of a reading classroom in an urban high school (p. 1258). The teacher, Molly, confessed that her need to make content meaningful came from her perception of the way students were viewed in her school district by other teachers, administrators, and community members. Skerrett and Bomer (2011) cite Molly from an interview where she described some adults' perceptions about her students and their literacy practices. Molly says:

I often worry about how kids at schools like mine get treated. Everything they bring to school is either vilified or simply dismissed--their clothes, their music, their language, their social networks, their art. You wonder why they keep coming! (Skerrett & Bomer, 2011, p. 1257)

Molly's testimony explains why she feels it her duty as a teacher to legitimize and integrate her students' out-of school literacies into her classroom curriculum. Molly believes that acknowledging what students deem important will do well for them to learn what she hopes to teach them (p. 1261).

Molly redesigned the curriculum in her reading class to engage students through the inclusion of out-of-school literacies with the curriculum by making explicit the similarities between the processes used to learn in both spaces. For instance, she states that the "cognitive

connections" they made with tattoos, tagging, and the social media was similar to the thinking that they should engage with when reading print (Skerrett & Bomer, 2011, p. 1270). For example, Molly scaffolded students thinking in reaction to an intense behavioral outburst in the classroom. The class debriefed the events and Molly highlighted for the students how the way they reacted and interpreted the events through various members' eyes was in the same manner that they should think when reading text and other print sources (p. 1271).

Skerrett and Bomer (2011) expound on these two examples to emphasis some ways Molly made students' "unofficial literacy practices" part of the "content for texts created in official school literacy and speech practices;..." (p. 1273). Molly's entire intent with her teaching methods in the reading classroom were to help students use literacy practices with which they regularly participated in outside-of-school as the basis for literacy experiences that they would engage with in-school (p. 1275).

Skerret and Bomer's (2011) findings add to the field of adolescent literacy "by demonstrating the importance of teachers valuing, affirming, and leveraging the commitments that youth hold for their out-of-school literacies to enhance their in-school literacy and engagement and success" (p. 1275). Skerrett and Bomer's research suggests implicitly the need to view and define literacy through a sociocultural lens. Without stating what counts and does not count as literacy, Molly enhanced the definition of literacy in her classroom by "accepting their [the students'] reports of those literacies and their imported examples thereof as primary texts, which then the class interpreted and analyzed" (p. 1276).

Of similar ilk, Allen Luke's (2012) work focuses on the ways that specific literacy stances, such as critical literacy, are integrated into the classroom to improve students'

knowledge. He evaluates a breath of literature on critical literacy with the aim to understand how such a stance can change literacy learning in the classroom. With Freirian (1970) influence, Beck (2005) defines critical literacy "as an attitude toward texts and discourses that questions the social, political, and economic conditions under which those texts were constructed" (p. 392). Further, she believes "students' voices and dialogue" are tools emphasized by critical literacy and become essential for reflection and meaning-making with texts (p. 394). Like other researchers who call for an expansive and ideological definition of literacy (Scribner & Cole, 1981/1999; Heath, 1983; Gee, 1989; Street, 2003; Kinloch, 2010, among others), Luke (2012) explores the changing notions of critical literacy and states "it [critical literacy] depends upon students' and teachers' everyday relations of power, their lived problems and struggles,..." and "on educators' ingenuity in navigating and enabling and disenabling local contexts of policy" (p. 9).

Luke's (2012) article does not present new research; however, he evaluates existing research on critical literacy for ways to implement it into classroom pedagogy (pp. 6-7). Allen suggests that critical literacy in the classroom is not only about recognizing how "literary texts produce diverse meanings, dependent upon readers' affective responses" (pp. 6-7); but also, how critical literacy in the classroom is about recognizing the ways students' responses to literary texts become modes for them to develop themselves personally, morally, and intellectually (p. 7). From his extensive review of critical literacy scholarship, Luke (2012) concludes that critical literacy must undergo constant change and reformation in the ways researchers define, teachers implement, and students experience (p. 9). Luke's (2012) review of the critical literacy literature and his views on its evolution is useful for the ways theorists and educators define literacy

because he calls for fluid definitions of literacy, while also affirming that literacy is context dependent.

Luke's (2012) work with critical literacy shows how such a stance can help students connect their larger worlds to the classroom curriculum. The use of critical literacy to form opinions and evaluate literature also enables students to form their identity by thinking about the ways that literature causes an emotional response.

Ann Arnette Ferguson's (2001/2010) work exemplifies how literacy practices can be used to display identity, group affiliation, and resistance to academic literacies. Ferguson (2001/2010) conducted ethnographic research with black males in an urban middle-school that caste them aside as troublemakers (pp. 9-11). She found the students' decision to use Black English as their main means of communication within the school was a deliberate act that allowed them to fulfill internal and external goals. For these students, their use of Black English afforded them an identity, a group affiliation, and a "commonality of social experience," (p.209) which allowed them to safely navigate daily life. Conversely, the students choice of language in school also placed them at odds with teachers' and administrators' expectations.

Willis (1995) and Ferguson's (2001/2010) work can be viewed as examples to demonstrate how literacy and identity sometimes conflict in the space of classrooms. Willis (1995), in "Reading the World of School Literacy; Contextualizing the Experience of a Young African American Male," exemplifies Gee's (2000) description of social literacies through her son's school experiences in a classroom where the literacies he brought were ignored. Willis (1995) terms the literacies and discourses that students bring to school as cultural literacy (p. 37). She states, "cultural literacy recognizes that there are differences in language forms, experiences,

literature, and histories of students that will affect literacy learning" (pp. 37-38). She contends that her son struggled with school literacies because teachers presented a culturally "neutral" knowledge; when, in fact, her son needed to "acquire a Eurocentric cultural perspective to be successful in school" (p. 39) and to meet teachers' expectations.

Willis' (1995) example of her son's struggle to excel with school literacies supports Gee's (1989) notion that literacy comes through some combination of acquisition and learning (p. 20), the proper ratio of acquisition and learning being unique to each person (p. 23). Willis (1995) viewed her son's struggle to acquire school literacies a result of an improper balance of Gee's (1989) acquisition and learning model in his school (p. 20). She believed this was a result of the teachers' philosophy of "culturally 'neutral' knowledge" (p. 39). Her son carried literacies that extended beyond the classroom, which led to his critical stance of those literacy practices that existed in the school. Unlike his teachers, he was unable to ignore his identity and belief system that was developed outside-of-school and consequently this resistance led to his struggles in-school when his prior knowledge and way of being was not substantiated by teachers.

Similarly, Donna Alvermann (2001) investigated identity struggles, like Willis (1995) and Ferguson (2001/2010), but with a larger sample of students. In "Reading Adolescents' Reading Identities: Looking Back to See Ahead," Alvermann (2001) recounts an ethnographic case study that she engaged in with Grady, a ninth grader who struggled with school literacies, and twenty-nine other students, which span seventh to ninth grade, in a similar school situation. Each student experienced similar struggles reading "assigned textbooks," which affected their overall negative perceptions towards reading in general (p. 684). Parents and teachers confirmed the students' struggles and resistance towards reading. During the fifteen-week study, Grady

emerged as a point of focus for Alvermann, as he became disengaged from the group's critical

media literacy activities because he felt self-conscious about his reading difficulties (p. 685).

Alvermann (2001) analyzes Grady's reading struggles through multiple contexts such as

culture, identity, and struggling reader (pp. 677-679). Additionally, she used three approaches

for considering the multiple contexts: the deprivation approach, the difference approach, and the

culture-as-disability approach (p. 680). The deprivation approach relies on "milestones" that are

measurable by formal, informal, or observational testing "to which members must respond if

they are to qualify as developmentally competent on those tasks" (p. 680). The difference

approach claims that people of particular cultures develop literacy skills in accordance with their

particular cultural situation and the demands of that culture (p. 681). The culture-as-disability

approach asserts that each culture maintains specific, complex ways of living that will teach

members how to progress, succeed, and/or fail in the specific context" (p. 683).

Alvermann (2001) admits to initially misreading Grady's reading struggles, due to her

innate reliance on the deprivation and difference approaches (p. 686). She began working

independently with Grady on what she terms "the discourse of video gaming" (p. 687). With

gaming, Grady believed himself as "knowledgeable" over Alvermann and such confidence with

the task enabled him to show his ability to discuss the games, his ability to email about the

games, and his ability to show general literacy skills (pp. 687-689). Alvermann concludes that

Grady's resistance to reading, when viewed through the culture-as-disability approach, emerged

because he did not value the institutional toolbox of "school-related literacy tasks" (p. 687) and

the way that he shows "culture constructs not only *what* counts as reading when reading counts,

but also *who* counts as a reader" (p. 689). The case of Grady demonstrates that one's culture and

way of living carries as much weight to being literate, as does his/her performance on normed literacy tasks within school settings.

Willis' (1995), Ferguson's (2001/2010), and Alvermann's (2001) research demonstrates how in-school and out-of-school literacies conflict at times. However, the argument over what literacy practices count in-school and out-of-school does not have to assume an either-or dichotomy. Kerry Anne Enright's (2011) research demonstrates how students can blend personal literacy practices with school literacy practice to fulfill educational and personal needs.

Enright (2011) conducted a 12-month qualitative case study of three students that represent the "new mainstream" (p. 81). She uses the term "new mainstream" to describe the culturally diverse population of students that interact in general education classrooms throughout the country. Enright chose three students from one classroom who varied culturally, historically, and linguistically. She then followed these students throughout the study as they prepared their Senior Exhibition projects individually and collectively. Enright (2011) paid specific attention to how "young people from different language backgrounds use language and literacy" throughout the creation of their Senior Exhibition projects (p. 81).

These cases serve as working examples of Street's (2005) notion of literacy as ideological as each student used literacy through a variety of forms and for a variety of purposes in the creation of their projects. Enright (2011) demonstrates Street's (2005) literacy notion when she affirms that "today's societies, economies, and classrooms require a more dynamic, multiple, and flexible lens on literacy" (p. 111) after observing the variety of ways her case study participants engaged in a similar educational activity.

Further, Enright (2011) asserts that students frequently cross borders of literacies forming hybrid literacies that can be used within the classroom to further ideas about the ways academic English can be taught (p. 112). She identifies border crossing as moving from one form of communication in a situated space to another form of communication employed in another situated space. She identifies students of the new mainstream as those that will challenge traditional teaching practices; however, she believes they can add multitudes of "unexpected talents, perspectives, and unique experiences" to the English classroom (p. 113). Enright (2011) claims that traditional approaches to academic literacy and language have been so tightly defined that polarities ensue and make it difficult to include the literacy practices that students engage with regularly (p. 82). She hopes that acceptance of broader notions of literacy within academic domains will invite student literacies into the classroom more that will make academic literacy and language "more inclusive and consequently less distinct" from student literacies (p. 84).

Enright (2011) suggests a shift concerning how academic literacy and language is defined to make room for students' literacy practices. She claims that a change in how theorists and educators define literacy will cause new learning opportunities for students that will allow them to apply classroom learning to the larger world and their places of work because they will be better prepared for the border crossing of literacies. Consequently, students who learn to navigate many forms of literacy will be able to participate in "multiple group memberships" (p. 111).

Enright's (2011) work is important to how literacy is defined by theorists, policy-makers, politicians, and educators because she recognizes the need to teach students how to transition literacy knowledge from the classroom to the world. If such agents and agencies are not willing

to hold broader notions of alternative literacies, or Enright's (2011) conception of hybrid literacies (p. 113), many students that do not possess the requisite skills with traditional literacies and academic literacies will struggle to fulfill their academic and work potential. Whereas, if the definition of literacy is broadened to include the literacies that students bring to school such as Enright suggests, students will better learn to navigate and learn various literacies that can be used in various contextualized settings.

Enright (2011) shows students who have learned to balance and transition between their various literacy practices. Yet, it is important to consider how these students became adept and enabled to move freely about their literate selves in the domain of school. Weil's (1993) work in the areas of multicultural education and literacy instruction provides a foundation for teachers to consider when they contemplate their expectations, methods, and opportunities for students.

Weil (1993) claims that current approaches to multicultural education are "non-transformative and intellectually domesticating" (p. 228). Further, he asserts students are not given the voice and active education that they deserve. Weil (1993) contends that students "bring legacies of oppression and resistance to our classrooms for which they seek and expect critical exploration, critical listening, and critical evaluation through radical discourse and rigorous critical analysis" (p. 228). Students' expectations for their learning environment needs to reflect such practices and demonstrates why they both resist traditional literacy instruction and find little relevance with academic literacy practices, for neither adequately addresses them as unique individuals with unique literacy practices.

Weil (1993) concludes "that understanding the voices of struggle and oppression" (p. 235) within students will raise their overall awareness, while simultaneously learning and

transforming them into literate individuals. He proposes a pedagogy that will enable students to bring their literacy practices to the classroom and learn new forms of literacy through their interaction with peers. Weil's (1993) work provides a definition of literacy that is transformative through the expression and sharing of individual literacy practices among people where they can learn and build on their own literacies.

Indrisano and Chall (1995) emphasize what Weil (1993) calls for in the classroom, and claim that, "Literacy abilities are cumulative and develop over time; thus effective instruction builds from the known to the new" (Indrisano & Chall, 1995, p. 80). For this reason, it is important for teachers to recognize and make use of the literacies students bring to the classroom as the base of knowledge to expand and connect with new knowledge.

Seglem and Witte (2009) offer one possible strategy that teachers can integrate into their practice to achieve some of the goals that both Weil (1993) and Indrisano and Chall (1995) recommend. Seglem and Witte's (2009) work emphasizes the need for English teachers to incorporate and pair traditional English texts with various activities, which allows students to visualize the text under study (p. 217). They believe it necessary for contemporary students to be versed in visual literacy because much of the information they consume enters through alternative formats (p. 217). Students who understand visual literacy will be better able to negotiate and read their figured worlds.

Seglem and Witte (2009) assert, "No longer are the abilities to read and write in a linear, left-to-right fashion the sole indicators of successful communication. Rather, the world is made up of visual symbols that require more complex thinking skills than traditional literacy requires" (p. 216). While such statements refer to a more traditional, autonomous model of

literacy, their forward thinking about literacy resides in their insistence that reading and communication extends far beyond the word and the text. Seglem and Witte (2009) claim that students, especially struggling readers (p.217), retain more textual knowledge when they associate the information with images, particularly those images which they create.

Seglem and Witte (2009) provide a more methodological approach to visual literacy than theoretical explication since the importance of their work in connection to the ways scholars define what literacy might entail is implicit through the examples provided. They provide suggestions to integrate visual literacy into the classroom through tattoo design, collage design, paintings, and comics (pp. 218-223). Interestingly, the activities that they suggest for the classroom are often intuitively done by students outside the classroom in their larger world where clothing, posture, speech, and actions stand as visual cues to others about their personalty and group membership. And, it is these very activities that I observed my students participation with that caused me to wonder and to seek better understanding as to how I may connect their interests and abilities within my English courses.

Literacy and literacy experiences occur through a variety of forms beyond text and speech. Technological and social media developments consistently reshape and further the need to continually redefine literacy. Librarians, who are historically charged with making relevant media available to the public, must decide what to include in their collections.

Audrey Gorman (1998), from a library science stance, contends that people interact with literacy in numerous forms and venues. She feels that libraries are responsible for representing new media in library collections. Gorman (1998), director of Roads to Learning, which is a public library initiative for those with learning disabilities, affirms that many talks of "twenty-

first-century literacy celebrate the fact that content comes from many sources in numerous

media" (p. 38). Gorman concludes that if sources of content is so varied today then libraries

must also reflect this change through collections of diverse forms of media. She refers to the

expanded media collection as information literacy, or twenty-first-century literacy. To define

this new media and literacy, Gorman believes that such literacies will enable people to thrive in

society by meeting their personal goals and gaining new knowledge to reach their potential.

2.6 Research That Invites Students Into the Conversation

I use this section to review the numerous studies that aim to enliven the learning lives of

students in the ELA classroom by inviting their personalities, thoughts, realities, and other

individual characteristics to the content in an attempt to make literacy personally meaningful. I

highlight those works that approach traditional methods of literacy instruction in new and

creative ways, as well as those studies that highlight the voices and ideas of the students.

In *Lives on the Boundary*, Mike Rose (1989) illustrates a desire similar to what Dewey

(1900/1990) suggests in regards to how he educates adolescent and adult English students "to

further develop their ability to think critically, and they needed [the need] to gain confidence in

themselves as systematic inquirers" (p. 141). Rose recognizes that if he is to gain the trust and

effort of his "nontraditional" students he cannot do so by fixating on their misuse of conventions

and grammar mechanics to "red-pencil failure" on them (p. 141). Rose acknowledges a need to

teach, or re-teach, his students to think deeply and critically about what they read, while also

allowing them the time and independence to put pencil to paper without worry of adherence to

standard conventions. Similarly, reluctant readers and writers are more comfortable and

ultimately willing to express themselves and interact with literature when conventions are set aside to share ideas freely.

In a manner similar to Rose (1989), Bob Fecho (2004), professor of adolescent literacy at the University of Georgia and a former ELA teacher in Philadelphia's public schools, describes classroom experiences that draw students into texts and writing, rather than push them away. Fecho (2004) states of his former classroom, "My whole intent was to develop a curriculum that felt seamless. I wanted sessions that flowed from writing to reading to speaking to language study and back in a cohesive and meaningful loop" (p. 17). In doing so, his students engage in literacy experiences that are unified and link skills together. Fecho teaches in such a way that he does not treat topics and skills as independent, but rather he emphasizes to students the interconnectedness of the topics and the skills. When a teacher creates such a "loop" of meaning, students are able to see how interrelated and reliant each act is on the other.

Fecho (2004) claims that his philosophy and practices are based on the work of Louise Rosenblatt (1938; as cited in Fecho, 2004, p. 9). He focuses on Rosenblatt's (1938/ 2005) idea of *transactions*. Rosenblatt (2005) asserts "that the source of 'literariness' could not be relegated to the text....The difference, it became apparent, resided in what the reader does in these two kinds of reading [efferent and aesthetic]—what is brought into the center of attention, what is pushed to the periphery or ignored" (p. 56). Her goal of the transaction theory is for readers to identify with a text, traditional or untraditional, in a way that they not only comprehend, but also where they connect to the text on a personal level.

Comparable to Freire's (1970) work on reading the world before reading the word, Rosenblatt (1978/2005) constructs her transaction theory around a belief in the importance of classroom dialogue based on readers' transactions with texts. In this mode, the teacher becomes less didactic and provides students more time to share their thoughts within the classroom, which affords them a more influential voice than might be found in more traditional, skill-and-drill oriented classrooms. Fecho (2004) explains, "the transaction between teacher and student should be one in which the texts of the world are interrogated in a mutually empowering dialogue" (p. 47). Fecho uses "empowering dialogue" to mean that both teacher and student are able to analyze a piece of writing through their idiosyncratic vantage point. Such methods allow for transactions and connections between student, teacher, and text.

Fecho's (2004) progressive style extends beyond skill instruction and better acknowledges students' contextualized lives because he recognizes and integrates into lessons the alternative literacy skills students bring to his classroom. He asks students to use prior knowledge to understand and connect with new information. He allows a space for students to tell stories of home and other out-of-school contexts to link the material taught in his ELA classroom. His use of empowering dialogue insists that the teacher allows students to express how they read, how they feel, and how they think about a particular text to develop multiple interpretations of a piece of literature. In a more traditional setting, a teacher is more apt to teach students how to see, how to interpret, and how to understand accepted interpretations. Fecho's style of teaching literature and writing allows students to use literacies that transcend those often emphasized in the classroom.

Fecho (2004) is not alone in his efforts to inform teachers of methods that can be used to bring students into conversations about writing and literature. Jeffrey Wilhelm (1997) enacts a more focused approach to demonstrate the implications of literacy instruction than Fecho (2004) through teacher-research in his own classroom. Wilhelm's (1997) text,*"You Gotta BE the Book": Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents*, describes his work and shows a specific concern with how students are taught to read, to transact, and to make meaning from texts. Like it is for Fecho (2004), Rosenblatt's (1938/2005) transaction theory is an influential teaching method for Wilhelm. His research focuses on the process through which the student-reader makes meaning *with* the text as opposed to reading and accepting the text's ideas at face value (1997, p. 19). In his own interpretation of transaction theory, Wilhelm (1997) asserts:

> In order to develop readers, we must encourage and foster the creative attitudes and activities of engaged readers..., the classroom can become a place where students not only produce and share meanings, but a place where they share ways of reading and being with texts, becoming aware in the process of their own strategies and those of others (p. 11).

Much of Wilhelm's (1997) work documents the success that students can have in the classroom when they not only bring their larger world experiences to the text or writing, but when they are also given the opportunity to express and share their unique understandings with classmates. In this way, Wilhelm indirectly acknowledges how students can use their alternative literacies and dialects to discuss and teach each other in social ways. When students join each other in groups to discuss a text or piece of writing they often use out-of-school literacies to

engage one another. Wilhelm is not greatly concerned with the words that students use to discuss writing and literature, but rather he is more concerned that they share, that they connect personally, and that they make meaning together. Similarly, I found in my research that students were willing to interact around literature when I stepped back and allowed them to lead the discussion.

While Wilhelm (1997) writes about students of various backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures; Lisa Delpit (1986), an instrumental figure in the progressive education conversation, writes specifically of the plight of minority students' literacy skills. Her article, "Skills and Other Dilemmas of a Progressive Black Educator," was originally a letter written to a colleague that focuses on her experiences teaching literacy skills. She reflects on her early years of "progressive undergraduate teacher training" (p. 181) from her present position as a university professor of three years. Delpit (1986) relates what she learned about the ways students become literate and how the environments in which they learn directly effect what they retain. She describes the open classroom (student-centered) as the most "humanizing" (p. 181) learning environment, but found through her teaching practice in Philadelphia schools that her progressive classroom benefited the white students more so than her black students. It was the recognition of this discrepancy and reality that caused Delpit to question the lack of academic progress with her black students. She writes that she learned in graduate school "that people learn to write not by being taught 'skills' and grammar, but by 'writing in meaningful contexts'" (1986, p.180). As Delpit's tenure continued in Philadelphia, she gradually adopted a more traditional methodology by integrating a skills approach. She witnessed writing improvement among her black students following her shift in methods.

By the end of her letter, Delpit (1986) lays claims to three conclusions: (1) that instruction should be both skill-based and progressive; (2) that those of the dominant culture need to listen to the voice of minority students; and (3) that we need further ethnographic studies on writing projects where both minority and non-minority groups participate (p. 185).

Delpit's (1986) concerns are for the growth and development of her students' literacy skills. She advocates and believes in progressive methods for literacy instruction, but not at the expense of her students' acquisition of the requisite skills. While she favors progressive methods personally, she reverts to a more traditional, skills-based approach in her classroom because such methods showed the greatest results in the learning and development of students' literacy skills. Delpit was capable of this instructional and methodological adaptation because she was cognizant of her students strengths and weaknesses. Further, her work highlights that no one method of literacy instruction fits all students despite where it falls on the traditional-progressive spectrum. Vetter's (2010) research documents similar findings of teachers concerned with doing right by their students. Her work reflects on the need for teachers to be aware that students' literacy skills and experiences are personal and contextualized. Their literacies are reflections of their personal stories and educational development.

Amy Vetter (2010) focused a five-month qualitative study of one teacher and her twenty-five, eleventh-grade students in one English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. Vetter utilized positioning theory, which looks at how learning becomes an identity process, to understand better how students shape and perform their literate identities (p. 37). She hopes teachers can

then use their understanding of students' literate identities to facilitate their growth through classroom practices and interactions.

Vetter (2010) is most concerned with the impromptu and daily interactions that Gina, the teacher, shared with her students. She focused on the moments when Gina interacted with students and positioned them as readers and writers through dialogue. Vetter's (2010) goal "was to provide snapshots to open dialogue about the complexity of classroom interactions and improvisations" (p. 43). Like Freire (1970) and other critical pedagogy theorists, Gina's secondary goal was to enable students to "make sense of themselves and the world around them" (Vetter, 2010, p. 44). Gina focused on student identity development in the classroom through interactions around reading and writing, but then pushed students to consider how they position themselves within the larger world.

Vetter (2010) found that Gina focused on identity positioning of students as readers and writers, but also as students with unique cultural and racial backgrounds. In doing so, Gina thought it important to position herself and her upbringing in relation to her race and culture. While students first see Gina as "a white, blonde-haired teacher", they quickly learn that she was "born in Columbia, lived in Laredo, and was knowledgeable about hip-hop and slam poetry" (Vetter, 2010, p. 45). Gina's honesty about her heritage and upbringing allowed her to make some connections with students, but she also recognized that she and her students would never be *the same*. Gina states:

> I don't try to say I have a clue. I connect to you in some ways and in some ways I'll never know. There is a balance. You don't want to say I know exactly what you are going

through because I don't. I don't know what it feels like to get on the bus and someone

clutches their purse. (Vetter, 2010, p. 45)

Gina furnishes students with numerous opportunities to feel like readers and writers

despite their initial resistance to the idea. For example, Gina provides writing prompts on topics

she believes are pertinent to students' lives. Students then select prompts from a bucket on

designated days. Detrek, a student, selected the topic of *addiction*, which he immediately

connects with drug addiction and feels no connection to write about this prompt. Gina

spontaneously repositions Detrek in this moment as both writer and as knowledgeable about this

topic, despite his reluctance. The conversation went like this:

Detrek: Miss, no. I need to switch mine. This is so stupid. I don't want this.

Gina: What will you do on Tuesday? [The day students will write.]

Freddy: Detrek, that is what we're supposed to think and then you gotta translate it.

Detrek: When I was addicted to …Miss, I don't smoke.

Gina: Is it only drugs you can be addicted to?

Gina: Let's change it to…What do you like to write about? What do you feel in the

mood for today? [Gina read the prompt and broadened the original question.]

Detrek: I feel like I want to switch this.

Gina: No. Tell me something you like to write about. You can't switch. Will you answer

my question?

Detrek: What do I like to write about, uhhhh, alien movies. I don't know, alien stories.

Gina: Alien stories. Interesting. Do you feel addicted to alien stories? [Gina and Detrek laugh.] HUMOR!! What else do you like to write about? Could you possibly be addicted to humor? Could you write about that? What does addiction mean? Go beyond what you think it might mean…you need to look it up in here and find some synonyms. (Vetter, 2010, p. 52-53)

Gina accomplishes a few things during this conversation: (1) she helps Detrek get past his resistance to a writing prompt; (2) she helps Detrek identify what he likes to write about; and (3) she helps Detrek look beyond his normal ways of seeing a topic and how he might be able to expand on his presumptions. Vetter (2010) cites numerous instances in her research of Gina's classroom where she is able, through improvised conversations with students, to help them move beyond resistance and position them as readers and writers (p. 60). Vetter (2010) asserts that preservice teachers need more training and teaching about how to meaningfully interact with students "with agentive narratives" (p. 61). Teachers who welcome these personal narratives into the classroom will encourage students to extend how they perceive their academic abilities.

Vetter's (2010) research records moments of a teacher connecting on a personal level with students through impromptu conversations in the classroom. Gina demands deep thinking from her students, demonstrated in her conversation with Detrek, and from such personalized conversations she creates positive results. These conversations enable students to utilize alternative literacy skills as they are talking about what interests them in regards to literature and writing. Secondly, Gina permits students to speak as they would to a friend outside-of-school

and forgoes the jargon often present in an academic setting. Vetter (2010) documents the positive use of conversation between teacher and student. However, what students hear from teachers and administrators is not always positive to their educational and personal development. Ferguson's (2001) work documents the negative effects that adult words can have on students in educational settings.

2.7 Research That "Re-Connects" Students in the Conversation

In this section, I investigate those studies that aim to "re-connect" with students, who for whatever reasons, are resistant to literacy education, and meeting the expectations of schools. As previously noted, literacy and the words of adults can empower or oppress (Street, 2003, p. 78). I review studies that expose the negative consequences of adults that label and cast-off students as well as those studies that illuminate ways for teachers to engage these students in their "contact-zone" (Gaughan, 2001) to make schooling relevant, meaningful, and personal again.

In *bad boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity,* Ann Arnett Ferguson (2001) observes and documents the transaction theory in action through the voice of a male student. Ferguson studies African-American males labeled "at-risk" in a Cincinnati school, where she finds a clash between the classroom processes of the school and the ways students of a particular group, labeled "bad boys" by staff, resist traditional classroom structures and practices through words, actions, and group affiliations (pp. 1-3). Ferguson (2001) finds within her school of study that teachers and administrators openly identify and track through punishment a certain group of young, African-American males who, by the staff's estimation, are prison bound (p.1). Reggie, a student in the study and labeled 'troublemaker' by teachers and administrators, states:

I always try to get the main character in the story 'cause I might turn out to be an actor

because I'm really good at acting and I've already did some acting. Shakespeare! See I

got a good part. I was Caliban. I had to wear the black suit. Black pants and top.

Caliban was a beast! In the little picture that we saw, he looks like the…the…[searching

for image] the beast of Notre Dame. The one that rings the bells like *fing! fing! fing!*

(Ferguson, 2001, p. 176)

Reggie demonstrates in this excerpt his comprehension of two texts, his connection with them,

and his ability to make cross-connections between two characters' similar traits. As well, he

relates his personal connection with plays and his desire to act one day. While the school labels

Reggie as difficult and potentially at-risk academically, he demonstrates a literacy competency

through his comparison of Caliban and the beast of Notre Dame that shows his method and

purpose for reading. He connects not only with the textual minutia of the stories, but with how

these stories contribute to his life goals of becoming an actor. Reggie's ability to actively read

and relate a textual experience might be useful in class discussions if his teacher acknowledged

his thoughts and potential to provide useful contributions in the class.

When Reggie, as well as all the other similarly labeled students, are denied the chance to

share and speak of their literacy experiences they lose their voice and confidence to share in the

future. When a student feels his or her voice is lost, he or she will react by either withdrawing or

acting-out. Gaughan (2001) engages and teaches students, like Reggie, who have been

educationally neglected, forgotten, and negatively labeled by teachers and administrators.

Gaughan (2001) states, "None of my students were nudged out of their comfort zone. They may

have been frustrated by skills they couldn't master, but because this pattern of teaching and learning resembled what school had always been for them, they were at least comfortable in their frustration" (p. 5). He moves forward with this reality and questions what he might do to light an educational spark in his students to push them further. While Gaughan holds a strong regard for the preparation of students for further education, he is most concerned with the preparation of students to live within the larger world (p. 9). In a case like Reggie, Gaughan might use his interest with acting to help him engage in other stories to show him that school can be relevant.

Gaughan (2001) asserts that students need to engage in reading, writing, and thinking that moves them from their comfort zone to the contact zone, which he suggests is the point where individuals consider not only their assumptions and beliefs, but they also consider the assumptions and beliefs of peers. His method is to engage students through units of thematic study, such as: assumptions and identity, prejudice, cultural representation, silence and sexism, war and voice—speaking up, sex and sexuality, and censorship and faith (pp. 9-10). Gaughan uses text and discussion within each unit, which he links to powerful films. Students are then able to visualize and experience the topics through multiple senses. He uses the individual units of study to awaken his students to worlds and realities outside their own, but also in order to better understand their own.

Gaughan's (2001) work describes how he helps students to engage and use their skills with alternative literacies when he invites them to bring to the classroom their unique ways of speaking, ways of understanding, and ways of writing. He does not censor students as to how they speak or write in the experiences, but rather he asks them to consider how their unique

views interact or conflict with classmates. In this process, Gaughan creates a classroom where students engage each other in the contact zone where their views are likely to both agree and disagree. He does not ask students to change how they read, write, and speak; he asks them to consider how peers can view the same theme or topic in different ways. Students' ideas are not evaluated as right or wrong. The creation of the contact zone is implemented to show how one's identity and experience can influence his or her unique way of critically reading, writing, thinking, and being.

Gaughan (2001) describes his methods of teaching in the contact zone as pioneered by Pratt (1991). Pratt (1991) defines the contact zone as the point "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of power" (p. 34; as cited in Gaughan, p. 33). Gaughan's (2001) efforts are intended to engage students in a curriculum where the texts are only points of departure. He selects texts and activities that will push students to consider the social, cultural, and political components of literacy in the larger world. In this process, he practices a pedagogy that Ladson-Billings (1995) terms *culturally relevant pedagogy*—"that addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate" (p. 469).

Gaughan's (2001) methods are progressive because he moves from a traditional didactic and skill-based method of ELA instruction to a more exploratory method. While he does devise and select the themes of study, he does not create the ending or takeaway for students. Gaughan chooses topics that are laced with controversy and numerous questions that he then releases

students to explore together with all the biases and experiences they bring to the topic and classroom. He welcomes alternative literacies into his classroom by encouraging students to write and to speak in their most natural ways of being.

Gaughan (2001) does not want students to lose their thoughts when they translate from their literate selves to conventions of standard English. However, by the end of each thematic unit, Gaughan does hold students to high standards and asks them to form their conclusions into standard English through final projects and papers. His work is important for ELA teachers because it suggests that students do not always need to write, speak, and think through traditional school norms, but rather they can engage through means that are most natural and efficient for themselves. The students will later learn how to move their thoughts into traditional modes of communication. This process allows students to think freely without fear of their difficulties in regards to conventions.

Gaughan (2001) recognizes the unique identities of his students and demonstrates this through the methods he employs in his classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995), a like-minded researcher and educator, works to educate future teachers on methods that are similar to her and Gaughan's (2001) pedagogical stance. Ladson-Billings (1995), in an article entitled, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," suggests a theoretical perspective for educating teacher candidates to be more successful in the classroom, specifically with African-American students (p. 466).

Ladson-Billings (1995) draws on Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) phenomenon of "acting white" (p. 176), which means to become successful in the eyes of mainstream teachers. Yet,

Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy aims to help African-American students and other minority students become successful while also retaining "their cultural integrity" (p. 476). By cultural integrity, she refers to an individual's unique way of being from culture to politics. Ladson-Billing's (1995) "re-teachering" pedagogy pushes teachers to make the classroom more democratic and relevant to students of various cultures. Her theoretical rationale is to welcome more students into classroom conversations as themselves, not as some modified form of themselves. Her theory insists that students are able to express their thoughts and ideas in the classroom through their personal lenses developed from both in-school and out-of-school life experiences. She does not want students to respond in inauthentic ways simply to please teachers and fulfill their expectations for the topic under discussion. Ladson-Billing's (1995) theory insists that students respond as they see the issue and asks teachers to respect and acknowledge the ideas that each student brings forth.

Ladson-Billings (1995) theory does not fall explicitly into a category of alternative literacy, but her theory enables students to use their alternative ways of knowing and being in the world to better inform their interactions with traditional literacy practices. Culturally relevant pedagogy serves as one teaching method under which students do not have to write and respond in ways that schools traditionally require. Gaughan (2001) takes the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy further when he discusses "shifting perspectives" (p. 38). He finds when students share a similar text, while also retaining their unique thoughts, reactions, and ideas about the text, they can then consider the ideas their classmates bring to the conversation and, in turn, rethink and better evaluate their own understanding and perspective.

2.8 Research That Empowers Students to Lead the Conversation

In this area, I discuss the work of scholars that investigate the actual thoughts and literacy practices of students. In each of these works, I find points where the students are empowered in a variety of ways to share how they view and react to others perceptions about themselves. In many cases, the students of these studies suggest a disconnect between who they are and how adults perceive them. Further, the students in these studies demonstrate that while they may not meet the traditional expectations of schooling, they do interact with and utilize literacy practices for both practical and personal purposes.

Gaughan (2001) and Ladson-Billings (1995) offer methods that empower students to express themselves; however, the successful implementation of the methods is not instant. Jones' article (2009), "Engaging Classroom Communities: Belonging, Rigor, and Support as Three Pillars of a Thinking Classroom," describes how a culturally welcoming classroom might look and feel like. She outlines three pillars for a successful classroom community: (1) a sense of belonging; (2) dedication to rigor; and (3) a safety-net of support for teachers and students (p. 127). Jones (2009) illuminates the progressive, culturally responsive classroom in action when she states:

> Students in urban settings should not have to worry about cultural differences or about
> being ridiculed for their successes or shortcomings. Teachers must nudge and nurture
> individuals to think broadly and take risks, so they can begin to take hold of their
> education, gaining access to all of the skills (reading, writing, speaking, and critical

thinking) that will allow them to practice intellectual freedom and fully participate in a

democratic society. (p. 131)

Jones (2009) asserts the importance of the individual classroom in the preparation of

students to enter the larger world. She speaks to the need for educators to create classroom

environments that allow for the full development of students' thinking, while simultaneously

supporting and welcoming the ideas of each individual. The full development of student

thinking occurs when students consider their own experiences and beliefs about a particular text

while simultaneously considering the unique perspectives expressed by classmates. The idea of

fuller thinking arrives when students allow others to challenge their thoughts where one can then

revise their beliefs or maintain them.

The most important component in the development of students' metacognitive process is

that they realize that ideas do not exist in a vacuum and that they will be more certain of their

conclusions when they evaluate ideas in agreement or opposition to the ideas of others about the

same text. However, students must feel safe and comfortable in a classroom if teachers want

them to share and express their personal thoughts, reactions, and beliefs about a text. Teachers

need to create a classroom culture where students are free to share their ideas without judgement

or ridicule. To create such classrooms, it is necessary to both solicit and welcome the thoughts of

students that so often go ignored. The work of Michie (2009) demonstrates what teachers can

learn from students when we not only ask, but really listen to how they respond and share their

experiences of the classroom.

Gregory Michie (2009), a former teacher in the Chicago Public Schools and now a teacher educator, captures two sides of classroom culture in an excerpt from a former student, Armando. Armando says:

> In sixth grade, I had Mrs. Ferguson. She was a good teacher, but our class, we got left out. They [administration] separated us from the other kids. I guess they thought it was for our own good. The other sixth graders would change classes, but we didn't. They used to tell us, "This is the way they do it in high school." So I thought the other classes were smarter than us. People used to call us "the troublemakers," so I used to walk the halls thinking I was all bad. I felt like everybody was scared of me, and that's the way I wanted it. I wanted to impress them, like for them to think I was always in trouble for something. But now, when I think about how I was back then, I think, "What a goof. What a idiot."
>
> I'm still not doing too good in English. Last year, I had a good English teacher. It was interesting in there. We did projects and made posters for books we read. But I was absent a lot. My English teacher would call my ma all the time, 'cause sometimes I'd skip her class and then she'd see me later in the hallway. So she'd be calling my ma all the time. It kind of made me mad, but I guess she cared about me. She wanted me to be in class. This year, my English teacher, she just sits there and talks the whole time. (Michie, 1999/2009, pp.56-57)

In this brief excerpt, Armando relates what he sees as the difference between good teaching and bad teaching, along with the way that institutional practices can separate and neglect subgroups

of students. Armando's description conveys not only his feelings about the treatment he and his classmates receive in school, but also how students will often fulfill the labels and stigmas that adults attach to them. In defeat, before beginning to battle, Armando and classmates accept the role of incapable student and "troublemaker" (Meier, 1995/2002, p. 10) as it is all they hear.

While Armando's account is sad in many ways, teachers can extract some positives that they can incorporate into their classrooms. For example, students will also react positively to praise, just as Armando fulfilled negative expectations. Furthermore, if teachers and researchers allow students to share such stories, those who teach and are willing to listen might notice the embedded advice in students' comments and apply them to their teaching methodology.

Armando's description of teacher actions and pedagogical methods also illuminates actions that foster students' participation and promote a positive classroom culture. Armando shares both positive and negative experiences he met in his English classes. The teacher who excited Armando provided students the opportunity to complete creative projects for texts read in class. In these projects, students are able to incorporate alternative literacy practices as they have more freedom to make the project their own. A poster presentation, power-point, and other such activities allow students to practice both traditional and alternative literacy skills. For instance, a student might create a comic strip where he or she uses language and expressions from his neighborhood to retell the story, while simultaneously pairing the artistic representation to a more academic paper that expresses his or her choices for the comic strip and how they are representative of the original text.

Armondo verbalizes what causes him to resist in the ELA classroom. He relates his struggle with an inactive teacher who only lectured to his class. While his feelings are not directly stated, Armando insinuates that he enjoys when students are welcomed into classroom discussions and made active members in the classroom. This is most obvious when he relates further difficulties with the didactic teacher.

Christina Rathbone's (1998) ethnography of an inner-city alternative high school, *On the Outside Looking: A Year in an Inner-City High School*, reflects similar sentiments as those Michie (1999/2009) expresses concerning the way students' attitudes often fulfill adults', in many cases teachers', assumptions about who the students are. Rathbone (1998) states:

> …--I began to understand that by way of protection most of the kids were buying into what older people suspected them of being anyway, and then in a wild twist of imagination and self-confidence they were throwing the images laughingly back in our faces. (p. 115)

Michie (1999/2009) and Rathbone's (1998) work on students' replication of adults' perceptions and expectations are helpful in my effort to understand why so many students struggle in the ELA classroom. The difficulty might not be so much with acquiring traditional (dominant) literacies, but rather the struggle might be for students to relinquish their out-of-school literacy skills for those of the classroom when they do not feel valued by the adults. Rathbone refers to traditional and dominant literacies as the ability to read, speak, and write that teachers teach through a focus on building individual skills towards the larger whole of standard English.

Like Michie's (1999/2009) experiences, Rathbone (1998) finds that students react in a similar manner in the larger world when they read negative perceptions from adult strangers. She writes:

> All day, every day, television, films, even advertisements reinforced the ideas that if you were poor and African American or Latino your expectations better be humble. But much more damaging than these prefabricated images was the real-life reinforcement they received every day, through countless encounters with people from outside of their world—shop clerks, pedestrians, fellow subway travelers, policemen, taxi drivers— otherwise perfectly normal people who shared or sped past or shuffled away from them on their way down to midtown and school in the mornings. (Rathbone, 1998, p. 67)

Rathbone's (1998) work identifies the numerous ways that students read the larger world in which they live and how this world often places negative stereotypes and assumptions on them. When adolescents encounter such negativism on a regular basis they have few options, either they resist or they fulfill. However, when adolescents are given a chance to express what they know, think, and feel many are willing to share. Luttrell and Parker (2001) engage students in a manner that allows them to use all of their literacy skills, alternative and traditional, to define who they are as literate individuals.

Luttrell and Parker (2001) investigate the actual literacy practices that high school students engage in on a regular basis outside the classroom. They claim that students use literacy practices to form their identities, which is consistent with much of the literature (Moje, 2000; Fischer, 2003; Forrell, 2006; Bartlett, 2007; Kinloch, 2010). This work draws from a larger

study they conducted, *High School Literacy Project*, which used ethnographic data to evaluate how students use literacy practices outside-the-classroom. Four North Carolina high schools are the sites of the project. Luttrell and Parker (2001) find, "Students use their literacy practices to form their identities within, and sometimes in opposition to, these figured worlds of school, work and family" (p. 245). Such findings dispel traditionally held notions by adults that students today are more media-driven (*Abstract,* p. 235). Luttrell and Parker present various excerpts of their data throughout the article and one piece lends itself well to represent what they find. Mindy, a study participant, states:

> I love to write. I write journals, a diary…every day. [I write about] what happens during the day, how I feel, if I had a bad day. You know, if I really meet a cute guy, or if I had an argument with a teacher, or anything. [I write poetry about] mostly how I feel. (Mindy, an eleventh grader at Central High who went on to fail her English class).
>
> (Luttrell & Parker, 2001, p. 235)

Mindy regularly uses language and literacy practices to understand her life outside of school, yet based on her lack of success in English class there is a disconnect between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices. Mindy seems to have struggles similar to Alice, another study participant, who feels that "English classes are disconnected from her interests in reading and writing or her hopes for a college education" (Luttrell & Parker, 2001, p. 243).

Luttrell and Parker's (2001) research demonstrates that adolescents are reading and writing outside the classroom. Yet, some students remain unsuccessful by teacher expectations. The question is: How can students that use alternative literacies regularly become successful

within the limitations of conventional, school literacies? Maria Teresa de la Piedra (2010)

locates a similar discrepancy between alternative literacy practices and traditional literacy

practices of biliterate students. Her work illuminates and insists that teachers become more

cognizant and aware of the alternative literacy practices that students employ. Teachers might be

able to better teach their literacy content to students through the utilization of students' skills

with alternative, home literacies.

Michie (2009), Rathbone (1998), and Luttrell & Parker (2001) all provide student voice

and perspective in their work to convey the many realities that today's students encounter on a

daily basis both in-school and out-of-school. However, students can also be part of the larger

educational conversation through what they do not say. Students' inaction and silence can speak

to how they they perceive the world of school and society. Katherine Shultz's (2010) work

makes a unique contribution to the literacy conversation because she is not interested in the

output of students, through whatever form, but rather she is interested in defining and redefining

what silence means in the classroom. She suggests that silence might too be a literacy practice

that teachers must recognize and understand as purposeful to the student.

Schultz's (2010) bids teachers to reconsider and redefine the silence they sometimes

come across in the classroom (p. 2834). By silence, Schultz urges teachers to look beyond the

silence itself in order to focus more on the underlying reasons for the silence. She chooses to

examine silence as an act of power and as an act of protection (p. 2835). Many teachers possess

narrow definitions of silence and, as a result, teachers hold limited interpretations as to what a

student communicates through his or her silence in the classroom. Shultz asserts that students'

silences place them in limited categories of "good" and "bad," or amenable and deviant (p. 2834).

Schultz (2010) found that students often used silence as either a form of power or a means of protection during two longitudinal qualitative studies, one in a high school setting and the other in a middle school (p. 2835). She noticed in the middle school that students who spoke the loudest were more often heard by the teacher, while those students who remained silent became virtually invisible (p. 2841). Her work connects with the larger literacy conversation because it is another way for students to read and navigate the larger world to find their place within it.

Shultz (2010) posits that both silence and talk in the classroom are governed by "implicit" and "explicit" rules. She petitions teachers to reconsider their rules and assumptions about classroom talk and silence. Shultz also notes that traditional definitions of silence do not account for the various cultural practices or traditions of silence (pp. 2847-2848). While Shultz's research focused specifically on silence as literacy, her research makes me wonder further about body language and expression as other forms of alternative literacies and literacy practices which need further investigation and assessment beyond teachers' biased assumptions.

2.9 Literacy in the Community

I review in this section the work of academics who investigate literacy beyond the classroom and the importance of doing so for the individual. While much of literacy instruction in school focuses on skill acquisition, Falk (2001) notes how literacy is equally important for identity formation (p. 314). My intent here is to illuminate both why literacy is important

beyond the classroom for the individual as well as to provide a contrast to the numerous studies of literacy in educational settings previously presented.

In *The Dialect of Freedom* (1988), Maxine Greene describes how freedom is born, denied, and fought for in the individual. Researchers (Weil, 1993; Luttrell & Parker, 2001; Moje, 2002; Kinloch, 2010, among others) claim that literacy extends beyond reading and writing; literacy is also about finding one's voice in his/her situated context. Greene (1998) asserts that there is "a dialectical relation marking every human situation: the relation between subject and object, individual and environment, living consciousness and phenomenal world" (p. 8). The literate person is one who can read and speak to his/her relationship within contextualized situations. Further, Greene asserts that "children who have been provoked to reach beyond themselves, to wonder, to imagine, to pose their own questions are the ones most likely to learn to learn" (p. 14). Children who are literate in their specific situations and the world in which they live are better able to become agents of their own learning and education.

Victoria Purcell-Gates (1995/1999) defines emergent literacy as "literate abilities and stances [that] emerge developmentally as children observe and engage in experiences mediated by print in their daily lives" (p. 7). Her definition is important to understanding literacy as it challenges the notion that literacy is only a product of school learning. Scholars (Scribner & Cole, 1981/1999; Health, 1983; Street, 2003) who endorse the notion about the importance of where literacy is learned look to the community and lived world of their subjects to understand better their literacy skill acquisition and their implementation of such skills. Purcell-Gates (1995/1999) summarizes such ideas when she states, "Children learn about what they experience and participate in within their particular sociolinguistic cultures" (p. 50).

Delpit (2002) affirms Purcell-Gates (1995/1999) theory of literacy learning outside-of-school when she states, "Our language embraces us long before we are defined by any other medium of identity. In our mother's womb we hear and feel the sounds, the rhythms, the cadences of our 'mother tongue'" (p. XIX, Introduction). Her sentiments express the importance of environment on the ways people acquire, learn, and internalize literacy and literacy practices. Both Delpit (2002) and Purcell-Gates (1995/1999) explain how children begin to learn literacy long before entering any classroom. Further, people that engage with literacy practices outside the classroom continue to develop literacy skills even as they simultaneously learn academic literacies in the classroom during school-age years (Kinloch, 2010; Skerret & Bomer, 2011). Maisha Fischer's (2003) work exposes an example of how some individuals continue to develop their literacy skills outside-the-classroom solely for intrinsic purposes well into adulthood.

Fischer (2003) conducted her research outside-the-classroom to explore the ways people of African descent use literacy as a form of expression and identity in two spoken word venues, Mahogany and Speak Easy (p. 367). She labels these communities, and others like them, as African Diaspora Participatory Literacy Communities, or ADPLC (p. 363). In these spaces, she located multiple literacies (p. 362) in use as community members of Mahogany and Speak Easy "did not choose between types of literacies; they blended oral and written traditions in their practice and sometimes in their delivery" (p. 384). Participants were free to engage in any form--prose, poetry, rap, or hip-hop--that they felt necessary to convey their thoughts and work during stage performances. This community valued audience response and critique as much as the presentation because "their is no hierarchy between speaker and listener. Everyone has an equally valued message, testimony, and story to share" (p. 376). The equality between speaker

and listener helped to develop a community of respect that is not always the case between teachers and students in classrooms.

African Diaspora Participatory Literacy Communities (ADPLC), specifically Mahogany and Speak Easy, filled a literacy need for the participants that was absent in their daily lives of work and school. The ADPLC's enabled participants to connect with ancestry, culture, and other like-minded individuals through various mediums of art, poetry, and music (p. 375). Pascal, a participant within the ADPLC, notes that the venues simply allow him to become more comfortable listening and speaking English (p. 380). Participants within these venues, or "alternative knowledge spaces", found them important because such out-of-school settings have been found through research to be purposeful and authentic places for literacy learning for people color (p. 363). The ADPLC's acceptance of creative expression, equality among participants, and form of expression allowed participants to express their ideas and identity without judgement, which led many participants to continue to develop and practice their literate identities.

Fischer (2003) details the motivation and inspiration for people to participate and maintain membership in African Diaspora Participatory Literacy Communities (ADPLC) (p. 374). Within her description, there appears an embedded definition of literacy derived from her experiences with the participants. Fischer (2003) states:

> The motivation and inspiration for community members to participate in Mahogany and Speak Easy can be characterized by three features: 1) a personal search with respect to identity, personal growth, and development; 2) an extended search for a local Black

community with which to exchange ideas and information; and 3) a movement to

understand meanings for Blackness in a global context. (p. 374)

From these three features, a definition of literacy can be reduced to entail the use of literacy

practices for identity formation and personal growth where one can exchange ideas with others to

better understand how their culture and background situates them in relation to the larger world.

The literate individual is able to use literacy practices as a way to identify personally, participate

within their immediate community, and navigate the larger world community.

Ian Falk (2001) claims that human-capital theory has distracted researchers from the

importance of social capital theory in all forms of learning. He is specific about the effects social

capital theory has on literacy learning (p. 313). He states simply that literacy is "the things we

see" that insists literacy is being used (p. 314). Falk furthers his explanation when he states,

"...literacy as being part of those social practices where literacy is made visible. These 'literacy'

practices are integrated into social activities—in schooling, in our personal lives, in civic and

cultural life and of course in the workplace" (p. 314). Such notions of literacy, practice,

occurrence, and situatedness, is reminiscent of the views held by other literacy scholars (Scribner

& Cole, 1981/1999; Heath, 1983; Gee, 1989).

Further, Falk's (2001) work promotes that literacy is as much about identity formation of

the individual as it is about skill acquisition (p. 314). He connects important elements of social

capital theory to the maintenance of "networks of our social groups with wider, external

networks" (p. 320). Falk (2001) views literacy as an important means of communication that can

maintain such social networks. For example, the individual who partakes in the social worlds of

work and his/her community must also be literate in the modes and discourses of these

communities to maintain his/her connection and maintenance in these groups. However, people deemed literate in such environments are not only dependent on text and speech; it is also necessary for them to understand the customs, beliefs, and accepted ways of being in each group.

2.10 Bridging Classroom and Community Literacies

To this point, I have reviewed and provided commentary on numerous studies that discuss literacy explicitly in-the-classroom and outside-the-classroom as well as the innumerable tenets of an expanded definition of literacy. Here, I aim to provide the literature that attempts to bridge literacy from both areas. It is in the intersection of students' literacy practices and traditional literacy practices where I believe students and teachers might find a common ground to engage one another for the purpose of bettering each other educationally, socially, and emotionally.

Various researchers focus explicitly on either classroom literacy practices (Frey et al., 2005; Seglem & Witte, 2009; Willis, 1995) or community literacy practices (Bartlett, 2007; Gee, 2000; Kirkland, 2009; Moje, 2000). However, the literacy practices of both the classroom and the community have pathways to be connected to one another and, in turn, influence and enhance the other. Teachers have long expected their students to implement into their daily lives and communities the academic literacy skills they teach in the classroom. However, teachers have not always welcomed the students' community literacy skills into the classroom to inform and diversify their practice. More recently researchers (Alvermann, 2012; Luttrell & Parker, 2001; Moje, 2002; Skerrett & Bomer, 2011; Teale & Gambrell, 2007) are working to document the purposefulness and outcomes that occur in classrooms when teachers begin with the literacy practices that students bring to school.

Bloome, Katz, Solsken, Willett, and Wilson-Keenan (2000) claim school literacy practices and family/community literacy practices are not easily compartmentalized as each effects the other; further, they state that a distinction is not necessarily needed, but rather such literacy spaces need be viewed heuristically (p. 156). Before bridging both spaces of literacy practices, Bloome et al. identify how this research views school literacy practices and family/ community literacy practices following their initial thoughts of literacy "as a set of social and cultural practices enacted by a group" (p. 155). They define school literacy practices as "uses of written language that are undertaken to display competence with a particular form and register of written language". Simply stated, this definition of school literacy practices is the ability of the student to take in written language to process and respond with an original response that displays understanding of both content and the desired form. Bloome et al. define family/community literacy practices as "part of, and reflect[ive of] the cultural life of, the family and community; engaging in family and community literacy practices eschews 'pedagogization'" (p. 155). Their definitions describe the communicative act that needs to occur for a specific purpose to be considered literacy in both arenas. Yet, Bloome et al. make the distinction that school literacy practices are pedagogical in nature, whereas family/community literacy practices are not necessarily solely to teach.

Bloome, Katz, Solsken, Willett, and Wilson-Keenan's (2000) research investigates the use of school literacy practices within the family/community in a public housing project (pp. 157-158) and then assesses community/family literacy practices in an elementary classroom (pp. 158-161) that is not often a point of focus. Their work demonstrates that particular literacy practices do not stop at a particular doorway, but rather transcend spaces. Bloome et al. (2000)

conclude that location does not always define the literacy practices enacted. They believe "...the social relationships among the persons involved and what written language was being used to accomplish" (p. 161) is more important than the space where the literacy practices and transactions occur.

In "Functional Literacy, Functional Illiteracy: The Focus of an Ongoing Social Debate," Valdivieslo (2006) exposes the large amount of functional literacy research produced over the last three decades. She contends that the majority of this work can be considered that of the governmental discourse type or academic discourse type (p. 123). Valdivieslo (2006) found government discourse typical defines literacy for the purpose of development and application, while academic discourse allows "...multiple voices and definitions, depending on the theoretical context within which the concept is analyzed" (p. 123). However, like other researchers (Bloome, Katz, Solsken, Willett, and Wilson-Keenan's, 2000), Valdivieslo (2006) claims that both discourses influence the another. From the time she spent at literacy conferences over the last thirty-years, she describes the evolution of how both discourse communities attempt to define literacy and concludes that literacy cannot be understood, measured, or reduced to skills without consideration for the sociocultural context in which it appears (p. 124).

Maria Teresa de la Piedra's (2010) research of biliterate adolescents near the United States-Mexico border documents a positive example of the ways home and vernacular literacies can be used in the classroom to increase learning with an expanded definition of literacy such as the one proposed by Enright (2011). De La Piedra's (2010) study sought to better understand how bilingual adolescents' literacy practices could be positively integrated at school (p. 575). She adopted Street's (1984) ideological model of literacy, which she summarized as always

"...multiple and local. The construct of multiple literacies implies that literacy practices vary according to the context and society in which they are embedded" (p. 576). In sum, De La Piedra (2010) found through interview and observation that the bilingual students she researched were using numerous vernacular and home literacies in effective ways, in-school and out-of-school, with family, friends, and community members.

De La Piedra (2010) also notes that teachers and the school as a whole did not recognize the students' literacy abilities as they did not fit the school's definition of literacy practices. De La Piedra (2010) explains, "Vernacular literacies enter the space of school as marginal activities that are either not considered valid knowledge by teachers or that are simply invisible" (p. 581). Her work with literacy is noteworthy because it documents the negative experiences children encounter in school when their ways of knowing, communicating, and being is disregarded by those who are tasked to teach them. As a result, the children De La Piedra (2010) observed experienced great difficulty learning academic literacies and language because teachers taught without making connections to their vernacular literacies with which they were proficient. Of a similar scope, Elizabeth Moje's (2000) work investigates how and why schools fail to recognize the varied abilities that students bring to school from their home and community.

Moje (2000) sought to better understand the "unsanctioned literacy tools" that students, who were gang connected and labeled at-risk by their school, employed in their daily lives both in-school and out-of-school (p. 651). While these students struggled with academic literacies, she found that they used alternative literacy practices fluently to write their own stories in their school, with their families, and in their communities (p. 661).

Moje (2000) argues "that marginalized, gang-connected adolescents use literacy not only to resist, but also to make meaning about the events in their everyday lives" (p. 654). She spent three years observing, interviewing, and collecting other forms of data on students she initially met with from two different English classes. As the research progressed, her interactions with the participants extended beyond the school and into the community. Like Weinstein (2007), Moje (2000) finds that her gang-connected youths deliberately use alternative literacies for various purposes and reports on her overall observations of these activities:

> I found that alternative or unsanctioned literacies used by these students included not only what one might think of as gang literacies (tagging, graffiti writing, hand signs, and dress and color codes), but also a wide range of poetry, narrative, journal writing, letter writing, and novel reading. At times the young people wrote to communicate with peers, at other times to send messages or complaints to their 'homies' (homeboys or homegirls), to rivals, and to family members. (p. 661)

Moje (2000) documents the various literacy practices that "deviant" (p. 652) students engage, while also suggesting their purposes for engaging in such practices. She classifies the purposes as: (1) to mark or claim physical sites of land; (2) to establish identities; (3) to position themselves or to label themselves in relation to others. The classification and purpose of these literacy practices is important because it legitimizes how the students use language, text, and visual representations for deeper purposes than those outside their group traditionally recognize. Further, Moje notes that these students believe their literacy practices are superior to school literacies as they provide them increased connections with their family and their culture (p. 675).

The students' practice of alternative literacies enables them to be "actors in the story" (Moje, 2000, p. 680) and not outsiders or listeners as they often feel with traditional literacies. Moje's (2000) work holds great implications for teachers because she contends that rather than ignoring or shunning these alternative literacy practices of gang-connected students, she believes teachers can better serve them by embracing their valued literacy practices and, in turn, using such practices as transitions towards, or to teach, other traditional literacy practices (p. 681).

Moje (2002) states and demonstrates in her research that literacy can be a mode of empowerment for disempowered youth. Weil (1993) proposes a curriculum based on a "critical thinking approach to cultural literacy" that can lead to student empowerment. He calls this curriculum critical multicultural literacy, which he defines as "a commitment to recognizing the relationship between theory and practice in pedagogy aimed at constructively creating a praxis that promotes dialoguing, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing issues of relevant historical and contemporary concerns" (p. 222). Within this pedagogical approach, students are able to understand their connectedness and disconnectedness within the larger world among peers who hold similar and dissimilar realities that lead to real purposes for learning with literacy practices.

Susan Weinstein's (2007) research demonstrates that students also employ alternative literacy practices beyond practical purposes for enjoyment and entertainment. Weinstein (2007) grounds her work in the field of social literacies and argues that "reading, writing, and communication are all deeply contextualized activities that can only be understood by exploring the people, places, and powers that surround or infuse them" (p. 272). Some other examples of

social literacies that adolescents engage in beyond the classroom include a variety of texts, such as, graffiti, how-to manuals, video games, and notes to friends. In "A Love for the Thing: The Pleasures of Rap as a Literate Practice," Weinstein (2007) documents four adolescent writers of rap, who call themselves the Maniacs, and describes the pleasure they derive from the product and process of rap—crafting to performance. She follows these four writers over a two-year period and finds that rap serves three major purposes: (1) a place to explore and construct identity; (2) a way to express resistance towards family, school, community, societal norms; and (3) a forum to express sexual and emotional frustration, confusion, and desire (Weinstein, 2007, pp. 270-271).

Weinstein (2007) suggests her work has implications for classroom writing instruction as well. She believes that students resist classroom writing because it is often formulaic, restrictive, and overly directed. However, students derive more pleasure in classroom writing when they are given more time to creatively explore and represent what is learned through various writing styles (Weinstein, 2007, pp. 280-281).

2.11 Conclusion

My aim throughout this chapter was to highlight and review the work of numerous theorists and researchers involved in conversations around and about literacy in the twenty-first century. My investigation does not claim to encompass all the literature that is currently available. However, it does contain the literature that I found most valuable when considering the students I teach, the direction from which my doctoral research progressed, and the ideas that helped further my understanding of alternative literacies. Alternative literacies, as defined in the

introduction (Kinloch, 2010), appear to be pathways that teachers must acknowledge more in their instructional methods to aid in the instruction of more traditional literacy practices for students today (Delpit, 1986; Rose, 1989; Wilhelm, 1997; Fecho, 2004). Students are more open to learn traditional academic literacy practices when teachers recognize and make use of the literacy practices they most identify with from outside-the-classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gaughan, 2001; Luttrell & Parker, 2001; Vetter, 2010).

Throughout my review of the literature, I have found that literacy and specific literacies are constantly being defined and redefined. I am struck by the way that literacy terms are often used interchangeably to talk about different forms of literacy and different ways of being literate. While each researcher defines his or her own terms, the variability of definitions in the literature does present challenges as to how I define alternative literacies for myself. Consequently, this also makes it difficult to state what literacy practices would be classified as alternative literacy practices. Despite the confusion of labels and names regarding literacy practices, the literature presented here serves to clarify my understanding of why students engage in various alternative literacy practices. I found that students utilize alternative literacies as a means to protect, identify, inform, and express who they are as individuals within the larger world (Willis, 1995; Moje, 2000; Weinstein, 2007; De La Piedra, 2010; Shultz, 2010).

Further, in my review of the literature, I became aware of the way that my work nestles within the larger conversation of students' literacy practices in-school and out-of-school. While much of the literature speaks to mainstream students literacy practices in-school, out-of-school, and the intersections of both areas, I did not encounter any examples of research that seeks to

better understand the personal literacy practices that students diagnosed with emotional and behavioral difficulties employ. This relative void in the literature is a concern that needs to be addressed because the special education subgroup requires unique pedagogical methods to engage, sustain interest, and generally educate within the larger schooling milieu.

My overall purpose of this study was to conduct a teacher-research inquiry that utilized various ethnographic techniques to help me better understand the literacy practices and the students who participate in those practices during unstructured times of the school day. In reflection on this goal and in connection with a review of the literature, I have come to better understand that literacy, while traditionally described academically, has the ability to awaken the individual, enliven the community, and bind the world of schooling with the larger world. In short, literacy is always at work, but in various forms. As many of the studies here reveal, literacy can be the bridge that links the self, people, and places in an effort to learn, express, and understand the interconnectedness of the world. I have come to learn that such an expanded notion of literacy serves to both legitimize the work of those I interacted with in this study as well a I have learned that their work beyond the classroom can positively inform my pedagogy in the classroom.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

It was breakfast time at Park High School. A student was engrossed in John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (2008). Legs crossed and head tilted, she appeared oblivious to all the happenings around her.

It was then midmorning break. A young man wore large, earmuff-like headphones from which muffled tunes emerged while he wrote lyrics and quietly read them aloud one line at a time, repeating the routine for each new line produced.

Lunch arrived. A particular student was again sketching original Manga comics, or Japanese animation, of his own creation (Brenner, 2013). This had become a daily ritual of his. His characters took on personalities of their own, but it appeared these characters also displayed aspects of the student's personality. The connection of person to character was most evident by the short, strong words present in the speech bubbles—*He's lying.*, *No, it's going to hurt.*, and *Trust him.*

I had informally observed these students and a few others engaged in literacy practices during non-academic periods of the school day for some time. However, this was not the norm at Park High School. Most students interacted socially at the lunch tables and then migrated to the game room to play pool, ping-pong, or continue conversations. The latter is a common high school image where students are diligent in academic classes and then social during unstructured times of day. Yet, during my time at Park, I had always noticed that a few students remained seemingly introverted as they engaged in literacy practices of their own choice.

I had observed that they were also the students who seemed disengaged in class during discussions or activities, yet they produced meaningful written responses to texts. Often, their responses to short-answer questions or "Reader Response" journals incorporated larger worldview references that connected a text to larger themes or current events. These students clearly had much to offer in the English classroom, but they tended to withhold in group settings.

Researchers note that English Language Arts curriculum and corresponding methods in practice do not always welcome what students bring to the classroom (Wilhelm, 1997; Fecho, 2004). Emig (1983) asserts that "many curricula and courses in English still consist almost exclusively of reading and listening" (p. 124). Teachers that adopt such methods within the classroom silently, or explicitly, disregard students' thoughts, connections, and written responses to texts. I believe these are the very contributions that awaken students and actively engage them in the English Language Arts classroom. Kutz and Roskelly (1991) state a major job of teachers "is to inquire into the relationship between what students know and what they express" (p. 33). When students are able to talk, to discuss, and to question, they are better able to make connections with the curriculum through their evaluation of it against the world in which they live.

My informal observations of students engaged in literacy practices during non-academic periods at Park raised questions about how and why they became disengaged in the classroom. I wondered that if I knew more about their literacy interests might I be able to consistently incorporate such interests into my courses to help them come alive? Swinehart (2009) claims, "Students must feel free to own their own thinking and aspirations, to dream big and achieve bigger; otherwise they will simply do what is asked and nothing more" (p.33). My observations

of withdrawn students was that they also resisted by not doing "what is asked" as a stance against what is imposed on them. The select group of students that participated in literacy practices during non-academic periods were interesting because they clearly engaged with language and meaning-making, yet they chose only to pursue it independently.

I asked of each observation of a student "at work", *Why do they do what they do?* The point of my research was to better understand the motivations for their literacy interests and how their engagement in these chosen literary practices informed their understanding of the world. While I found what they did and what they created to be of great interest, I focused on the resulting thoughts and feelings that they shared or embedded in artifacts about their participation in such practices. I took their responses to my questions, as well as my observations of their personal literacy practices, and analyzed them for potential themes and commonalities. I define personal literacy practices as those that are not assigned, taught, and/or recognized in the typical English Language Arts classroom curriculum.

3.2 Perspective

With twelve years of experience as an English teacher at Park High School, I have constantly observed students in-classes and out-of-classes. I often have held impromptu conversations with students when the observation of a literacy practice was not enough to satisfy my curiosity and I needed to ask questions to learn more. Berg (2007) states that "Good ethnography requires that the researcher avoids simply accepting everything at face value but, instead, considers the material as raw data that may require corroboration or verification" (p. 179). In the roles of both teacher and doctoral student, I wanted to formalize what I had always done and let casual observations evolve into a formal project by creating a space for students to

work and for me to conduct a teacher research inquiry using various ethnographic techniques such as interview and observation.

My choice to conduct a study using teacher research methodology was not a difficult decision. I had always felt, as I believe many teachers do, that the students we work with each day become our extended family. And, as a result, I wanted to highlight all the good students did, find the areas where students needed to improve, and learn from students ways to improve my instruction. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), authorities on teacher research methodology, provide a clear, yet complex definition that provides both a micro and macro view of teacher research:

> Whether called research, inquiry, action research, or teacher research, the goal is not to produce findings, nor is it simply to analyze the results of standardized tests to identify areas for reteaching. Rather, the goal is to create access for all learners to equitable and stimulating learning opportunities; to identify levers for needed change in people, institutions, and systems; and to act in ways that respect and honor the participation of various constituencies whose lives are implicated in the educational practices under consideration. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 143)

This statement notes that teacher research inquiries are centered on the local context and designed with specific populations in mind, yet it also recognizes that teacher research is about respecting learning opportunities for students and recognizing that how one teaches can have positive effects far beyond the classroom. At the heart of my study was the desire to look closely at what students at Park High School were already doing and then work with them to better

understand how their literacy practices might become part of classroom instruction to help them better connect with the curriculum.

While I used ethnographic techniques to collect data in this research, I situated this study in teacher research methodology because my inquiry is at the heart of my practice as a teacher. Dinkins (2009) recalls his own teacher research where "I [he] viewed himself more as a collector of stories and perspectives and less as an actor pushing a particular agenda. I [He] involved himself in the action neutrally, not saying much but, of course, thinking a whole lot" (p. 256). My inquiry was one that aimed to better understand students who engaged in literacy practices on their own, the same students who were generally not asked to share their personal thoughts, feelings, and motivations by adults in schools. I supposed that understanding what the students created and how they responded to their creations could lead to a developed understanding of what their works provided them and how it could be used to build bridges to the formal curriculum.

In this teacher research inquiry, I used ethnographic techniques to collect, analyze, and present the data gained to accomplish my goal. My application of ethnographic techniques in a school setting enabled me to immerse myself into the students' lives, their work, and their explanations of such work to gain a deeper understanding. I employed multiple ethnographic tools to interact with the research participants: extended observations, semi-structured and unstrucutred interview questions, field notes, artifacts, coding, and data analysis (Delamont, 2002; Glesne, 2006; Berg, 2007). My use of varied techniques of data collection allowed me to formally document the students engaged in literacy practices of their own choice. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) state that teacher research is "grounded in the identification and

empirical documentation of the daily dilemmas and contradictions of practice, which then become grist for the development of new conceptual frameworks and theories" (p. 95). I hoped that whatever I could deduce from the data collected during this research would allow me to see the specific population of Park High School in new ways to inform new methods for instruction in the English Language Arts classroom.

3.3 Neighborhood Setting

The Park High School is part of the City of Madison's public school system. The City of Madison, founded in 1630 and established as a city in 1892, is the fourth oldest English settlement in America. The city is situated just a few miles north of a major metropolis in the Northeast United States. The Blick River runs through the center of town and the river has historically been used to support Madison's economy through ship building, rum production, and leather tanning. Remnants of these trades are still visible and their embeddedness in the community in records of the historical society and the prevalence of historical sites. The Blick River flows to a large harbor and empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Today, the river is utilized mainly for recreational activities associated with boating; however, early inhabitants used the river as a point for the importation and exportation of goods.

Madison's population is 56,173, as indicated in the 2010 census report. While the city boasts the representation of over seventy nationalities, the majority of the population identifies as White (78%). Three other race-identifying categories that compose the population are Black (9%), Asian (7%), and Hispanic (4%). Past descriptions of Madison from casual acquaintances indicates that the city has historically had a strong Italian community. However, the populace has increasingly diversified racially and ethnically since the early 1970s. Madison's gender

composition is 52% female and 48% male. The census reveals that 68% of the population are between 18-64 years of age.

Residents of the city most often identify themselves geographically as being from the North, South, East, or West sections of Madison. These smaller communities emerge from the central Madison Square where many of the historical buildings, city buildings, and retail shops are located. Like many New England cities, Madison Square is composed of low-rise red brick buildings that house retail shops on the lower levels and apartments on the upper floors. Tree-lined sidewalks border the square, with a few parks along the way. The inhabitants of each city quadrant carry their own assumptions and generalizations about those who live in the others. The greatest generalization I have heard is that *all the rich people* live in North Madison, also called "the heights," while the immigrant and the "poor" population live in *South*. The later comment is likely a result of most of Madison's low-income government housing being segregated to the southern section of the city.

The high school students in each of these neighborhoods identify their membership in the community by the public transit bus number that circulates their area. For instance, the 101 is a major bus route that runs through South. I have observed 101 tattooed on both current and former students and graffitied on walls of many businesses. Park High School is located in South along Main Street, just in front of a major city park, with four baseball fields, a basketball court, community pool, and playground. The graffiti in this park, most often found on the basketball court, also brands the 101.

Park High School's immediate neighborhood is composed largely of triple-decker homes, some made up of floor-by-floor rental units, others intergenerational family floors, and single-

family condos divided by floor. Many of the homes in South are from the early 1900s. In recent years, many have been "flipped" inside, transformed into condos, and sold to young professionals or rented to college students.

A major asset to both the City of Madison and Park High School is the well-respected university that is just outside the city center. The university brings Madison some notoriety by mere association and also supports the schools and students monetarily, academically, and through sponsorship of community-based activities. In past years, the university has donated furniture and gym equipment directly to Park High School. It also donates the use of their official NCAA basketball court for Park High School's home basketball games.

3.4 Focal Setting

The Park High School building has a rich tradition in Madison's community, especially in South, since many of the residents attended the school. The school was constructed in 1896 as a community elementary school and then repurposed in the late 1970s. The redistribution of students to newer and larger elementary schools provided the opportunity for the creation of Park High School. Administrators and a few teachers designed Park High School to serve students who receive special education services, yet continued to struggle to make adequate academic, social, and emotional progress in mainstream settings. The vision of Park High School is to provide a similar high school learning community that is small enough to differentiate instruction and provide clinical services in a structured environment. Many students embrace a welcomed fresh start.

Park High School is a substantially separate educational site that serves grades 9-12. Students who complete Park's academic requirements receive a Madison High School diploma.

Located two miles from Madison High School, Park High School has been in operation

for more than thirty-years. The school enrolls up to forty students from Madison and

surrounding school districts, and serves a variety of students with learning difficulties who have

Individual Education Plans (IEPs), the majority diagnosed with emotional, behavioral, and/or

academic difficulties which impact learning progress. Common disabilities represented are:

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Anxiety, Bipolar, Oppositional-Defiant

Disorder (ODD), Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD),

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), and/ or a Specific Learning Disability. Many students

have multiple diagnoses that compound and influence academic progress. The low teacher-

student ratio of 1:4 enables teachers to work closely with students to build rapport and support

individualized learning.

The Park High School vision states:

> The Park High School provides an educational and therapeutic experience for high school
>
> age students. Enrolled students acquire a 21st century education within a small,
>
> supportive learning community, promoting academic, social and emotional confidence.
>
> Students transition as productive, healthy contributors to the society in which they live.
>
> (PHS Website)

While the mission states:

> The Park High School program provides opportunities for success in an alternative high
>
> school setting. Its major goals include helping students to acquire a 21st century
>
> education; promoting social, emotional and developmental growth; improving learner
>
> self-esteem while influencing life-long learning. Successful completion of the Program

will develop confidence for safe and independent living, as productive healthy

contributors to a diverse and rapidly changing world.

The program provides a therapeutic/educational environment that exhibits understanding,

empathy and compassion for the individual needs of each student it serves. We provide a

means of improving student attendance and behavior while educationally motivating our

students into responsible citizens who possess personal integrity and the ability to be

successful in today's society. The program collaborates with parents, state and local

officials, medical and related service providers, and the community at large in its quest

for a successful and fruitful outcome of high school graduation. (PHS Program Flyer)

Further, the school's goal is to provide the students with learning outcomes that they can use to

transition back to Madison High School, collegiate learning, the workforce, and most

importantly—independent life.

3.5 Around the School

Park High School is a block past South's major retail area that consists of convenience

stores, a liquor store, pizzeria, insurance agency, karate studio, and a well-known deli/bakery.

Many students take advantage of the bakery for both breakfast and lunch when their funds

permit. A fire station is within eyesight and the firemen visit the school often for safety checks.

South's elementary school is a block further up the hill. The principal of the elementary school

allows Park's basketball team to practice in their gym during the season. Streets of houses, a

large park, and other businesses also surround the building.

The Facade

Visitors to Park High School encounter a three story red brick facade with dilapidated

granite steps that show the building's age. The steps need to be replaced, but continual concrete

bandages are all they receive. Each floor is lined with large windows that stretch to ceiling

height. A sign, brown with gold lettering, displays the school name, a long-term project by

students in the woodworking class. On the opposite side of the walkway is a flagpole and large

granite boulder with a bronze dedication plaque memorializing Madison's war veterans. The

exterior entrance of Park High School is framed by two blue doors with metal grates over the

windows. The secretary, the gatekeeper at Park, uses a small security camera to grant or deny

admission to the building. The rounded top of the white steeple is clad in copper, but has

oxidized to a rich blue-green patina. A hawk, often observed, makes his home in the steeple.

3.6 In the School

Once in the building, one observes a polished granite entry way with detailed columns

and intricate woodwork. The building shows age and signs of neglect, but this area is timeless

and seems unchanged by the years of use. The foyer serves as the ornate center from which

rooms branch off. Each floor replicates the other in terms of rooms and size. The two main

floors have six classrooms each. The first floor has two counselor offices, a kitchen, lunchroom,

break room, "reflection center", and a conference room. The second floor houses the five

academic classrooms, student restrooms, and the library. Many students refuse to enter the

library due to a thick mildew smell that emanates from old ceiling tiles and yellowed books. The

basement is home to the janitor's storeroom, the wood shop, the weight room, and another

conference room.

The rooms are approximately 19'x 30' and contain mismatched furniture, usually tables

and not desks. The sunlight bursts through the windows and naturally sets a cheerful mood on

clear days, but it also makes it difficult for teachers to use projectors and other technologies

because there are no shades. Teachers must save such activities for the dreariness of a rainy day.

The hallways are dark and always warm, its walls made from straw-colored cinderblocks,

the floor painted a bland grey, peeling and stained. The rooms are multicolored from leftover

paint and the wooden floors show years of wax and trapped remnants left unswept before they

were sealed, time capsules of the happenings that once occurred. The most interesting floor

leads into the lunch room. A few years back, paroles from a local jail who worked in the

building placed dollar bills on the floor and then thickly sealed over them with wax and

polyurethane. You do not have to wait long to observe a student trying to pry them out.

I have spoken with many people who have visited Park High School and their reactions

range between "from the outside I thought it was condemned" to "the old world details make it

such a beautiful place that just needs some attention." Some points of the building bother me to

no end, while other physical elements of the building always catch my attention and make me

happy to work at Park. Additionally, the small class sizes, the chance to individualize content,

and the prospect to create community is a constant appeal. My accumulated memories that have

so fully influenced how I view learning and teaching further my affection for the building.

3.7 Researcher Role

I maintained two distinct roles at Park High School, yet each role informed the other. I

served as a teacher, but I also viewed the school through the lens of a doctoral student. As a

teacher I worked diligently, yet experienced frustration when my students did not respond to

lessons as I planned. While other times, I focused solely on student behavior to pave the way for

students' future learning, which sometimes left limited time for actual content teaching. As a

doctoral student in education and a researcher studying my own school setting, I viewed the school as a gold mine ripe to be explored and improved through careful study of the realities, and as a site ripe with the potential for positive change. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) affirm that, "With practitioner research, the borders between inquiry and practice are crossed, and the boundaries between being a researcher and being a practitioner are blurred" (p. 94). However, I recognized the realities and challenges that my students faced. I believed research such as my inquiry into student's literacy practices during unstructured periods (i.e. breaks, hallway passings, lunch) would acknowledge and highlight students' literacy interest outside the classroom that could be one potential pathway to more fully engage them in the classroom. I was challenged in the study design to construct a research space similar to the unstructured periods, but during an instructional period. School administrators required that any research I conducted be confined in a classroom to limit the exposure to students not in the study. In order to meet this requirement and remain true to what I wanted to know more about, I attempted to include for participants numerous points of choice, expression, and freedom to create in the course.

My dual-lens extended to my evaluation and observations of students. As a teacher, I believed I understood students in terms of how they functioned in class and interacted with others outside the classroom. As a student, I withdrew somewhat from quick judgements to just observe students during the unstructured times of breakfast, break, class changes, and lunch. During these times, I performed and located myself based on my teacher duties, but I could also observe more fully the ways students interacted to track the tendencies of any one student. With only forty students in the school at maximum capacity, it was easy to create a mental catalogue

of what I saw and heard. My navigation of the student and teacher lenses is what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) term "'work the dialect' of inquiry and practice", where at no time did I see in just one way, but rather I looked at the school milieu as intricately intertwined (p. 95). Similarly, while I separate my teacher and student roles here explicitly, it is only for the purpose of differentiating my actions during various points of the school day and research project. However, I was theoretically sliding back-and-forth on the teacher-researcher continuum (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 57) where I was truly both roles at once.

I intended my teacher research inquiry to formalize and capture what occurred during my observations of non-school-sanctioned literacy practices in process during unstructured times of the school day. As a teacher my observations had only been informal until I put on the hat of researcher. I had not taken field notes or collected artifacts focused on literacy or self-expression to represent what I saw. As a researcher, I adopted a role of participant-observer where I moved from mere observation to more formal observation, collection, and interpretation connected to the goals of my study. Glesne (2006) states that, "participant observation in a research setting, however, differs in that the researcher carefully observes, systematically experiences, and consciously records in detail the many aspects of a situation" (p. 52). Further, Glesne asserts that the researcher needs to frequently analyze his data for both meaning and how such meaning is represented, as well as how one's personal bias may influence one's interpretation of the data (p. 52).

Unique to my situation was the role of participation I assumed during the observations. In a single meeting period, I attempted to traverse the participant-observation continuum. I spent moments at the start of each class introducing and providing prompts, by the middle of the

conversation I would only clarify questions of participants (saying as little as possible), and by

the end I had completely separated myself from the group to remain silent and only observe and

record their interactions and discussions (Glesne, 2006, pp. 49-50). I attempted to scaffold the

research process because I believed it necessary for this group of students. Although in doing so

I inadvertently introduced a power dynamic because while I expressed a desire for students to

take control and make the space theirs, I was also imposing myself on the space by structuring

the meeting period. However, the greatest challenge I faced was my ability to separate what I

knew of the participants as students from the ways I did not yet understand them as participants

in my research. I experienced difficulty disregarding my teacherly-insights and "making the

familiar strange" in order to view them through the lens of researcher (Glesne, 2006, p. 51). The

research meetings often took on a process similar to one of my classes where I provided some

instruction and then left time for students to discuss the material and form a written response.

However, participants did not share their written responses with the group as is typically done in

my classes. While students seemingly appreciated the anonymity and safety of controlling their

research artifacts, it was an instance where I made some decisions for them that may or may not

have been different in the unstructured periods I was attempting to replicate.

Glesne (2006) cautions that with *backyard* research "previous experiences with settings

or peoples can set up expectations for certain types of interactions that will constrain effective

data collection" (p. 31). To some degree, I felt this happened as far as the data I collected during

the various interviews. While the participants answered all of my questions, it appeared in

reviewing the transcripts that most of the respondents did not reveal much about their feelings of

the work. They focused more on answering in the 'right' way to 'get it right' for my research. It

appeared they wanted to do their best as if my questions were a typical test and they did not want to disappoint me with inaccurate or off-base responses. In these moments, the transcripts revealed that I consistently assured them that I was not seeking an answer, but rather uninhibited responses to a prompt or question. If I were to replicate this study elsewhere, I believe the respondents' responses would be more of the first-thoughts that entered their minds because they would not feel an underlying "duty" to do well for me.

I also found during the interviews that students were only willing to go so far in what they disclosed. Their withholding of information was not something they did when they spoke with me in the role of teacher. On numerous occasions, my questions led students to expose information about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences that were difficult for them to talk about. They would begin to tell a story or recount a memory that exposed either a dangerous situation or negative memory, but then quickly transition to something else. Glesne (2006) asserts that during interviews respondents can expose "*dangerous knowledge*" that makes it risky for the researcher to hold (p. 32). To some degree, I believe my respondents attempted to stop short of disclosing information that would cause me to have to report about their welfare or dangerousness.

Had I not know each participant so well, I assume they may have shared more because they would not need to worry about my professional obligations and duties since my only role to them would have been that of a researcher. For instance, one respondent began to talk about a period in her life when her depression was so bad that she harmed herself to some degree. Yet, she quickly stopped talking about this moment because she thought it was not the time. In this instance, I assume that she saw me as a researcher and not as a teacher because this is a student

that typically shared much with me about her personal struggles and past experiences. As a result of our close-relationship, it seems some data may have been lost due to my role as researcher in particular moments; but overall, I think more could have been undiscovered if I were working with participants who I had no prior connection or rapport.

I shared a close-connection with each participant prior to the outset of the research project. And, in many ways, they all demonstrated that they were proud to be part of the project and happy that they could now help me. Yet a large drawback, that I had not anticipated, was that they remained unreliable regarding attendance. As previously mentioned, many of the students at Park High School struggled to consistently attend for a variety of reasons. When I combed my field notes and during the research period, I found that rarely were all participants present. I was initially disappointed with this fact, but as I considered the reasons for their absences and the participants' dedication when present, this issue illustrated one of the greatest daily struggles at Park—consistent attendance. Further, my reviews of the interview transcripts revealed some of the underlying feelings and reasons that participants did not always come to school. And, this connection between the data and participants' realities added to a fuller picture of who they were and why they did what they did. I also found that many participants requested to "make-up" what they had missed during a research session, which is something they would not have done for their regular content courses.

3.8 What was going on?

Long before returning to graduate school and more recently contemplating where to conduct my doctoral research, I felt compelled to share with others the personal literacy practices that I observed in my school. Park High School is a place that some describe as a "lifeboat" for

students who did not succeed in mainstream settings. Others described it as a school for students on their "last chance" to receive an education. Some people simply called it a "dumping ground" for the city's youth that had negatively impacted their mainstream schooling option, Madison High School.

During my career at Park High School there have been times when I would have agreed with each of the statements. Yet, I had also always felt it was a place where there was an opportunity to see in students something more than is typically seen. Teachers and counselors worked with the challenges of students' inconsistent attendance, tardiness, substance abuse, elevated drop-out rate, and low-performance on standardized achievement tests. And, if these are the issues that one wanted to see and highlight as hallmarks of our students it was not difficult to make a negative case regarding their academic performance and social behavior. However, these were the students' issues that brought them through our doors and they were difficulties that were not remedied quickly.

Park High School remains a place where students are given another chance to succeed academically, socially, and personally. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) state, "it is a hallmark of much of practitioner research that the ultimate goal is challenging inequities, raising questions about the status quo, and enhancing the learning and life chances of students" (p. 102). My research was an attempt to give students a forum where they were the voice and the action that revealed their more subtle and less seen accomplishments. This research was not about scores on state assessments, days absent or tardy, or behavioral incidents in the schools or community. It was about enabling students to challenge how others viewed them by showcasing aspects of their

literary lives and interests that were less often documented, as positives that could be used to support them to write their futures.

The guiding notion behind my research, then, was to systematically document the role that personal literacy practices play in individual student's lives; however, my secondary purpose was to highlight the good in what students did at Park High School to skeptical outsiders. I viewed this secondary purpose as a moral imperative because it was a driving force in my attempt to make a difference both in the school community and in the larger educational conversations surrounding "at-risk" students and literacy practices.

3.9 How did I work with what I saw?

I initially considered my study to be solely about the literacy practices enacted by students in unstructured settings. I then would have conducted student interviews to ask students to offer their interpretations of literacy in their lives. Using this structure I would have undoubtably produced enough data for analysis; but, I wanted to do more with my research.

This dissertation is based on data I collected from a literacy elective class that I designed around the theme of *The Literate Individual*. The decision to create a course for this research was initially that of school administrators because they were not comfortable with research extending beyond my classroom and throughout the entire school. My intent was to focus only on a select group of students that initiated their own literacy practices outside the classroom during unstructured periods. Yet, administrators insisted that the project be conducted under the guise of an elective course because students are both entitled to the "break" periods and are entitled to receive credit for any academic work they do. Further, administrators desired as little disruption to the larger school community as possible. I negotiated for the research course to be

Pass/Fail based solely on attendance. I fought for this grading scale to ensure, as much as possible, that students would not feel as though assessment was being placed on their participation and course products because traditional grading could alter the participants' actions.

The Park High School daily schedule had seven periods. The morning consisted of the four core content classes and the final three periods were composed of electives such as art, physical education, academic support, et cetera. I proposed an elective entitled, *My Literate Self: How I View, How I Read, and How I Represent My World*. The course met twice per week for the spring semester of school year 2013-2014. The timeline of the course resulted in 12 class meetings of 50 minutes each. I interviewed students prior to the start of the course with general questions about literacy to establish an initial baseline of their notions of literacy. I also conducted intermittent interviews throughout the course that were specific to course work and student thinking about literacy.

During all interviews, I referenced and sought information from students about how their personal literacy practices figured into their understanding of literacy and the world. I created the questions for both the semi-structured interviews and the unstructured interviews to scaffold the conversations about students' literacy interests and understandings. I also believe the interview structure was important because I have found this population does best when they are are able to preview what is to come and can track their progress from beginning to end. I found some interview questions, although designed with simplicity in mind, were difficult for students to respond. If I were to have had more time in the planning of this research project, I might have worked collaboratively with students and elicited suggestions from them to construct the interview questions. It seems this additional step might have shown students that I wanted both

their input and also that what they brought to the project was equally important as what I brought.

I designed the structure of the course around the three core components referenced in the course title: view, read, and represent. I presented at each course meeting a written, auditory, or visual prompt that I chose to elicit a personal response. Participants were given time to evaluate and process each prompt with follow-up discussions as a group. I then provided time during the final segment of each class for students to formulate a personal response to the day's prompt.

After a discussion of the described prompts and in the last segment of each course meeting, participants catalogued each prompt with their response in a digital portfolio on a slide-based computer program called Microsoft PowerPoint or Apple Keynote. My purpose for using technology in this research was three-fold: (1) students could produce an artifact of the course that was easily saved, retrieved, and shared; (2) students were able to access related content from the internet to construct responses; and (3) students typically enjoy working with technology in the classroom.

I designed this course to make students the active actors, which reduced my need to instruct because I wanted to be able to observe how and what they produced together. However, I did need to facilitate each class to ensure all components—reading, prompt discussion, slide creation—were addressed. Yet, I can recall times where the need to maintain course structure may have been a hindrance to one of these activities. For example, there were moments when I had to end a discussion early or have a student stop work on a slide before completion due to time constraints. In these moments I had to insert my authority on participants, but it was a

necessary reality for the project to proceed systematically. This is one point where participants may have benefitted from the research occurring during the truly unstructured periods.

In each phase of the course, I asked students to bring themselves into the classroom to discuss, create, and analyze what they were doing. Campano (2009) states that "teacher researchers go beyond critique to offer more humanistic alternatives, ones that provide students the freedom to participate in processes of educational self-determination and becoming" (2009, p. 337). The students were the ones who determined the output in the slide presentations, the direction of discussions about prompts, and the questions they expounded on during the unstructured interviews. However much freedom I did provide, I recognize, as previously explained, that working with the students in a course about their personal literacy practices outside of classrooms would alter my data and understandings to some degree. However, I do not think adhering to administrative pressure and requirements fundamentally changed what I focused on learning more about with this group of students. The change to my initial plan proved beneficial as it afforded data from group discussions and the slide presentation that I had not originally conceived. Further, I created a distinct research space to provide both familiarity and safety for the participants to share and express their thoughts.

3.10 Population

I selected a small number of students (~3-5) to participate in the study as advised by Wolcott (2008) who asserts that ethnographers should "do less more thoroughly" (p. 93). I considered Wolcott's suggestion and agreed that working with a few participants deeply would yield much data for deep analysis. My decision supplied 3-5 smaller case studies, 3-5 groups of interviews at various times of the course, and 3-5 digital course artifacts. As well, my experience

conducting small group discussions with this population supported that 3-5 students was an ideal group size. Finally, I began with five students to ensure room for a few participants to withdraw from the study without causing significant issues in regards to a lack of data.

My sample of participants were representative of what Delamont (2002) terms as "opportunity sampling" (p. 83) or Berg's (2007) "convenience sample" (p. 43). However, this would remain the case with any study that I might have conducted in my school. Due to the small population of Park High School, I was the only English teacher and I worked with each student daily. My sample for a similar study at the larger Madison High School, approximately 1,300 students, would surely produce a sample of participants with whom I would be a relative stranger. I had an understanding of the students and their personalities prior to the study, which posed both benefits and complications. I did not need to spend valuable time building rapport and trust because I had already done this in the course of my professional duties. Yet, I did anticipate that identifying myself as researcher may confuse the students to some extent in the beginning and I needed to develop my relationships with the students in this role.

I chose my sample from a group of students based on a set of observable behaviors that I previously did not understand in terms of these behaviors' origin, purpose, and result. I utilized what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) term "criterion sampling"—or the selection of particular individuals because they met a specific criterion in the culture sharing group and context that leads to alternate behavior (pp. 45-53). I recruited the participants based on my personal knowledge of them from previous informal observations. I chose students specifically because of their exhibition of literacy practices conducted on their own accord during unstructured times of the school day: breakfast, break, and lunch periods. My population selection arose from the

observable interests that these students had for their individual literacy practices. As previously

mentioned, I observed many students who engaged in personal literacy practices that I would not

consider the norm for most students at Park High School. I estimated that 1:4 students at Park

engage in literacy practices outside the classroom. I explained to a group of 8-10 potential

participants the project, the course, and the level of their involvement.

Despite the ease with which I chose my population for the study, I remained extremely

vigilant during the analysis of the data to ensure I recognized and accounted for my biases and

additional knowledge of participants that developed outside the course. Delamont (2002) lends

caution to opportunity sampling, yet suggests that with honesty and reflexivity in regards to the

data, the sample selection, and the effect of the sample selection on the data gleaned, one can still

yield purposeful results (p. 84). I needed to constantly reflect about what I saw, read, and wrote

to ensure that it occurred during the research course and not elsewhere during my teaching day. I

regularly reviewed my field notes for the unintentional insertion of personal thoughts or

conclusions that went beyond what I actually observed during a class. Further, I considered how

the data and themes would be altered if I had opportunity selected other students in my school.

For instance, what would the results have looked like if I conducted a similar course with a

random sample of students at Madison High School? I was honest with myself when

considering that the data and results would have potentially changed if the course had been

replicated elsewhere. However, this did not change what I uncovered in the specified research

site. My recognition and honesty about the sample only influences the generalizability of the

study and heightens the potential for scrutiny of my analysis and findings.

3.11 Procedures

I collected data from a variety of sources utilizing ethnographic techniques. I collected

data through semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Berg,

2007; Wolcott, 2008, p. 55), tangible artifacts/documents, and field notes. Glesne (2006) cites

these three sources of data-gathering techniques as dominant in qualitative research (p. 36). My

collection of data from three different sources allowed for *within method* triangulation.

Delamont (2002) describes this type of triangulation as using multiple forms of data to

substantiate what is suspected from other data forms or to identify common themes across

different data sets (p. 181). For instance, if one of the participants asserted that they engaged in

personal literacy practices for enjoyment, I analyzed the field notes and artifacts for moments

that demonstrated the individual enacting such a theme. Further, my collection of multiple data

types aided with the analysis phase because I was able to investigate the various forms for

confirmation about what I saw emergent in one type.

Interviews

I conducted both semi-structured and unstructured interviews throughout the course of

the study. Berg (2007) defines semi-structured interviews as:

> a number of predetermined questions and special topics. These questions are typically
>
> asked of each interviewee in systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are
>
> allowed freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to
>
> probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions. (p. 95)

I administered a semi-structured interview with each participant to obtain responses to similar

questions at the outset of the research. My purpose for the semi-structured interview was

twofold: (1) it allowed me to establish a baseline of the participant's general understandings of literacy; (2) it afforded me data to compare and contrast student's thoughts on a particular question with those responses of other participants to the same question. Yet, I also allowed participants the opportunity to digress as needed. I used similarities as points of comparison to identify potentially larger themes in the group based on data that supported similar thoughts expressed by multiple participants.

I conducted unstructured interviews periodically throughout the duration of the study. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) designate unstructured interviews as those composed of "non-directive questions" that are "open-ended, rather than requiring the interviewee to provide a specific piece of information or, at the extreme, simply to reply 'yes' or 'no'" (pp. 152-153). In the unstructured interview, the researcher adopts the role of active listener to maintain relevance, probe for details, and request clarification about ambiguous responses (p. 153). My purpose for the unstructured interviews was to obtain students' thoughts about what they were doing, why they were doing it, and to what outcomes such practices led them. This information connected to how they viewed, read, and interpreted the world through literacy practices. I conducted these interviews midcourse with the participants in order to track how student's responses developed during the study to identify themes or points of meaning for particular tasks. I ushered students through this metacognitive task for both the purpose of gathering data and for self-reflection about their role in the project. Further, I utilized the unstructured nature of these interviews to delve deeper into why students were participating in their literacy practices and how these practices were beneficial for them. Since the study removed students from the unstructured

spaces where I first observed them, I believed asking questions such as these might reveal responses that would enlighten me about their work during unstructured times of school.

My overall goal with this project was to better understand the students' purposes and outcomes when incorporating literacy practices into their daily lives beyond the English Language Arts classroom. I anticipated that both semi-structured and unstructured interviews would cause students to reflect on their use of literacy practices and develop some understanding as to why they did them. The interviews allowed students a time to verbalize and contextualize their purposes that in turn resulted in data for analysis. In addition to notes, I used a digital recorder to ensure accuracy of students' responses in both interviews and course meetings. I personally transcribed the audio recordings to connect deeply with this data.

Field Notes

I anticipated the field notes would become a great source of data in this project because I spent a good deal of time in observation of students at work. The interviews provided a time for students to discuss their work and the observations provided the students' actions when they wrote, created, and analyzed during the course. Simply, I captured the words of students through interviews, while the observations captured their actions. I was able in the course of meetings to focus on students as a group in the field for two 50 minute periods per week based on the structure of this research. I conducted all interviews during planning periods when I was not responsible for any teaching duties and could anticipate minimal disruptions.

My general process to record and analyze observations was trifold. I relied on the suggestions of both Delamont (2002) and Berg (2007) who term the steps differently, but arrive at a similar process. The first phase was to collect in the field "real time versions" (Delamont,

2002, p. 60) or "cryptic jottings" (Berg, 2007, p. 198) of what I observed. They describe this process as shorthand note taking of date, time, context, participants, sketches, terms, and major events that occur. I recorded only what I saw and heard, not what I thought. The intent was to both record observations and write triggers for memories that later required greater descriptions and accounts to capture a particular moment.

My second phase of field note collection was to work with the skeleton developed in the field shortly after—this often occurred at the end of the school day or that evening. I expanded my notes into Delamont's (2002) "out-of-field versions" (p. 61) or Berg's (2007) "detailed descriptions" (p. 198) that are much more comprehensive and recount all that a researcher can recall about the observation in general, the setting, the participants, the activities, and any point of detail that might be lost with time. Berg (2007) states, "They [notes] should include as much texture, sensation, color, and minutia as your memory permits" (p. 198). Further, Delamont (2002) advises that the out-of-field versions should be complete enough to last beyond the fieldwork and to enable analysis some time later (p. 62). In this more exhaustive write-up of observations, I was afforded my first chance to provide input and review what occurred. I saw this task as my first point of analysis for the project where I kept notes separate about my thoughts on what I observed.

My third phase of field note work consisted of what Delamont (2002) terms "analytic memos" (p. 62) that are similar to Berg's (2007) "subjective reflections". Both Delamont and Berg describe this part of the process as the point where the researcher begins to include his/her thoughts, feelings, opinions, and initial interpretation of the events observed in the field (Delamont, 2002, pp. 62-65; Berg, 2007, p. 199). However, Berg (2007) cautions the researcher

to "bracket and identify" (p. 199) points where he/she inserts thoughts about observations. For this phase, I utilized a double-entry notebook (Wilhelm, 1997, p. 42) because I was familiar with the process and it has worked well in the past to help me cognitively map various pieces of information into a coherent structure when writing about literature. To complete this process, I dedicated the left column to contain the original notes from the field, while the right column would contain thoughts, opinions, and personal analysis of the observed data. This allowed me to compartmentalize both what actually occurred and also my thoughts about what occurred without confusion over the two types of information in the present, or later in the final analysis.

Artifacts

For my final data set, I collected research artifacts in the form of digital slide presentations that represented student work from the course. Students produced a new slide each time the course met that included the prompt and his/her response to that prompt. The students catalogued the slides into a complete presentation that represented the duration of the course. I left the creative design and response on each slide up to the students. However, I requested that each slide contain the prompt title and their reaction to the prompt in some form. I anticipated many responses would be typed reactions, but students also created numerous visual responses. Glesne (2006) terms such data as *measures of accretion*, defined as "things people have created" (p. 67). I found this data was both interesting to analyze and I also believe it enriches the dissertation with creative products to help the reader understand each student's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the world in which they live (Glesne, 2006, p. 68).

I analyzed student's responses over the length of the course and among each other for a particular course date at the conclusion of the study. I utilized this process to consider both their

thoughts over time and also in specific moments. I found the individual slides became points of entry for interviews and discussions where I gained more information or simple clarification of what they produced. Further, the students' digital slide presentations became enduring products that were compared to the literacy products I initially observed prior to the course.

Course Prompts as Research Artifacts

The class prompts are also research artifacts because they directly contributed to the study by: (1) guiding the course content; (2) guiding the course discussions; and (3) guiding the student created responses. I chose to use prompts so the students would be exposed to the same content that they would discuss and respond, just as "mentor texts" are often used in classrooms for teaching particular skills (Newman, 2012, p. 25). Moving the study to my classroom, I believed it important that the students share something in common since they did not all participate in the same personal literacy practice. The prompts would provide them a common ground from which to engage one another and to begin their own style of response. I also specifically chose the prompts to elicit information that might lend understanding to my research questions.

My initial selection of prompts was somewhat erratic; in that, I compiled approximately fifty potential prompts that would fit a general criteria. My requirements in selecting each prompt was that it needed to: (1) represent a particular time or ideology in American history; (2) be unfamiliar to students, but not foreign; (3) be something that is readily available or potentially observable in daily life; (4) be open-ended to elicit varied interpretations; (5) have the potential to be engaging; and (6) be readable within the allotted time frame. From these initial selections, I then began the process of whittling down the prompts based on type and genre. For example, I

grouped all the poems together and again assessed them by the above criteria. However, in this phase of selection I also asked: What is the best one or two poems to engage the group, fit the selection criteria, and address the research questions? I then went through this process again with video clips, then with nonfiction texts, and so on. I continued this process until I had a collection of approximately fifteen.

I ultimately used nine prompts for the course meetings. I selected the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) advertisement because the image suggested a movement of the newspaper to new mobile platforms. I believed this would lend understanding to Research Question [RQ] 1 and RQ 3 because the advertisement represented a common occurrence today—the movement of text to technology. I also saw in this advertisement a hint of breaking with tradition that may or may not have pleased the students. I wondered how this group of teenagers, so adept with technology, would view the traditional newspaper now so vastly available.

My selection of "Holding the Pen—What Brings Me to The Act of Reading and Writing" and an accompanying line drawing of a hand was chosen to help each participant think about why they engage in their own literacy practice [RQ 4]. The poet shares his experiences and personal history as it relates to each finger that enables him to write. I thought this a suitable piece to use at the beginning of a course such as this to expose the participants to both the thoughts of another writer, but also to expose them to another's story, imagery, abstract thoughts, historical connection, et cetera. I imagined that this prompt might bring to the surface some memories and begin the churning of ideas from the participants' own stories that would provide more understanding of RQ 1, RQ2, RQ 3, and RQ 5. With each of these questions, I attempt to

reveal the students' understanding of their own literacy and the way they interpret the larger world.

To learn about the students' thoughts of the larger world, I believed it important to first help them reflect on their immediate world and their place in it. I chose Carl Sandburg's poem, "Chicago," as it is his reflection on a particular city in a particular time. I wanted the students to first think locally and and then expand their view globally. Sandburg's specific examples and imagery in "Chicago" could also enable the participants to think about specifics of their community and how they feel about them that might enlighten my understanding of RQ 1 and RQ 3. I silently hoped for at least one student to write another version of "Chicago" about Madison.

My use of "How Wolves Change Rivers" was to both introduce film/image to the project and also to introduce the natural world. I believed this piece to be thought provoking because the animals were the voice of the story. However, the video's embedded message was also generalizable to modern, developed society [RQ 1; RQ 3]. I also anticipated that participants were not incredibly familiar with national parks and the vast, yet interconnected, spaces which I hoped might cause the group the discuss either their experiences with nature or lack thereof [RQ 5].

I selected Cisneros' chapter "My Name" because it is a nonfiction piece in which she reflects through a younger version of herself on family, place, and life. However, she writes the chapter in a fictional style that reads easily, yet is complicated with subtext and symbolism. I hoped this would cause students to reflect on their own family and history that they might then connect with their personal literacy practices. I thought this might illuminate information to

inform RQ 2 and RQ 4 because Cisneros acts as a model of how one might better understand him/herself through writing and images.

I chose the Langston Hughes poems, "Mother to Son" and "I, Too, Sing America," because they also deal with a speaker trying to understand his/her place in a particular time period. As well, his works are commonplace in American literature classes so I anticipated the participants might have some context about the Harlem Renaissance and Hughes' role in that period. Further, his language in the poems is accessible, but again, they are loaded with symbolic meaning and suggestion that I hoped would cause an in-depth discussion among the group. In such a discussion, I anticipated the students would share thoughts related to RQ 1 and RQ 3 as they attempt to make connections between their world and Hughes' world.

I followed Hughes with speech excerpts of President Barrack Obama on topics that many teenagers consider or wonder about at some point in the high school years. Obama's quotations offer a very different commentary than most commonly experience from political figures. I wanted them to experience the words of a most powerful authority on topics that they too consider. I hoped for their discussion to expose ideas that might cause personal connections within the group [RQ 5]. As well, their sharing of ideas on these topics might express personal information about their world views and how their literacy practices help them demonstrate such views [RQ 1; RQ 3].

I opted for Thoreau's *Walden* as a prompt because it not only expresses his disinterest with American ideology of the period, but also because it describes a person that is moved to action by his discontent. When I teach selections from Thoreau in typical ELA classes the students are often initially dismissive because of the difficulty of his language. However, they

often change this view of his work when we analyze it together and make modern connections. I

imagined the discussion of his language and ideas might cause the group to work as a team and

inform RQ 5. Also, I thought they might share what they are discontent about in modern society

and willing to act on [RQ 1 and RQ 3].

I chose to conclude the course meetings and research with Moore's "Four Precepts" and

Davis' poem, "Head, Heart." I selected Moore's piece because her "precepts" were timeless and

could be applied in a variety of ways. I thought they had a feel of the "self-help" genre that

many people enjoy. I believed the discussion of this prompt might entail each student sharing

how they identify with or might apply her suggestions in his/her life [RQ 1; RQ 3; RQ 5]. I

envisioned Davis' poem about how the heart and head connect and influence each other would

cause the students to discuss personal emotions that they are ever cognizant. As well, if the

students revisited such emotions with her piece, I anticipated they would make for meaningful

slides that could inform RQ 3 and RQ 4.

As detailed, I spent much time and thought in the selection of prompts that would drive

this research and subsequently the students' discussions and personal slides. And while I had

reasons with each prompt, I never could have anticipated how the group or an individual would

respond. I was only confident that I had chosen prompts without a single interpretation. My

intent with each prompt was to begin a conversation and cause a reaction from the participants.

In this light, I used the prompts as catalysts to entice the group to thought and discussion.

Forms

I provided both parents and students with consent and assent forms to participate in this

research project prior to the start date. I designed the forms to describe the research question(s),

the scope of the course, any potential dangers, and expectations of participants based on recommendations of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Lesley University. I eliminated all identifying factors of the research site and participants through the use of pseudonyms. I saved and stored all digital slide presentations on password protected computers in the research classroom. My field notes, digital audio recorder, and any other written communications were stored in my personal lockbox at my home.

3.12 Data Analysis

General

In the last line, which is not my favorite line, but at least a line that ends my favorite book F. Scott Fitzgerald writes, "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (1925/1995, p. 196). I believe this idea of going forward only to go back was similar to my process of collection and analysis of data for this research project. I laid the plan of a novice researcher destined to make some mistakes. However, I recognized at the outset that data would lead me in other directions from where I started and so I moved forward in new directions. I also found that these new paths would erode and I had to develop new plans, start fresh, and try again. Yet, no matter the path, I remained focused on the research questions that initially grounded this study:

1. How do these students view, read, and interpret the world?

2. For what purpose(s) do these students consistently engage in literacy practices outside the classroom?

3. To what degree do the literacy practices enable them to better understand the world in which they live?

4. What intrinsic or extrinsic benefits do the students receive as a result of their literacy practices?

5. In what ways might these seemingly very different students connect interpersonally due to their literacy or artistic acts?

As I sought a better understanding of students' individual literacy practices outside the classroom in the data, I also found this course to be a Fitzgeraldian journey for the students. They were consistently asked to manifest responses to art, literature, and contemporary artifacts from the world that surrounded them. I hoped they would think, rethink, and devise responses that illuminated some portion of the ways they perceive the world. So, like this novice researcher, they too embarked on a journey of self-analysis and self-discovery.

Coding

This project produced approximately twelve weeks of data that consisted of interviews, field notes, and research artifacts. My task was to identify meaning within the data that did or did not relate to the research questions. I sought a systematic way to code all the texts and artifacts that were produced during the project. Glesne (2006) defines coding as "a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data (i.e. observation notes, interview transcripts, memos, documents, and notes from relevant literature) that are applicable to your research purpose" (p. 152). Glesne's definition served as caution that no matter how systematic my plan began, I needed to be open to change, to reorganization, and to the inclusion or the exclusion of some data as the process of data analysis unfolded. Yet, I am a person that needs a loose plan or else nothing will be started or ended.

While I consider this research to be teacher-research, based on Berg's (2007) description of data analysis I felt a phenomenological stance would also pair well with this project as Berg claims "human action can be seen as a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning" (p. 304). Berg (2007) continues that the phenomenological researcher will "attempt to uncover or capture the *telos* (essence) of an account" where the approach can provide "a means for discovering the practical understandings of meanings and actions" (p. 304). With my project, I sought to better understand the literacy practices, or phenomenological occurrences, that some students at Park High School already participated in during unstructured times in the school day. Further, my intention was to better understand *why* they participated in these practices. Students at Park High School did not typically engage in literacy practices during break times, but for some reason the students that participated in this study did.

I collected and coded data based on the individuals involved in the study in the opening weeks of the study. I used simple file-folders labeled by student pseudonyms to hold all the data that accrued from field notes, interviews, and double-entry journals. Once some data was gathered I began what Berg (2007) called "open coding" where I "identify[ied] and even extract[ed] themes, topics, or issues in a systematic manner" (p. 205). I followed a blend of Delamont's (2002) suggestions for physically coding the data. I used multicolored, sticky tabs on each piece of student data that corresponded to a chart that listed any developing themes. I changed and manipulated the coding tabs as themes and topics changed over time. I continually reorganized, recoded, and redefined data until the completion of the project.

I continued the coding process by regrouping data under themes rather than under student's names after I left the site. For instance, if *anxiety reduction* was a theme that emerged

about the students' use of literacy practices in the school, I then created a folder to hold data that was relevant to anxiety and emotions together. I found this process entailed the copying of all collected data and then returning originals to individual student folders. I then physically cut and pasted thematic data onto poster board of the appropriate code color. This process allowed me to engage closely with the data as I read, reread, and reanalyzed the data with two coding forms (Delamont, 2002, p.175).

Another relevant question emerged during this study and I believed that the data may lend some understanding to it. I was curious to learn:

Did this group identify interpersonally as a result of their literacy/artistic interests or participation in the study?

This study required the students involved to work both cooperatively and independently. The students created slide presentations and participated in interviews independently; however, they interacted with one another during the discussions about prompts and the general milieu of the course. I was interested to uncover if mere participation in the study and interaction with the other participants would reveal a shared culture among the students or if one would develop during the course. My initial observations caused me to think that the students participated in literacy practices for themselves and by themselves. Yet, during the course of this study, the students found a common ground or shared understanding of their use of literacy practices that helped some participants develop closer relationships through these shared interests.

3.13 Conclusion

The intent of this teacher research inquiry was to better understand the literacy practices that students willingly employed during unstructured times of the school day at Park High

School. The students engaged various genres of writing and reading through their practices and some students also blended artistic and musical components into their work. I assumed that each of the students participated in these practices under their own guidance. I found their participation in these practices interesting because such actions were beyond the observable norms of their peers and the practices appeared to provide some type of personal enrichment. However, I needed to remove students from the unstructured times and spaces due to administrative pressures that I had to adhere. I thus designed a course for the classroom that replicated many of the choices and freedoms students found during unstructured times of the school day. I also only invited students to the study who I previously observed involved in literacy practices during unstructured times. I asked students to share stories and examples about how they interacted with literacy practices beyond the English Language A rts classroom during the unstructured interviews.

The unanswered questions of—W*hy are they doing this?* and, *What does it provide them?* —consumed my thoughts and caused me to want to learn more from them. In my role as a teacher, I wanted to know how I might integrate their literacy interests into the curriculum to make learning more relevant and personalized. While in my role as a researcher, I wanted to grasp how I might bring these students together to better understand what brought them to their literacy practices to better understand if they shared a group culture.

Don Murray (2009), writer and teacher of writing, states:

It [Writing] is the process of exploration of what we should know and what we feel about what we know through language. It is the process of using language to learn about our

world, to evaluate what we learn about our world, to communicate what we learn about

our world. (p. 2)

Murray's thoughts on the use of writing to inform personal discoveries and as a way to represent

those discoveries rings true to what these students did without placing labels on their process. I

entered this research without a clear understanding of their reasons, methods, and purposes for

participation with these literacy practices. However, I did feel some understanding may exist if

someone took the time to ask the questions and to listen to their answers.

Heath and Street (2008) insist that "Ambivalence, uncertainty, and a curious attachment

to figuring out what is happening keeps ethnographers wanting to learn what others just accept or

never really think about" (p. 28). I found myself in this intersection between uncertainty and the

desire to know more in regards to the ways students use literacy practices outside the classroom.

Why didn't these students just talk with friends? What would be better than a game of pool or

ping-pong in the activity room? What draws these students from the more social aspects of

unstructured times of the school day to these cerebral and individual actions?

I had few concrete answers to these questions, yet I hoped this research would provide

more insight as to *why* some students pursue literacy practices on their own in a setting where it

is not commonplace. I believed with further understanding, just maybe, teachers could use new

knowledge about students' lives outside the classroom as a means to better support and engage

all students in the classroom.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

I witnessed students writing during breaks and during lunch in notebooks that seemed sewn to them; students reading voraciously to a point that they did not notice any external chaos; students drawing entire comic frames with simple comments that add layers of meaning; and students rapping lyrics aloud that they had penned only moments before. While these acts are often visible in mainstream high school settings, they were not the norm at Park High School. Park High School carries a reputation in the City of Madison as a school to house "thugs", "druggies", and those that care little about learning in general. The principle purpose of this study was to identify why a select group of students at an alternative high school chose to employ literacy practices during the unstructured times of the school day. I was intrigued by this small sample of students who chose to engage in literacy practices of their own accord that I first noted during informal observations.

Everything clicked for me when I noticed a positive phenomenon occurring daily—some students were engaged in literacy practices on their own. I began to think and watch closely as time passed regarding who was doing what. I then began asking them direct questions about their projects. Stepping back, I began to wonder—why? For what reasons do these students engage in personal literacy practices? A large lens looking into Park's break and lunch rooms will notice the students talking like they were hanging on the closest street corner, some playing pool or ping-ping in an adjoining room, and others who always seemed to be dreaming up their next plot to get away with something. As I dialed in my lens to focus on those students who used

free times in seemingly constructive ways, I found they were engaged in the same literacy practices daily.

I realized that these student anomalies could provide not only rich information for my research, but also that their input may inform the instruction of my ELA classes. Further, the participants' chosen literacy practices might possibly rewrite Park High School's reputation in a positive light if the community knew such stories. School administrators required my research to be confined to my classroom and to assume the form of a course where students could receive pass/fail credit. If I was to learn anything from these students, I needed to oblige and change my initial research design to fit with district mandates. Yet, I was still able bring this group together and design a course that allowed them much freedom of thought and representation.

I conducted my research contemplating the following questions:

1. How do these students view, read, and interpret the world?

2. For what purpose(s) do these students consistently engage in literacy practices outside the classroom?

3. To what degree do the literacy practices enable them to better understand the world in which they live?

4. What intrinsic or extrinsic benefits do the students receive as a result of their literacy practices?

5. In what ways might these seemingly very different students connect interpersonally due to their literacy or artistic interests?

I used semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Berg, 2007; Wolcott, 2008), field notes of class discussions, and research artifacts constructed during the course to gain a better understanding of the participants' literacy practices and world views. While the initial aim was to learn about their literacy practices outside the classroom, I gleaned more in depth thoughts and understanding of the students' interactions with literacy practices and their perceptions of the larger world in which they live by moving this study into the classroom. During one discussion between two participants, Mess and Jacqui, discussed a prompt that caused emotional issues and feelings to surface.

> Mess: "This made me want to like cry, man."
>
> Jacqui: "It made me definitely think about some shit."
>
> Mess: "Yeah. Me too. This poem just hits home for anybody who is like…it just brings you back to that one sad point in your life. You know?"
>
> Jacqui: "Yeah."
>
> Mess: "Which is why I'm a bit nervous to talk about this in more detail or write a thing (slide response) about it, which is why I'll probably just draw another picture."
>
> Jacqui: "Yeah, I am a little too, but ahh, this is a safe place so."
>
> Mess: "Yeah. It's not like its gonna be, 'Oh hey, look at this. We're gonna laugh at it' (imitates fictitious peers)."

I use this piece to represent the complexities that students were willing discuss because they were not among all their peers in this study. By going into the room, participants felt they were in a "safe place" (Jacqui) and thus willing to share more. However, as this selection suggests, the participants did not always delve deeply into explanation about the literacy practices they

engaged with, but rather delved deeply within themselves and shared with each other in seemingly therapeutic ways. In the following sections, I introduce each participant and relevant data that enables one to better understand them. After participant introductions, I explore the five themes that emerged from the research and elaborate on each theme with support from the data.

4.2 Meeting the Research Group

Coming Together

The five students that embarked on this research journey were individuals. They shared very little with each prior to the research and they navigated Park High School largely in isolation. Yet, the five participants did have a shared interest—engaging in literacy practices during unstructured times of the school day—whether they knew it or not. And, this is the very reason that I had brought them together. I wanted to better understand their literacy interests and literacy practices, the ways in which literacy influenced their larger world, and the ways in which they may or may not connect with one another by engaging in a shared literacy practices course.

Being that I feel each of the participants are so unique unto themselves, I will share some thoughts they expressed during our semi-structured and unstructured interviews that speak to their thoughts about literacy, identity, and the larger world. As well, I will provide additional background information about the students that is relevant to the study that I am privy to in the role of teacher-researcher (Cochran-Smith & Lyle, 2009). The participants chose their pseudonyms for this research that, without going into detail, further reveals something about or from their personhood.

Jacqui

Jacqui is an eighteen year old sophomore. She came to Park High School after officially withdrawing from school. As early as middle school, her personal issues began to significantly impact her ability to learn because she was not able to attend school regularly. Jacqui is cognitively capable to make academic progress, yet her multiple diagnoses of anxiety, school phobia, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Post-Tramatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression render her incapable of attending school with any consistency. In middle school, she had tried home tutoring, but she canceled so often that she ultimately felt no need to continue and officially withdrew.

I am unaware as to how Jacqui's return to school came about, but she did and she enrolled at Park one-year before my study commenced. She disclosed her most recent school experience before Park in one of our interviews:

> I had a tutor that came once a week, but uhm, right before here [Park High School] I
> dropped out so, I wasn't getting anything…I think it [social interactions found at school]
> definitely helped, uhm, personally, I think it is an important part, I wanted an education
> and I needed one. I didn't want to drop,…get my GED, I was already dropped-out, but
> uhm, I wanted to get the diploma because I didn't want some problems I have to hold me
> back from that. I was very upset when I personally did have to drop-out and I ahh was
> afraid to tell the people I love the most that I was doing that. It was upsetting. Uhm, but
> no ahh, being back [in school] definitely helped with the social because being here helps.

Jacqui is physically a large girl. She typically wears dark blue jeans, combat boots or high-tops, and each day her tops are a mixture of rock bands or professional wrestling graphics. She is a

passionate wrestling fan and is always ready to share her expertise on the subject. Unfortunately, most people in the school have no idea what she is talking about when she tells of this-or-that match between so-and-so. Luckily her uncle is also a devout wrestling fan, "with my uncle, I always debate wrestling. Always. It always comes-up, we have gotten very angry [chuckling] at each other." She speaks well, adult-like, and understands all the social cues of a person of her age. Yet, it is what is on the inside of Jacqui that causes her the greatest difficulties.

During the previous winter, I, in the role of coach, convinced Jacqui to join Park's basketball team. I knew she loved the game from previous physical education classes I taught during elective periods, but I also expected that confidence would be an issue. While her weight in the school is of no immediate consequence, on the basketball court it is immediately apparent because of the effort she must exert to transition from defense to offense. The other players were supportive of her efforts and they provided consistent encouragement. She made it through the entire season and became one of the most dependable players. While she sometimes took trips-off from offense to catch her breath on the defensive side, she never gave-up, backed-down, or let physical limitations impede her desire to participate. Since I met her, I knew she was smart. Yet, her navigation of the 10-game basketball season showed me she was a lot more than intelligent. She had grit, determination, and a desire to be social, despite the difficulties such situations posed for her anxiety and OCD.

When we discussed definitions of literacy, she stated, "literacy is, I would say it's learning English, or the English language and the many works [texts] that are involved in it like poems, sonnets, stuff like that." She describes my question as simple, yet notes that it is difficult for her to explain. She continues to say, "Like you know to speak fluently and correctly in

proper diatribe [dialect]…it doesn't mean you need to [know] every language, every word in the English language whatever or dictionary you read, but if you have a proper knowing of the words you use and you can understand basically the stuff. I believe that would make you literate."

We then discuss both the physical act and cognitive act of reading. Jacqui says, "To look over, I'd say a piece of work that is literature and consume the knowledge from it." She then expands her definition and suggests that reading occurs not only with a book, but also within our environment. She mentions the reading of "signs on the street" or a schedule for the school's basketball team. Jacqui's expansion of what she reads causes her to reflect on her daily reading habits. She notes, "Probably just titles to YouTube videos [chuckles], hum, and whatever is given to me in English. Just, you know, I'll read a STOP sign. Or, just look at buildings as I pass and just read the names that are on them or street signs because I'm horrible with street names. But that is mostly what I read on a daily basis."

Similarly, Jacqui struggles to articulate what it means to write. She utters with little confidence, "Writing…Writing just, I, I would say is…your killing me with these questions, I'm joking. They seem so simple, but it's always…writing I would say, I mean well you could write anything, hum but, writing is just the jotting down of something. Anything, all the agh, yeah I can't really…get any better than that [chuckle]." As we continue, she adds that reading and writing are "a basic necessity." She also raises the issue of Braille. It appears she thinks this might qualify as literacy as "your still taking in the information and you can still put down information even if it is in a different form." She equates this thought to the use of a foreign language.

As Jacqui begins to describe why she writes, she reveals the literacy practices that I notice her engaged in during school and she explains how such writing aids her emotionally. She says that she mainly writes for school assignments, for organizational purposes, and song lyrics for "stuff I've been through." I ask if she shares her lyrics with others or coordinates them with music and she asserts, "No, I kind of want to, but I can't sing for shit. But uhm, well for anything. But, I don't know it's just something to kind of mess around with agh, deal with stuff I never have. Which one time I had a bad time because I got really sad after doing that for a little bit because I guess I wasn't ready." Jacqui discloses that her writing of song lyrics helps her to deal with emotional struggles and difficult experiences from her past.

Jacqui later discusses her desire to learn a musical instrument to help express herself. She shares that she always wanted drums, but was not allowed to have them. She settled on a guitar; "It was the next best thing besides the drums" and she tried to teach herself using YouTube. However, she did not play the guitar for long because "my sister was getting angry at me because it was really bad, loud." However, she shares that she thought she may have done better with different instruction that corrects one as he or she plays. She says, "I'm more hands-on than watching something and doing it myself." While she appears disappointed with her lack of success, she understands her specific learning style and how it could improve her play.

Jacqui discusses her love of reading autobiographies. She shares:

Yes, if it's an interest. I enjoy autobiographies. So, obviously I've got wrestling ones. I've read quite a few of those and I find it enjoyable to read about it because you can watch a DVD and it only gives you so much. But when you have that actual person writing and

giving you that actual hands-on experience, from someone that actually pens their own
book.

Jacqui transfers here her need to learn by "hands-on", kinesthetic methods. By penning, she suggests that good writing comes by one doing it, rather than the dictation of thoughts to another. Further, she suggests a recognition that text can provide deeper meanings and descriptions than can be captured by film. She expands on this thought when she explains her favor of traditional print texts over ebooks or other technologically based reading apparatuses. She explains, "I want to hold the book, I want to be able to stop it," and "Ah, like now they are making magazines online, I don't like that. If I am reading the magazine, I want to hold the magazine."

Peyton

Peyton is an eighteen year old sophomore. She transitioned to Park High School after initial difficulties during her freshman year at Madison High School. At the time of this study, she had been on Park's attendance roles for approximately three years. However, during this time she attended only intermittently and even received home tutoring in an attempt to help her transition back to school on a regular basis. Peyton is diagnosed with both anxiety and school phobia that manifests through excessive absenteeism. As a result, she continues to attend without receiving course credits because of an inability to meet attendance requirements and complete necessary assignments. Yet, Peyton continues to attend and do well when present while also utilizing the individual counseling opportunities to discuss personal struggles at home and within school.

Peyton demonstrates positive interpersonal skills and maintains meaningful relationships with teachers and staff due to her maturity. She shares few interests and interactions with peers

as she is much older than others of similar class standing. Peyton is close with Monroe, another

participant in the study, and they often work together to improve attendance. For instance,

Peyton's boyfriend drove both her and Monroe to school for a period of time to ensure neither

had an excuse not to attend. Her boyfriend, of some time now, is a graduate of Park and often

speaks with her adjustment counselor about relationship issues and strategies for him to help

Peyton become more successful at school.

Peyton is a cognitively capable student. Her educational testing places her above-average

(Woodcock-Johnson III) in comparison with her peers. When present, she participates in all

facets of my class, yet favors independent assignments. She is often able to focus and complete

not only current assignments, but also make-up assignments from missed days. As a teacher, I

struggle with Peyton because she is effective in class, responsible to complete assignments at

home, and intellectually above her peers. As well, she is able to establish consistent attendance

for a few weeks, but then is derailed by emotions and struggles to regain momentum. Many of

these personal issues stem from issues at the home. She lives with her mother, older sister, and

niece. She shares a tumultuous relationship with both her mother and sister. While her father is

transient in her life, she reports that her mother gives all her attention and money to him when he

decides to live in the home. Further, Peyton experiences difficulties with her sister because she

comes in-and-out of the home. When she is present, Peyton loses her room to her and then

sleeps on the couch and loses much of her privacy. Inevitably, her issues at home effect her at

school by way of a decrease in patience and need for extended time with her counselor.

While Peyton performs well academically, her emotions and lack of confidence surface

when she encounters assignments that insist she either take a risk or move outside her comfort

zone (Gaughan, 2001). For instance, she often exhibited annoyances and insecurities about her academic abilities during this research. She thrives with closed-ended and directed assignments, but she often questions herself from the open-endedness and interpretive nature of this research. Her questioning of her abilities is most evident during the class discussions with others because she did not feel her comments were as developed as some others. At times, she also experienced difficulty making a personal connection to the prompts that resulted in questioning herself and the basic, "I can't" statements. During a discussion of a Sandra Cisneros prompt, Peyton says, "You always give us things that I have nothing to say. I don't know. I don't understand". As the course progressed, her feelings of inadequacy and confidence escalated and she began to name the emotions. During a discussion about an excerpt from Thoreau's *Walden*, she states, "This made me angry…How do you people understand what he is saying? I just can't, for the life of me, understand this. I just feel dumb in this class. I just can't—". In the immediate face of such feelings she often withdraws, yet Mess attempts to assist her with the Thoreau piece and she is able to work through her confusion and express meaning by the end of the talk. Mess helps her engage with the piece by rereading and discussing it line-by-line. In summation of the prompt, Mess and Peyton agree:

> Peyton: That he wanted to live life and know that he lived it before he died. Right? Am I close?
>
> Mess: Yeah
>
> Peyton: "…and not when I came to die discovered that I did not live" [Cited the text]. I, he doesn't want to die with not living.

While Peyton is not completely confident with the piece, she derives some meaning with the help of a peer and also uses the skill of textual citations as evidence.

Peyton interacts with subsequent prompts in a similar manner; however, she is more confident and willing to expand on her thoughts during our interviews about reading, writing, and literacy writ large. Many of her initial responses are short and undeveloped, but she ultimately expands on her statements when I offer probing questions. I initially invited her to the research group because of numerous observations of her voracious reading of teen fiction during unstructured times.

I ask her for a personal definition of literacy and she initially offers one based on an autonomous model of literacy (Street, 2003). She says that literacy is, "Like English [class], reading books and stuff", but sarcastically laughs and adds, "sounds so smart". I follow with what does it means to be literate and she says, "So literate is like, I don't know, like grammar" and "like the way you talk". She appears somewhat unsure of such answers and insists she will, "Google this when I get home."

When Peyton and I discuss reading and some related purposes of reading her answers reveal more of an ideological model of literacy (Street, 2005, pp. 417-418). She expands, "Uhm, well it's [reading] something you do to, well it depends. If you're reading for fun or if you're reading for school. If you're reading for fun then it's to escape for awhile. If you're reading for school then it's to learn. Yeah, learn". She continues to share that she often reads for both of these purposes and adds that she also reads many text messages. I agree with her because she has a habit of doing this in class. She positions her leather-like purse on top of her desk in such a way that her phone can be hidden in one of the creases and out of my view. I often see her eyes

wander to the screen. She is mature about it and does not let it be a major distraction. I typically

let it go because it seems to be a comfort for her to have some connection to those outside of

school. She notes other forms of reading as well, "—facial expressions, body language. Uhm,

like reading situations. Uhm, like if you look at something and there is no TV and no voice, you

can still read what is going on".

Peyton and I transition to the act of writing and what it means to write. She provides

another straightforward definition, "When you put words down and make a sentence." She

offers places where one writes such as in school, to sign for a credit card when shopping, and in a

personal journal. She describes her experience with journal writing.

> Yeah, I always used to, I used to have a journal and then I would write in it and then I
>
> would just completely forget about it. Like I would write in it for a couple of days
>
> straight and then I would forget about it. And then I would never write in it again… Yeah,
>
> I feel like, I feel like it just takes so much time then I go to write and I don't know what
>
> I'm writing anymore. So then I just ramble on.

 I inquire about why she chose to write at times, despite apparent difficulties, and she simply

stated "to vent." She then went on to say, "Uhm, to just write your emotions. Like uhm, I don't

know, like in journaling or you write a poem so you can write your feelings. Personally, I can't

do either of those." She reveals a need to release her emotions, yet feels her ability to write is

not effective. She makes attempts, but feels "stuck" with her thoughts and also notes difficulties

writing poetry because "I can't rhyme, I can't use metaphors; metaphors are not good for me." I

am not clear how metaphors "are not good" for her, though I assume she means it is difficult for

her to make connections. I am more interested by both her desire to express her feelings in some

form, her use of "I can't" statements, and her assumption that poetry needs to be symbolic and rhythmic. Peyton's perceptions of writing, reading, and literacy, are composed and reflect school-house ideas and definitions. Yet, her notions on writing, reading, and literacy expand considerably when questions seek description and explanation.

I inquire further about other artistic interests that Peyton maintains. She offers that she often sketches and listens to music on a daily basis both in- and out-of-school. Her eyes widen when I mention music and she admits that it is a passion of hers. She adds, "Sometimes if I'm sad, If I'm angry, there is always a song for every mood." Her favorite groups include *The Beatles* and *Pink Floyd*, which piques my interest because these are not the typical artists that I witness her peers interested in. I ask why she enjoys these groups and she says, "The lyrics, the beat, like the instruments and stuff. Like I don't know, like nowadays it's [music] all like autotunes and like DubStep [electronic music], I don't like any of it." Her statement further solidifies my assumption that Peyton enjoys traditional ways of doing things: handwriting her work over word-processing; classic rock over electronic; and print text over digital text. Each of these acts allow one to be more reserved, relaxed, and generally more secure from exposure, which is generally the way Peyton carries herself.

Peyton reveals her personality and exploration of life further when we discuss her personal reading that I so often observe her engrossed in during unstructured times. She begins to describe her reading interests through a text she has asked many times to read together in class. Her self-proclaimed favorite novel is John Greene's *Looking for Alaska* (2006). Having shuffled through some online reviews for her next book choice and a chance referral during another conversation, she decided to go to a large book retailer. She says, "So, I read it and I

loved it!" I ask why and she reveals, "It just gave me a whole new outlook. I'm like, I don't know, it sounds really morbid, but like death is what I think about. Like it just seems to follow me everywhere."

Peyton shares a story about another book she read on a teacher's recommendation, *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn, which shares similar themes on the darker points of life. Peyton explains that "I just couldn't stop reading that book. I couldn't. And I, I would read it through every class, I would read it on the bus home, and then when I got home until I went to sleep." I ask why this novel is of such interest and she describes her interest as, "So, like I either like the book and I just have to read it all the time or it's just not interesting to me and I can't read it."

Throughout our discussion, I notice Peyton's motivation to both write and read extends purely from her connection to a subject or when wrestling with an emotion. I ask her to try and pinpoint a few ideas that interest her in what she reads and she says, "Uhm, I don't know, just like the suspense, the mystery, death. Suspense and mystery always go together." When I consider this statement in connection with her previous thought that "death follows me everywhere," it becomes evident that her focus on the darker points of life are real to her. Peyton is not just a student who displays a "semi-gothic" appearance and persona, but she is one who consistently attempts to understand her negative emotions by both expressing herself in writing and by reading others stories of difficult life periods. I ask Peyton more about her writing and whether she shares it with friends or family. She says:

> Not about what I write. See like writing, like writing is weird for me because it is weird
> to read my own writing. I hate when other people, like I wouldn't, I would fail my
> classes when I was in middle school because like I would refuse to write essays or

anything because I just, I didn't want them to hear what I had to say.— I don't know, I just, it's just like embarrassing. Like I could never write a book because if I did, I would have to be anonymous and I couldn't. It's just weird, I could't have people read my opinions in my writing.

Again, Peyton's words illustrate that she has something to say, but it is more for herself than others. Throughout our discussions, it becomes evident that she uses reading, writing, and music as forms to express herself, understand herself, and answer key questions about life. Many of her questions and notions about literacy emanate from past experiences both in- and out-of-school. Much of her resistance and lack of self-esteem during difficult learning assignments and during this research appear embedded in her reluctance to share personal emotions, thoughts, and events.

Mess

Mess is a seventeen year old sophomore. He came to Park High School after his IEP team deemed that he did not make progress at the mainstream Madison High School during his freshman year. He had attended Park for two years at the time of this study. Mess encounters numerous difficulties on a daily basis due to multiple diagnoses of school phobia, anxiety, and depression. Mess identifies as transgender and regularly struggles with questions about his identity and gender roles. While he is biologically female, he identifies as male. He is currently undergoing hormone treatments and other processes to create an identity true to his feelings. His wardrobe has come to resemble male-oriented fashion trends. He most often wears jeans with a hooded sweatshirt or plaid button down opened with a t-shirt underneath. His hair is cut short and he often wears a baseball cap or some other variation of headgear. For instance, he often

rotates between a soft pink or bright green wig that are cut short in the style of the characters found in his manga comic books. In the winter months, Mess wears the most interesting of winter hats. It is a plush, white and black fur that replicates a panda's face. Long strains of fur protrude from the ear areas and travel to his waist. At the end of these fur extensions are built-in pockets that replicate a panda's paw where one can place their hands. His shoes are well-worn, cross-trainers in simple black or white.

He is academically proficient and educational testing determines he is cognitively above-average (Woodcock-Johnson III) in comparison with peers. Academically, Mess is an A student when present; however, the compounding effects of his diagnoses and internal identity questions often result in frequent absences and ultimately a loss of class credit.

Mess is a most creative individual, who expresses himself through his creative writing and drawing of Japanese inspired comics. He creates complex characters through his craft with the use of words, body language, and appearance. These characters also appear to be outgrowths of his own personality in that they often replicate similar experiences and emotions that Mess encounters. Mess described this in his own words:

> I definitely feel like, for me, I'm pretty big into art and I feel like art is a…like a story all
> in itself. Like, I'm generally into, I can draw scenery, but I'm much more into drawing
> like people and their reactions. And, like, just the way somebody is sitting, their posture,
> their facial expressions, can tell you a huge story. Like what they are wearing, what their
> hair looks like, what are…they smiling? Are they frowning? You can get an entire story
> just off of that little [bit of information]. And I think, like subtleties like that and being
> able to fill in the dots is…very, very much reading.

While his work is a passion beyond the classroom, he also uses art within the classroom to both personalize and better retain content. He shared:

> Like, in Social Studies say we were learning about Mesopotamia, or something, I would look into it a little and then create a whole story or set of characters based on Mesopotamia…and… you know…add in those things. Think of those characters or those people would help me remember. Even personifying ideas or elements or something, it's just a really creative memorizing tool. I suppose…it's kind of like, what are those called?…uhm, Please Excuss My Dear Aunt Sally.

Mess's use of his artistic interests to retain content demonstrates his aptitude and interest to learn. His use of art to connect with content peeks my interest because it serves as a potential piece that I could use in the classroom to enhance my own practice. While Mess recognizes the benefits of using art to retain and connect with content, I could suggest similar tools to other students to help them better retain information as well. When I ask Mess how pairing art with content materials has helped his learning, he clearly expresses, "I honestly think it's the only reason I pass."

Mess holds a basic definition of literacy as "the ability to read, write, and understand." However, as he discusses literacy further he unknowingly describes Street's (2003) ideological model of literacy because he expands on what it means to write, read, and understand in the 21st century context. He explains literacy as not so much about spelling or grammar, but more so about the ability to understand concepts, "get something out of it", and apply it in the future. He termed this application to future learning as "reciprocal" and I understand this to mean that he thinks one should be able to apply, relate, and connect various thoughts and texts that one

experiences in school and life. Mess explains his reciprocal idea of literacy through an example

of two people discussing a television show.

> And they [people discussing a television show] are like, 'Oh I like this and this. It kind
>
> of all ties back into this; how they were talking about that; and talking about its, like
>
> symbolism, or the kind of like metaphors they [script writers] like kind of throw in there
>
> without them [the viewer] knowing. And then somebody is like, 'Oh yeah, yeah that is
>
> cool. But I think it is like this, this, and this.' Being able, the process of being able to take
>
> something, analyzing it, and then bringing forth your own interpretation of it. I think, is
>
> an example of being literate even without reading and writing.

In this point, Mess references the ways that literacy is embedded in culture, daily life, and social

norms. His example provides one demonstration of how one's interpretation is based on his/her

experiences, beliefs, and biases.

In an attempt to unpack Mess's thoughts about literacy further, I ask him specifically

about reading and then specifically about writing in hopes he will further elaborate on his notion

of literacy. He provides a strict definition of reading at the outset of his comments as "being able

to see certain symbols and recognize that they represent sounds and words in whatever language

you're reading. And you have to know what those [symbols] mean and what they translate to,

obviously, or you're just looking at symbols." He then explains that he reads mostly the writing

of his friends that he knows either personally or through the internet. He focuses on one

particular internet writer whose texts he enjoys because they blend the realities of the author's

personal history with elements of fantasy to create an entirely new story. He is interested in

these stories because they engage him. He expounds, "I mean, you could just read anything, but

I think the most important part is that you enjoy reading it. You'll want to read more, you'll take more out of it, and it will mean more to you. You'll remember it. You'll have your own opinions on it. You know?"

> Mess is equally adept at sharing about texts he feels are not engaging. Mess shares:
>
> If you're like just forced to read something, you're not going to get much out of it and you probably never will because it's not something you're interested in and it's kind of just shoved on you. You know, you can't enjoy it or think, you won't be thinking as deeply on it because it's not going to be on your mind as much. You know like, say, it is like watching a really good TV show or reading a really good book, even after it's over, you're like, 'Oh man! That was so good! I'm still thinking about that ending!
>
> Woe!' [Hits hands together from emotion].

Mess's descriptions of the result of engaging, or not engaging, with what one reads caused me to reflect on the texts I use in my classroom. His statements affirm and provide a student testament to what I have suspected cause certain texts I use in the classroom to be either "boom or bust."

> Mess shares that reading is not always just the word. He describes how art too can be read like a story and filled with similar literary elements like those found in a text.

> For me, it's something [art] that I guess I have just picked up along the way. I mean, at first, I couldn't really see many differences. Well, when you're little you can obviously tell, 'Oh this person is happy. This person is sad.', but when I was actually starting to make it myself I was like, 'How do I know their sad?' Or, 'How do I know they are happy?' And I tried to…you have to look into things further. There are certain, there are always little clues spread out, whether you're reading it or you're drawing it. There are

little clues spread out that hint to the overall message and it's your job to connect those

clues in order to get something out of it.

Mess further describes how reading is found in art when he describes his appreciation of music.

He enjoys most genres of music aside from country. His interest in music is not based on the

melodies so much as his focus is on the lyrics; "The biggest part about listening to music for me,

besides the [sound of the] vocals, is the lyrics. Because I want to be able to paint, picture the

entire story via the song. I want it to paint out an entire scenario for me. That I can do whatever

I please with." For Mess, it appears his interests with music, art, and text revolve around the

ability to make meaning and find personal connections to take away from each respective

medium. This idea becomes more evident when Mess and I speak about what it means to write

and to create art. He shares:

> I think my writing and art is generally for my own, for my own gain. To better myself, to
>
> express my feelings, to cope with hard things, to…it's just a form of expression really.
>
> And it's enjoyable, I mean you wouldn't do it if you don't enjoy it. So, I think that's one
>
> of the biggest parts. You make it unique to yourself and personalizing like that,
>
> personal…, personalizing like that is basically what makes you want to do it, you know?

Mess, like Jacqui expressed, uses literacy practices not only for enjoyment, but also to

understand himself better and to deal with difficult emotions and situations that he experienced

in the past.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth, a twenty year old senior, attended Park for approximately three-and-a-half

years at the time of this research. She briefly attended Madison High School, but numerous

verbal and borderline physical outbursts resulted in a change to her school placement. While she often struggles with emotions, she is capable of controlling her responses to them. Yet, in the larger Madison school setting, she was often targeted and triggered by peers. Like many students by high school, she had developed a history with classmates and they understood when she was vulnerable to their attacks.

Elizabeth's academic evaluations reveal that she generally performs in the low-average range (Woodcock-Johnson III) in comparison to her peers. However, in the more intimate Park setting, she is able to receive personalized and direct instruction in order to make progress, but such instruction does not alleviate all negative distractions from peers. Elizabeth is formally diagnosed with anxiety, school phobia, PTSD, and practices selective-mutism as a defense or control mechanism. Each of her academic and social/emotional difficulties make her more susceptible to peer harassment because the other students recognize when they can take advantage of her. Further, Elizabeth disassociates at times and does not always interpret particular situations as they actually occur. For instance, she might react to a student talking quietly in the back of class to a friend. While this student may only be disregarding the lesson, Elizabeth may interpret the student to be talking ill of her. She typically will confront other students in such moments by verbally challenging them. However, Elizabeth recognizes her response as positively advocating for herself. Elizabeth can often be derailed for days after moments such as those described in this example.

During this research, Elizabeth was generally in a positive emotional space because she recognized that graduation was only weeks away. Reminders of graduation were often all that were needed to redirect her in potentially trying moments. Yet, her attendance and interpersonal

communication remained a continual difficulty. Elizabeth and I developed a positive and trusting relationship over her time at Park, but she remained somewhat unreliable when it came to meeting the requirements of this research. Despite numerous attempts and set appointments to conduct interviews she was absent or declined on the particular day. However, she demonstrated care and effort in the construction of her digital slide portfolio that deserves inclusion within the data. As well, she was an active listener during each of the prompt discussions she attended, despite electing to not regularly contribute.

Elizabeth is important to this study because she consistently displays a passion for independent reading. It was not often that she would travel without a novel to engage with whenever possible. While I can not be certain, as we never had the chance to conduct the interview, it appeared that she found in her stories the experiences and personal connections that she had difficulty establishing in her own life. I must believe she processed all that she read because many times in English class she proposed thoughts and interpretations of the literature that was most insightful and developed.

I also believe she used her reading as a way to escape the realities and pressures of home. Her parents are first-generation Portuguese immigrants, who were not always able to provide for Elizabeth's needs emotionally, socially, and monetarily. Elizabeth functioned as the family translator at many school meetings and she also assumed a motherly role in the care for her younger siblings. To help the family further, she worked long hours at a local buffet restaurant to contribute for the essentials.

My most heartbreaking and vivid memory of Elizabeth illustrates the home and world in which lives. She was having a good day in my English class when I noticed her attention begin

to waver towards her cell phone. Her demeanor and body language changed instantly. Her head slumped and she bounced from her chair and began to gather her things. As she left the room, I attempted to intervene and ask some questions. She only mustered a comment to the effect of, "I have to go." While the exact words I can not recall, but the vocalization remains etched in my memory; it was in a tone that implied she had uttered a thousand times before—a tone of panic. I later learned from her counselor that this most recent disappointment was the efforts of her father. He had found her collection of tip money she was saving to go to beauty school and spent it all to enroll in a business opportunity. However, this *opportunity* eventually revealed itself as a pyramid-scheme advertised on television. Elizabeth lost all her savings weeks before graduation.

Monroe

Monroe was a nineteen year old senior at the time of the study. She came to Park for her final two years of high school. She had experienced difficulties at the mainstream Madison High School and Park was a suggestion of the IEP team to help her make steady progress before she fell too far behind in credits. She is formally diagnosed with anxiety and school phobia.

Monroe dealt with an extremely difficult home life after losing her mother to illness in her early teens. She lived with her father, who also had serious health issues and remained home on disability, and her grandmother until the summer before her senior year. Her older brother, an alumnus of Park, had also recently left home for Basic Training with the Marines when this research occurred. Monroe has a history of promiscuity, smoking, alcohol, and drugs that she abuses to avoid the pressures associated with her home life. However, after losing her grandmother and inheriting sole responsibility to maintain her home, she appeared to make better choices as a senior that also resulted in an improvement in her attendance. For instance, she

proudly states, "I just started it [a personal journal] like the beginning of this year. I quit smoking, so I needed something to do. You know?…Yeah, no more tobacco".

Monroe is a bright and cognitively capable student. Her academic testing (Woodcock-Johnson III) indicates she is average when normed with peers. In my classes, she always displays effort, care, and interest in her assignments. Other teachers express similar opinions. Yet, she is also very guarded and only sparingly shares personal information. However, she often gains the attention of male students due to her revealing dress, frequent alterations to her hair color, and/or the addition of a new tattoo. I can only surmise that such behaviors are to exert some control over her life in a seemingly out-of-control home. The summer prior to my research, her brother came to Park's summer program to visit and shared a recent story about a party Monroe hosted at their home where the police responded to fighting and drinking on their front lawn. He shared this passively, yet it was evident that he also sought some advice or simply felt the need to inform me about her behavior beyond school.

Monroe often disengages from peers during unstructured times during the school day. She relaxes in a chair and reads for the entire period without recognition of conversations or other distractions around her. Page-by-page, she delves deeper into her chosen novels that she later describes to me as loans from her friend, and fellow research participant, Peyton. When I do not observe her reading during such times, I often find her writing in a familiar notebook that I learn during this research is her journal. I often wondered how a student that appears so devoted and structured in the building acts irresponsibly outside of school. Nevertheless, my research interests were focused on better understanding her choice to read or write in school when not in classes.

Monroe is generally clear and precise in her responses to interview questions. She exhibits some restraint and guardedness when I ask her to delve deeper with some of her statements. Her normal calm demeanor appears replaced by anxiety and a lack of confidence in some statements. She responds to all questions with brief simple statements. For example, when I ask her to define literacy she pauses and slouches further into the chair. She says, "That's a tough one, Justin. Basically, anything to do with English: writing, reading, spelling, grammar. Everything you would learn in English class." When I offer some further questions, she expands her thoughts, a literate person "use[es] correct grammar, they know how to use their words, they are able to talk." Her responses are in a tone that are more questioning as if she wants a correct or incorrect indication from me. She pauses for some time, but is not able to muster any more descriptions and laughs nervously.

I addressed reading and writing separately in our conversation to elicit further thoughts from Monroe regarding literacy. She shared that "Reading is a hobby, something that people do in their spare time. Others like to do it and others don't." But more interestingly, she posed a more developed response in the form of questions; "Maybe it can be something to take your mind off things? Maybe it can be a stress reliever? Maybe, if it's a science-fictional book, maybe it can take you away from reality of the world?" I surmise that these questions represent her purposes for reading. Interestingly, her responses did not acknowledge that reading can also be to learn. When I inquire about how she reads, she quickly and jokingly says, "Slowly. I find myself like over-reading [rereading]. I concluded her main purpose for reading is to relax and escape realities. I came to this conclusion based on her stated reasons that one reads, coupled

with her frequent rereading because her focus when reading wavers from the text to internal thoughts.

Monroe shared a bit more about her reading habits and how she chose what texts to read. She quickly shared that she reads her horoscope online daily with a brief laugh that suggested she was unsure if this qualified as reading. When she discussed her choice of novels, she said, "Yeah, I get a lot of those [personal choice texts] from Peyton. She likes to read a lot. She likes to recommend things to me. Yeah, I borrow her books." I inquired further about why she enjoyed Peyton's recommendations. She said, "I like what she reads…I like to read a lot of life stories of people. Peoples' situations and things. Like people from 'Southie' and Kurt Cobain." I deduced that Monroe enjoyed reading texts about people and places that she could personally identify and connect. Her examples were of people and places that are generally acknowledged for experiencing difficulties and trying backgrounds.

I transitioned the focus of the conversation to writing. Monroe said that writing is used to "Express. Uhm, get things off your mind, stress reliever, hobby." Again, her demeanor suggested she was not defining writing, but rather naming personal purposes for writing. For the above reasons, she shared about her personal journal that she writes in weekly. She said it is for writing about "stressors, things I need to get off my chest." I inquired whether the contents were personal and she emphatically stated, "Yeah, I would be devastated if somebody got a hand, got a hold of it." Her response led me to conclude the journal was not just a substitute for smoking, but also a place to express deeper thoughts and feelings. I asked about her thoughts on writing for school versus writing for herself and she notes, "Well yeah, depending on what, on what it is I'm writing for you [my ELA class]. I wouldn't write anything personal in the work you give

me." I was well acquainted with Monroe's writing in class and it affirmed her guarded stance. She only shared personal experiences and memories on the surface in her in-school journal, but also understood the need to make some personal connections to the texts we read in class. Monroe beautifully summarized later in our discussion the division between school writing and personal writing as, "Well, when I write things for here [school], it's what you ask me to write about, the assignment. There are like rules for that, but when I write on my own it's not like that. It's free, open to whatever I want at the time."

When I broadened the conversation and raised questions about other artistic interests, Monroe described a deep connection with music. Her selection of music "depends on what I am doing, how I am feeling. Well, say I'm like sad or emotional, I like to listen to Fleetwood Mac." However, she also listened to DubStep, an energetic form of electronic music, when she goes out with her friends. She said this was because she had two very different groups of friends. She goes to parties and clubs to dance with one group to electronic music; while with the other group, who Peyton is a part, she listens to calmer and more soothing music. Monroe also added that she and Peyton often discussed the novels that they had both read.

Monroe is a complex person, as we all are, that used writing and reading to escape, relax, and cope with difficult issues. Visually, she presented as well put together and confident. However, her descriptions of her actions and her verbalization of emotions revealed that she lacked positive self-esteem and self-confidence. My hypothesis was reaffirmed when we discussed the phrase, *Reading Your World*. She translated it to mean, "Going into my head. Seeing things through my point of view." She continued, "It's my world, so…I mean, I hate saying this, but I think I'm more of pestimistic [intending pessimistic], than optimistic." I asked

for a specific example that might demonstrate how she viewed something pessimistically in her world, but she was not willing to provide one. I assumed, again, that this was an attempt to avoid being deeply personal and to maintain her guard. It was not evident why Monroe was so guarded, whether it was to avoid difficult issues or if it was to keep them from others, but what was clear was that life realities constantly weighed on her being. I gleaned further understanding about Monroe's pessimistic world-view within one of her prompt responses. After watching a brief video clip on the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone Nation Park and their effects on the entire ecosystem, Monroe wrote in response, "It's a chain reaction of the way of life, which is exactly how everything is supposed to be." Based on this statement, she appeared to generally hold stock in the idea that everything happens for a reason. If she viewed such a maxim as truth, then she may not have willingly shared her own struggles because she assumed the events of life are preordained and unalterable by personal action.

4.3 Introduction to Research Findings

I collected, coded, and analyzed data from each of the previously describe participants for a period of 12 weeks. As described, I collected data from interviews, group discussions, field notes, and digital slide presentations. In sifting through this data, by type and collectively, I found themes emerged with varied frequency that was dependent on the data collection type. For instance, I located more information about the group culture when I combed the field notes and prompt discussion transcripts. However, I did not find mention of group culture within the 1-1 interview transcripts. I found similar occurrences with the other themes as well. I identified six core themes within the research:

1. Participants' Identification of Emotions

2. Participants' Text-to-Self Connections

3. Group Culture that Developed Among Participants

4. Participants' Perceptions of Technology Regarding Literacy and the Larger World

5. Participants' Text-to-World Connections

6. Power Dynamics Embedded in Customs and in the Classroom

While I identified each of the themes individually, much of the data collected from the participants can be interpreted as illustrative of more than one theme. Also, I found students comments were indicative of three categories within the broader context of emotions: (1) positive emotions, (2) negative emotions, and (3) verbalization of emotions. I have organized these three subgroups of emotions all under the umbrella of Theme 1. The table below illustrates the frequency with which each theme occurred and within which data type. I also wove evidence of the themes into students profiles to create the fullest picture of each participant.

Figure 1

Occurance of Themes in the Data

	Theme 1: Positive Emotions	Theme 1: Negative Emotions	Theme 1: Verbalized Emotions	Theme 2: Connecting Text-to-Self	Theme 3: Group Culture	Theme 4: Perceptions of Technology	Theme 5: Connecting Text-to-World	Theme 6: Power in Custom/ Classroom
Data Type: Course/ Group Discussions	1	1	5	6	6	6	1	11
Data Type: Field Notes	5	6	7	8	8	5	8	7
Data Type: Semistructured and Unstructured Interviews	3	3	N/A	5	N/A	2	3	3
Total Occurrences	31			19	14	13	12	21

Theme 1: Participants' Identification of Emotions

Participants often expressed emotions by way of making direct connections to themselves or indirectly by noting elements in the prompts that were of interest. Participants used the prompts as inlets to reveal both positive and negative emotions that they experienced in the moment or in the past.

Positive Emotions

In a group discussion of "Chicago," Jacqui commented, "There is still pride for his [Sandburg] city" despite the "turmoil and hardships." Jacqui, who often chooses to focus on the negatives of the world, suggested here that one may still find happiness in situations that are not completely positive. She connected this to Sandburg's use of personification when he attributes human qualities to the City of Chicago in the poem. She then made specific references to lines where he uses personification. Her awareness and acceptance of this technique demonstrated that she was able to transfer the theme of the text to her own life. By this I mean, she understood that a city can be beautiful despite having some pitfalls; she also understood that a person can be positive despite having some personal difficulties.

The idea of *pride in place* was also demonstrated by her choice of dress on one particular day. Jacqui wore to class both an American flag bandana and a hooded-sweatshirt with her name on the sleeve and Park's logo silk-screened on the front and back. Students are rewarded with these sweatshirts if they earn the Student-of-the-Month award. She appeared positively affected by each article of clothing evident by her cheerful mood. She was proud both of earning the award and of her country, which she has spoken about on previous occasions. However, I was interested when I learned about her reasons for wearing the bandana. Her typical response to anxiety is to pull hairs from her scalp. At this time, she has removed so much hair that holes to the scalp are visible and the bandana is to cover them from the view of others. But, like the beautiful city that has some pitfalls, she makes this a positive moment by covering her *pitfall* with something she feels is positive.

Mess also uses clothing and head coverings to express positive emotional states. She often wears either a green or pink wig, cut short and styled to replicate characters typically found in manga stories and his art. He wears these wigs with pride and confidence in the school. Other students do not make mention of them positively or negatively. As well, Mess continues to wear the panda-styled winter hat with mittens attached. He only wears this on days when he is in a positive mood. One day when he wore this hat to class, he also began to playfully spin in the computer chair during the prompt discussion. Mess displays outwardly his positive feelings to others by using specific articles of clothing as visual cues.

During the course, Mess and Jacqui developed a positive and supportive relationship with one another after an initial negative confrontation. When they discussed Davis's poem, "Head, Heart," Jacqui revealed emotional stories about times when she felt suicidal. Mess reciprocated and ultimately replied to Jacqui, "Treasure each moment you have,…My head wants to snuggle my mom." Mess's statement demonstrates that he is capable of both sharing and supporting others when in good emotional standing. Jacqui accepted his advice and their bond strengthened after divulging such personal information to each other.

In contrast to the above scene, Elizabeth is not always adept when sharing her emotions. For example, she came to me before one of the meetings and appeared sad and downtrodden. She wanted to tell me she was being dismissed before class. I attempted to ascertain the reasons, but she was not willing to reveal. I spoke with her the following day and she instantly began to smile and laugh. I again inquired about her reason for dismissal. Elizabeth shared that she was dismissed to go to the movies with her boyfriend before he went to work that night. In both instances, her appearance did not seem to match the situation. In the first interaction, she

presented as upset when in fact she was doing something positive; conversely, in the second interaction, she presented jovial while explaining her manipulation of the adults in the school.

Students' expression of positive emotions were more prevalent in the interviews and slide presentations because they were more willing to share personal thoughts and feelings. For instance, Mess wrote on his slide response, regarding Moore's "Four Precepts," that, "If you give good, you get good back." His identification of the theme of this piece indicates that he understands that with positivity comes positive outcomes. Similarly, Jacqui shared her story about her return to school as a positive venture, "I wanted to get the diploma because I didn't want some problems I have to hold me back from that." In this statement, she demonstrated an ability to rewrite a negative period, the dropping-out of school, into a positive period where she challenged herself to not let negative influences hinder her success. Peyton described in an interview two moments of success in regards to reading and writing. While Peyton reported a choice to fail classes in an effort to conceal her writing from others in middle school, she shared, "It's not as bad now because I can get over it, but back then I would rather fail my class because I wouldn't do any of the writing." Her statement illustrates her emotional growth in recent years and her ability to now take some risks by allowing others to read her thoughts. Peyton also demonstrated a sense of accomplishment and confidence when she described her insatiable thirst for novels and what they provide her. She said, "I like after I read the book to you know, put it in my collection. It makes me proud of myself." Her thought also connected to her resistance of technology devices for the purpose of reading. She enjoys reading books in print, not online or on e-readers, because the physical texts become personal trophies that she can collect and admire on her bookshelf.

Negative Emotions

Participants expressed negative emotions and feelings through verbal, nonverbal, and textual cues. Often times, I did not understand the antecedents of participant's moods until after the expression. Mess experienced a difficult emotion state for a period of about three weeks during the research. During this period, Mess was not always reliable to attend or participate. For instance, his parents dismissed him one day after a long discussion with his counselor about his identity and depression. On another occasion, Mess made it to class, yet remained withdrawn from others. His mood was only interpretable through body language. He slouched in his chair and rested his head sideways on his arm for a majority of the period. His ability to listen to the discussion was evident because he would nod his head in agreement at times, but offered no verbalizations. He continued the silence and slouched manner as he designed the slide in response to the prompt. Mess later shared with me that he had not been sleeping at night. In fact, some nights he never went to sleep and would return to school the following day in the same clothes. Mess's explanation of these events explained his disengagement during some of the course meetings.

During another meeting, I noticed Mess was not completely engaged within the group discussion. He listened, but picked at his forearm repeatedly. His fingernails attracted my attention because they were unkept and yellowish. His nails were of varied lengths, some short and others long with signs of wear. On one particular finger, a nail extended nearly a half-inch and was perfectly manicured. I considered how his nails may be visual cues about his identity confusion. I wonder if some are intentionally shorter to imitate traditional male grooming, while

others remain longer to represent feminine grooming traditions. Despite my curiosities, I am

never privy to truly understanding the cause of the arm picking and nail variations.

In an interview with Mess, he described his use of art and writing as a way "to better

myself, express my feelings, and to cope with the hard things." He went on to say, "I mean my

writing has never been that good, but I have been drawing since I was three." Mess is a good

writer, but often lacks confidence in his abilities. In content classes, he often pairs his art with

writing to both make sense of and retain the curriculum. On a slide intended to represent a

prompt by Thoreau, he wrote, "How do I know if I am living?" over a silhouetted character

whose hands covered his face. He paired the image with a statement below, "I want to live,"

where *live* was in large bold type. The slide represented not only his understanding of the

Thoreau piece, but also appeared to be a commentary on his own life. In response to the "Head,

Heart" poem, he drew a feminine character with large open eyes crying. He listed multiple

questions to the left side of the image, as if they were inside the character's mind, and on the

right side, "HEAD, HELP, HEART." His play on the words of the title causes me to question if

Mess believed his heart needed the help of his head. Further, Mess's slide for the Hughes' poems

depicted a character's face in the middle of the page speaking, "I will become strong." Each of

the three slides connected with the prompts, but it was also evident that Mess wanted to convey

his own thoughts regarding his personhood with such responses.

In our first meeting, Jacqui asked for clarification on what should be included on her

slides. She has a desire to meet expectations, but requires affirmation in her work. She said, "I

have the littlest insecurities, I get it." She identified the reasons for her perseveration on her

work and how it interrupts her daily life. She had met expectations, but needed confirmation

before she could feel settled. Jacqui's low self-esteem was also evident in a class discussion later in the research project. While she expressed a fondness for both the Davis and Moore prompts, she remained reluctant to respond and withheld her thoughts from the group. Her lack of confidence was expressed through her body language as she looked down when speaking and avoided eye contact with other group members. As well, her hesitance in this discussion may also have been an attempt to avoid further challenges to her ideas by Mess. In a previous meeting, Mess offered many rebuttals to Jacqui's comments regarding the "Holding the Pen" poem. In this discussion, Jacqui became extremely frustrated with Mess and exclaimed, "Ah, couldn't you just let me have a good point and act like I'm smart for a second. Jesus!"

Like Jacqui, Elizabeth often reveals her emotional state verbally and with body language. Although she often withdraws in social situations due to an elevation of anxiety, she may also present and appear as if she is not anxious. During one class, the group viewed a video clip about the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park. Elizabeth entered the room in a seemingly unusual mood. Prior to the start of this class, she fidgeted with her hands, talked excessively about disconnected subjects, and asked a few irrelevant questions. She stated to the class, "I'm very impatient today," without any solicitation. Once everyone was settled, she then calmed and said very little. Her only comment for the remainder of the period was, "That [the video] was touching." Near the end of the period, she received a text message. She silently stood and walked out of class and then out of school. I learned later that the message stated that her father had spent all of her work savings. I question if her elevated mood at the start of the period could have been related to the information she eventually received about her father.

Verbalizing Emotions

The participants explicitly expressed their emotions in all forms of the data that I collected. Most of their comments focused on frustrations they experienced at home, at school, and within the research. The participants' frustrations generally reveal that they all lack confidence and possess low-self esteem in their abilities.

Jacqui shared that a major factor in her decision to return to school was an opportunity to experience more social situations. However, when in social situations her anxiety elevates. She said, "If I'm a little more anxious, or nervous, I'll stay quiet. You can take in a lot of information when you're quiet." This statement informs me about her lack of offered comments during group discussions. While she enjoyed being in the conversation, she only spoke briefly and only when she felt most confident in her ideas. While it is a positive that she has learned strategies to navigate social situations, her low self-esteem limited her in other areas. For instance, her passion for music, both writing song lyrics and learning to play guitar, were limited because she strongly suggested that she was unwilling to share her lyrics and stopped playing guitar because, "My sister was getting angry at me because it [her playing] is really bad, loud." Due to Jacqui's concern about how others will respond to her music, she concealed her lyrics and quit learning to play the guitar.

Peyton frequently verbalized her feelings during discussions of the individual prompts. She is one who favored a clear theme in a piece of writing and became frustrated when the theme was not immediately apparent. In response to the Cisneros piece, she initially stated, "I'm confused." When the other participants continued to discuss their interpretations, her voice elevated and she added emphatically, "I don't know anything about this!" Her vocalization

suggests that she did not feel her comments were being heard or considered by the group. A similar scene unfolded during the discussion of Thoreau's *Walden*. After Mess volunteered to help Peyton, by rereading the passage and discussing it line-by-line with her, she appeared to become more comfortable with the contents of the passage. However, as Peyton created her slide, she exclaimed, "I can't even remember how to spell *necessary*!" Mess again helped her by sharing a mnemonic device he uses to remember the correct spelling. I reminded her that she did not need to focus on identifying a "hidden meaning" in the text; however, she only became more agitated and insecure about her interpretive abilities. Peyton also verbalized negative perceptions about her writing and a lack of desire to share her writing with others in our interview that I described in her personal section.

Informing the Research Questions

A review of the data for *Theme 1: Participant's Identification of Emotions* reveals many moments where the participants address the research questions [RQ 1-5] that guide this study. Jacqui made a particularly personal connection with Sandburg's "Chicago" because she believed it demonstrated the pride he felt for his city. She too feels a similar pride in her own city and she describes her connection to the city through positive experiences and her interest in the sports teams. Her connection to her city lends understanding to RQ 1 and RQ 3 because her explanation describes explicitly how she connects with her immediate world. As well, she notes that while she only knows the "good things," she is confident that the negatives would give it character as well. Jacqui's decision to return to school also addresses RQ 1 and RQ 3 because she explains a diploma as not only important for her confidence, but also for her life plans.

While school is, and remains, a constant struggle for her, she understands that the larger world values and rewards education with better opportunities of employment.

Peyton and Mess inform RQ 2 and RQ 4 when they describe the purpose and benefit of their favored literacy practice. Peyton, the voracious reader of teen fiction, spoke about the positive feelings she experiences when she completes a novel. She states how placing a book on her shelf is like placing a trophy on a mantle. To her, it represents an accomplishment and something to be proud of. Peyton's choice of teen fiction novels also informs RQ 1 and RQ 3 because the content is written to describe the experiences of characters who are of similar age and living through similar trials-and-tribulations. Mess, the manga comic artist, is more explicit in the way he informs RQ 2 and RQ 4. He directly says that his work is a way "to better myself, express my feelings, and to cope with the hard things." Mess is extremely cerebral and for him his work is a functional tool of expression.

On separate occasions, the pairs of Mess/Jacqui and Mess/Peyton interact in ways that show care and support for one another that informs RQ 5. In the meeting when Mess and Jacqui discuss "Head, Heart", they share the deepest of feelings and emotions about their experiences contemplating suicide. They discuss what led them to such feelings and how they managed their way out of such thoughts. This moment shows how they have come to trust, respect, and care for one another in this course. In a similar way, Mess shows empathy for Peyton when she struggled with both the Thoreau and Cisneros prompts. While Mess is often quick to share his opinions, he decided at these times to be supportive and assist Peyton in developing her own. He reviewed each piece with Peyton and provided both commentary and probing questions in an effort to increase her comprehension.

Theme 2: Participants' Text-to-Self Connections

The second theme that emerged from this research is the connections participants made between the prompts or other texts discussed during interviews and group discussions. In general, when students were able to establish a personal connection with a piece they responded positively and shared much interpretation during both the interview or class discussions. Conversely, when students were unable to connect with texts they generally expressed frustrations towards them and doubted their abilities of interpretation and response in some way. Despite the form of participants' responses, they all understood that making personal connections to texts aided their meaning-making process. When participants established text-to-self (Rosenblatt,1978) connections, they were then often able to understand the text, discuss the text, and represent the text more confidently.

Mess developed a deep appreciation and connection with the poem "Holding the Pen" and its associated line drawing. He easily related to this poem because his hand and fingers are also essential to his own writing and artistic practices. During the discussion, he showed the other students the callouses on his hand like trophies from clenching pens and pencils. He described the poem as, "just what has brought the author to love reading and writing and the fingers are just like the steps he is taking towards that life, I guess…At least that is what I got out of it." Mess also introduced the idea of gender in his interpretation. Following his previous thought, he added, "Or hers. I don't know what they're [meaning male or female]." Mess also seemed to connect with this piece because the speaker's gender is not clear and Mess often struggles with his own identity. While his stories are not the same as those in the poem, it appeared Mess reflected on his experiences with writing and art like the poet. However, Monroe

struggled to connect with this piece and shared, "I'm not a big fan of this one…This doesn't explain my fingers. So is this [the poem] just his fingers?" Since Monroe was unable to identify with this piece, she also had trouble establishing a clear interpretation.

Monroe was moved by the embedded theme in the "Wolves" video and provided a clear interpretation to the entire group with confidence. She said, "Everything feeds and stems off the other. So, without one thing there won't be another. And, with one thing there comes another. That [her summary] was good, right? That's what I got to of it. It's just like everything else in the world. Not just wolves." She made a direct connection at first, but soon added, "It's, you know, like I don't know, evolution. Like, like we all grew, we all came from there, how the world started. Things started mating, you know?…This makes me think about life." During this discussion, she also assumed a leadership role within the group and directed the discussion, while also encouraging everyone to participate. In this moment, Monroe expressed more pride and confidence in herself and her interpretations than during any other point in the research.

Monroe made another connection with President Obama's speech excerpts that focus on themes of *hope*, *destiny*, and *courage*. In her slide response, she summarized one excerpt to mean, "humans today should be capable to recognize our failings and then do our best to rise above them to overcome the challenges we've faced." She elaborated that one's past should not shape his or her future. Her strong tone in this response demonstrates a passionate connection to this text and the core theme. Monroe detailed her text-to-self connection:

This to me speaks very loudly, because everyday I see people who have failed to

overcome their battles and fall short to addiction, mental instability or lack of education.

People on the streets who have lost faith and forgot the meaning of hope. People who

have dropped out of school or have even lost a loved one, who now have been scared

forever and have failed to see any bright light in their future. People who have lost

themselves and can't seem to find the strength within them to pick themselves up and

wipe the dirt off their knees. Those are the people who have lost sight of their destiny.

While Monroe is typically guarded, she let down her fence in this response as she generally

revealed that she was, at one time or another, a witness or participant to such experiences. My

professional knowledge of her past allows me to connect each detail with specific events

referenced here; yet, I am most interested in the final sentence where she writes herself out of the

narrative. I interpret her separation from negative situations to mean that she now feels stronger

and beyond such influences because she is focused on her future. I come to this conclusion

based on her consistent vocalizations about being successful and serious in her senior year of

high school in order to graduate.

Mess made numerous connections with both Langston Hughes' poems. He reported that

he enjoyed all Hughes' poems and that he enjoyed "Dream Deferred" so much that he once

memorized the poem. He described the theme of "Mother to Son" to be about life and "getting

past struggles that life has." In his discussion with Jacqui of the "I, Too Sing America" poem, he

focused on the idea of empowerment that he feels is embedded in the text and thus likes it

"better, just for that meaning." He elaborated on this in his follow-up comment; "I like 'I Too

Sing America' better, only because I feel like instead of throwing a pity party, like he got sad, it's

more of like 'let's not focus on the sad at all, let's just become stronger and raise up'." Mess

connected with this poem because it assumes a positive stance towards a difficult reality.

Personally, Mess assumes a similar stance when he is in positive emotional space in reflection on

his own life. Jacqui agreed, "There we go." Jacqui also introduced the topic of suicide and her

past thoughts on the subject, "Everyone goes through some stuff, some even get to suicide."

They both openly shared examples from times in their lives where they had questioned life and

ultimately contemplated suicide. Mess again assumed a positive stance to a conversation about

difficult times. He said, "All life is work. What is the point of life if you just end-up dying?"

Mess and Jacqui established a friendship and came to trust each other as the research

progressed. Their initial sharing of deeply personal information during the discussion of

Hughes' poems allowed them to talk candidly again about Moore's "Head, Heart" poem. Mess

noted that my classroom was a "safe place" and, as a result, he felt comfortable to share. They

spent some time differentiating between the emotions they felt the head and the heart control.

They discussed their clinical depression and the ways in which it impacts their lives. They

decided that the "heart can hurt" beyond the physical and noted that it can "bring you back to one

sad point in your life." Jacqui shared specifics about living with PTSD and how she witnessed

her mother clinically die at one point, though she ultimately survived. She discussed the ways in

which the event elevated her depression. Jacqui still has issues when she perseverates on

memories of the event. Just prior to the research, she missed weeks of school due to a

hospitalization based on her emotional state. When the group concluded their discussion, they

decided the poem would be more aptly named "Head, Heart, and Mind" because of the influence

the heart holds over one's emotions.

While Peyton was frustrated by some of the research prompts, she reported connections

to the texts and lyrics in the music she chooses to listen. She listens to all genres of music, but

she really enjoys *The Beatles* and *Pink Floyd*. Peyton believes music is all about the lyrics and

how they speak to her emotions. She said, "Sometimes if I am sad, if I am angry, there is always a song for every mood." While she is able to interpret lyrics and often relies on them to sooth her when frustrated, I find it then contradictory, or simply out-of-place, that she struggles to make meaning and connections with the poems in the research course.

Informing the Research Questions

I review the data introduced for *Theme 2: Participant's Text-to-Self Connections* to connect instances where the participants address the research questions [RQ 1-5] that guide this study. Mess provides evidence for RQ 1 with the connection he makes to the "Holding the Pen" prompt. He questions the poet's gender because he believes that would help in his interpretation of the poem. Without knowing the poet's gender, he describes a layer of meaning as being missed. This seems to connect with his own identity struggles that he regularly processes with his school and home counselor. With gender as a large question for him, it seems to also impact how he views and reads the larger world.

Monroe also makes positive connections with both the "Wolves" prompt and the Obama prompt. In both cases, she lends understanding to RQ 1 and RQ 3 because she takes her understanding of the prompts and relates it to the larger world. Monroe concludes from the "Wolves" prompt, "Everything feeds and stems off the other. So, without one thing there won't be another…It's just like everything else in this world. Not just wolves." While she does not provide a specific worldly example, her thoughts about the interconnectedness of the world are clear. Similarly, Monroe becomes impassioned with her conclusions about the Obama prompts. She writes on her slide, "humans today should be capable to recognize our failings and then do our best to rise above them to overcome the challenges we've faced." Her summary sentence

shows that she is not content to let people use their past as an excuse for their future. This idea connects to the personal growth she has demonstrated this year with increased attendance, better grades, and vocalizations about quitting negative habits.

Peyton also makes positive connections with music lyrics and her description of that process informs RQ 1 and RQ 4. When not reading novels, Peyton describes a large interest in music. She is specific that the music she enjoys has meaningful lyrics. She uses her knowledge of these lyrics to match her selection at any given time with her particular mood. In the stories of the lyrics, she finds comforts and likes to listen to how others engage with their emotions to calm her own. In doing so, Peyton interprets the stories of others [RQ 1] and then uses those interpretations to better understand her own emotions [RQ 4].

Theme 3: Group Culture that Developed Among Participants

The third theme that emerged from the research is a shared group culture among the participants. I identified and selected students to participate in this research who demonstrated an interest in literacy practices during unstructured times of the school day. The students shared few social interactions prior to the research with the exception of Peyton and Monroe who were previously friends. However, over the duration of the research, all participants became closer socially and more supportive of one another during the course meetings. I term this a *group culture* because they came together around a core set of common experiences (the prompts, the discussions, and attempts to represent the prompts). With time, each participant gradually offered more input into discussions and revealed personal details in regards to experiences and emotions that are not commonly shared in a high school classroom. Most of the data demonstrates brief moments when participants assisted others with suggestions and praise.

Further, while not part of this research, I informally observed that they formed friendships, furthered existing friendships, or showed increased support for each other beyond the research site. This was evident through increased social interactions during the school day and reports from Mess and Jacqui about how they now email one another when they will be absent from school or to acquire missed class assignments.

Early in the research, Mess and Jacqui argued about their interpretations of the "Holding the Pen" poem. Jacqui took a risk and shared her thoughts about a possible connection between the poem and the line-drawing to which Mess remarked, "It has nothing to do with this." Jacqui defended herself and said, "It has everything to do with it." While this made for an awkward moment and tense discussion because Jacqui subsequently shut down, the narrative changed in later class meetings because they chose to share deeply personal information that caused them to bond.

In the opening moments of the next class, Mess randomly shared her love of cats with Jacqui in what appeared to be a peace offering in an attempt to reconnect. Jacqui agreed about her love for cats, but more importantly they both appeared relieved to have reconciled the argument without ever mentioning it again. In subsequent classes, they moved forward positively. When they discussed the Hughes' poems, they openly shared thoughts about depression, grief, and self-harm. They discussed personal bouts with depression during the Moore discussion. Further, they both agreed that the research site was, in Mess's words, "a safe place," to talk about such difficult realities. In the moment of the argument, Monroe also showed a connection to Jacqui by affirming her thoughts about the connectedness of the poem and the drawing. Monroe said, "Oh! That's a good connection," because Jacqui supported her thoughts

by providing evidence that the finger placement in the drawing depicts what is stated in the poem.

Mess learned more about gently interacting with others when discussing a text as the course progressed. He described the Cisneros piece as a warning to resist a controlled life, such as the life described by the character in the text. Peyton became frustrated with the piece and made numerous comments, "I don't know anything about this. I don't know!" In an attempt to bring Peyton into the conversation and build her interpretive confidence, I asked a general question, "Anybody want a controlled life?" Peyton passionately verbalized, "No." Rather than blatantly disagree with Peyton, Mess calmly stated, " I think some people do. People who, people who like rules and order and stuff. Who want to feel safe and stuff." Peyton pondered his thoughts and replied, "I agree." This scene demonstrates that Mess learned how to better interact with others during discussions, as well as he learned strategies to offer an opposing viewpoint without being confrontational.

The following class, I introduced an excerpt from Thoreau's *Walden*. Peyton immediately reacted to the difficulty she experienced while trying to comprehend the piece. Rather than telling Peyton what a text meant to him, Mess suggested that they read the selection together again. Mess supported Peyton and stated that her lack of understanding was due to the way I read the piece. Mess felt my lack of emotion while reading was the cause of her confusion about the text. Further, he introduced humor to Peyton's annoyance and said, "Today is bully Justin day! [laughing]." Peyton accepted his help and ultimately became more confident with the piece and she concluded, "He [Thoreau] wants to live or die." While this was not a completely developed interpretation, Mess assisted Peyton by not allowing her to give-up and

experience further defeat. Mess also offered further assistance to Peyton when she again was frustrated during the time reserved for creating slide responses. Peyton was upset because she struggled to spell *necessity,* but Mess quickly offered a mnemonic device he liked to remember how to spell *necessity*. Peyton was visually soothed by his comment and was able to verbalize appreciation.

The participants began to solidify as a group and demonstrated a shared group culture, as I term it, during the fifth prompt discussion about the video clip, "How Wolves Change Rivers." Participants showed an increased respect for others ideas; they shared fluid conversations; and they began to assume distinct roles in the group. At the outset of this conversation, Jacqui had expressed some concerns and confusion about specifics in the video and Mess respectfully clarified.

Jacqui: Well, why did the wolves come back in the first place?"

Mess: Uhm, they [scientists] released them there.

Jacqui: Didn't catch that part.

Mess: It was right at the beginning. It was only one sentence though.

The participants demonstrate in this scene a newfound ability to cooperatively clarify content for one another in order to proceed with an accurate discussion. While Mess offered an opposing view to Jacqui's idea, he followed it with the comment that "it was only one sentence though" to imply for Jacqui that the cause of wolf reintroduction was easily missed and not well explained.

Later in their conversation about the "Wolves" prompt, Peyton made a few comments that demonstrated her interpretation, which suggested minimal connection with the piece. Peyton began, "Wolves impacted the world. Do I have Chemistry next? [laughs]?" Her

comments expressed a desire to advance because she viewed this prompt as simplistic and concrete. Yet, the other participants, Mess and Monroe, assumed more assertive roles to redirect and focus the conversation.

> Mess: I think it's just trying to show one little change can make such a big deal.
>
> Monroe: They [wolves] changed the physical geography.
>
> Mess: I don't know. Was this documentary only about wolves or does it go on to talk about other things?

Mess and Monroe's exchange suggested a desire to stay on topic and an attempt to extract further meaning from the prompt. Both of their comments delve deeper and refocus the conversation to specific points of the video. Monroe suggested the ways in which the wolves directly effected the physical environment; while Mess raised questions about the purpose of both the producers and the scientists who reintroduced the animals. Their comments also illustrated the ways in which both Mess and Monroe were able to establish leadership roles in the group, without being overbearing or intrusive towards the ideas of others. They used strategies such as "I think…" statements and directed questions to solicit further comments from others in order to build respectful relations among the group.

Monroe demonstrated similar leadership qualities later in the discussion when Peyton offered another potentially distracting comment. The students had been discussing the wolves as animals in general and how it was ironic that while they are predators, they are also "adorable" because their fur makes them look like "toasted marshmallows." Peyton stated, "I'll have toasted marshmallows. I want smokes [cigarettes] really bad." Monroe redirected the discussion, "All right. Wolves guys, wolves." Her comment refocused the group and they each

contributed pertinent comments to further the discussion. However, Elizabeth remained quiet today and asked, "I think I'll be better at writing instead of talking about it. Does that work?" The others accepted her request and continued their conversation.

Monroe was especially vocal during the discussion of the "Wolves" prompt and her classmates showed approval and support for her thoughts. Toward the end of the discussion, Monroe made a short speech that dutifully summarized the film, while also making personal and worldly connections. The other students appeared impressed with her comments and silently agreed to adopt Monroe's entire oration. Some participants exclaimed favorably:

Peyton: Wow! I have not much to say to this [referring to Monroe's interpretation approvingly].

Jacqui: I feel like you covered everything with that [comment is directed towards Monroe].

Monroe: Hear that Justin? I covered it all [proudly stated]. Anybody else want to cover it? I think we all agree Justin.

Peyton: There are no arguments here.

Everyone contributed some piece to the conversation about the "Wolves" prompt. Yet, as a group, they all came to the conclusion and agreement that Monroe provided a significant interpretation that they all agreed represented their thoughts as well. This brief scene demonstrates a moment where praise, trust, and confidence developed among the research participants. And while Elizabeth removed herself from the conversation, she was comfortable enough with the other participants to ask if she could just listen to them and explain her thoughts on her personal slide.

I found numerous other moments in the data that illustrate similar forms of connection in which participants bonded, supported, and shared common beliefs. The scenes here depict the various connections made among the participants that support the claim that they all came to share a group culture far beyond my initial identification of them as students who participated in literacy practices beyond the classroom.

Informing the Research Questions

The data I utilize to detail *Theme 3: Group Culture that Developed Among Participants* is particularly useful to understand connections of this data to RQ 5. As previously stated, the participants' relationships with each other developed as the course progressed. They did not share much with one another in regards to their personal literacy practices, but rather shared their thoughts about the prompts, the personal connections they made to these prompts, and their emotions. This is most likely because during the course meetings is when they shared the most time together where I was also present. I am not able to comment on what they may have discussed beyond our meeting periods.

The development of the group was also evident in the way participants gradually assumed different roles within the group. For instance, Monroe evolved into a leader; Mess became a challenger of ideas; Jacqui developed a strong voice; Peyton provided comic relief; and Elizabeth proved a thoughtful listener. They gradually accepted one another in these roles and emerged as a friendly unit that supported each other with compliments and suggestions during prompt discussions. I was most impressed with the connection that developed between Mess and Jacqui. They began the course challenging one another. However, they seemed to make amends

when Mess expressed his love of cats and a spontaneous conversation ensued. I later observed them talking throughout the school and Mess eventually shared that they email regularly now.

Peyton and Monroe's relationship also strengthened during this course. Previously, they mentioned during their interviews that they sometimes "hung-out" together beyond school. I later learned that their relationship was closely connected to their personal literacy practices. Peyton and Monroe shared something similar to an informal book club. Peyton assumed the role of provider and continually shared novels she enjoyed reading with Monroe. They would then review and discuss the novels together. As well, they report frequently sharing their music because they both favor music that they can connect with their moods and emotions. I use each instance of their connections to show how the participants' actions inform my conclusions about RQ 5.

Theme 4: Participants' Perceptions of Technology Regarding Literacy and the Larger World

As previously noted, the five themes I identify as a result of this research at times overlap and complicate each other. The participants expressed clear thoughts about technology connected to literacy practices and the larger world. In general, the participants demonstrated an understanding of: (1) how to use technology in daily life; (2) how technology can simplify daily life; and (3) how technology can intrude on one's privacy and freedoms. The participants' common understandings and thoughts about technology further demonstrate a shared culture among the group as they hold similar values on the topic of technology and its integration into life practices.

People habitually adopt and integrate technology into their daily lives and many adults perceive younger people as more immersed in technology as any other subgroup. Generally, I

agree that younger generations, who have grown-up with technology, are most adept at

implementing it into their daily lives to enhance communication and simplify traditional tasks.

As well, I feel tablets and e-readers have redefined the ways in which people access and interact

with various types of texts. Prior to this research, I generally assumed that most young people

embraced technology; however, the participants of this research caused me to question my

assumptions about technology when they expressed their individual beliefs. Participants'

comments about technology appeared in most of my interviews because I asked a specific

question in regards to technology. The topic of technology also naturally emerged during some

of the prompt discussions. The participants' comments about the influence of technology

emerged in the following ways:

1. Technology as a Cause for other Activities/Services Extinction and the Loss of Privacy

2. Technology as a Means to Acquire Knowledge

3. Technology and Literacy Practices

Technology as a Cause for other Activities/Services Extinction and the Loss of Privacy

The participants discussion of the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) mobile advertisement raised

many concerns from the students. This was the only prompt that was specifically connected to

technology and, as a result, many of the participants' views emerged during this particular

discussion. Monroe clearly expressed her general position on technology when she said, "Well

yeah, basically it's [WSJ advertisement] just saying that uhm, it's technology that's just going to

eat everybody. It's taking over the world." Mess then proceeded to look deeply into the

advertisement for symbolism in the pictures in connection with the advertisement's intent; "I'm

trying to take a look at what the things are on the *Wall Street Journal* [headings]." Monroe

connected the mobile technology (iPad & iPhone) represented in the advertisement to an infomercial about a mobile scanner that uploads personal documents to one's computer. She began to question this device, "But what happens if your computer breaks? What happens if your computer is stollen? Then what happens to all your personal documentation?" Monroe's questions spurned a response from Peyton that demonstrated her broad perception of technology, "That's why you don't put any personal things on your electronic devices." Monroe agreed, "In the end, technology screws all!"

Mess raised further questions about technology when he introduced the topic of electronic mail [email]. He said, "Well, mail is already obsolete." He suggested that email has cut the cost of buying stamps and paper to communicate with others. Peyton replied, "I'd rather do that [buy stationary supplies]. I hate email." Mess concurred and offered, "Well, it's more that, it's more intimate that way [sending letters]." Mess addressed how the formality and structure of letter writing is lost with email because it functions more as sending short notes, rather than expanded narratives with a voice to the targeted audience. In the end, Peyton conceded positively that email does travel much faster than letters. Mess also offered a solution for those without home computers by suggesting that one can still access email through a public library. Peyton mentioned her desire for society to return to the pay phone that has now become archaic. She was troubled by the expense of cellular phones and felt there is still a need for pay phones because not everyone is able to afford the cost associated with a cell phone. Mess added that a need also still exists for pay phones when people forget their cell phones and have an emergency.

Jacqui struggled with her position on technology because she was able to recognize both sides of the story. During an interview, we revisited her thoughts about the group discussion on the WSJ advertisement when she offered compelling points, both positive and negative, in regards to technology.

> In, for the hum, viewing of the world, the *Wall Street Journal* mobile ad because it is showing how much the world is changing and being technologically advanced and it's just getting crazier and crazier the stuff your able to do now. I feel in some ways it's good, but in others it's not the best to have every single thing electronic. Cause it takes away from basic social behaviors. You can barely talk to somebody on the phone anymore because they are always texting. And so, I feel like this, it's a basic straightforward ad, but kids now-a-days are going to grow up in a world where they don't really know how to communicate to each other. And I think that is a bad thing, especially coming from someone who has social problems and phobias and stuff like that.

Peyton, who is an avid music fan, addressed one particular way that she believed technology has influenced music. As mentioned, she enjoys classic rock music and other genres that employ lyrics that she can connect with emotionally. For her, music is about identifying with the lyrics. The lack of lyrics found in DubStep, electronic-based rhythm music, bothers her greatly. Peyton shared during an interview a description of DubStep music, "Like the instrumental and there is no lyrics or anything. It's just beats." Peyton found the integration of technology into music resulted in songs that are void of meaning and songs that lack any potential for one to connect with the theme. Peyton insisted that music without lyrics is just sounds that leaves the listener without a chance to personally connect or react.

In regards to privacy concerns, both Peyton and Monroe commented on the ways that technology depletes one's ability to remain private.

Peyton: Yeah, did you know if you say a word, or so I have heard, if you say like a certain word or something the government like goes into your phone?

Monroe: And it triggers (make authorities aware)…

Peyton: Yeah! What?

Monroe: Like bomb, right? Like just because I said, 'bomb' right now. If I was on the phone, it would like trigger the FBI and they would like hack into your phone call.

Peyton: They [the government] are listening to everything (jokingly). They are listening to us right now (whispers).

Monroe then shared a worldly connection about a recent news story concerning a teenage girl who was removed from a plane for saying a specific word on her phone. Whether Monroe and Peyton shared actual facts in this scene I do not know, but their comments were sincere, despite some joking, about how they perceive the lack of security and privacy of technological devices. Monroe and Peyton's comments intrigued Elizabeth who asked genuinely and cautiously, "Can that thing [my recorder] hear me if I whisper?"

Technology as a Means to Acquire Knowledge

While the group generally agreed that technology may invade their privacy, they were all in general agreement that technology is a means to acquire knowledge quickly and easily when used properly. Mess shifted one discussion to a positive view of technology, "Well, you lose a lot of privacy, but what you gain—it [technology] gives you a lot in return…It's just getting more and more digital. You're losing privacy, but your also…gaining. We're gaining control

and advancing, but at the cost of a lot of privacy. This section focuses on the moments when participants identified what one *gains* from technology.

Peyton revealed moments that demonstrate her use of the internet to locate information quickly. For instance, when she found it difficult during our interview to define literacy, she commented, "I'm going to Google this when I get home." As well, Peyton used the internet for research about future novels that she might read. She reported little interest in reading texts online or on an e-reader, but she frequently did access the internet to find books that she might enjoy. Once she identifies a list of potential new books, she then prefers to go to a particular large, chain bookstore to survey and browse the potential titles.

Similarly, Jacqui described a comfortableness with finding new information or instruction on the internet, but maintained that she favors traditional texts when reading. Jacqui shared one way that she used the internet to learn to play guitar.

> I did actually watch a couple YouTube videos to learn the strings. But I basically just played no strings, not holding down any, tried strumming to just work on holding the pick correctly, get the right sound in the strings. Because you know, you get caught up in it. It's nice to have the good thing, but hum, I was originally going to buy an electric guitar because I wanted to get a video for the PlayStation 3 that is called "Guitar Smiths" or "Rock Smiths" because it goes step-by-step how to play the keys.

Jacqui identified one way that she often used the internet to find information quickly about endless topics. She also understood how video websites offer not just written instruction, but also visual instruction to aid her learning.

Monroe intuitively displayed one way that the internet can be a useful aid to locate information during a tense discussion around the poem, "Holding the Pen". While some participants argued over the connection between the poem and the accompanying illustration, Monroe intuitively went to the computer to research the symbolic meanings associated with human fingers. She suggested to the group that they might be able to better interpret and discuss the poem if they understood more about the differences, both scientifically and symbolically, of fingers.

Technology and Literacy Practices

In an interview, Mess described the many ways he uses the internet to access texts that people post, as well as to post and receive comments about his own writings and drawings. He described his reading of others' work online:

> [I read] Unofficial stories that people post up, or make, or whatever. I find them to be very interesting, especially if you can find one particular author you like. Because even though they don't come in at as great a quantity as like an actual book would, there are so many different ideas and it is also interactive. Like you can go and talk to the author and be like, it's just, I love how…, it's like you don't have any control over it, but it is almost like you do with how personal it can be. It is very, the information is all right there and if you have any questions you can generally contact the person who wrote it.

As well, Mess enjoys using the internet because information is more orderly. His creations of text and art can be revised, changed, and assume a variety of formats. He shared:

> Well, I feel like it is not only a medium that I'm more used to, I also like how it feels like you have so much more space than when you are reading in a book. I feel like with a

book everything is just really crammed together and you're trying to flip the pages and online it is just so much more, neat.

Mess concluded that "so much can happen to a book." He identified the ways in which one can manipulate the internet for many purposes as well as a space where one can share their creations easily. He totted at one point about having "5000 views or something" of one of the comics he had created. This shows the ways in which an introverted individual can interact and socialize with others from the safety of their home. Mess expressed pride and confidence from the positive reviews he received of his online work. He also enjoys being able to critique others' posted work.

Peyton, Jacqui, and Monroe all held contrasting viewpoints in regards to reading texts online or on technology devices. For instance, Jacqui asserted, "I want to hold the book; I want to be able to stop it. That's why I don't like these Kindles or e-books. You can't hold it, you can't move it—If I'm reading a magazine, I want to hold the magazine." Peyton responded in a similar manner when asked about reading online or on a device; "No, no, no. Like what's the point if you can't fold it?" Further, Peyton expressed enjoyment and satisfaction in the completion of a book and being able to place it on her bookshelf like a trophy. Peyton does not mention the connection, but the physical texts also enable a social act between Peyton and Monroe when shared. Monroe explained, "Yeah, I get a lot of those [books] from Peyton. She likes to read a lot.—She likes to recommend things to me.—Yeah, I borrow her books a lot." Monroe suggested that the texts become physical links to a friend that also become points of discussion.

The participants use of technology in their slide creations became a way for them to say more. Mess often created original art work that he then scanned and embedded onto his slides. Elizabeth and Jacqui used technology on their slides in more basic ways, such as clip art or the inclusion of pictures found online that represented their understanding of a particular prompt. Peyton and Monroe elected only to use words in their responses. However, their slide responses assumed a structure that most often began with a summary of the particular prompt's theme followed by a descriptive example from their lives.

Informing the Research Questions

I review data in *Theme 4: Participant Perceptions of Technology Regarding Literacy and the Larger World* to provide this group's connection with technology and also to communicate the instances where the participants address the research questions [RQ 1-5] that guide this study. I find that overall the participants shared a general distrust and contempt for technology. Mess is an exception because he notes how useful it can be and also shares how the internet allows him to share and consume a variety texts for his personal literacy practices. Yet, he does affirm with the group that technology can diminish privacy if one is not careful.

The participants' discussions of technology lend much understanding to both RQ 1 and RQ 3 because they share how they *view* the world being changed with technological advancements. For instance, Mess discusses how he is saddened that email now dominates traditional mail because he feels it is not as "intimate," which Peyton agrees. Peyton also specifically notes that cell phones have caused pay phones to vanish and it is not fair for those unable to afford a cell phone. Monroe concurs with a negative assessment of cell phones and suggests one can have issues if they do not read the fine print when installing applications.

Peyton and Monroe further share that the government monitors cell phone conversations and one might be in trouble if they were found saying the wrong thing.

Despite a general animosity towards technology, Mess and Jacqui struggle with their thoughts about it because they use it for their personal literacy practices. Their use of technology lends some understanding of RQ1 and the way that these participants *read* and *interpret* the world. Mess frequently posts his work on the internet for others to read and comment. He also uses the internet to access original texts from others around the world. Jacqui describes her use of the internet both to learn and to share her thoughts. As a wrestling fanatic, she frequently watches videos of wrestling matches and interviews of wrestlers on YouTube and similar websites. She also participates in online discussion forums where wrestling fans can discuss a variety of related topics. Further, she has also tried to learn to play guitar by watching self-teach videos and playing along.

The participants hold a general distrust for technology because they believe it can cause a loss of privacy; however, they each acknowledge that it can also be beneficial when used properly. In review of the data, I locate a comical moment with Peyton. She is adamantly against technology during each of the class discussions, yet I found in the interview transcripts a point where even she admits, "I'm going to Google this when I get home."

Theme 5: Participants' Text-to-World Connections

The fifth theme that emerged from this research is the connections that participants frequently drew between the text within the prompts and the ways they related it to their larger world. This section is similar to *Theme 2: Participant's Text-to-Self Connections* with the exception that the connections extend beyond the realm of one's lived experiences. For example,

Theme 2 is classified as experiences unique to a particular participant. Perhaps, he/she connected a text to a memory from a family vacation to the Grand Canyon. However, participant's connections in *Theme 5* encompasses those that other people may experience or easily relate to as well. For instance, they may connect a text with a swim in the ocean or the feel of summer's heat in a large city. In both cases, *Theme 2* and *Theme 5*, the participants expanded their understanding of the text in each prompt when they were able to make personal or worldly connections. Participants often expressed frustration or disengaged in the instances where they were not able to draw from experiences to better understand a prompt.

Jacqui made a connection to pride in her own city when we discussed Sandburg's "Chicago." She identified the poet's theme as loyalty to a place, such as one's hometown. She noted that Sandburg describes not only positive elements about Chicago, but also the "turmoil and hardships" that make it a unique place. She cited a line to support her statement, "Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a/ savage pitted against the wilderness" (ln. 19-20). Despite her loyalty to her city, she said, "I have not seen enough of the underbelly of the city, only the shiny parts." In this case, she was better able to connect with this poem because she too understood what it means to feel loyalty to a particular place. Yet, she also admitted inexperience with and lack of exposure to the negative realities embedded in her own city.

Jacqui and Mess both relied on the historical events, thoughts, and cultures of a particular time period when discussing some of the prompts. For instance, when they began their discussion of Hughes' poem, they first attempted to agree on the setting depicted in the poem. They mentioned such ideas as "segregation, prejudice against…" some people. Jacqui thought it might also have had to do with the particular place. She added, "And this could have been North

and South. You know there was still segregation in the North even though…" Mess interrupted

Jacqui and finished her thought, "I think this is a little more than North versus South. I think it's

more of viewing African-Americans as lower than Caucasian people." Jacqui agreed and they

then framed the remainder of their conversation around the speaker's experiences when placed in

the context of a prejudiced and segregated society.

Jacqui further analyzed the poem at the level of individual words and their connotative

and denotative meanings. She noted that Hughes used dialect to convey both the time period and

the speaker's apparent lack of education. She cited the use of the word "dog" as symbolic for the

treatment of some people at this time period. In this example, she identified larger societal issues

and individual word meanings in the poems. She was able to draw from prior historical

knowledge to better understand the poem. However, she was not completely connected because

she did not live the experience, but she was able to conclude that class, race, and place in this

time period were "touchy subjects."

A similar scene unfolded when Mess and Jacqui analyzed Moore's "Precepts." They

concluded that while her work was written in the 1950s, the context of the time period was not as

important to understanding her piece as it was with some other prompts. Mess concluded, "I

think the purpose of this is trying to make something timeless, which is why all the concepts are

pretty vague." Jacqui agreed with Mess and offered some maxims that she was familiar with to

demonstrate her understanding of Mess's statement.

During an interview, Jacqui expressed a desire to form a debate club within Park High

School. Her anxiety often elevates in social situations, but when in a smaller classroom setting

she has become a positive contributor to discussions. She described that such a club was needed

for students to demonstrate their knowledge on worldly issues, despite their age. She discussed a potential debate group:

> I mean we could go from current events, but then there could be the stuff that goes on with celebrities, which I don't follow. But I mean someone could be really for…like they approve of Miley Sirus and stuff she does at her concerts, which is very vulgar. And some people…but I think, we could also just cause were teenagers we're not [incapable of having such conversations], we understand current events and stuff and I think we could also discuss stuff like war, hum, gay rights, and women's rights hum, stuff to do with animals, because a lot of people care about animals here [at PHS]. Or just, debate stuff we do in school. We could debate what should be changed or what shouldn't. Just a forum to debate any issues because it's an open thing and we could find two sides…I, especially in myself, I always try to be Devil's Advocate. So if I'm thinking about something, I always want to give at least my side of what the other person could be thinking. I think it is the best way to view it.

Jacqui detailed in this moment her desire to discuss openly both local and world issues. She thought such a club would be "cool" and "fun." Her comments about her age, and the age of her peers, as not relevant suggests that she felt somewhat silenced. Since she feels silenced in some way, be it by parents, school, or other greater influences, her idea to establish a debate club would not only afford peers a place to discuss timely issues, but it would also afford them a chance to express their thoughts to those outside their group.

The group made multiple text-to-world connections when they discussed the video clip, "How Wolves Change Rivers." However, Monroe was the most vocal during this discussion and

the others chose to agree with her statements more so than offer their own. Monroe first

identified what the video itself was showing, "It's just telling you how wolves create a huge

impact on the wilderness." But later, she made an important worldly connection that, "It's just

like everything else in the world. Not just wolves." To which Jacqui added, "Every action has a

reaction." Peyton questioningly offered, "Science." Monroe further connected and said, "This

makes me think about life." Elizabeth added, "Isn't it like a chain [reaction]." Each participant

expressed the general theme of the prompt in their comments and the ways the video literally

shows the connection of wolves to the environment, but more importantly they each connected

the cyclical theme to the larger world without being subject specific. Some participants spoke of

life in general, while others related the theme to scientific concepts. Mess lightly offered a most

interesting personal connection about the wolves' appearance. He said, "Well, it was cause they

were all like white and fluffy and like they looked like toasted marshmallows. I wanted one." In

his artistic way, he perfectly described the wolves' coats while also reminding other participants

of times when they either camped or made S'mores over an open fire.

　　　　While each of the previous data examples are brief, they exemplify the many connections

that participants made between the prompts and the larger world. It became evident throughout

this research that all the participants needed to establish a connection between the texts and their

prior knowledge in order to make meaning with a piece that would extend beyond a literal

understanding.

Informing the Research Questions

　　　　An evaluation of the data for *Theme 5: Participants' Text-to-World Connections* exposes

multiple instance where the participants address the research questions [RQ 1-5] that direct this

study. Jacqui and Mess's discussion about the time period, the issues, and the culture of the country was important for them to situate the context and purpose of Hughes' poems and Moore's "Precepts." For instance, they raise issues of race, segregation, and prejudice that they believe is embedded in Hughes' poems. As well, they begin to discuss the context of the 1950s period that they agree is when Moore's piece was written, but ultimately decide her message was meant to be timeless and not specific to the period. These examples inform both RQ 1 and RQ 3 as Jacqui and Mess understand the importance of knowing the historical context of a piece in order to interpret it thoroughly. I believe such contextualization is a skill they often use when reading, viewing, or living an experience or text.

Jacqui also provides understanding to RQ 1, RQ 3, RQ 4, and RQ 5 during an interview where she expresses a desire to form a debate club at Park. In reference to RQ 1 and RQ 3, she contributes that such a club would allow teenagers a forum to debate both entertainment interests like the concerts of Miley Sirus, but also a place where they can discuss serious issues "like war, hum, gay rights, and women's rights, hum, stuff to do with animals…" Her comment demonstrates that she believes her peers are not always thought as capable as she believes they are by adults. This comment informs me about her perception of adults and the larger world [RQ 3]. Further, Jacqui's desire to be part of something social, despite her anxiety, is a major reason she returned to school [RQ 4].

The participants' experience and discussion of the "Wolves" prompt offered further evidence and understanding about both RQ 1 and RQ 3. Monroe becomes the voice and leader in this discussion, but all group member agree with and participate during her analysis and summary of the video. She concludes the video is about the effect reintroducing wolves has on

Yellowstone National Park, but she adds, "It's just like everything else in the World. Not just wolves." Jacqui contributes, "Every action has a reaction." Elizabeth mentions that it resembles a chain reaction. Mess connects it to an experience with S'mores. The participants demonstrate with each new comment how they view, read, and interpret the world and then apply their understanding of some stimulus to a greater meaning or a particular personal moment.

Theme 6: Power Dynamics Embedded in Customs and in the Classroom

The sixth theme that manifested from this research is the embedded influence of power, authority, and institutional structure. The idea of power within this research was not intentionally integrated, but rather became apparent during both my analysis of the data and also during my reflection on all components of the project after its completion. The issuance of power, in most cases, was neither intentional nor readily apparent of any negative intention. Rather, as I look to the moments when power, authority, and institutional structure emerge, it is evident that the actions and responses are natural in the situations regarding the shared relationships of the participants and the customs of being in the specific situations.

When I speak of *institutional structure*, I refer to the traditional and established expectations and structures that guide one within an educational setting in any role they participate. I also use the term *custom(s)* to describe the anticipated and expected norms for one to conduct him/herself in a given situation. For instance, I would term it customary for students in a circle discussion to attentively listen while others speak and wait for a void to begin sharing their thoughts. Also, I would term it customary for the teacher, or the group leader, to pose the questions and topics at the start of a discussion.

I locate numerous moments of embedded power dynamics in instances like these throughout the data. I organize the moments of embedded power into four subcategories: (1) power of the institution; (2) power of the teacher-researcher; (3) power of the student, and (4) power of technology in everyday life.

Power of the Institution

I conducted this study within a school setting and thus the study is naturally susceptible to influence from the structures, the systems, and the authorities that dictate the setting. My specific setting of Park High School, an established alternative high school of thirty-two years, carries its own long history of ways of doing and being in the setting. As well, Park is controlled beyond its physical walls by the larger Madison Public School district and those people in positions of authority. The teachers and students of Park are well aware of the influence of structures and authority that dictate much of what occurs in the school.

As previously described, my initial intention and research design was to conduct my research beyond the classroom during unstructured periods of the day. When I posed such a project to the building administrator, and subsequently to those in central administration, I was strongly encouraged to think of ways that I might conduct similar research within the confines of my classroom. All administrators were interested by the research I proposed and displayed outward enthusiasm for the project, but they wished the scope to be limited to a few students in a structured setting. Their rationale focused on issues of privacy and interference with learning for those students not involved in the project.

I had no recourse or ability to contest their decision. Rather, I heeded their advice and sought creative ways to replicate my original project in a way that would closely study the

personal literacy practices of students in an alternative high school. I did change the process of the research, but retained the original intent. Ultimately, the move into the classroom resulted in a more structured project and produced copious amount of data of varied types that may not have occurred with the original research structure. This issuance of power and authority on my research proved to be positive because it challenged my thinking and creativity, yet it is also important to note because such structures continually influence other educational environments.

I found in the data analysis numerous moments where social, institutional, and authoritative structures held influence not just over me, but also over the participants in this research. I find these moments most often in how students act in a manner that is expected in the classroom. These moments include not challenging the ideas of other participants, providing supportive comments, and speaking in proper turn. For instance, Mess assisted Peyton with her interpretation of a prompt on multiple occasions and Monroe often validates the ideas of others with positive comments.

Elizabeth also displays her understanding about the norms of group discussion and requests the group allow here to stray from conventions. Prior to the discussion of the "Wolves" prompt, Elizabeth asks a question of the entire group while she looks at me. She had appeared emotionally distraught since her arrival at school today. However, she typically wants to do well even when she is not feeling her best. She asks in a soft tone, "I think I'll be better writing instead of talking about it. Does that work?" This scene demonstrates Elizabeth's understanding of social and institutional expectations for one to participate in a conversation when they are present. While it appears she would like to do so, it is also evident that she does not feel comfortable and emotionally capable at this moment. Further, she addresses the whole group,

but makes eye contact with me as I believe she views me as the one with authority to decide in this situation.

Power of the Teacher-Researcher

I describe earlier my role in this teacher-research inquiry as one of "collector" of voices, stories, and artifacts in an attempt to better understand the literacy practices of the participants (Dinkins, 2009, p. 256). However, neither I nor the participants, were able to fully forgo my professional role as a teacher at Park High School. I was also the teacher-researcher that designed and conducted all components of this study while also making numerous planned and spontaneous decisions throughout the course. The students did hold power over me during the consent process because it was their decision to participate in the study or not. However, once permissions were attained, I became the sole decision maker regarding the contents, structure, and actualization of the project. I determined many structural elements: the selection of prompts; the semi-structured questions; the time to transition to the next question; the time allowance for each activity in a course meeting; the decision when a discussion needs a question prompt; the delivery of prompts in a standard tone and plain word processed format.

My decision to choose the prompts was one of both practicality and functionality. I wished to provide a selection of prompts that students might identify with as well as those within their abilities to comprehend and interpret. I wanted the students to not be readily familiar with the selections; I wanted to challenge them; and I wanted those prompts that could stimulate conversation. It is apparent the prompts could be powerful in themselves because the more difficult ones challenged the participants' confidence at points. For example, the Cisneros prompt caused some confusion for Peyton that led her to question her interpretation. She states,

"She wants to change her name. No she doesn't…yes, she does. I think?". Peyton's statement demonstrates the confusion that some prompts caused her. In moments like this, she often responded not just verbally, but also physically with a clenched fist, head down, or down-trodden face. I also exerted some authority during the discussion of "Holding the Pen." Mess and Jacqui became verbally contentious with one another to the point where it was necessary for me to interject. Mess interrupted Jacqui for the second time and her frustration was visible. I focused on Mess and stated, "Now wait a minute though, what were you going to say [now looking to Jacqui]?" My authoritative insertion here was necessary to both support Jacqui in the moment and to set a tone of mutual respect for the remaining meetings.

I located other moments of power, in the form of authority, when both Mess and Peyton question the expectations of the written prompt responses. Prior to responding to the *Wall Street Journal* prompt, Mess asks, "How long does the prompt [response] have to be?" I only shrug my shoulders in response because I want them to respond with as much as they can in the remaining time. I anticipate if I issue an exact expectation they will work to it and stop. By remaining vague, I hope they will write as much as possible before the end of the class.

Peyton also questions the written response following the students' discussion of the "Wolves" video prompt. Once the group settles to write their responses, Peyton asks, "What are we…what are we writing about?" I was actually taken aback with this question because the students, especially Monroe, shared so many thoughts about the prompt in their discussion. I found the question additionally interesting because we were approximately three-weeks into the project and Peyton had already written multiple responses. In retrospect, I wonder if she was asking if she should write the ideas Monroe had shared in the discussion or if she should share

her own thoughts. I speculate, since Monroe took such a strong role in this discussion, that

Peyton might have not felt confident in her own thoughts when compared to the overwhelmingly

positive response the other students provided Monroe. This moment exposes the low self-esteem

Peyton generally projects about herself and her academic abilities. As previously detailed, she

expresses similar sentiments about her interpretive abilities at other points in this study.

Peyton expresses frustration with her interpretive abilities during a discussion of the

Sandra Cisneros prompt. I anticipated that this would be a reading that she would enjoy as it is a

narrative about a girl coming-of-age and trying to understand her mother's emotions. While a

nonfiction piece, it is written in a creative style that I believed was similar to the teen fiction she

regularly read on her own. However, following our reading, she stated to me, "You always give

us things I have nothing to say! I don't know. Somebody put a sack over her grandmother's

head and made her sit by the window?" It did not appear that she intentionally decided to target

me explicitly in this moment. Rather, her response seemed to be frustration with all the

difficulties she experiences in connection with school and this prompt served as a catalyst to

cause her to react. I did feel responsible for her frustration in some ways because I had

deliberately chosen prompts that were not completely clear and that would require some

interpretation of abstract language. The Cisneros prompt proved to be too challenging for her in

this moment and as a result she reacted negatively towards it and herself.

Power of the Student

I intentionally designed this study to make students active participants and decision

makers in the interviews, in the discussions, and in the creation of their prompt response slides.

And like any classroom situation, when the figure of authority imparts freedom to the students

within the room the result can entail both positive and negative elements. In a positive light, the students took ownership of their thoughts and the ways they would express these thoughts throughout the entire course. Many participants appeared more confident because they were doing academic activities that other students in Park High School were not involved. In contrast though, some participants acted empowered in their roles and often spoke over others or guided discussions based on their interpretations. However, this confidence also enabled some to feel capable of supporting their peers and capable of becoming positive influences.

The participants' support for one another was evident in the discussion regarding "Holding the Pen." Jacqui makes a connection between a missing pinkie in the drawing as holding significance to the poem's line that notes "no visible pinkie." As a result, she concludes this to be proof that the drawing is to be paired with the poem. Monroe reacts appropriately and approvingly when she notes, "that is a good connection"; however, Monroe's positive assurance for Jacqui's comments also feels as if she has assumed a role of authority in the group and that Jacqui would appreciate such a statement coming from her. Yet, whatever thoughts Monroe held about her place in the group, she uses her influence in a positive way in this situation.

Jacqui appears reluctant in the previous example, but she had taken control of the group earlier in the discussion. Mess, who appears confident and often strongly shares his thoughts, had challenged Jacqui's connection of the poem to the drawing. In another form of power dynamics, Mess attempts to solicit my understanding of the relationship between the two in order to confirm he is right. I only affirm that I had grouped the image and poem together, but reiterate that this was not necessarily the case originally. With a lack of clarification from me, Jacqui assumed a leadership role when she exclaimed, "It has everything to do with it!" While Jacqui

had not been this strong in the past, the group defaulted to her thought here and remained quiet.

Mess understood Jacqui's strong opinion on the matter and did not respond either.

Monroe and Mess both positively exert their power in the discussion of the "Wolves" video prompt and the Cisneros prompt, respectively. Monroe's long explanation of the "Wolves" prompt and "How [it's about] everything feeds and stems off the other. So, without one thing there won't be another…" The group applauds her comments in agreement. In this moment, Monroe dictates the groups interpretation of the prompt as well because she has taken control as the group leader. She continues to suggest that she covered all thoughts that could be associated with this prompt. I was both proud with her confidence in the moment and also impressed with how well she had spoken about the prompt. Yet, I did still wanted to hear more from the other participants, but the way she said, "Hear that Justin? I covered it all. Anybody else want to cover it?…I think we all agree, Justin," stunted any further discussion. Her peers appeared resigned to her interpretation and were not willing to suggest any other ideas. This scene aids my understanding of RQ 4 because Monroe seemed motivated to say more with each positive comment she received. The participants' comments also elevated her mood and confidence which serve as intrinsic motivation.

Mess utilized his role in the group when a discussion of the Cisneros prompt was slow to begin. The piece suggests through the characters' relationships that some have control over others' lives. I posed to the group an open-ended question, "Anybody want a controlled life?" Peyton quickly responds, "No." However, Mess pauses a moment before he replies. He says, "I think some people do." Peyton's facial expression holds many unspoken questions. He continues, "People who, people who like rules and order and stuff. Who want to feel safe." I am

impressed with his thoughtful response and rationale. His response actually causes Peyton to reconsider her first thought to a point that she replies, "I agree." The group initially thought the idea of someone or something controlling another life seemed negative. However, when Mess gave some context and reasoning to his thoughts his ideas became powerful enough to sway the group's position. Mess did not seem to have any motive of turning the thoughts of the group or imposing his ideas on them, but he did become powerful in this moment because he both expressed his contrary position and supported it with practical examples. In this moment, Peyton reads and interprets the phrase "controlled life" as being negative, which tells me more about RQ 1. However, when Mess contextualizes the question with the example of "safety", Peyton is able to step back and reassess how she reacted to the question initially [RQ 5].

Issues of power are also silently present with each participant as a result of their personal histories, emotions, and academic difficulties. While many of these powerful influences are not openly discussed, there were brief moments when they surfaced for each participant. For example, Mess and Jacqui both discuss how suicide and self-harm is something with which they have experience. Monroe references her recent quitting of smoking because she recognizes her addictive personality and wants to make an effort to remedy some of the unhealthy things with which she participates. Mess continually struggles with identity issues and his depression is often evident when his head is down or when he repetitively picks his skin. Jacqui continues to struggle with anxiety and depression which are visible as she continues to wear bandanas due to Trichotillomania. Peyton displays numerous questioning moments of her interpretive abilities and raises frustrations about home life due to poor familial relationships. Each of the

participants "carried baggage" before, during, and after this research which holds power over them and influences their daily lives and thus some elements of this research.

Power of Technology in Everyday Life

I discuss earlier the participants' views of technology in *Theme 4: Participants' Perceptions of Technology Regarding Literacy and the Larger World*, but I briefly return to technology at this point because the students make clear that their frustrations with technology rests in the power it holds over people and assumedly antiquated products. I initially assumed that all students of the participants' generation enjoyed and favored technology. However, my assumptions were not accurate with these teenagers.

The participants speak openly about their frustrations with technology when they encountered the *Wall Street Journal* prompt since the advertisement displayed how the newspaper was now available on a variety of mobile platforms such as the iPhone and iPad. Monroe states her skepticism succinctly, "Technology is going to eat everybody. It's going to take over the world." Peyton expands the conversation to the way cell phones have replaced pay phones. She is bothered that a service like pay phones were accessible to everyone and now that they are gone some people are left without a way to communicate when not home if they are unable to afford a cell phone. Monroe adds that it is not just money that bothers her about cell phones, she is also troubled by the invasion of privacy. She states that the government can monitor cell phones and that they do not always do so responsibly. Peyton makes light of this whispering, "They are listening to us right now…" I connect each of these snippets as informative to RQ 3 because the participants use their viewing of the world as being changed by technology and are then able to locate specific examples where they regularly see this occur.

The influence and power of cell phones is not just an issue with monitoring conversations, but also an issue of invasion on one's privacy with the variety of applications [apps] available for smartphones. Monroe states that it is necessary to read all the fine print of these apps because companies "bury the truth" in fine print. In this example, she provides evidence about her distaste for technological advancements because she is bothered with how the companies intentionally manipulate or gain access to personal information through the apps.

While much negativity surrounds the group's thoughts on technology, Mess makes a positive reference to the ways in which one can benefit from it. Monroe notes the future of newspapers as uncertain and concludes that everything [newpapers, books, music, etc.] will be digital. Mess adds that companies like the *Wall Street Journal* change with the times as they move from print formats to digital platforms. He also adds that with technology in general and specifically with the use of the Internet, "Well, you lose a lot of privacy, but what you gain, it gives you a lot in return." Mess, in this moment, assumes the role of Devil's advocate and makes the positive connection that technology and such advancements are very useful if one is careful in how they use them [RQ 1; RQ 3].

In retrospect, the elements I discuss of power, authority, and institutional structures played a large role within my work. I find this most interesting because it is an element that I did not account for or consider in the structuring and actualization of the research. However, I do not look at these power dynamics as detrimental or a fault with the research, but rather as an added layer of meaning that needed to be named and accounted for in the analysis.

4.4 Conclusion—How I Studied, What I Intended to Study

From the inception of this research, I encountered gatekeeping (Glesne, 2006, p.44) of the richest form because I was not able to directly study the phenomenon of my problem statement in its natural habitat. I was limited in the design and implementation of my research by school administrators who required the project to be limited and controlled. Their requests were well warranted and I understood that within the scope of a public school the students have a right to relative privacy and exclusion from research. I want to reinforce that I did not feel negatively towards the administrators' requests and regulations, yet their input certainly affected the design and implementation of my research. As a consequence, the administrators' guidelines also limited, to some degree, my ability to directly address my guiding research questions.

I was able to create an artificial biome that replicated much of the intended research space with some modifications and limitations. While I first felt this may negatively impact the phenomenon under investigation, my new direction led to the richest data about the students as individuals, as learners, and as a small culture sharing group. Throughout the course implementation and the subsequent collection of data through interviews, classroom field notes, and research artifacts, I came to better understand each participant.

As individuals, I learned that each student had past and present life experiences that severely impacted their educational journeys. However, each student demonstrated at various times both coping and personal management skills that enabled them to "get through" the tough circumstances and the tougher periods that they encountered. Each student showed some degree of resiliency when faced with difficulties and often they helped one another endure the difficult moments. I found, beyond resilience, a strength in each student that enabled them to take a risk

in the course or to take a risk by standing up for what they believed without fear of criticism. Further, each student demonstrated on numerous occasions his or her creativity in the way they interpreted, analyzed, or represented a course prompt.

As learners, I came to understand the numerous ways these students engaged, viewed, and performed learning activities. I learned about their likes and dislikes, their successes and struggles. Rosenblatt's (1978, 1994/2005) transactional theory describes the ways in which it is necessary for students/readers to make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections in order to make meaning of a text (pp. 16-19). The participants often identified either a text-to-self or text-to-world connection with a literary piece in order for it to have meaning within the context of their lives. Further, these students were not able to make many text-to-text connections due to a lack of exposure and familiarity with academic texts.

As a culture sharing group, these students grew together with time. I define a culture sharing group as one in which the participants share similar interests, experiences, and common language while also providing one another with critique and support to grow both individually and collectively. I learned from this group of students that while they previously secluded themselves during social periods they could, in fact, be very social.

They all began reluctantly and with great skepticism of what was happening and why they had been chosen for this research. I often needed to reiterate that I established this group based on their individual behaviors and interests with literacy practices that I had observed outside the classroom. And, I also reassured them that if they gave the course a chance they may find that as a group they had some things in common. During the first classes, students struggled with the group discussions because I left them to facilitate on their own. This meant each needed

to adopt some role as mediator, contributor, and/or follower. While initial classes were slow-going, they each established their space within the group through their contributions and the way in which they delivered their thoughts that often revealed individual personalities and experiences. This group of generally introverted students emerged united because they were each respectful to one another, felt safe in the space, and openly engaged in a new learning experience. They further vocalized pride in the fact that they were able to help me.

As a group, I was most interested to better understand their views of technology related to literacy practices and the effect technology has in everyday life. I entered with the assumption that all students today enjoy being inundated and immersed within technology as so many tote a cell phone, tablet, laptop, or e-reader from place-to-place. However, I came to find that these students felt skeptical, confused, and sometimes annoyed with the ways that technology is so greatly integrated into daily life. Many expressed skepticism about the ways in which technology compromises their privacy and costs them financially.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion of the Research Questions

In Chapter 4, I utilized the data to introduce both the participants and the emergent themes from the research. In Chapter 5, I will discuss further the ways in which the data informs my understanding of the emergent themes and how this research can potentially inform teachers and academics about students with EBD who employ literacy practices during unstructured times of the school day. In the final sections of this chapter, I will present recommendations as a result of the research, identify limitations of the study, and suggest areas where further research is still necessary. I will conclude with a personal reflection on the study as a whole.

I used the following questions to guide my research:

1. How do these students view, read, and interpret the world?

2. For what purpose(s) do these students consistently engage in literacy practices outside the classroom?

3. To what degree do the literacy practices enable them to better understand the world in which they live?

4. What intrinsic or extrinsic benefits do the students receive as a result of their literacy practices?

5. In what ways might these seemingly very different students connect interpersonally due to their literacy or artistic interests?

My initial research questions were all addressed within the data I collected and analyzed. After careful and tedious analysis of the data as described in Chapter 3 and the presentation of data in Chapter 4, I am able to compartmentalize the results into six themes:

Theme 1: Participants' Identification of Emotions

Theme 2: Participants' Text-to-Self Connections

Theme 3: Group Culture that Developed Among Participants

Theme 4: Participants' Perceptions of Technology Regarding Literacy and the Larger World

Theme 5: Participants' Text-to-World Connections

Theme 6: Power Dynamics Embedded in Custom and in the Classroom

The themes that I identified and employed to organize the data provide evidence and understanding to each of the research questions. I found, in some cases, that particular bits of data could potentially be categorized under more than one theme; I also found that each theme could be viewed as capable of providing a better understanding about more than one of the research questions. Acknowledging such overlaps, I have organized my discussion of the data around the questions that guided my research. I will use the themes, relevant data, and relevant research literature to explain the ways in which this research addressed the individual research questions.

Question 1: How do these students view, read, and interpret the world?

I initially posed this question to discern between the ways students in alternative high schools involve themselves beyond the classroom with literacy practices to observe the world, to read what is in front of them each day, and to interpret what they see and what they read. My use

of *view, read,* and *interpret* in this question suggests definitions more expansive than those found within a dictionary. By *view*, I mean how do such students take in all the stimuli in their surrounding environment both within the context of school and out-of-school while positioning themselves in acceptance or dismissal of such stimuli. By *read*, I mean the ways in which students process what they encounter, whether it be traditional words on the printed page or the tightly clenched hands of a fellow passenger on public transportation. And lastly, I intend *interpret* to encapsulate both the ways in which they process what is viewed and read, while also referencing the ways such stimulus influences their thinking, their actions, and their entire being.

Each of the participants expressed their views of the world as if outsiders looking-in. Their interpretations of others' intents and actions typically swayed toward skepticism and distrust of others—whether those others be adults, peers, or elected officials. The participants' skepticism is most noticeable with the *Wall Street Journal* prompt that spurred thoughts about technology and the vulnerability of one's private information when using technology. Also, Monroe, Jackie, and Mess all make direct reference to feelings of angst if outsiders were to acquire their personal writings. A general mindset of distrust pervaded the participants' responses. I equate this distrust to numerous factors, but mostly it appears to originate from personal history and individual mental health diagnoses that influence each participant's lens. Yet, the participants' feelings towards technology further explain their recognition of power dynamics when one utilizes modern devices.

The participants' distrust and choice to isolate affords them the opportunity to look deeply at all they encounter. Each participant referenced an interpretation of a particular prompt or previous personal experience where they sought further meaning because their stance of

distrust led them in search of another meaning, reason, or motivation. For instance, Monroe

connected the Apple image in the WSJ prompt, but Mess immediately wanted to know what was

on the screen of the iPad in the image. He believed further meaning would be embedded in

numerous places of the advertisement because he understands advertisements are meant to be

powerful and influential to consumers. In another instance, Jacqui held firm to her interpretation

of the hand line drawing that was paired with the poem "Holding the Pen." She insisted that

deeper symbolic meaning was present because of the hand position and "in the drawing their is

no pinkie which could be like in the poem [where it is written] there's no visible pinkie

[referencing *The Invisible Pinkie* stanza]." These and numerous other data examples, as

described in detail during Chapter 4, provide insight to the ways in which these students view,

read, and interpret the larger world. As many of my research questions dovetail and overlap,

other moments where participants demonstrate how they view, read, and interpret the world are

embedded as I discuss the remainder of the research questions in relation to the data I collected

and analyzed.

Question 1: **How do these students view, read, and interpret the world?** **Summary of Findings**
• describe their views about the world as outsiders looking-in
• demonstrate skepticism and distrust of those in positions of power and authority
• nervous and anxious of others viewing their work
• connect text(s) with personal experience to make meaning

Question 2: For what purpose(s) do these students consistently engage in literacy practices outside the classroom?

I found that each participant engaged in literacy practices for various purposes at various times. For instance, Mess often wrote comic narratives and drew animated characters to tell his story, while also creating his characters to share with others. Peyton, Elizabeth, and Monroe most often read teen novels that allowed them to both escape the world for awhile and to remove themselves from what immediately surrounded them. Jacqui focused on her writing of song lyrics "to deal with things I never have." As well, she often took to the internet to watch and write reviews on various public video sites such as YouTube. She enjoyed making comments, evaluating the comments of others, and generally having the opportunity to debate topics of interest to her, such as professional wrestling, because this practice gave her a voice (Falk, 2001; Forell, 2006).

In an interview Mess succinctly described his reasons and outcomes of his artistic endeavors. He states, "I think my writing and my art is for my own, for my own gain. To better myself, to express my feelings, to cope with hard things, to…it's just a form of expression really. And, it's enjoyable, I mean you wouldn't do it if you don't enjoy it." His statement acknowledges multiple reasons that he consistently employs literacy practices that are all for intrinsic rewards—to express, to cope, and to enjoy. Jacqui expressed similar sentiments for her purpose to write lyrics as "just something to kind of mess around with, deal with stuff I never have." The participants demonstrate with such statements that they are involved in these activities to mend an internal need to process both their past experiences and their present emotions. The literacy practices with which they engage give voice to who they are and perhaps

to no longer feel invisible. For example, Peyton described her occasional journal writing as a

way "to vent" and "…to just write your emotions."   Monroe also describes how her personal

literacy practices are more open and fulfilling than the writing opportunities presented in school.

She says, "Well, when I write things for here [English class] it's what you ask me to write about,

the assignment. There are like rules for that, but when I write on my own it's not like that. It's

free, open to whatever I want at the time." Monroe's comments speak to the academic and

personal writing divide. It appears from her statement that school writing is something to be

completed, while writing for herself is an act of freedom, meaning-making, and a vocalization of

her thoughts (Weinstein, 2007).

I found it interesting that none of the participants explicitly described employing literacy

practices to learn. They generally engaged in their activities to better understand themselves,

escape their realities, and for the opportunity to actively engage in dialogue with others about

topics of interests. Jacqui mentioned using the self-teach videos on the internet to learn guitar,

but found this method of learning did not match her personal learning style or her need for

immediate feedback.

Question 2: **For what purpose(s) do these students consistently engage in literacy practices outside the classroom?** **Summary of Findings**
• use literacy practices to escape reality, share personal stories, and cope with emotions
• employ literacy practices to give themselves a voice in the world

Question 3: To what degree do the literacy practices enable them to better understand the world in which they live?

I asked this question in an attempt to uncover the ways in which participants utilized their literacy practices as meaning-making processes to comprehend and find their place in the larger world. I wanted to better understand how these students viewed their world in relation to the literacy practices that they participated. In actuality, I found that most of the participants used their literacy practices as a means to escape the larger world, to understand their world, and to avoid their personal "stressors". The participants engaged in their identified literacy practices to focus on themselves, improve themselves, and express themselves.

Peyton and Monroe both spoke about their reading of novels as ways to avoid life realities. However, they also read to enable themselves the chance to connect personally since they often had conversations when they both had finished the same text. Mess described his creation of manga characters and the resulting comics as a means to express his internal feelings. He shared his resulting comic characters and stories over the internet as a way to further express himself. Jacqui described her writing of song lyrics as a deeply personal experience that she was unwilling to share with others because they were an attempt "to deal with things I [she] never had." However, Jacqui interacted with those in the larger world when she wrote comments to videos on websites such as YouTube. In this effort, she did not speak with others in hopes to better comprehend the happenings of the larger world, but more so for the purpose of engaging in a social experience. Similarly, Jacqui also admits that the absence of social experiences when she had withdrawn from school was a key factor that motivated her to reenroll.

None of the participants made a direct connection between their literacy practices and how the practice helped or hindered their view of the larger word; however, I note numerous and specific moments where each participant's comments during the interviews, group discussions, and slides demonstrated his/her current views of the larger world. Interestingly, many of their thoughts about the larger world emerged when technology entered the conversation. I first noticed this trend when discussing the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) prompt that advertised WSJ with Apple as a means to deliver their products on a mobile platform. Monroe quickly shared, "basically it's just saying the uhh it's technology that' going to eat everybody. It's taking over the world." Mess agreed and they looked even closer at the advertisement to find hidden messages because he believed a deeper, subliminal message was also at work. Peyton later added, "That's why you don't put any personal things on your electronic devices." Monroe expressed her agreement, "In the end, technology screws us all!" This brief scene demonstrates the participants' general uneasiness with technology and the ways in which they feel it can impact their lives. While the participants recognize that the world continually adapts to integrate such technologies, they also share strong personal beliefs that this trend is dangerous and will ultimately prove negative with time. The participants are never specific about particular instances when technology negatively impacted them; however, their comments of general distrust and skepticism about technology suggests they all believe it will negatively impact them at some point and as a result they must always be cautious.

From similar discussions of technology, the participants note their views and distrust for the government. They link both government and technology under the umbrella of distrust because they posit that the government promotes and supports technology to enable them to

better oversee American citizens. Peyton introduces, "Did you know if you say a word, or so I have heard, if you say like a certain word or something the government goes into your phone?". Monroe provides "bomb" for an example and retells a story she read recently about a girl who was targeted for saying such a word on an airplane. To which Peyton jokingly replies, "They [government] are listening to everything…They are listening to us right now [while whispering]." Albeit a playful scene, it demonstrates how multiple participants are weary of both technology and governmental use of technology because it raises concerns about a loss of privacy. The participants' comments demonstrate their awareness of the power and influence that technology, big business, and the government has over the general public (Freire, 1978).

The participants expand on their feelings of technology and how it can become a vehicle to invade their privacy beyond the government. For instance, Monroe describes how the downloading of applications (apps) can open a computer or phone to all forms of intrusion from "hackers." While Mess agrees with the various statements and stories cited in the discussion, he also adds, "well, you lose a lot of privacy, but what you gain, it [technology] gives you a lot in return." Each of these examples serve to enlighten one about the ways these participants view and interpret their world. The participants are aware of innovations and recognize the worth in them, yet they also tend to look for negative purposes that may not always be apparent.

Question 3: To what degree do the literacy practices enable them to better understand the world in which they live?   **Summary of Findings**
• implement literacy practices to escape and understand the larger world
• perform literacy practices to avoid personal "stressors"
• enact literacy practices to focus on themselves, improve themselves, and express themselves
• hold negative view of technology for the way it changes tradition and may invade personal privacy

Question 4: What intrinsic or extrinsic benefits do the students receive as a result of their literacy practices?

My early observations of students engrossed in their literacy practices caused me to speculate that their motivation to engage in these practices was to produce products such as lyrics, journals, comics, and stories that could be tangible representations of their being to share with others. However, over the course of the research, it became more evident that their literacy practices were employed more to make meaning of their personhood and achieve intrinsic benefits such as increased self-esteem, expression of emotions, and outlets to cope. Their practices were often conducted in isolation and the products were intended to give meaning to only the individual. In review, Mess created detailed manga stories with original characters reflective of his own developing personality; Jacqui wrote emotional lyrics and used online message boards in attempts to socially interact despite her crippling anxiety; Peyton devoured teen fiction and coming-of-age stories that she regularly shared with friends; Monroe frequently read the recommendations of novels from Peyton, while also maintaining a journal to cope with personal issues; and Elizabeth read a vast amount novels and biographies to seemingly escape and better understand her home life. The participants described their individual intrinsic motivations gleaned from their literacy practices in many of the interviews and some of the class discussions.

Each of the participants shared, to some degree, the importance and purpose of their literacy practices. Peyton, a voracious reader of teen fiction, discussed her search for suitable texts and the ways in which each completed novel became an observable trophy on her bookcase. Peyton shared, "I like after I read the book to you know put it in my collection. It makes me

proud of myself." She shares this with a smile like she was remembering an exact moment when she was able to add a completed text to her shelves. Interestingly, Monroe later relates during an interview that she relies on Peyton's suggestions for texts she should read next. So, not only do books become trophies for Peyton, but they also then enable her to share new knowledge with friends and to play the role of critic and mentor. In such roles, I imagine Peyton is renewed with confidence and self-assurance that is required to engage in a socially interactive literacy practice such as recommending books. Peyton's role of critic and mentor also demonstrates that the confidence she gains in these roles make her powerful over her anxiety to a point where she is willing to take a chance and make novel suggestions to friends.

Monroe describes the need for her literacy practices when she discusses her motivation to read and to write. She notes that she likes to read "life stories of people [biographies]" and some fictional stories that Peyton suggests. However, her main interest is writing. She talks of writing in her journal as a way to get things off her mind and to express "stressors, things I need to get off my chest." When Monroe writes she can be open and express her thoughts without divulging to others. I come to this conclusion because she shared, "I would be devastated if somebody got a hand, got a hold of it [journal]." Also, she uses her journal as a coping mechanism. Prior to the research, I understood that Monroe abused a variety of substances, but has since taken steps to decrease her dependence. She shares about her writing, "I quit smoking so…I needed something to do. You know?" In an effort to reduce her dependence on smoking, she employs a healthy activity like writing because she can still get the emotional release without the negative consequences (Luttrell & Parker, 2001).

Jacqui's literacy practices are much different than those of Peyton and Monroe. In her descriptions, Jacqui seems much less settled on the particular practices she engages. By this I mean, she recognizes that she has strong emotions to cope with, negative memories from the past to remedy, and low self-esteem in the present that she wants to improve to decrease her anxiety. As a result, Jacqui seems to adopt any practice in the present that she thinks might make her feel better in the future. I noticed Jacqui during initial observations because she was always reading and writing something that did not appear related to academic classes. However, the practices I initially observed gave way to those that I only learned about during the course of the research. For instance, Jacqui divulged her love of professional wrestling and how it was a major part of her relationship with her uncle.

On her own, Jacqui frequently visited professional wrestling websites where she was able to have conversations with other fans, read and post comments on particular videos, and debate the merits of particular wrestlers with others. And, while she enjoys doing this activity, she also would like to see a similar activity available at school, "it would be cool if we had a debate thing [club] here [PHS]." When she divulged this it explained some of the reasoning and purpose she derived from her wrestling conversations—socialization. Jacqui is very introverted and her anxiety makes it difficult for her to participate in typical high school social situations. For instance, she will often withdraw from the noise of the cafeteria to eat in a quiet place. Yet, like with her participation on the basketball team and her stating that the social piece was absent when she was home tutored, she does want to be social and practice suppressing her anxiety in such situations to move forward emotionally. She shared, "…being back definitely helped with the social because being here [Park] helps."

Jacqui shared another literacy practice that she frequently engaged with during one of our interviews that I was previously unaware. She spoke about her love of music. Specifically, she wrote lyrics, attempted to learn guitar, and dreamt of playing the drums. While her attempts to self-teach the guitar are interesting and utilize various literacy practices, I was most interested in the lyrics she wrote. While it is not uncommon to hear the youth of PHS freestyle rapping in the lunchroom and hallways, Jacqui was writing serious lyrics about her past in an attempt to cope with many difficult experiences and her mental diagnoses. She said, "Whenever I get a chance to I will write stuff up into song lyric form about what I am feeling…just stuff I've been through." I inquired if she shared her music and she vehemently replied, "No, I kind of want to, but I can't sing for shit," which shows also the power that her anxiety holds over her desire to participate in certain activities. She added that at one point her lyric writing caused her to go into a deep depression because after completion she continued to perseverate on the ideas she had written. Despite this setback, Jacqui typically used literacy practices to both express her emotions and to "deal with stuff I never have."

Of all the participants, Mess was the most consistent and devoted to his literacy practices. He frequently engaged with a few practices such as fantasy fiction writing, drawing original characters, and scripting comics. He shared that his writing and art is something he has always done "for as long as I can remember." When he talks of reading, he raised the idea of engagement and the ways in which one can learn, retain, and develop more meaning when one is engaged with a text (Wilhelm, 1997; Fecho, 2004). It seems that he carried the idea of engagement into his personal literacy practices because he includes such subtleties that makes his work something for others to engage and interact with. Mess later offers a succinct rationale

for his literacy practices that describe the intrinsic rewards he gains. He stated, "I think my writing and art is generally for my own, my own gain. To better myself, to express my feelings, to cope with hard things, to—it's just a form of expression really. And, it's enjoyable…" He also adds that in all his works he attempts to make it "unique to yourself and personalizing."

Before, during, and after this research, I have observed Mess continuously amassing volumes of notebooks and sketch pads filled with his work that he rarely shares. When prompted, he is happy to divulge his creations, but only when asked. It seems his literacy practices have little to do with the product, like Jacqui, and all about the process. He takes comfort in creating art and texts that are "unique" to his emotions and experiences that he can then set aside and begin anew. Mess describes that each story never really ends because they all generally connect to him. He states, "So, I feel the pictures and stories often go together to help express even more than either could alone." However, during the years I have known Mess, the products of his work are most evident in his identity formation, increased self-confidence, and developing maturity.

It is difficult to ascertain Elizabeth's intrinsic or extrinsic motivations for participating in her particular literacy practice because she was reluctant to participate in an interview and because she never divulged her reasoning during class discussions. However, I assume her constant reading of novels was some form of escapism comparable to that of the other participants. I come to this conclusion solely because of the way in which she shared few connections with any classmates, was older than most seniors [21], and experienced emotional issues both at home and in-school. Her desire to remain isolated did emerge during a class discussion about the "Wolves" prompt when she asked the group, "I think I'll be better at writing

instead of talking about. Does that work?" In this case, and many others, Elizabeth chose to be

present, but only in the physical sense. She prefers to withhold her thoughts from the group and

yet gives much insight on her slide responses. For example, Elizabeth's slide that represents

Barrack Obama's quote on *Destiny* states, "It reminds me of growing up and finding who I really

am and not what society made me look like or be. I think this quote reminds me to be myself

and to accept others as well as myself for making mistakes that were made." I highlight this

piece of her work because it shows the depth of her thinking and her ability to not only process

the text, but also to make the important text-to-self and text-to-world connections (Wilhelm,

1997, p. 19; Rosenblatt, 1978, pp.16-20) that can be transformational in people's lives.

Question 4: Intrinsic or extrinsic benefits do the students receive as a result of their literacy practices? Summary of Findings
• use literacy practices to make meaning of their personhood
• utilize literacy practices to increase self-esteem, express emotions, and as outlets to cope

Question 5: In what ways might these seemingly very different students connect

interpersonally due to their literacy or artistic interests?

Each participant came to the research not completely clear about the reasons as to why I

was interested in the literacy practices that they participated in outside-the-classroom. As well,

they were somewhat surprised to meet the other participants that I had also invited to this

experience. It was immediately evident that the group I had assembled was composed of the

most solitary students at Park High School, yet it was never explicitly acknowledged by

participants during the research. While this was not my intent, it was a reality that would

inevitably occur with a research project that sought to investigate the individual literacy practices

of students on their own time.

The initial meetings were bland and the participants spoke very little during the time set aside to discuss the prompts. The group encountered numerous awkward silences in the early class meetings that were broken only when a participant assumed a leadership role and shared his or her ideas. It appeared that they wanted to endure these moments in order to get to the next portion of the course where they could individually create their slides and comfortably share all their thoughts on a particular prompt.

However, three classes into the course, the conversations and group dynamics took an interesting turn—the participants began to recognize, appreciate, and interact with one another. The conversations became increasingly longer and more substantive. The participants' silence that was present in the opening meetings gave way to laughter, questions, and the expansion of each others' expressed ideas. Simply, the participants became more comfortable in the setting, shared their thoughts with each other, and began to form bonds. Those transitional moments and all the others going forward in the course served as seeds that eventually grew into real connections and friendships by the end of the research period.

Mess and Jacqui's initial moment of contention over the "Holding the Pen" prompt ultimately served as an example of growth and friendship. While I document this moment in detail during Chapter 4, I will recap the incident as initiated by one of Mess's brusque comments to Jacqui, "It [the hand drawing] has nothing to do with this [the poem]!" While Jacqui was visually and verbally flustered by his comment, she was not willing to remain silent. She persevered with evidence from the prompt to support her conclusion and Monroe legitimized her thought by saying, "Oh, that's a good connection." This was an initial moment where Monroe demonstrated her authority and leadership in the group. Mess, hearing the approval of Jacqui's

comment, soon agrees that the two pieces may have some connections with one another. Monroe's development in this scene to a position of authority shows the embedded power within the group where her comment soothes Jacqui and quiets a potential rebuttal from Mess.

Similar to the above example, other moments serve to demonstrate how this mismatched group of students came together to make more meaning from each of the tasks I presented them. As a group, they evolved into participants that assumed specific group roles, participants that supported each other's ideas, participants that helped each other when they were lost, and participants that ultimately became friends beyond the confines of the study.

Question 5: In what ways might these seemingly very different students connect interpersonally due to their literacy or artistic interests? Summary of Findings
• formed meaningful, respectful, and supportive bonds in the research setting
• developed roles within the group
• extended their personal connections with one another after the research

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The major limitations of this study revolve, to some degree, around the inherent nature of qualitative research where one studies fewer participants, but provides deep insight and attempts to create a living portrait (Berg, 2007, pp. 2-4; Creswell, 2007, pp. 39-41). While I intentionally chose to focus this research on a small sample of students [5], I also recognize that such a small sample size may raise questions in regards to validity, reliability, generalizability, and replication. However, I also view this limited sample population as a positive attribute of this research because it allowed me to interact closely with each participant in all phases of the research as well as the small sample size enabled me to provide thick description (Geertz, 1973; Creswell,

2007, p.194) of each participant including numerous examples of specific statements made by them. It was my goal in this research to give voice to the participants and the data presentation in Chapter 4 was an opportunity to use *their* words to make them *alive* to the reader.

I also acknowledge that the research site may be called into question because of its specific placement in the hierarchy of school settings. My research site was not in a large public high school where students may navigate their secondary years without making connections with each teacher. Also, my site was not an inclusive educational setting where students of all emotional and academic abilities coexist. The setting I chose, as previous described in Chapter 3, is one that is substantially separate and designed to service no more that forty students who are all supported with IEPs and diagnosed with emotional and behavioral difficulties, despite often average academic potential. However, my decision to conduct research in this setting did not preclude my desire to study the literacy practices of a specific subgroup. As a result, my choice of Park High School as the site to conduct my research is what Berg (2007) terms an "appropriate population" (p. 40) because I would not have had access to suitable participants for this study in another setting, such as Madison High School

In my tenure at Park High School, I have always struggled with personal ethical considerations of the students' exclusion from the mainstream Madison High School, but nevertheless I have made peace with their exclusion because of the individual attention they receive as a result of attending Park. However, in terms of this research, I acknowledge that drawing a sample of five students from a school of twenty-five, at the time of this study, may call into question my results and conclusions. Yet, this close attention to marginalized subgroups is what I believe essential to reprogramming the public educational landscape where politicians,

administrators, and other stakeholders continually attempt to standardize and implement large-scale, poorly focused reforms.

As previously detailed, the entirety of my research took place during the Spring semester of 2014. During these months, I achieved permissions, held various interviews, processed initial data, and conducted the course, *My Literate Self: How I View, How I Read, and How I Represent My World*, over 12 meetings. As the course and subsequently the research came to an end, I pondered the ways in which the richness and data could have grown exponentially if I only had more time, more interviews, and more course meetings. My research was limited to only four months. I anticipate that skeptics may call into question how with additional time the participants' interests, thoughts, and habits potentially could have changed and skewed these findings. Yet, I believe the duration of this research was sufficient due to the fact that it was informally in-process much longer from both my informal observation of students and the participants use of literacy practices long before the research began. While I worked reflexively and consciously to withhold all that occurred beyond the scope of the research, some may assert that my "closeness" with the students is a design flaw and reporting issue. Yet, I feel it is this "closeness," both before, during, and after the research, that enabled me to gain such rich and personal data from the participants with minimal time. Further, being that this project is at heart a teacher-research endeavor, it intuitively makes sense for overlaps to occur between the researcher and participants that informs and develops the research process (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 18). As a result, I believe this research ultimately benefited from the personal relationships I maintained with each of the participants.

I understand that both the duration and the scope of this project makes it one ripe to be questioned because it occurred with few participants in a very specific setting for a limited period of time—though I feel these issues are minor due to the depth of the data collected, analyzed, and implemented. My efforts to engage reflexively during this research process entails that I need acknowledge the largest elephant-in-the-[research]room. I initially set to research the individual literacy practices of students in nonstructural times of the school day. As previously explained, administrators insisted that the research be conducted in the classroom under the guise of a structured English elective. Their conditions for my study to occur introduced a power dynamic to the work, but my restructuring of the project resulted in a stronger project. I was able to add the prompts, group discussion, and electronic slide presentations by moving the research into the classroom. Based on the administration's restrictions, I understand that some may question if I actually studied what I set-out to study. I believe I did, and more.

Understanding such gatekeeping restrictions prior to beginning the course afforded me the opportunity to plan around the inconveniences and replicate, as closely as possible, the unstructured times of the day in the classroom. As well, I integrated numerous opportunities for students to engage, to share, and to reflect on their literacy practices in the course. Such elements I chose to implement were: (1) semi-structured and unstructured interviews to discuss their personal literacy practices; (2) group discussions where the participants each reacted to common prompts; and (3) personal slide presentations where participants could represent through a variety of forms their thoughts. I believe the essence and reality of the participants' literacy practices beyond the classroom were captured through the implementation of the three

components described above as closely as possible without actually observing each participant in his/her unstructured space.

I note the above limitations to recognize that this study, like any inquiry, may be limited by the chosen methods. However, the methods I implemented also provide this study with data and understanding that may not have been attained using other methods. Berg's (2007) introductory description of qualitative research "is to demonstrate the fruitfulness and often greater depth of understanding we can derive from qualitative procedures" (p. 2). He notes that while many do not debate qualitative research "in the abstract" the use is "sometimes criticized for being nonscientific and thus invalid"; however, he defends such criticism, "Clearly, certain experiences cannot be meaningfully expressed by numbers" (p. 3). I opted for qualitative methods, in a teacher-research inquiry utilizing multiple ethnographic techniques, because I believed that such a stance would provide me the best opportunity to better understand my participants' literacy practices by providing data of "greater depth of understanding" that could be analyzed against my research questions. As well, to understand what was really going on with the participants, I anticipated it could not "be meaningfully expressed by numbers" because they are individuals and I wanted to know more about who they were and and how they use literacy to make meaning (Berg, 2007, pp. 2-3).

I adopted a teacher-research stance in my research because the phenomenon I observed was a natural byproduct of my professional life and thus, "the borders between inquiry and practice are [were] crossed, and the boundaries between being a researcher and being a practitioner are [were] blurred" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 94). As a teacher in the research setting, I had ready access to the site and rapport with both participants and potential

gatekeepers. Despite the ease of access, the idea of myself as teacher-researcher became a new role that could not be neatly separated because each role simultaneous influenced and informed the other. During this work, I wore both hats simultaneously, thinking like a teacher and thinking like a researcher, because a purpose of this work was to both improve my practice and to conduct a formal inquiry.

In this work, I wanted to give voice to the participants and allow them to tell their stories so that I might place them in comparison with the research questions to tell another story of their use of literacy practices. I utilized multiple ethnographic techniques such as interview, participant-observation, field notes, and research artifacts to capture the necessary data to tell their story of literacy and personhood. The multiple data sets allowed for "between method triangulation" of the various types to affirm the presence of similar themes in other data sets (Delamont, 2002, p. 181). I believe the comparison and confirmation of themes and understandings within my data not only help to provide an accurate picture of the students and their literacy practices, but it also negates those elements that might be deemed limitations in this study.

5.3 Recommendations as a Result of the Study

As a result of this study, I suggest three recommendations to improve the literacy experiences, social experiences, and overall education of students who attend substantially-separate special education high schools, commonly termed alternative schools. My recommendations call attention to specific areas that some practitioners term as "best practice" (Cunningham et al., 2009, p.419; Cook & Cook, 2013). I believe, based on this research project, professional experience, informal observation, and the literature regarding

alternative education, special education, and literacy writ large, that what I recommend is not common practice in many alternative educational settings. Many alternative educators call for scripted, predictable, and structured curriculum and learning environments that *manage* students diagnosed with EBD (Lewis et al., 2004, p.248). My recommendations ask that educators in alternative settings engage in a humanizing educational process where they encounter students on multiple levels beyond academics (Freire,1970, pp.32-33). I ask such teachers to encounter their students' interests socially and emotionally—then academically.

  Recommendation 1: *Institute programs that share with all students the personal literacy practices they can utilized to positively express one's feelings, struggles, identity, and needs.* When I reflect on electives from elementary school, I remember all the projects in art and sports from physical education that I engaged with for short periods of time. For instance, an art teacher may focus on still-life watercolor painting for a week. The gym teacher may do dodgeball one week and the following week volleyball. In each case, the teacher's goal is not to make an artist or an athlete. The goal is to expose the students to opportunities. I envision with this recommendation a program that exposes students to numerous literacy practices for short periods of time. For instance, teachers could develop mini-units based on students' input about topics of interest. Each unit, to last a few weeks or less, could focus on a specific literacy practice such as comic creation, journaling, online blogs, and many others to explore and develop understanding about the student-chosen topics. Such practices could then be regularly reinforced and implemented in the traditional ELA classroom. In the end, my hope is that students would engage with and adopt a literacy practice they enjoy to regularly and independently express and explore themselves.

Recommendation 2: *Develop protocols that ask teachers to connect with their students beyond the classroom, so that they may bring students' interests into the classroom.* My purpose of this research was to better understand a phenomenon I informally observed beyond the classroom. Having followed this observation down-the-rabbit's hole, I encountered my students on an entirely new level. Kutz and Roskelly (1991) state, "When teachers ignore what students bring to the classroom, the students may ignore what the teacher brings as well" (p. 57). I found the inverse is also true. I found new engagement from the participants because they understood I was doing a major project in order to better understand them. With my investment in them, I feel they reinvested themselves in my general English courses in a show of reciprocal respect.

All teachers have busy teaching schedules and effective use of planning and down time is where one can accomplish all the paperwork associated with the profession. However, it is also during these times when one can make meaningful connections with students beyond the classroom. While implementation would vary school-to-school, I believe this research and the outcomes stand as rationale for the importance that teachers be with students beyond class. It is in the unstructured spaces where students can be themselves and teachers can notice points of personal connection that may eventually aid future learning.

Recommendation 3: *Create opportunities to share personal literacy practices with peers in the classroom or as a whole school celebration of personal literacy practices.* I make this recommendation based on the passion and interest that research participants spoke to and explained about their individual literacy practices during the course of this research. The often introverted and self-consumed participants became extroverts when I provided them the

opportunity to share about their literacy practices. Further, the same participants discussed the curriculum of ELA classrooms with lethargy and indifference. For this reason, I recommend educators, especially alternative educators, create classrooms and schools that celebrate students' literacy practices in a manner similar to the historic pep-rally before the "big game." The more students are exposed to literacy practices of peers, the more likely it is they too will engage with literacy practices of their own.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

I entered this research a novice teacher-researcher with little to no experience in the design, implementation, and presentation of findings for a systematic, scientific inquiry. As a result, I encountered numerous set-backs in regards to time, access, and hindsight reflexive thoughts—"I wish had done…." To battle my thoughts of inadequacy and hesitance, I continually had to remind myself that I was only attempting to engage in a unique research project with a teacher-research stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 7). In moments of confusion, I found comfort when I reminded myself that I was a seasoned teacher first and novice researcher second because such thinking allowed me to make mistakes, evaluate, and move forward without being paralyzed by blunders. I was a teacher asking questions of his students and hoping to gain data that could be used to propel the students, myself, and the vast body of literacy research a bit further. In this vain, I acknowledge mistakes made during the duration of this research. Yet, I wholeheartedly believe I was onto something in this specific setting with a specific subgroup of students.

I believe future research can expand on what I have begun in three main ways:

1. *Focus research on students' literacy practices outside-the-classroom, during unstructured periods of the school day, with students of a similar emotional and academic profile.* [i.e. Conduct this research project in the setting I initially proposed.]

2. *Replicate the research in mainstream high school settings with more participants and with students beyond special education identifications.*

3. *Replicate the research in multiple alternative high schools to increase generalizability and potentially effect change in the methods of teaching literacy to students diagnosed EBD.*

5.5 Personal and Professional Learning Outcomes as a Result of the Research

My doctoral studies, research, committee members, and dissertation challenged me both personally and profession. It is fitting that I conducted a teacher-research inquiry as that is all I have been for these last, long eight years—a teacher and a researcher. I consistently carried the weight of the next deadline or the next task that I was unsure how to begin.

The weight I carry will soon be lifted and what will be exposed is all that I have gained. While I am able to see growth and connections today, I anticipate the positive outcomes having conducted this project will further reveal themselves through reflection with time. Personally, I learned from this work balance, perseverance, and to challenge my assumptions. I conducted this study while teaching full-time and attempting to maintain personal relationships with friends and family. The interruptions that these factors could provide taught me to balance my time, efforts, and energies in a way to meet them all. I learned more about perseverance because it was not just "hard work" that could get me through this period. I had to be constantly working with seemingly no end in sight and had to just be happy to know I was inching closer. I also

challenged my assumptions in many ways throughout this research. One constantly has to make choices based on what they know at any given moment. I made so many of these choices regarding how to structure the research, write the dissertation, engage the participants, and many others that I could only act on what I thought would be best in the moment. This experience was a long list of firsts—first research, first project design, first interviews, first [and last] dissertation, first navigation of the school administration. These "firsts" and so many others challenged me continually and I made many mistakes. However, my mistakes are what I take away from this work because I did not let the mistakes fester. I revised, undid, and changed my mistakes into opportunities to make this happen. My learning to address the mistakes, no matter how difficult, has helped me develop into a more complete person and effective teacher.

From a professional view, I learned from this research that very little in the classroom is actually as it appears. The cheerful student is not necessarily joyous; the irritable one is not really angry; the lethargic one is really wide awake. The way I interpret the students on a particular day when I read their faces in an instant is really a guess. For instance, the face I believe to be excitement may really be anxiety; or, the students' outward interest in a lesson may only be a desire to get it done. I have learned that no matter how certain I am of an occurrence in the classroom, with a student, the content, or the method, the reality may not be what it appears.

Recognizing that my perception is not necessarily the reality, I have also learned what can be gained when I dig deeply and ask the questions of a phenomenon in the classroom and school. My research began with a simple observation of students using down-time to read, to write, and to create. I now comprehend that each issue or question that enters my mind about my teaching, the environment I teach in, or those I teach could potentially be its own research

project. While I will not likely study another educational phenomenon to this degree, I most

assuredly will not simplify anything that occurs within a school as so much is at its root.

Lastly, I have always felt a disconnect between my training to teach ELA and my training

in special education. I learned through graduate degrees in both disciplines in

compartmentalized ways and since I have attempted to coherently blend this knowledge so that

my training in one would inform the other and vice versa. I also note that such

compartmentalization is present in the available literature. However, I have finally found clear

connections of ELA and special education for my specific situation in this research that I can

build upon to improve my pedagogy.

5.6 Conclusion and Reflection

Too often teachers tell students to follow them; I found in this research project when I

asked students to let me follow them everything changed. I wanted to better understand why

some students chose to engage in personal literacy practices beyond the classroom. I recognize

that a host of "mainstream" students regularly read, write, and engage in other literary pursuits of

their own volition. However, for students similar to my participants such pursuits of literacy

practices is not the norm and the perceptions by outsiders of these same students are of a more

deviant, skeptical, and negative nature. This is no more evident when ill-informed parents

reluctantly tour our school and express concerns about their child attending. I have heard "that

this school is for all the troublemakers," "the druggies and the gang kids," and "I don't want my

child exposed to those kids to learn bad habits."

Park High School enrolls students who do face substance abuse issues, who are gang

connected, and who resist academics regularly. In my tenure at Park, we have never worked so

hard as the last three years in an attempt to positively rewrite community perceptions by reinvesting and reconnecting with our students. My main goal in this research was to illuminate the literacy practices and the small group of students who engage in them to bring forth evidence of what actually occurs within Park. Secondarily, I hoped to share with community members and other stakeholders an actual reality of Park—one that I believe is also present in other alternative schools if one cares to look.

Personally, my research was not just about conducting a project to complete a degree. This research was about seeking insights into the questions I regularly ask myself in the course of my teaching duties that hold significant importance to me. It was also about bringing together understandings of literacy and of special education that I find sparsely connected in the literature. Further, and most importantly, I aimed in this research to better understand this group of students who quietly go through each day unnoticed and to give them both personal solace and a voice with which to communicate their narratives. My hope was to let them speak, to let them share, and to let them represent themselves in a safe place through personal literacy practices. In the end, I believe it is these students who accurately represent both special education and alternative education. The participants may not conform or succeed as defined by traditional norms of mainstream education for a myriad of reasons, but when they are respected, enlivened, and valued they produce deeply emotional and academic work.

In description of teacher-research, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) assert:

Fundamental to the notion of inquiry as stance is the idea that educational practice is not

simply instrumental in the sense of figuring out how to get things done, but also and more

importantly, it is social and political in the sense of deliberating about what to get done,

why to get it done, who decides, and whose interests are served. (p. 121)

Embedded in this statement of teacher-research, I find the questions whose answers succinctly

summarize this research. I wanted "to get done" the work of meeting participants on their level

and through their interests. I wanted to learn about the ways and reasons that they utilized

literacy practices of their own choosing beyond the classroom. I needed "to get it done" in order

to dispel myths and assumptions about students in alternative learning environments and to share

what they actually do and why they do it. I "decide[d]" their stories needed to be heard and told

to enlighten other educators and stakeholders about the academic abilities and potential of

students who are often caste off and assumed to have little connection to learning and education.

And finally, I wished "to serve the interests" of the students I work with on a daily basis. In this

research, I believe that the participants interests are clear—they wish to be heard; they wish to be

thought as capable as mainstream peers; and, they wish to have an opportunity to actively

participate in making their literacy practices from beyond the classroom a staple within the

classroom to inform and drive the content to make schooling personal.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT AND ASSENT LETTER

Consent Form:

Lesley University
Graduate School of Education

Project: *My Literate Self: How I View, How I Read, and How I Represent My Larger World*

Justin Moyer, M.Ed., Ed. M., Ph.D. student
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February-June 2014

Parents, Guardians, and Participants:

I am a high school English and Special Education teacher at Curtis Tufts High School, Medford, MA 02155. I am also a doctoral student at Lesley University, Cambridge, MA 02138. From February to June 2014, I will conduct an ethnographic research study for my dissertation in fulfillment of the Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Educational Studies degree.

In my eleven-years at Curtis Tufts High School, I have often informally observed students who participate in literate and artistic activities during unstructured times (i.e. breakfast, break, lunch) of the school day. Students participate in independent reading, comic/sketch development, lyric writing, journaling, etc. This group of students is not large, but my intent is to observe, interview, and document the students doings in order to gain a better understanding of 'why they do, what they do'. What does their participation provide them? How do they feel during the literate act and after a product is complete?

The project design is ethnographic in nature and will utilize many elements of the ethnographic toolkit, such as: interview, participant observation, artifact collection, field notes, etc. As well, the duration of the study will last approximately five months with 2-4 course meetings per week for 40 minutes. In addition to this time, students will be regularly interviewed (biweekly) for periods of approximately thirty-minutes each beyond course meetings.

The general design of the study will be like an English Language Arts elective course . The course will meet 2-4 times per week for two quarters of the school year (approx. 16 weeks total). I plan to enroll no more than six participants in the study. Students will be selected from my ongoing observations of their use of literate practices for personal interest during unstructured times of the school day.

During each class, students will be provided with a prompt (visual, auditory, written, etc) from the larger world that intends to cause some emotional reaction/connection with the students. Students will then have time to process each prompt and discuss their reactions with one another. In the last section of each class, students will produce one slide per prompt (1 slide per class) in which they include the prompt and some reaction (written, auditory, artistic) that shows their thoughts/ reaction to the prompt(s). Each class will follow this three prong set-up. Prompts will include, but not be limited to: historical speeches; short selections from literature; prominent paintings; political artifacts; photography from the Boston area; etc. Students will compile their slides in a digital slide-presentation program that will result in a personal portfolio of the course representing how they see, view, and respond to the world in which they live. These slides will become research artifacts for individual and thematic analysis.

Further, each student will participate in semi-structured interviews, pre- and post-study, in which they will be able to discuss and explore their craft (written or artistic), their reasons for participation, how they interpret the larger world, and their hope/development/reaction to the study.

During the course of the study, I also plan to conduct brief thirty-minute unstructured interviews where students can discuss and react to recent prompts or work with those prompts in the course.

The gathering of data will rely on audio-recorded interviews, field observation notes, and analysis of the course artifact (Powerpoint Presentation created by each student).

Participation requires a willingness to attend course meetings, interact with other students, participate in interviews, and create the digital slide presentation. The intent of the interviews is to give students a voice in the study and help them vocalize their literate processes.
However, if you feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, you have the right to decline to answer any question or end the interview.

Participation in research is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be in this study. If you decide to be in this study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions during interviews. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will not be compensated in any way for your participation.

The greatest benefit of this study is intrinsic. I hope students gain positive feelings from their participation in this study as they will be able to share their interpretation of the larger world and the ways in which they represent those views by artistic or literate means. Secondly, students school days require them to receive credits towards graduation for each period they attend. Students that participate in the study for one quarter will receive 1.25 credits and those that remain in the study for both quarters will receive 2.5 credits. These credits will be recorded as English Independent Study credits. I wish I could eliminate this, but students would actually be harmed if credits were not awarded because they would fall behind peers. I will not evaluate students work in the study with tradition grading methods. All participants that maintain the school attendance policy will earn credits.

You will encounter no additional risks to health or safety beyond those risks of your normal school day. Your participation, non participation, or withdrawal from the study will have no impact on any other course you may or may not have with me.

Any data collected from the survey, observations, and interviews will remain anonymous and confidential to the extent allowed by law. I will use pseudonyms or numerical identifiers rather than your name on study records. As well, the pseudonyms will be used in place of school, district, and city identifiers. I will keep the data (field notes, audio recordings, and surveys) secure in a lockbox at my home. I will be the only person with access to the research documents. I take seriously the task of removing any identifiable information from interview transcription and other documents to maintain your anonymity.

I will use the data collected at Curtis Tufts High School to write a dissertation in fulfillment of my degree. If I wish to use any of the data gathered during this study after the conferral of my degree, I will again ask for further permission from all participants.

You will receive a copy of this consent form.

Date:_____Investigator's Signature:_____Print Name:_____

Subject's Signature:

I am 18 years of age or older. The nature and purpose of this research have been satisfactorily explained to me and I agree to become a participant in the study as described above. I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time if I so choose, and that the investigator will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.

Date:_____Subject's Signature:_____Print Name:_____

My son/daughter is under the 18 years of age and I, as his/her legal guardian, authorize his/her participation in this research.

Date:_____

Signature of Parent/Guardian or
Legally Authorized Representative:_____Print Name:_____

Assent of participant under age 18

Date:_____

Signature:_____Print Name:_____

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may be, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Dean of Faculty or the Committee at Lesley University, 29 Everett Street, Cambridge Massachusetts, 02138, telephone: (617) 349-8517.

Contact Information:

Lesley University Institutional Review Board

Dr. Terrence Keeney: tkeeney@lesley.edu

Faculty Supervisor
Dr. Caroline Heller: cheller@lesley.edu

Researcher/Student
Justin Moyer: jmoyer@lesley.edu

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Spring 2014

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What is your definition of literacy?

2. When do you consider a person to be literate?

3. What is your definition of reading? How or what do you read on a daily basis? What things can be read?

4. What is your definition of writing? How or what do you write on a daily basis? For what purpose(s) does one write?

5. Are you one to discuss or debate current events or issues? What types of events or issues interest you?

6. Do you have artistic interests (i.e. music, paint, poetry, sculpture, etc.)?

7. Do you have a favorite author, magazine, website, musician, artist?

8. What about this source appeals to you?

9. Where do you access your reading materials (print, technology, etc.)?

10. How would you explain the phrase, "Reading your world"?

11. Where and when do you have most of your interactions with reading?

12. Where and when do you have most of your interactions with writing?

13. Where and when do you have most of your discussions/debates with others?

14. How would you describe reading and writing activities in your home?

APPENDIX C: UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Spring 2014

Unstructured Interview Questions

1. What thoughts or questions have come about as a result of your participation in this research

    project?

2. Have the prompts caused you to think more deeply about literacy, social issues, or the world?

3. Describe any memories that have surfaced during your participation in the research.

4. Have you engaged in literacy-based activities beyond school and the research recently?

    What have you been doing and for what purpose(s)?

5. In what ways has you participation in the research project brought you closer to or further

    from the other participants? Describe.

APPENDIX D: LIST OF CLASS PROMPTS

Below is a list of prompts, organized by sequence of use, that were used during the research

course meetings. I provided an initial reading of each prompt with minimal introduction to the

context aside from mention of the author and the general time period of publication or time

period referenced in the piece.

List of Prompts:

1. *Wall Street Journal* advertisement for mobile platforms

2. "Holding the Pen—What Brings Me to The Act of Reading and Writing" poem and line
    drawing of a hand with a pen. Anonymous

3. "Chicago" poem by Carl Sandburg

4. "How Wolves Change Rivers" by Sustainable Human [https://www.youtube.com/watch?
    v=ysa5OBhXz-Q]

5. "My Name" Chapter except from Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street*

6. "Mother to Son" and "I, Too Sing America" poems by Langston Hughes

7. Barrack Obama speech excerpts on *Hope, Destiny,* and *Courage*

8. *Walden; or "Life in the Woods—Where I Lived and What I Lived For"* excerpt by Henry
    David Thoreau

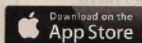9. "Four Precepts" by Marianne Moore and "Head, Heart" by Lydia Davis

APPENDIX E: CLASS PROMPTS

Holding the Pen—

What Brings Me to The Act of Reading and Writing

<u>The Thumb</u>

A white, middle-class family
in the post-war exhilaration of
a victorious America with unlimited prospects.
Education for GI's and their families.
An eclectic and passionate love of language/learning in both
parents.
Grandparents who were teachers on both sides.
An anchor to life-long literacy.

<u>The First Finger</u>

Books and reading of All Kinds that
Entered my pre-television world and stamped me as a literate
person.
Someone who could get books on demand at the library.
For free—except fines for late books I wanted to keep.
The words, the sounds, and pictures, stories, and facts
which circulated around me—the currency of the larger world—
Babar, Mulbury Street, National Geographic,
Encyclopedia Americana.

<u>The Second Finger</u>

Schooling and Community and Church and Girl Talk and Brownies
The secondary discourses I had to learn in a different way—
more consciously, more attentively.
Both the central and the middle finger.
Still intimate sometimes, but purposeful, and sometimes,
awkward or punitive.
School as a place to grow up behave learn the rules.
A place of wonder some days, the Star Chamber on others.
Church another etiquette, the deep beauty of music, the ancient
feel of words.
Be careful with words—they have consequences.

<u>The Third Finger</u>

The discourse of family stories told and heard as I grew into
adulthood.

Of being and of raising children,
Of familial negotiations and diplomacy,
Of witnessing the miracle of language making its first marks on
the wee ones.
Noting the importance of play, pleasure, and progressive error.
Insights for teaching and Learning.

The Invisible Pinkie

The hand rests on a small but critical digit,
a pointer of theory and practice,
the advanced knowledge domains of the academy
luscious words filled with Latin and Greek tone that allow
us to know ourselves knowing.
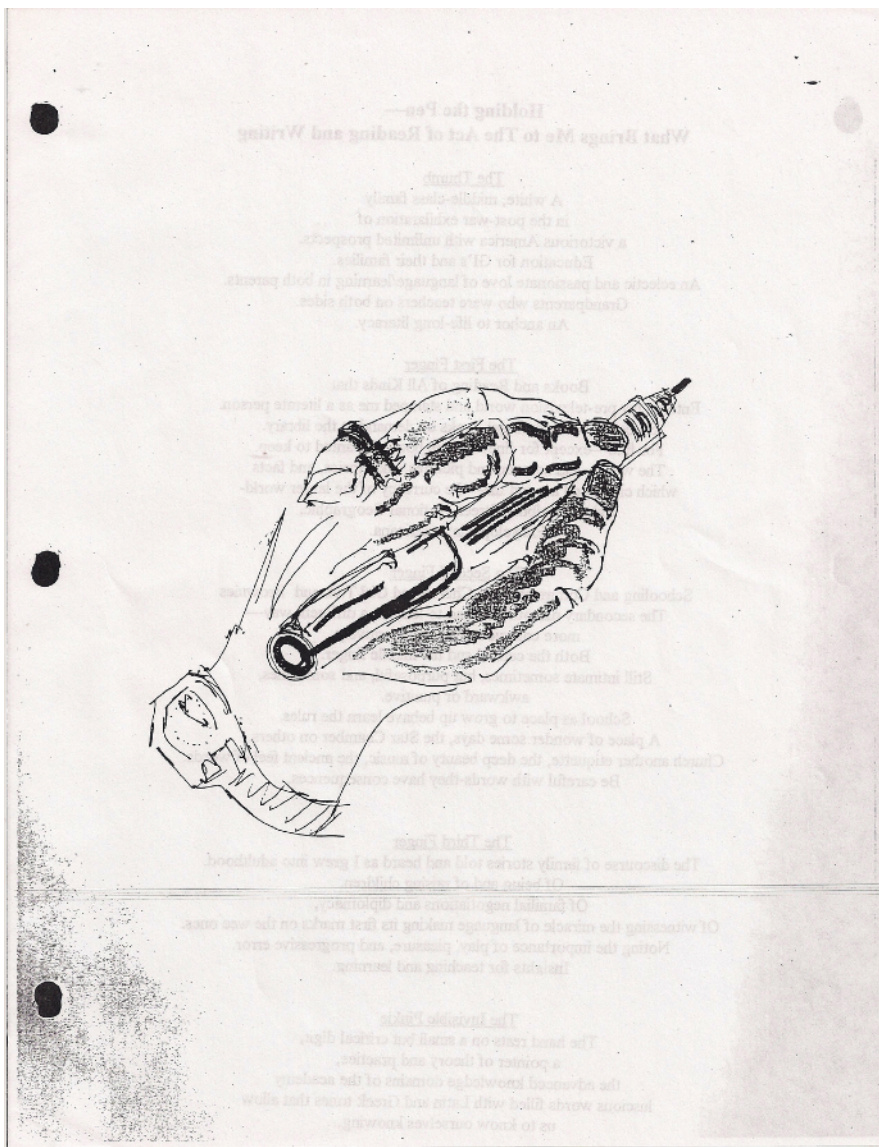
"Chicago"

Carl Sandburg

Hog Butcher for the World,
   Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
   Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
   Stormy, husky, brawling,
   City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen
your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I
have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of
women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at
this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud
to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job,
here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft
cities;
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a
savage pitted against the wilderness,
   Bareheaded,
   Shoveling,
   Wrecking,
   Planning,
   Building, breaking, rebuilding,
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white
teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man
laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a
battle,
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and
under his ribs the heart of the people,
                Laughing!
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-
naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of
Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

"My Name" from *The House On Mango Street*

By: Sandra Cisneros

In English my names means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, song like sobbing. It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse – which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female-but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexican, don't like their women strong.

My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it.
And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but don't want to inherit her place by the window.

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister's name-Magdalena-which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza.

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do."

"I, Too, Sing America"
By: Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh,

And eat well,

And grow strong.

Tomorrow,

I'll be at the table

When company comes.

Nobody'll dare

Say to me,

"Eat in the kitchen,"

Then.

Besides,

They'll see how beautiful I am

And be ashamed--

I, too, am America.

"Mother to Son"

By: Langston Hughes

 Well, son, I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

It's had tacks in it,

And splinters,

And boards torn up,

And places with no carpet on the floor"

Bare.

But all the time

I'se been a-climbin' on,

And reachin' landin's,

And turnin' corners,

And sometimes goin' in the dark

Where there ain't been no light.

So, boy, don't you turn back.

Don't you set down on the steps.

'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.

Don't you fall now"

For I'se still goin', honey,

I'se still climbin',

And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Barrack Obama

on Hope

Speech: January 3, 2008

"Hope is what led a band of colonists to rise up against an empire; what led the greatest of generations to free a continent and heal a nation; what led young men and women to sit at lunch counters and brave fire hoses and march through Selma and Montgomery for freedom's cause. Hope is what led me here today—with a father from Kenya, a mother from Kansas; and a story that could only happen in the United States of America. Hope is the bedrock of this nation; the belief that our destiny will not be written for us, but by us; by all those men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is; who have courage to remake the worlds it should be."

on Destiny

Speech: June 4, 2005

"The true test of the American ideal is whether we're able to recognize our failings and then rise together to meet the challenges of our time. Whether we allow ourselves to be shaped by events and history, or whether we act to shape them."

on Courage

"As Americans, we can take enormous pride in the fact that courage has been inspired by our own struggle for freedom, baby the tradition of democratic law secured by our forefathers and enshrined in our Constitution. It is a tradition that says all men are created equal under the law and that no one is above it."

Walden; or, Life in the Woods—Where I Lived, and What I Lived For
By: Henry David Thoreau

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.

"Head, Heart"

By: Lydia Davis

Heart weeps.

Head tries to help heart.

Head tells heart how it is, again:

You will lose the ones you love. They will all go. But

    even the earth will go, someday.

Heart feels better, then.

But the words of head do not remain long in the ears of

    heart.

Heart is so new to this.

I want them back, says heart.

Head is all heart has.

Help, head. Help heart.

Four Precepts

By: Marianne Moore

Example is needed, not counsel: but let me submit here these

four precepts:

Feed imagination food that invigorates.

Whatever it is, do it with all your might.

Never do to another what you would not wish done to yourself.

Say to yourself, "I will be responsible."

Put these principles to the test, and you will be inconvenienced

by being overtrusted, overbefriended, overconsulted, half

adopted, and have no leisure. Face that when you come to it.'

APPENDIX F: DIGITAL SLIDE PORTFOLIOS

My literate self: how I view, how I read, and how I represent my world

By: Monroe

My Name
Sandra Cisneros

- Reading this chapter from Novella the character speaks of her name and what comes along with it. While reading her opinions on her own self and her name it brings on thoughts of where my name came from and what it means. She sounds like she's placed herself back to her child hood days, where all that mattered were her own thoughts. It's as if she's escaping her present and rewinding time back to her kid days.
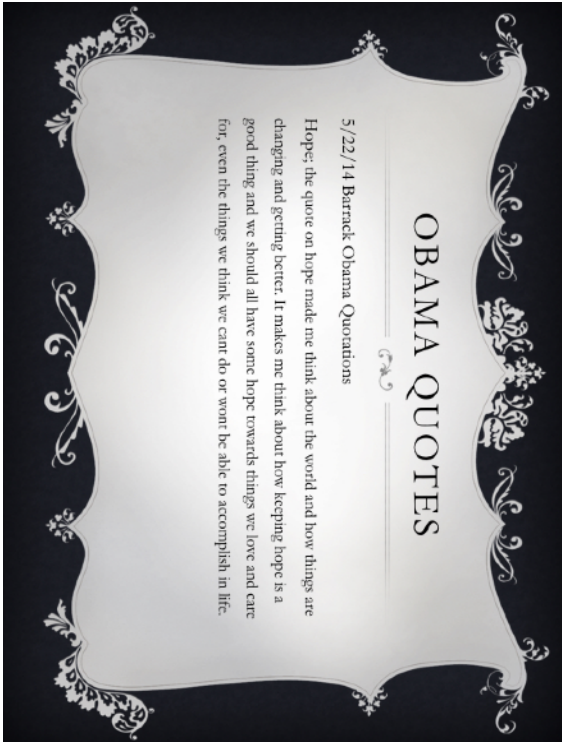
WSJ ad

- This advertisement has many different opinions. Some could say its stupid, others could say its brilliant. I'm stuck somewhere in between, with internal hate for this new found technology generation we have going on and the brilliance behind it. There's no doubt we've made it far quit far in this world but whether or not we've made it far in the right direction is the question. Although it makes everything much more simpler there is much more behind it mentally. Sometimes I feel it's turning us all into some sort of robot. Maybe we as people should focus more on the effect it's having on us, rather than its simplicity.

How wolves changed rivers

- While watching this clip a few images popped into my mind. It brought apon thoughts of the ways of life, how things have progressed so far in this world and how we've all gotten here. Without one thing there isn't another and with one thing comes another. With out the wolves everything was non existent but when the wolves appeared everything sprung back to life, the way of nature seemed to remember its way. Birds started flying, animals started showing, and trees started growing. It's a chain reaction of the way of life, which is exactly how everything is supposed to be.

Barrack Obama quotations

- My own creation on Destiny: humans today should be capable to recognize our failings and then do our best to rise above them to overcome the challenges we've faced and whether or not we should or shouldn't allow ourselves to be molded by the events in our past or to act in our own ways to shape them.

- This to me speaks very loudly, because everyday I see people who have failed to overcome their battles and fall short to addiction, mental instability or lack of education. People on the streets who have lost faith and forgot the meaning of hope. People who have dropped out of school or have even lost a loved one, who now have been scared forever and have failed to see any bright light in their future. People who have lost themselves and can't seem to find the strength within them to pick themselves up and wipe the dirt off their knees. Those are the people who have lost site of their destiny.

ELIZABETH

My Librain Self

How I write, How I read, And how I represent my world

BARRACK OBAMA

5/22/14 Barrack Obama Quotations

Courage; this quote is about equality and how no one is better than others or below others everyone is equal no matter where they come from or what race they are. Every one is equal and deserves to be respected and treated the same.

OBAMA QUOTES

5/22/14 Barrack Obama Quotations

Hope; the quote on hope made me think about the world and how things are changing and getting better. It makes me think about how keeping hope is a good thing and we should all have some hope towards things we love and care for, even the things we think we cant do or wont be able to accomplish in life.

HOW WOLVES CHANGE RIVERS

5/8/14

How wolves change rivers was about wolves but something much deeper. It was all about the environment and the food, & animal chains. How animals do things that they don't know are helpful to other animals but are. Shelter and food are two of the subjects they talked about in the video. Animals make shelter for other animals and themselves with wood from outside like birds do when they are making nests for the winter and when they are laying eggs.

5/1/2014 HOLDING THE PEN

This anonymous poem that I have read called Holding The Pen was about creative writing and about what brings the person to read or write. The poem had different stanzas such as the thumb, the first finger, the second finger and so on. The stanza topics of the poems stanza was to outline or categorize the stanzas and topics of each of the poems thoughts. I think the person who wrote this poem had growing up in mind and how when you get older and when you practice you get better at your writing and creativity. I feel like each finger stood for a memory or life time in there life when there writing wasn't the best until the last finger came around which could of symbolized the end of someone's learning experience and how the writing has gotten better because of all the years of practice.

When I looked at this ad it made me think of all our new technology today and how its been improving tremendously threw out the years of my life. It was about how you can download WSJ (The Wall Street Journal) on to your apple devices and be able to approach it at anytime threw out the day as needed.

OBAMA QUOTES

5/22/14 Barrack Obama Quotations

Destiny; this Barrack Obama quote reminded me of me growing up and failing at times but then having my parents there right by my side at the end to help me threw. It reminds me of growing up and finding who I really am and not what society made me look like or be. I think this quote reminds me to be myself and to accept others as well as myself for making mistakes that were made.

JACQUI

My Literate Self: How I View, How I Read, and How I Represent My Larger World

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HOLDING THE PEN

In this poem each appendages is carefully dissected to tell a story of each. The thumb sets the ground work for the hand. The first finger is where you start to learn the basic knowledge of reading & writing. The second finger is where you start to mature & learn in different ways while being aware of your actions. The third finger is a line of tradition, family. Lastly, the pinkie which isn't always seen to do much but has an important purpose in how we read & write along with some prestige. The drawing shows all this. The thumb & first finger seem to almost be attached & the same as they have similarities in them probably because both the thumb & the first finger have ties to your basic knowledge. Then when you get to the middle it looks to have a serrated or sharp edge on the finger probably indicating to be careful with how you use it. The third has a wedding band symbolizing family. The pinkie once again invisible. In conclusion each part of your hand tells a story but its up to you to decide what it says.

WALL STREET JOURNAL AD

This ad for the Wall Street Journal shows how we read in the modern era & how it has changed. The days of going out to buy a freshly made newspaper are in the past. Now all we have to do is click an app & we can access the news anytime anywhere. Since most people already get there news from online sources an app like this can make it easier for all the worlds top stories to be at a swipe of a finger. This add largely shows the availability on Apple products as well as a sample of the app at work.

"CHICAGO" BY CARL SANDBURG

"Chicago" by Carl Sandburg is a gritty poem about the city of Chicago & even though it has its shortcomings is able to laugh in the face of adversity. I picked this photo because Chicago is still able to be a bustling city through all it's problems.

HOW WOLVES CHANGE RIVERS

How Wolves Change Rivers is a documentary about how a small number of wolves where released in Yellowstone National Park & the effects they had on the ecosystem. This documentary made me think of the profound effect that something little can have on an ecosystem & affect all forms of lives. One action leads to a reaction which leads to another, all leading to a bigger picture.

"MY NAME" SANDRA CISNEROS

"My Name" is an appropriate title for the prompt because the prompt is about Esperanza's name. What it means to her, how she got it, & how she'd like to change it. Diving into further levels than just the outright name. My name was given to me by my sister. When my parents where deciding what to name me she said "She's a Jacqueline. That's her name". I've always liked my name & it ends up I was named what I was named just so my sister could call me Jacq her own little nickname for me. Though she never ended up calling me Jacq because I needed to learn my full name & she's always called be Jacqueline since. Though she never called me Jacq "friends" of mine used to say it in a teasing manner. Which is why I hate it to this day. My middle name is Elsa which was picked in honor of my father's sister that passes away. If I could I probably would have chose a different middle name, but not enough that I would go down to City Hall to change it. Overall I understand where the prompt is coming from everyone's name has a meaning, a story, a history of where they come from.

LANGSTON HUGHES

"Mother to Son"

"Mother to Son" is a poem that describes hardships in a mothers life through a metaphorical staircase. As she says "life for me ain't been no crystal stair", she's had tacks in it, splinters, boards torn up, & places with no carpet on the floor. Even though this mother is obviously wise & old in her years I can relate. I'm not even eighteen & I've had my fair share of tacks & torn up boards. The whole meaning of this & something I've come to realize personally, is no matter what shit is handed to us in our lives you got to keep going. Trust me I've wanted to give up, end my misery & just die. Even last week I thought of dying, but the whole point of living is making the best of the time you have. Trust me I don't have everything figured out, not even close but I got to keep going on because if I stop I may not get back up. Besides who wants a freakin' crystal stair anyways. It's the triumphs & tragedies that you go through that make you who you are.

PRESIDENT OBAMA QUOTATIONS

Hope

Hope is something you need to have in life if you are going to survive it. Hope is what keeps us going when we are at our lowest of lows & feels like there's nothing left to live for. It keeps us in the fight whether it's someone that has hope in us or our own hope for a brighter future. If it wasn't for hope some of our nations greatest triumphs would never have happened because it was because those people had hope that things would get better that they NEVER GAVE UP.

Destiny

In my opinion we are the ones that write our own destiny & that it's not some preconceived plan that we come into life with. It's the choices we make & the roads that we travel that determine who we become & what we do in our lives. We are in charge. We are the pilot that chooses are destination, but don't get me wrong it's not an easy road, but no one said life was easy.

"LIFE IN THE WOODS -- WHERE I LIVED, AND WHAT I LIVED FOR" BY HENRY DAVID THOREAU

"Life in the Woods -- Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" is about a man that goes to live in the woods to find the purpose of life. When he finds he has not been living he wants to get everything he can out of it & live life to the fullest. The meaning in this story should be applied by everyone in their life: LIVE!! Don't get caught up in electronics or other things because next thing you know life has passed you by & you have nothing to show for the time you've spent.

FOUR PRECEPTS BY MARIANNE MOORE

Even though these precepts where written in 1963 they can still be applied to todays youth & dare I say it to all future generations.

Whatever it is, do it with all your might.

Basically if your putting the effort into doing something don't be half-assed about it. Put everything you have into it because you are making this thing happen. Make it be worth something.

Say to yourself, "I will be responsible."

In life you have to be responsible for your actions. So don't do anything that is wrong or immoral because it is you that is responsible for what you do. Think before you act.

"HEAD, HEART" BY LYDIA DAVIS

I personally like "Head, Heart" even though it is a tad depressing. It is depressing because it shows an internal struggle between two parts of the human internal system, the head & heart. It also is depressing because it touched a cord in me which brought up some of my internal struggles. With myself I have felt quite a bit of pain emotionally which physically makes my heart hurt & when it comes to my PTSD my mind in ways knows what's real but my other part of my mind is struggling, hence pain in my heart. Though that does bring up another issue which is it isn't always the mind that is rational trying to help the irrational heart. For example I also have OCD & your mind can become overwhelmed finding it very hard to be rational, though it has only been recently where with the OCD I've been able to be more rational, though it has caused me tons of pain along the way. I think what to get out of my rambling in which I could be completely wrong or off topic is that you should be able to have a good connection between your head & heart but more importantly is to have your head in the right place because if it isn't it will never be able to help heart.

By: peyton

WSJ Ad

What I get from this advertisement is that everything is becoming electronical. Pretty soon if you don't have an Iphone or an Ipad, then you'll be behind on everything. Even the newspaper is an app now. I can't even walk into the store to buy a wallet without it having an Iphone case. Its basically expected of you to have an Iphone or an Ipad. I think that the technology is advancing faster than people can keep up.

Head, Heart
Lydia Davis

This means that your head knows right from wrong and it can tell you the logic of any situation, but it doesn't help how the heart feels. You could be hurting and you can keep telling yourself all the right things, but it doesn't mean it's going to help how much it hurts. If you go through the loss of someone close to you, your head knows that that's just a part of life. Your heart can't tell that though. It is going to keep hurting even though you knew all along that this would happen. Or if you were to go through a break up, your head knew that was a possibility all along, but that doesn't stop your heart from still caring about that person and wanting to be with them still.

"My Name" S. Cisneros

The part of the story that caught my attention was when she said her grandmother was carried away with a sack over her head and married. I take that as a metaphor for she was married against her will. All of that makes me think of how people were actually forced into marriage and I can't understand that that's how people grew up. Forced into marriage and made to live a life they don't want to. Who decided that was a good idea? Why did we take young women and make them marry men that are old enough to be their fathers, all for a wealthy life. Just because of the money. Their parents used their children to marry men so they would be alright moneywise. I find that completely absurd. That's what I thought of while reading the story.

Obama Quotations

This just made me think of why he can say any of these things. He hasn't written any of these speeches because other people write them for him. How can he do any of these speeches if they aren't his own words? What does it even mean to get up in front of the country and speak the words of a speech that aren't his?

How Wolves Change Rivers

The wolves are the reason the rivers are back because of the food chain. When the wolves moved back to the park, the deer moved out. When the deer moved out, the vegetation started to come back to life. When the vegetation started to come back to life, the animal population started to rise. The badgers, mice, beavers and other animals brought the park back to life. All this happened because of the wolves.

Walden; Or Life in the Woods
H.D. Thoreau

In this story he talks about how he wants to feel like he has lived before he dies. He talks about what his idea of living is. My idea of living is just doing things that make me happy. Not forcing myself to do things that I feel are unnecessary. I want to spend time with the people I love and go places that I want to go. I don't want to feel like myself or anyone else is holding me back.

Four Precepts
Marianne Moore

What I get from this article is to just do everything the best that you can. When you do something, put all your effort into it. Never do anything you don't wish being done to you. Just be a good person and you will have a fulfilled life.

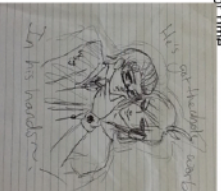## My Literate Self: How I View, How I Read, and How I Represent My Larger World

By: Mess

Holding The Pen

- I will be making an illustration for this session, since that is what has shaped my literacy skills since as long as I can remember, drawing is my version of "Holding the Pen" and my fingers all have a precious meaning to me, just as the author's did to them.

-Mess

WSJ Apple Ad

- I find this to be pretty ironic. A company that's whole premise is having the physical papers of their work in your hand now has an app, that of course is for all your Apple products! Just goes to show how our society is leaning towards technology heavier than ever. They probably have some partnership going on with Apple, considering Apple always tends to dominate the market, and the WSJ is all about the market.

This also reminds me of this great video from Cracked.com, which I would like here, but it seems the internet is down... Anyways, I also want to do a drawing to this too- so I'll have to start that now before I run out of time.

-Mess

Langston Hughes Poems

I WILL BECOME
STRONG

Walden; or Life in the Woods
-Thoreau

I WANT TO LIVE

Head, Heart Revised

HEAD,
HELP,
HEART.

Bakura...? What are you—

He's lying.

Maybe he's trying to protect you...?

No, it's going to hurt.

Trust him.

The evidence is right there.

But maybe-
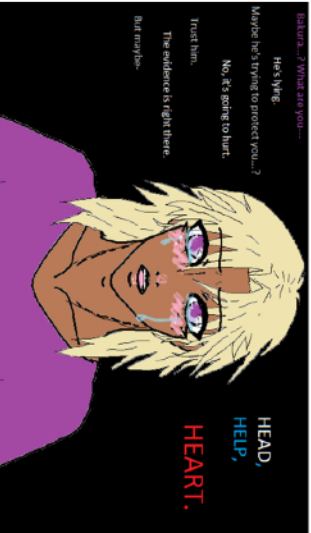
While I like the concept of my original picture for this prompt, I am not fond of the artwork. I was trying to depict how much you can want and love something while still knowing it's bad for you. I'm not fond of the spacing, and while I was trying to use as little words as possible to give them a stronger feel, especially with heart being the only hint of red in the poem, I don't think it was very effective, so here is a revised piece.

How Wolves Change Rivers

This picture is one that only I and a few friends can truly understand how it fits in. They're of my first ever original characters (from when I was around 9), Seth, who ironically was a wolf-man, and Jamie, the girl in the background. Seth was always a loner type, but tough and reliable, he had an aura that drew peo[...] to him and amazing leaderships skills. And with his determination, he was able to change not only the life of [...] but the entire planet via overthrowing a corrupt governme[...] with his own rag-tag malitia. Thus another example of how [...] something so small can start a huge ripple of effects, or "How Wolves Change Rivers".

-Mess

Four Precepts

No matter how bleak it seems.
If you give good,
you get good
back. ♡